

# Praise for Cooks' Covid strategy

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*From left to right: Australian High Commissioner Dr Christopher Watkins, Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Immigration Tapaeru Herrmann, Honorary German Consul Heinz Matysik, Prime Minister Mark Brown, German Ambassador Stefan Krawielicki, his wife Isabelle Krawielicki, New Zealand High Commissioner Tui Dewes, and Honorary Consul for Japan John Webb at the reception at MOTU Villas on Tuesday. PHOTO: HEINZ MATYSIK/22012104*

**Germany's ambassador to the Cook Islands Stefan Krawielicki has praised the government for keeping Covid-19 out of the country while enjoying his first unofficial visit this week.**

The ambassador and his wife Isabelle arrived in Rarotonga last Friday just one day after the official border reopening with New Zealand. Ambassador Krawielicki is also ambassador to New Zealand, Tuvalu, Fiji, Tonga, Kiribati and Samoa. He and his wife were expected to travel back to New Zealand on January 27 but have decided to extend their visit by another couple of days. The ambassador said, "It's a fantastic place to live and to visit. We have met many extremely friendly people."

Last September, ambassador Krawielicki was scheduled to come for an official visit to the Cook Islands but his trip was cancelled due to border closures and travel restrictions.

His visit would have marked the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Cook Islands and the Federal Republic of Germany. The ambassador said he was “a bit disappointed” he could not visit last year due to Covid-19, but that he was glad that he could finally make the trip.

“I was keen to come to the Cook Islands last year in September to celebrate the 20th (year of) diplomatic relations between our two countries but it wasn’t possible.

“But (instead) we did it in a wonderful ceremony organised by the High Commissioner of the Cook Islands in Wellington, Elizabeth Wright-Koteka.” On Monday, the ambassador attended to biometric passport requests from German nationals with the assistance of Honorary German Consul Heinz Matysik at his law office in Avarua.

There are approximately 20 resident German citizens currently living in the Cook Islands.

During the pandemic, the German Embassy and Minister of Foreign Affairs in Berlin chartered 26 flights to repatriate 10,000 German tourists from New Zealand along with other tourists of the European Union (EU).

Another 300 Germans and other EU nationals were stuck in various islands of the Pacific including the Cook Islands where 75 passengers were repatriated back to Germany and other European countries.

The ambassador said it took incredible teamwork from all authorities, including Embassy’s, Defence attaché’s and many others to complete the job.

He said it was exciting to repatriate Germans from all over the Pacific and New Zealand successfully, when the sudden lockdown came in March 2020.

Ambassador Krawielicki said the repatriation was also an opportunity for both Germany and the Cook Islands to showcase their close partnership and cooperation, thoroughly appreciating and acknowledging the Cook Islands’ assistance in this complex and challenging task.

He said that due to the excellent level of communication and cooperation between both countries, they were able to use the repatriation flight to supply the Cook Islands with important medical and humanitarian goods.

“We chartered three flights and it touched 12 countries and 10 legs altogether. We were happy to take them with us,” he said.

“It took us so much time to do it that we calculated if we would have invested as much time for those 300 to repatriate them for the 10,000 Germans in New Zealand, we would have worked around one and a half years for the repatriation for the 10,000 nationals in New Zealand.

“We did it in two and a half weeks and altogether 3 weeks to do the job in the Pacific.”

On Tuesday the ambassador and his wife attended a private reception at MOTU Villas held in his honour, with a number of dignitaries and resident German citizens in attendance.

On Wednesday, he and his wife were received by Prime Minister Mark Brown at the Prime Minister’s Office where he enjoyed an exchange of views about bilateral relations, saying it was “a great privilege”.

He said the Cook Islands have done “a fantastic job” with Covid and keeping it off the island of Rarotonga.

“I congratulated the Prime Minister for this achievement of the Cook Island government and the cautious approach to open in a very safe way, which will hopefully continue with New Zealand where most of the tourists are coming from.”

Earlier this week the ambassador also held talks with the Director of Environment Halatoa Fua, enjoying a fruitful exchange of views about how to tackle tourism, and the sustainable tourism issue in his previous posting as well as his new approach to environment.

Ambassador Krawielicki said when it comes to global and environmental issues, particularly climate change, both the Cook Islands and Germany are on the same page. He said Pacific Islands' challenges are also Germany's priorities, including fighting climate change, preserving our oceans, and protecting our environment. "My feeling is that tourism and environment are two sides of the same medal (coin) and I really commend the Cook Islands on how they managed to have sustainable tourism up to now.

"We are totally on the same page with the Cook Islands and the Pacific regarding climate change issues, regarding doing all the necessary efforts to reach the goal of the Paris agreement 1.5 degrees or at least well below two degrees.

"My government has been supporting the Regional Pacific Nationally Determined Contributed (NDC) Hub since 2018. Via this NDC Hub, Germany up until 2021 supported the Cook Islands through our development agency GIZ to help fight climate change.

The Pacific nations are contributing 0.01 per cent altogether of the world's CO2 emissions, said Ambassador Krawielicki, adding "this is why it is so important to save Tuvalu, save Kiribati, save Samoa, save the Cook Islands and save the world".

"I am really glad and hopeful that this goal may be reached together in a joint, teamwork, of the leaders of the world." As part of their commitment to the Pacific, the German government have also continued to assist and support the Cook Islands and other Pacific Island nations through initiatives such as the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation's Instrument of the European Union. The fund mobilises around 80 billion euros to foster global recovery over the next seven years.

Around 8.5 billion euros of the fund will be used exclusively for Asia-Pacific international partnerships on sustainable development, climate change, democracy, governance, human rights, peace, and security - which is in line with Germany's long-standing commitment to the Indo-Pacific Region.

The German government also reconfirmed its commitment back in September 2020 with the adoption of its first Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region.

Ambassador Krawielicki said Germany is now "much more engaged" in all areas and issues concerning the Pacific islands and is ready to support political issues.

He also said that following the events in Tonga recently he feels "deeply sorry" and extremely shocked about this sudden and unexpected catastrophe that has occurred to the people of Tonga.

"I would like to express my sincere condolences to the families which have lost beloved ones and to the whole nation of Tonga. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. The German government is following the news very closely and we are in contact with other governments to see how we can help."