

# RMI's court system rated best in the region

For the second year in a row, the Marshall Islands court system has been rated the best among 14 independent Pacific island nations.

The Pacific Judicial Development Program's annual report, "2012 Court Trend Report," issued in July, shows the RMI has the only judiciary in the region that met all 15 performance standards. The previous year, it had met 14 out of 15.

Palau is the next best, meeting 14 out of 15. Tonga and Niue met 12 each, while Tokelau and the Cook Islands met 10 each.

The report noted that the smallest island nations are promoting increased transparency in court operations. "In the 2011 Baseline Report, only two of the 14 countries (including the RMI) were able to report on 10 or more of the 15 court performance indicators," the report said. "One year on, six of the 14 countries are able to report on 10 or more of the court performance indicators." The report added: "It is interesting to note that these initiatives on court transparency and accountability are being led by three of the smallest jurisdictions in the Pacific."

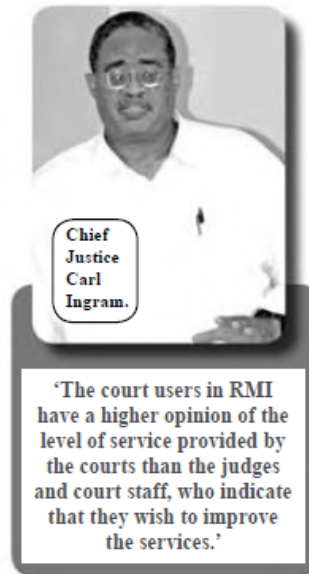
The aim of Pacific Judicial Development Program activity is to support and develop the monitoring and evaluation capacity of judiciaries across 14 countries in the Pacific region.

In the 2011 Baseline Report, the Republic of the Marshall Islands was the only judiciary of the 14 countries reviewed that produced its annual report in the year immediately following the reporting period and published it on the judiciary's web site.

The report included separate sections on three of the island nations' judiciaries, including the RMI.

The RMI court system implemented an "access and fairness court survey" over two weeks from April 9-20, 2012 at both the Majuro and Ebeye courthouses, the report said. Majuro had 101 survey participants and Ebeye had four survey participants. In 2012, Majuro had 259 High Court cases filed and 3,214 District Court cases filed (total: 3,473 cases) and Ebeye had 34 High Court cases and 349 District Court cases (total 383 cases).

The survey questionnaire was based upon questions used in the International Framework for Court Excellence (IFCE) self-



assessment questionnaire and a number of surveys from other courts around the world.

"The Court received overwhelmingly positive responses from court users," the report said.

The RMI judiciary asked its judges and court staff to complete the IFCE self-assessment questionnaire in 2011. Following the client survey undertaken in April 2012 it is possible to compare the responses of court clients, judges and court staff to the same survey questions.

"It is interesting to observe in the results that the court users in the Republic of the Marshall Islands have a higher opinion of the level of service provided by the courts than the judges and court staff, who indicate that they wish to improve the services currently offered," the report said. "The views of the court staff and the judges in the Marshall Islands are quite similar in relation to the level of service provided by the court. This would tend to indicate that there is a regular dialogue between judges and court staff on how to provide the best services possible to the public and what the next steps of the court will be to achieve this."