



An open letter to practitioners  
from the Chief High Court Judge,  
Hon Justice Helen Winkelmann

3 March 2011

Dear Practitioners

The purpose of this letter is to tell you about the arrangements that have been put in place so that we can ensure that the business of the court continues following the Canterbury earthquake.

As most will be aware the Christchurch High Court is within the cordoned off zone. Structurally the building has been assessed as sound. However the interior of the building has suffered damage, particularly to the registry areas. Flooding in the basement is now under control. Many of the surrounding buildings are extensively damaged and we expect that the court will not be operating from the central city site for some time. Registry functions will not be housed there, and hearings will not occur in that court building for the foreseeable future.

However, the Court remains able to deal with urgent matters at short notice, such as bail appeals, applications for interim relief and writs of *habeas corpus*. Because of the difficult circumstances practitioners are working in, the court will accept informality in documentation at this time.

Arrangements are being made on a case by case basis as to where all matters, urgent and non-urgent, will be heard. At this stage proceedings are likely to be heard in alternative court centres such as Timaru, Ashburton, Wellington, Invercargill and Dunedin. The registry will make contact with counsel involved in forthcoming fixtures to ascertain their ability to undertake scheduled hearings.

The High Court is aware that many practitioners do not have access to their files and that some records may be permanently lost. If that is the case we urge all practitioners to cooperate to assist in the reconstruction of missing files. We also ask legal practitioners deal with each other with courtesy and consideration, making particular allowance for the difficulties that Canterbury practitioners are facing in these times.

The Christchurch registry is open. Because there is presently no building available in Christchurch, registry functions in the short term will be undertaken out of the Wellington High Court. Filings may be made electronically at [Canterburyhcapplications@justice.govt.nz](mailto:Canterburyhcapplications@justice.govt.nz) or by other arrangement with the registry. The contact person for inquiries is Jane Penney at (04) 931-5831. When practitioners make contact with Wellington High Court, they should indicate that their query involves a Christchurch matter.

Arrangements are currently being considered to provide some registry facilities in Christchurch. As these arrangements are confirmed, they will be notified on the Ministry of Justice website at <http://www.justice.govt.nz/media/christchurch-earthquake-february-2011/affected-courts-and-trials>

The February law practitioner admission ceremony has been cancelled. The court manager is contacting all applicants and the court will undertake admissions both individually and by group as necessary.

Finally, the High Court Judges wish Canterbury residents, and in particular Canterbury practitioners, all the very best in the months ahead as you rebuild your lives and practices. Our thoughts are with you during this difficult period.

Yours sincerely



Hon Justice HD Winkelmann  
Chief High Court Judge