

New JPs sworn in

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Written by Rashneel Kumar (/national/local/itemlist/user/3916)

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The new Justices of the Peace with Queen's Representative Sir Tom Marsters. Tearoa John Tini, left, Simiona Teiotu, Sir Tom Marsters, Dr Jon Jonassen and Ngatokorua Mataio. 20082134

Four new Justices of the Peace have been appointed to ease the workload of those deciding court matters.

Tearoa John Tini, Simiona Teiotu, Dr Jon Jonassen and Ngatokorua Mataio were sworn in before Queen's Representative Sir Tom Marsters earlier this week.

However, Justice secretary Tamatoa Jonassen – whose father is one of the new JPs – said there was need for more.

Their numbers had been reduced significantly as a result of the Justice of the Peace Act 2017.

That Act sets out tight criteria, requiring a person with a good standing in the community, fluent in Cook Islands Maori and English, with a sound knowledge of local culture. Those over 72 years of age or older are not considered for the role.

Jonassen said a 2019 amendment to the Act helped somewhat, allowing the Chief Justice to appoint Tangianau Taoro to the office of Senior Justice. "The process involves support from the Minister of Justice, Cabinet, the Executive Council, and the Queen's Representative. The swearing in ceremony finalises the process of becoming a

JP, which for these new JPs has been over a year,” he said. “For full disclosure, Dr Jon Jonassen is my father, who was considered to be a JP before I applied for the position as Secretary.”

The four new JPs underwent training administered by the Pacific Judicial Strengthening Initiative in June/July this year, along with the current JPs and court staff in Rarotonga and Aitutaki, Tamatoa Jonassen said.

Simiona Teiotu, the youngest of the four, said he was looking forward to putting in practice what he learned.

Teiotu, who works as aviation security inspector with Ministry of Transport, started as a trainee criminal and civil clerk in 1989.

“It’s a responsible position and like every other job, you have to go through a process and we underwent training over two months to prepare ourselves for the role,” Teiotu said. “I believe we will be observing other JPs carrying out their role until we get the roster that’s when we will know our full responsibilities.”

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