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Marshall Islands leads Pacific judiciaries in transparency

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MAJURO — The Marshall Islands court system received the highest marks among 14 Pacific nations evaluated by the Pacific Judicial Development Program.

A report on judiciary's in the region recognized the Marshall Islands judiciary for "setting high standards for judicial transparency."

Of 15 performance standards, Marshall Islands courts met 12 — the most of any island reviewed — and partially met two more. Palau, another north Pacific nation, met the next highest number of the performance standards. The evaluation did not include the court systems in Guam and the CNMI.

"We're being recognized for our case management," said Marshall Islands Chief Justice Carl Ingram. "They are using us as an example in their report."

Ingram noted that because of the High Court's performance, "we are able to get donor funding to further improve our services."

The report on the PJDP Pacific-wide court improvement program, funded by Australia and New Zealand, was issued Thursday in Majuro by the country's High Court. The evaluation focused on 15 areas selected by Chief Justices in the region that represent essential data that jurisdictions should have the capacity to collect, analyze and present in their annual reports.

Performance areas agreed to by court systems included standards in case management, affordability and accessibility of services, published procedures for handling of complaints, human resources, and transparency of operations.

"Ingram praised Clerk of Courts Ingrid Kabua for leading the courthouse staff in implementing the 15 standards that have improved the court's services to the public.

"The initiatives introduced by the judiciary of the Republic of the Marshall Islands were particularly interesting," the report noted, saying that they include:

- The ability to collect and analyze court performance data on 14 of the 15 indicators chosen by PJDP jurisdictions.
- Publication of an annual report on the Marshall Islands judiciary website in the year immediately following the reporting period — the only court in the 14 nations to do so.

The two standards the Marshall Islands judiciary partly met related to cases disposed of through the district court and the system for receiving complaints concerning court staff members. It did not meet the indicator for granting civil court fee waivers.

Palau's judiciary was the next highest achiever in the review, meeting 11 of the standards, with two partially met and two unmet.

Tuvalu was the only other country to meet a majority — eight — of the indicators.