

# Judicial video conferences clear backlog

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Ministry of Justice building. GRAY CLAPHAM / 20050411

## **Criminal and civil court matters are resuming later this month, through video conferencing between Cook Islands and New Zealand.**

Land Court matters, presided over by Judge Craig Coxhead, have started this week.

This follows the successful Court of Appeal hearing that was completed through a web conference last month, said Secretary for Justice Tamatoa Jonassen.

“There was some very good feedback from that hearing, which gives us confidence in moving ahead with doing the court sessions scheduled for this month, and hope there are no internet connectivity issues through Vodafone,” Jonassen said.

The Criminal and civil court session will be presided over by either Judge Colin Doherty or Chief Justice Sir Hugh Williams, from July 27 to August 7. “The technology affords more flexibility in scheduling, but also limits the types of cases that can be heard,” Jonassen said.

Complex matters like jury trials would need to wait for when judges can return to the country.

Jonassen said there were government discussions to allow judges’ return. For now, this month’s cases were a mix of new and adjourned matters. Others had been dealt with “on the papers”.

“Our court staff have put in a lot of hard work coordinating with the Judiciary what cases would be scheduled and preparing for hearings,” Jonassen said.

Meanwhile, the Ministry have concluded a Justice of the Peace workshop sponsored by Pacific Judicial Strengthening Initiative, the New Zealand Government, and the Ministry of Justice.

Jonassen said the workshop was perhaps the first of its kind, which involved web conferencing technology to join faculty and participants from Australia, New Zealand, Aitutaki, and Rarotonga to provide six days of judicial training specifically for Cook Islands Justices of the Peace.

Senior Justice of the Peace Tangi Taoro arranged and facilitated the workshop.

He added that they are also looking into how to improve the use of web conferencing technology with all the Justice Pa Enea offices to facilitate better communication and future training initiatives.

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