

SMART ECONOMY GRANT KICK-STARTS COOK ISLANDS FIRST BLOCKCHAIN INITIATIVE

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) is pleased to announce that Ora Fiduciary (Cook Islands) Limited (Ora Partners) are developing a new 'Smart Trust platform' with support from the Government's SMART Economy Initiative (SMART).

The Smart Trust platform will enable Ora Partners to offer innovative digital technology to trust businesses in the Cook Islands and overseas. It is being used as the pilot project for the development of a new blockchain ecosystem for the Cook Islands.

Put simply, a blockchain is a digital record of transactions. The name comes from its structure, in which individual records, called blocks, are linked together in a single list, called a chain. As an example, blockchain technology is used to record transactions made with cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum. It has other applications which are being developed the world over.

From a financial services perspective, blockchain technology can facilitate mutual trust between parties who would otherwise have been doubtful of each other's data. Puai Wichman of Ora Partners, says there is a clear need to modernise the trust industry and adopting blockchain technology will help the Cook Islands to become a world leading provider of innovative trust and financial services.

"The Smart Trust pilot will establish a functional, practical, useful and profitable application of blockchain technology. It will lay the foundations for a new digital ecosystem for the Cook Islands - a bridge to the future, built on the blockchain," says Puai. "The Smart Trust platform will move the traditional trust legal framework and processes onto a block-

chain-based digital platform. This presents a whole array of benefits including transparency and privacy where it is required and automation of outdated trust processes. Going digital also enables greater accessibility to a far bigger market than currently exists for the Cook Islands trust industry. Blockchain technology will enable us to introduce new property ownership concepts, which will have far reaching implications for the industry and beyond."

MFEM Financial Secretary Garth Henderson says: "This highly innovative pilot project has the potential to create immense economic benefit for trust companies, banks, law firms, accounting firms, money managers and other related financial services firms. Once a new blockchain ecosystem is established, it will also open up opportunities for the wider Cook Islands economy and for Cook Islanders to be technology-based entrepreneurs competing on the world stage."



The SMART Economy initiative supports the Cook Islands' Economic Development Strategy 2030 by encouraging the development and adoption of innovative and productive technologies. This in turn fosters our creative and knowledge industries to strengthen and diversify our economic base.

A Cook Islands led blockchain ecosystem will open up new opportunities across a wide cross section of the economy, including Government. The introduction of this technology needs specialised expertise not currently found in the Cook Islands, so Ora Partners will collaborate with Cyber Ventures, an international cybersecurity consultancy specialised in Blockchain development, to deliver the Smart Trust pilot.

Funding from Government makes it a key stakeholder in the Smart Trust project. "We are delighted to have received support through the SMART Fund initiative and see this as the first step towards a long-term strategic partnership with Government," says Puai. "The Smart Trust platform will create a new revenue stream for both Government and the private sector, which will in turn create jobs and new skill sets for our people. I am genuinely excited with the transformative nature of this technology which fits in perfectly with Objective 2 of the Cook Islands Economic Development Plan 2030 - to bring about a more complex and diverse economy".