



Cook Islands **NEWS**

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Manatua cable project set to start

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The Cook Islands and other Pacific Island countries participating in the Manatua submarine telecommunications cable project are close to finalising the international tender to carry out this multi-million dollar development.

Finance minister Mark Brown said they were expecting to complete the submarine cable project by next year.

Apart from the Cook Islands, the project which is expected to bring faster, more affordable and reliable internet services, also includes governments of Niue, French Polynesia and Samoa.

“We are very close to finalising the agreement for the international tender to go on, hopefully that will be done by the end of this month,” Brown said.

“There is just a small issue to deal with and that is the legal definitions between the banks – the ADB (Asian Development Bank) and the IDF part of the EIB (European Investment Bank), on what needs to be included in the final document. But otherwise we are ready to move.

“We are expecting completion of the cable by 2019. (It will) provide us with access to bandwidth at a much cheaper price than what we are currently getting from satellite. So you would expect to see prices for the bandwidth dropping considerably.”

In early April last year, the governments of the Cook Islands, Niue, French Polynesia and Samoa signed an agreement to facilitate the design, construction and operation and maintenance of a regional submarine cable system to connect their countries. Rarotonga and Aitutaki will be connected to the system.

Government’s quarterly financial report said a memorandum of understanding had also been signed by the countries for the planning and implementation of the Manatua cable system.

A project steering group was formed to prepare the project and establish a Construction and Maintenance Agreement detailing overall management of the Manatua cable system.

“The government of New Zealand, represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) is providing a grant of \$15 million to the Cook Islands government to support the project,” the report said.

“The Cook Islands government have requested ADB support to finance the Cook Islands’ share of the cost.

“ADB have set aside an Ordinary Capital Resources loan allocation of up to US\$15 million to assist in financing the sections that connect Rarotonga and Aitutaki to the main section of the cable system, finance construction of the landing stations in Rarotonga and Aitutaki and the setting up of a project management unit to support the implementing agency and co-finance the main section of the cable system, proportionate with the Cook Islands’ share.”

The report said the ADB was also providing technical and legal support to Cook Islands to prepare the project.

“Social and environmental impact assessments have been completed and the submarine cable is expected to be operational towards the end of 2018, or early 2019.”

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