

# NOAA-Led Ocean Mapping Expedition in Cook Islands Hailed as a Resounding Success



By Kim Doster, Nov. 20, 2025

RAROTONGA, Cook Islands – Exploration Vessel Nautilus, operated by the Ocean Exploration Trust,

successfully completed a groundbreaking three-week mission to map and explore the Cook Islands' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This collaborative effort, led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through its Ocean Exploration program and supported by a grant to the Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute (OECI), marks a significant milestone in strengthening U.S.-Cook Islands partnerships in marine resource management.

Guided by priorities set by the Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA), [the expedition](#) employed remotely operated vehicles, advanced mapping technology, and telepresence to collect critical data on abyssal plain habitats. Seven Cook Island-based scientists joined the mission, which included imaging and cataloging seabed and biological compositions, providing valuable insights into diverse seafloor habitats. This publicly available data will help inform and advance the responsible management of marine resources in the region.

The mission concluded with a port event hosted by the Cook Islands Government, showcasing the expedition's findings to the local community. U.S. representatives, including Embassy New Zealand Chargé d'Affaires David Gehrenbeck, NOAA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere Erik Noble, and International Trade Administration Deputy Assistant Secretary for Textiles, Consumer Goods, Materials, Critical Minerals & Metals Joshua Kroon, joined Cook Island leaders to celebrate the mission's findings.

"The success of this expedition underscores the power of international collaboration in advancing ocean exploration and sustainable resource management," said NOAA Administrator Neil Jacobs, Ph.D. "We deeply value our relationship with the Cook Islands and we are proud to be a key partner in their mission to understand and manage the marine environment while prioritizing environmental stewardship and identifying areas for economic development."

## **About NOAA Ocean Exploration**

As part of NOAA's Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, NOAA Ocean Exploration is the only U.S. federal program dedicated to exploring the unknown ocean. For over 20 years, it has led deep-water mapping and exploration, delivering data and insights to advance U.S. leadership in ocean science and resource management.

## **About the Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute and Ocean Exploration Trust**

The Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute (OECI), hosted by the University of Rhode Island, collaborates with consortium members, including the Ocean Exploration Trust (OET), to support NOAA's mission through exploration, technology development, and data utilization. OET, founded in 2007 by Dr. Robert Ballard, operates the 224-foot E/V Nautilus, a state-of-the-art exploration vessel equipped with remotely operated vehicles and acoustic mapping systems. Live broadcasts of expeditions via OET's website enable global participation from scientists and the public.