



CHIEF JUSTICE OF NEW ZEALAND | TE TUMU WHAKAWĀ O AOTEAROA

Annual Report

For the period

1 JANUARY 2025 TO 31 DECEMBER 2025



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Introduction

This Annual Report provides information about New Zealand's judges, about the courts and their operation, and about work underway to better support that operation.

The fundamental role of the courts in our society is to administer justice. This work supports the rule of law – the ideal that every person is equal before the law and equally entitled to its protection. Individual judges uphold the rule of law by administering justice through the courts. A principle essential to this role is judicial independence – judges must be free to make these decisions, protected from external influence or pressure.

People who visit our courts will see the rule of law in action. Every day, in courtrooms across New Zealand, judges hear and determine disputes across the full range of the law. They resolve matters of great significance to individuals, whānau, communities and businesses. This report gives a sense of the range of the work that courts do, and of the challenges that exist for their effective operation.

Courts require good systems and adequate resources in order to manage heavy workloads and deliver justice efficiently and in a timely way. The report outlines operational change that is under way to ensure that the courts can continue to play their vital role. This is part of

the judiciary's continuing focus on ensuring that the courts remain fair, accessible and responsive to the needs of those who come to or are brought before the courts.

Throughout the year, judges have led or contributed to work aimed at improving court processes, reducing delay, strengthening access to justice, supporting open justice, and preparing the courts for future challenges. The report provides many examples of work being done across the courts. Projects of note include the District Court's Timely Access to Justice programme; the judiciary's consideration of how generative AI could assist in court administration (page 63); addressing court accessibility for Deaf and disabled people (page 57); improvements to civil justice, such as the introduction of the new Commercial List to support the efficient

resolution of commercial proceedings in the Auckland High Court (see page 37); and contributing to public understanding of the work of the courts through our open justice initiatives (see Part 4).

Courts do not operate on their own. They are reliant on the Ministry of Justice to provide registry and other staff, buildings and technological support. The relationship with the Ministry of Justice is described in Part 1 of the report. I am grateful to the Ministry of Justice for the invaluable assistance they provide to the judiciary to enable the courts to operate.

Courts are also reliant on other agencies and individuals within the justice system to play their vital role in proceedings; others such as the legal profession, Police, the Department of Corrections, Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand.

The report explains how the judiciary ensures, in the face of this operational interdependence, that the important principle of judicial independence is maintained. The best example of this cooperative approach relates to the development of protocols to assist with the use of technology to support remote participation in court proceedings. This is underpinned by the important principle that the judiciary must retain ultimate control over the conduct of hearings, including the use of remote participation technology, because it is the duty of judges to ensure that every person who comes before the court has a fair hearing.

Also described is the extent of cooperation with judiciaries across the region. Part 5 describes how our judiciary benefits from strong ties that enable us to share knowledge with judiciaries in the Pacific, Australia and around the world.

The people who work in the courts best understand the issues that need to be resolved and how to resolve them. I am grateful to the New Zealand Law Society, and the many members of the legal profession who have contributed their expertise to the initiatives and forums described in this report. For the same reason, I thank the many justice sector agencies who judges work with every day for their commitment to the smooth operation of our courts.

Finally, I thank the judges and judicial officers of New Zealand, and the staff who support us and the courts. It is a privilege to lead a judiciary that approaches this responsibility with dedication, knowledge and care.



Helen Winkelmann
Chief Justice | Te Tumu Whakawā

The year in review

Delivering justice

Judges are responsible for the administration of justice according to law in New Zealand's courts. The essential nature of their work is to hear and determine proceedings by applying the law to the facts as found by the judges using a process that is fair and transparent.

The Ministry of Justice provides support for the operation of the courts. The Ministry is responsible for providing the courthouses, staff, technology and all other operating systems necessary to support the courts.¹

The judiciary and the Ministry work together when considering changes to the courts' operating processes. This year the judiciary, supported by the Ministry, progressed a number of initiatives to modernise and strengthen the courts. This chapter provides a brief overview of those initiatives, with further detail set out in the report.

» **Timeliness in the courts**

There was an improvement in the timely hearing and disposition of cases in the District Court this year. This is the result of many years of coordinated effort, as outlined in Part 2: The work of the courts.

» **Improving accessibility in the courts for Deaf and disabled people**

Disabled people are over-represented in almost every aspect of the justice system. In the criminal jurisdiction, disabled people experience much higher rates of victimisation than the general population. A significant proportion of defendants have a disability. Deaf and disabled people often encounter barriers when trying to access justice. The Chief Justice

has said that access to the courts for members of the Deaf and disabled communities is part of the core work of the courts: see Part 3: Access to Justice for work undertaken this year by the judiciary to advance accessibility in the courts.

¹ This model must operate in a way that supports the independence of the judiciary and ensures the best use of public funds to ensure the courts' safe and effective operation. The judiciary has a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry that sets out how the relationship operates. This is called the *Statement of Principles Appendix 1*.

» **Digitisation of case management system**

The courts' current reliance on paper-based systems is inefficient, contributes to delay and creates the risk of error. For the last few years work has been underway to develop Te Au Reka. This digital case and court management system represents the most significant investment in the courts' case management system for decades.

This year the judiciary assisted in developing and testing Te Au Reka. This digital system will be progressively introduced to courthouses in New Zealand, beginning late 2026 in the Family Court. An update is provided at page 61.

» **Remote participation protocols**

In 2025, the judiciary published protocols for the use of remote participation in the civil jurisdiction in the High Court and District Court, and in the Family Court and Employment Court; and for the criminal jurisdiction in the High Court and District Court.

These protocols provide defaults for when remote participation can be expected to be used and by doing so provide greater certainty for people involved in hearings, and those working within the justice system. The protocols also reflect the judge's responsibility to ensure procedural fairness at every hearing. They ensure that decisions as to whether remote participation is appropriate in any proceeding ultimately lies with the judge. See Part 3: Access to Justice.

» **Generative AI in the courts**

Generative artificial intelligence has the potential to support the efficient operation of the courts by assisting with some administrative tasks, but the use of generative AI in a court setting must be carefully managed so that it does not jeopardise the integrity of the court process.

Against this background, this year the judiciary undertook work to define the parameters governing the appropriate use of generative AI. This work is described in Part 3: Access to Justice.

» **Court security**

Security incidents in courthouses continue to increase. There was a 28 per cent increase in incidents that court security were involved with from 2024 until 2025. This increase is of concern for the judiciary and the Ministry of Justice as to the safety of court users. Judges play an important role in management of incidents and are required to be familiar with security procedures in all courts in which they sit. The Ministry of Justice provides site specific health, safety, and security inductions in both base and circuit courts. These inductions are also available to regular court users such as members of the legal profession.

» **Stewardship of the courts system**

The judiciary, and judicial leaders in particular, have institutional responsibility for how the courts function, to support the work of the judges in their courts. Examples of how heads of bench have exercised that responsibility this year include the judiciary's submission to the Ministry of Justice's review of the legal aid scheme (page 59).

» **Engagement with policy formation**

By convention, the judiciary does not generally comment on executive policy-making or parliamentary law-making. But that convention does permit comment where proposed legislation might affect the operation of the courts, judicial independence, the rule of law or the administration of justice. In 2025, the Chief Justice made submissions on the Regulatory Systems (Courts) Amendment Bill and the Regulatory Standards Bill.

The judiciary also considered other law reform proposals through the Legislation and Law Reform Committee - see the committee's report on page 87.

PART ONE

The judicial branch of government

“I swear that I will well and truly serve His Majesty, His heirs and successors, according to law, in the office of judge; and I will do right to all manner of people after the laws and usages of New Zealand, without fear or favour, affection or ill will. So help me God”.

THE JUDICIAL OATH: SECTION 18 OATHS AND DECLARATIONS ACT 1957.

The rule of law

An independent judiciary plays an essential role in upholding the rule of law in New Zealand. The rule of law is the ideal that everyone is equally subject to the law, and is equally entitled to its benefit. It is a fundamental principle of New Zealand’s constitutional framework and an essential foundation for individual freedom and wellbeing, social cohesion, and economic prosperity.

The role of the judiciary

The judiciary is one of the three branches of government in New Zealand.² The judiciary is responsible for upholding the rule of law through the administration of justice according to law in New Zealand’s courts.

When hearing and determining proceedings brought before the courts, it is the task of judges to:

- » make sure that the court process is fair and transparent
- » make findings about the facts relevant to that proceeding
- » identify the relevant law, and apply it to the facts as found by the court, to determine the outcome of the proceeding

- » give their reasons for that outcome, and
- » make any appropriate orders.

By applying and thereby giving effect to the laws made both by Parliament (statutes) and the courts in earlier decisions (case law) – the judiciary upholds the rule of law and the constitutional framework of our free and democratic society.

An independent and impartial judiciary

Judicial independence is the principle that judges must be free to decide cases in the manner set out above, free from influence or pressure from external sources – be it commercial interests,

public opinion, the other branches of government, or even other judges themselves.

In New Zealand, as in all countries with a similar court system, judicial independence is supported by a variety of constitutional and statutory protections. By convention, the appointment of judges should be free from political interference. Once appointed, judges may only be removed for misconduct or incapacity.

These protections support judges to act “without fear or favour, affection or ill will.”³

² The other branches of government are the executive, which is responsible for the day-to-day administration of government; and the legislature, which is responsible for (among other things) making law in the form of primary legislation, granting supply to the executive, and holding the executive to account politically. All three branches are responsible for upholding the rule of law. See the [Chief Justice’s Annual Report 2024](#) for a comprehensive explanation of the roles of the branches of government, the principle of separation of powers, and how the branches work together.

³ Judicial oath: s 18 Oaths and Declarations Act 1957.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR COURT ADMINISTRATION

Although the judiciary is an independent branch of government, it is dependent on another branch, the executive branch, for operational support. The Ministry of Justice provides the courthouses, staff, technology and all other operating systems necessary to support the operation of the courts.

This model must operate in a way that both supports the independence of the judiciary and ensures the best use of public funds to ensure the courts' safe and effective operation. For this reason, the judiciary has a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry that makes clear how the relationship functions in order to respect judicial independence. This is called the Statement of Principles: see Appendix 1.

The Courts Strategic Partnership Group (CSPG) is the formal forum for the Ministry of Justice and the judiciary. In this forum senior judges and senior Ministry leaders work together to discuss how the operation of the courts is to be supported now and in the future.



Detailing on the Senior Courts judges' ceremonial robes

The judges

Judicial leadership

The Chief Justice is the head of the judiciary and the judicial branch of government. She is also the head of the Supreme Court of New Zealand, and head of the Senior Courts. She is ultimately responsible under the Senior Courts Act 2016 for the orderly and efficient conduct of the business of the High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court.

All other courts within New Zealand's court system are headed by a judicial leader who has statutory responsibility for the business of their court or courts. The President of the Court of Appeal and the Chief High Court Judge are responsible to the Chief Justice for the orderly and efficient conduct of their courts.

The Chief Justice is the principal spokesperson for the judiciary and the principal point of interface between the judiciary and the executive branch of government.

The Chief Justice acts as the Administrator of the Government when the Governor-General is out of the country or otherwise unavailable for duties.

Heads of bench

The heads of bench as at 31 December 2025 were:



Chief Justice Helen Winkelmann

Chief Justice of New Zealand and Tokelau, and head of the Supreme Court



Justice Christine French
President of the Court of Appeal



Justice Sally Fitzgerald
Chief High Court Judge



Chief Judge Christina Inglis
Chief Judge of the Employment Court



Chief Judge Heemi Taumaunu

Chief District Court Judge



Judge Jacquelyn Moran
Principal Family Court Judge



Judge Ida Malosi
Principal Youth Court Judge



Janet Robertshawe
Principal Disputes Referee



Chief Judge Caren Fox
Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court



Chief Judge David Kirkpatrick
Chief Judge of the Environment Court



Judge Anna Tutton
Chief Coroner



Chief Judge Kevin Riordan
Chief Judge of the Court Martial and Judge Advocate General of the Armed Forces of New Zealand

Leading divisions of the District Court



The judicial workforce

The number of judges New Zealand has serving in each court at any given time is set out in legislation.⁴

At 31 December 2025 there were 268 permanent judges and associate judges, 39 acting judges and 263⁵ other judicial officers presiding in New Zealand’s court system.⁶ A list of all sitting judges and judicial officers in 2025 can be found in Appendix 5. Judges who retired during 2025 are listed in Appendix 6.

The number of judges and judicial officers by court are as follows:

Supreme Court Te Kōti Mana Nui	Six judges One acting judge
Court of Appeal Te Kōti Pira	10 judges One acting judge
High Court Te Kōti Matua	40 judges Four acting judges Eight associate judges ⁷
District Court Te Kōti-ā-Rohe	172 judges ⁸ 31 acting warranted judges 13 Family Court Associates 17 community magistrates One acting community magistrate 181 judicial justices of the peace

4 Statutes include the Senior Courts Act 2016, the District Court Act 2016.

5 Judicial officers are made up of community magistrates, family court associates, environment commissioners and deputy commissioners, coroners, relief coroners and associate coroners, and judicial justices of the peace.

6 Some judges and judicial officers hold more than one position or sit in more than one court.

7 One associate judge is currently appointed full-time as Chair of the Independent Police Conduct Authority | Mana Whanonga Pirihimana Motuhake.

8 This number includes judges on secondment or performing special roles (such as Children’s Commissioner or Chief Coroner). This number excludes Environment Court judges, although judges of that Court also hold District Court warrants.

Te Kooti Whenua Māori Māori Land Court and Te Kooti Pira Māori Māori Appellate Court	14 judges One acting judge
Employment Court Te Kōti Take Mahi	Five judges One acting judge
Environment Court Te Kōti Taiao	Nine judges 12 alternate judges ⁹ 12 environment commissioners Three deputy environment commissioners
Coroners Court Te Kōti Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati	22 coroners ¹⁰ Seven relief coroners ¹¹ Eight associate coroners ¹²
Court Martial Te Kōti Whakawā Kaimahi o te Ope Kātua	Ten judges ¹³
Court Martial Appeal Court Te Kōti Pira Whakawā Kaimahi o te Ope Kātua	Three appointed judges ¹⁴

- 9 “Alternate judge” is the terminology used in the Resource Management Act for “acting judge”. Alternate judges are either retired Environment Court judges or serving judges of the District Court or Māori Land Court. Alternate judges who are retired Environment Court judges generally serve in a full-time capacity, whereas alternate judges who are serving judges of the District Court or Māori Land Court sit only on select cases.
- 10 During 2022, the cap in the Coroners Act 2006 was raised from 20 to 22 – see s 109(2)(a) of the Coroners Act 2006.
- 11 Relief coroners perform the same role and function as coroners. They have a fixed-term warrant and may work either full or part-time. Associate coroners hold a fixed-term warrant and do not have the power to hold an inquest.
- 12 The Chief Coroner has been included in both the Coroners Court and the District Court counts.
- 13 Only the Chief Judge sits full-time in the Court Martial. The Deputy Chief Judge and all other judges are District Court Judges who sit on an as-required basis.
- 14 Appointed judges are practising lawyers or retired High Court judges, who sit in this court on an as-required basis. All judges of the High Court are also judges of the Court Martial Appeal Court. The Court sits as a panel of three, with at least one appointed judge.



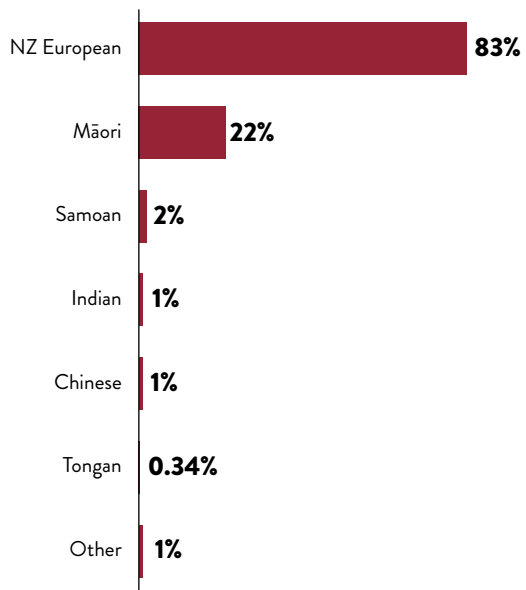
Judicial diversity census

In 2023, in order to better understand the make-up of the judiciary, the Office of the Chief Justice developed a survey to capture information on education, religion, professional background, ethnicity and geography, gender and sexuality. This information has been collected from new judges since then. The information in this section is drawn from the census.



ETHNICITY AND GEOGRAPHY

Respondents identified with these ethnicities:

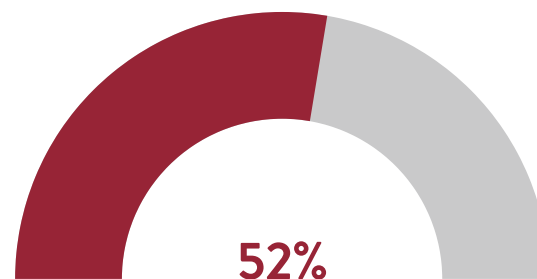


Origins

- 33 immigrated to NZ
- 44 have one parent who immigrated to NZ
- 31 have two parents who immigrated to NZ

RELIGION

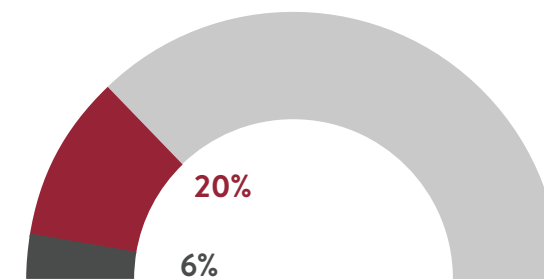
52% of judges said they identified with a religion, and the majority of these identified as Christian.



DISABILITY

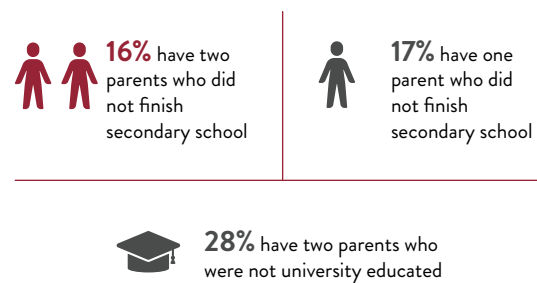
6% of judges reported having a disability.

A further 20% per cent of judges reported having a close relative with a disability.



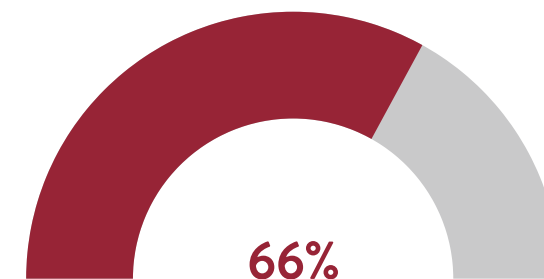
FAMILY BACKGROUND

This is used as an indicator of socio-economic background.



LANGUAGE

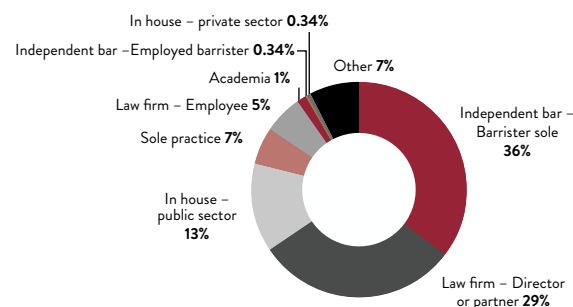
66% of judges have some proficiency in te reo Māori.



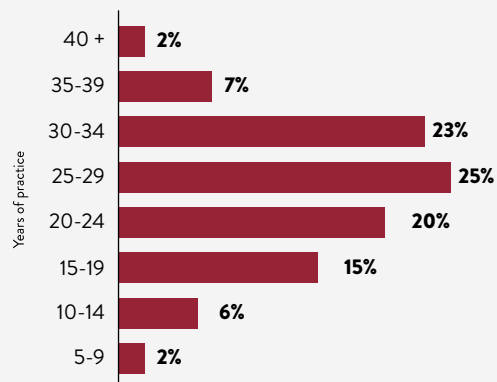
PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Practice areas immediately before judicial appointment:

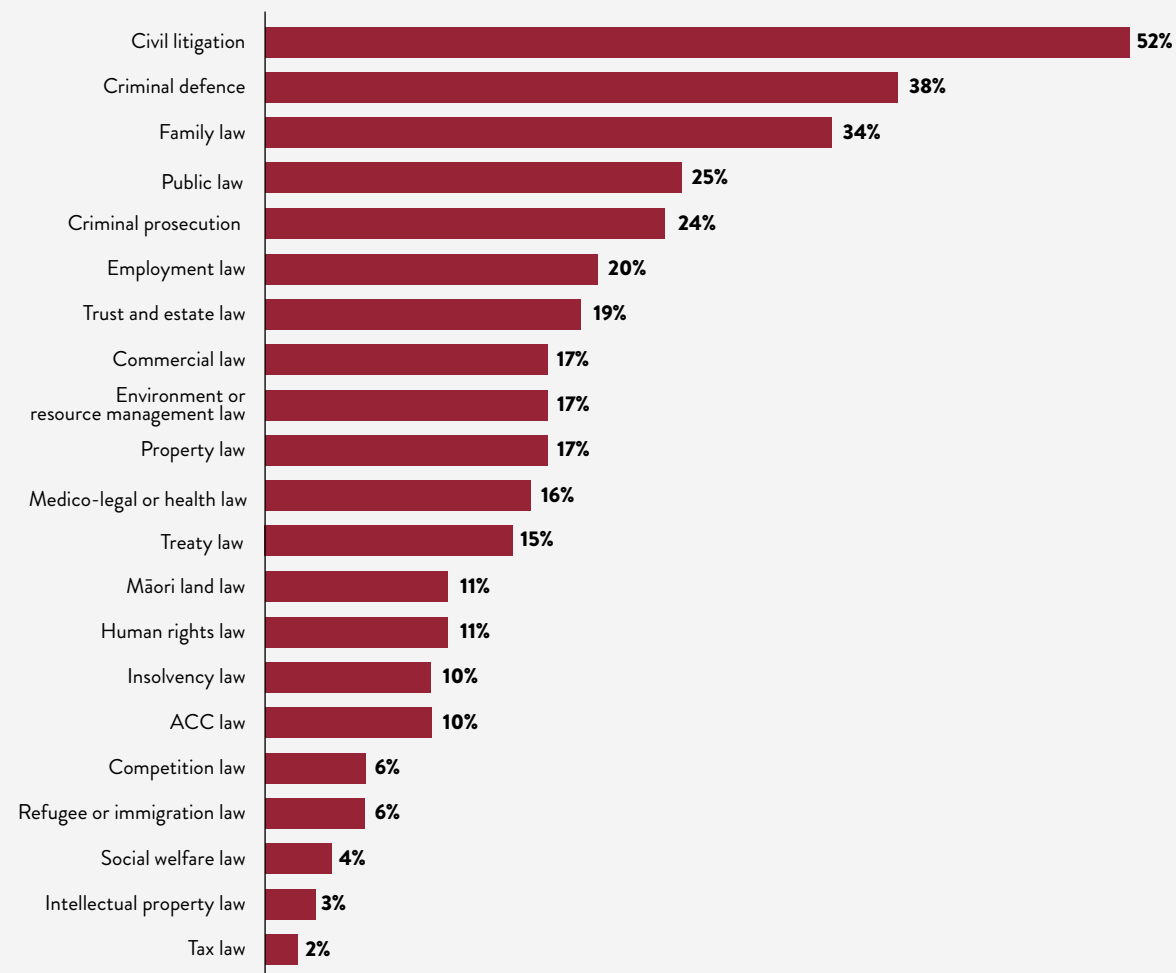
Judges who used to work at Crown Law, Public Defence Service and Police Prosecution Service are categorised as In-house lawyers.



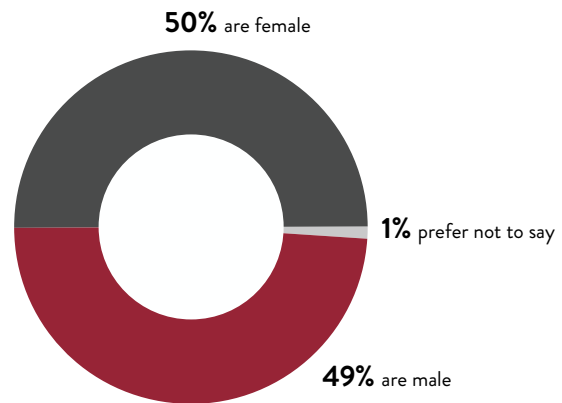
Post-qualification experience of judges and judicial officers:



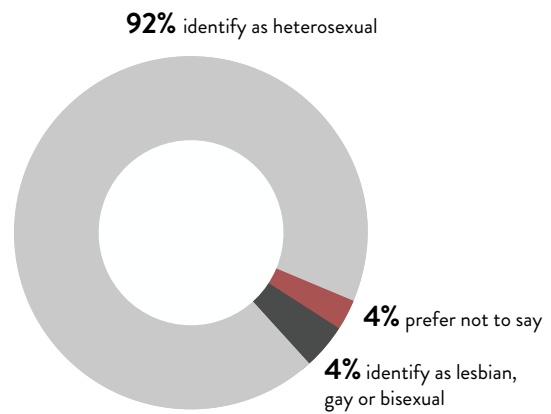
Judges' areas of practice before judicial appointment:



GENDER



SEXUALITY



These graphs represent statistics from all courts.





ADDRESSING GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE SENIOR PROFESSION

Despite the growing numbers of women in the legal profession, and various initiatives aimed specifically at addressing gender inequality, it is a matter of continuing concern that too few women are leading cases in the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court.

Lead counsel are those who have overall responsibility for how a claim is presented to court. Junior counsel play a support role in this.

Research released in 2025 by the New Zealand Bar Association shows that between 2020 and 2023, 30 per cent of lead counsel in the Court of Appeal and 26 per cent of lead counsel in the Supreme Court, were women.¹⁵ Since 2012, these figures have remained relatively unchanged. The Chief Justice spoke at the report's launch event: see page 69.

¹⁵ <https://nzbar.org.nz/assets/NZBA-Gender-Ratio-Report-December-2024.pdf>.

Judicial conduct

Judges and judicial officers are expected to conform to a high standard of behaviour, both off and on the bench. The Guidelines for Judicial Conduct outline these expectations.¹⁶

There are three processes by which members of the public or the legal profession can raise concerns about the conduct of a judge:

- » The primary mechanism for dealing with complaints of judicial misconduct is the independent office of the Judicial Conduct Commissioner, established under the Judicial Conduct Commissioner and Judicial Conduct Panel Act 2004. The Judicial Conduct Commissioner receives and assesses complaints about the conduct of Judges and following a preliminary examination can: take no further action, dismiss the complaint, refer the complaint to the Head of Bench or, in the case of a complaint that could, if substantiated, warrant consideration of removal of a judge, recommend to the Attorney-General the establishment of a Judicial Conduct Panel.
- » This year, the Judicial Conduct Commissioner recommended to the Attorney-General that a Judicial Conduct Panel be convened to inquire into the conduct of a District Court judge.
- » The New Zealand Law Society operates a process by which members of the profession may raise concerns about judges' conduct in court.¹⁷
- » The judiciary has a policy under which registry or court staff may raise concerns or complain about bullying or harassment by a judge. A complementary policy is being developed for judicial officers (such as community magistrates and judicial justices of the peace). The latter work is led by the Chief District Court Judge's Chambers | Te Whare o Ngā Kaihautū Waka o te Kōti-a-Rohe o Aotearoa.

¹⁶ See <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/about-the-judiciary/judicialconduct>.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/about-the-judiciary/judicialconduct/concerns-about-the-conduct-of-court-proceedings>.

Judicial education

Te Kura Kaiwhakawā | Institute of Judicial Studies

All judges receive ongoing education throughout their careers. Te Kura Kaiwhakawā | Institute of Judicial Studies is responsible for providing this education. The curriculum covers:

- » an intensive orientation programme for new judges
- » foundational judicial skills, such as decision-making and judgment writing
- » the law of evidence and procedure
- » updates on substantive law
- » courses to support judicial understanding of matters of social context relevant to their work (such as mental health, addiction, and diverse communities)
- » tikanga and te reo Māori.

Te Kura Kaiwhakawā also manages online resources called bench books, which bring together up-to-date case law and statutes, legal commentary and practice notes for judges and judicial officers. Bench books contain legal content and contextual information relevant to factual and legal issues that commonly arise in cases. Te Kura Kaiwhakawā publishes 12 bench books, eight of which relate to particular courts, and four that are specialist bench books, and two handbooks. These are:

- » *Senior Courts Bench Book*
- » *District Court Bench Book*
- » *Family Court Bench Book* and *Family Court Associates Bench Book*
- » *Youth Court Bench Book*
- » *Te Puna Manawa Whenua | Māori Land Court Bench Book*
- » *Employment Court Bench Book*

- » *Environment Court Bench Book*
- » *Coroners Court Bench Book*
- » *Criminal Jury Trials Bench Book*
- » *Sexual Violence Trials Bench Book*
- » *Family Violence Bench Book*
- » *Kia Mana te Tangata | Judging in Context: A Handbook*
- » *The Law of Evidence Handbook.*

The *Criminal Jury Trials Bench Book* and *Te Puna Manawa Whenua | Māori Land Court Bench Book* are publicly available on the Courts of New Zealand website. More bench books will be published as resources allow.

EDUCATION FOR NEW JUDGES

Te Kura delivers a five-day programme for newly appointed judges and judicial officers. The programme focuses on judicial responsibilities, including the application of core principles of judicial conduct and ethics. Taught by experienced judges, the sessions also cover key aspects of court practice – courtroom management, judgment delivery, bail, sentencing – as well as relevant social context content. The programme provides an opportunity for new judges to establish professional connections with their colleagues. Throughout their judicial career, judges will have the opportunity to engage with this content through Te Kura courses.



Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-Based Institutions

Recommendation 33 of the Royal Commission's final report *Whanaketia – Through pain and trauma, from darkness to light*¹⁸ directed that people involved in the justice system, including judges, receive education and training from subject matter experts on:

- » the Inquiry's findings, including the nature and extent of abuse and neglect in care, the pathway from care to custody, and the particular impacts on survivors of abuse and neglect experienced in care
- » trauma-informed investigative and prosecution processes
- » all forms of discrimination
- » engaging with neurodivergent people
- » human rights concepts, including the obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Chief Justice and heads of bench accepted recommendation 33, and requested Te Kura Kaiwhakawā to develop a curriculum and programmes to address the identified topics.

In 2025, judges participated in a programme of education relating to the findings of the Inquiry and their relevance to judicial practice. This programme began with a national webinar led by senior members of the judiciary and counsel involved in the Inquiry that outlined key findings and recommendations and identified issues that may arise in court proceedings.

Te Kura then delivered in-person education programmes for the District Court, the senior courts, and other courts. These programmes were aligned with the Inquiry's themes and recommendations and included contributions from survivors, the Chair of the Inquiry, a former Commissioner of the Inquiry, senior counsel, senior members of the judiciary, psychologists, psychiatrists, academics, and community advocates.

¹⁸ Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions, *Whanaketia – Through pain and trauma, from darkness to light: Final Report* (June 2024).

PART TWO

The work of the courts

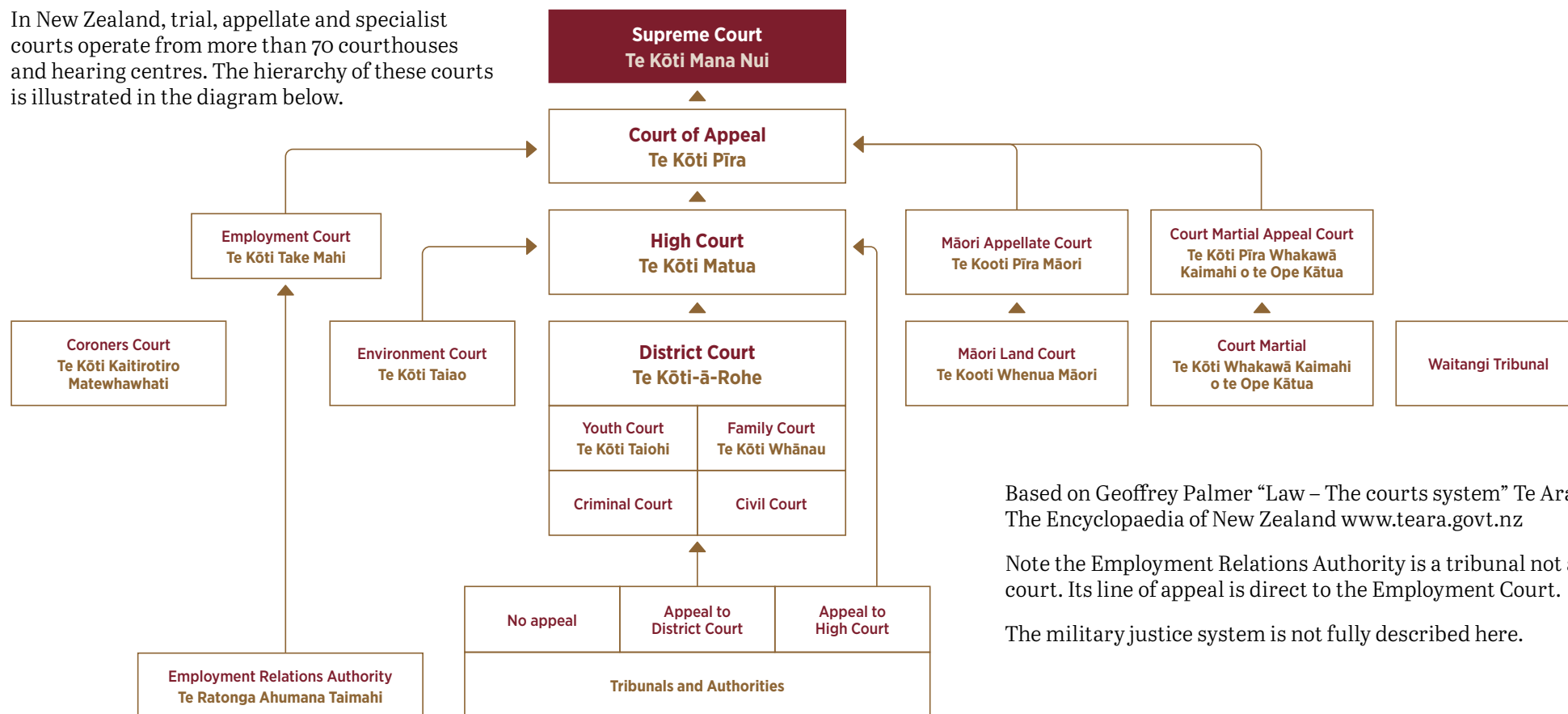
Independent, fair and efficient courts are an important cornerstone in our democracy. Courts underpin social stability. They give confidence that our rights as citizens can be upheld, that our differences and conflicts can be resolved through law, that those who interfere with our rights can be held to account; that our society can be protected from law breakers, and that the State can be required always to act lawfully.

FROM THE COURTS OF NEW ZEALAND WEBSITE

New Zealand's court system

In our democracy the role of the courts is to facilitate access to justice. There are many aspects to this work – administering the criminal law, including criminal and judge alone trials, issues of bail and sentencing, resolving civil disputes between citizens, upholding the rights of the individual and ensuring that government agencies stay within the law.

In New Zealand, trial, appellate and specialist courts operate from more than 70 courthouses and hearing centres. The hierarchy of these courts is illustrated in the diagram below.



Based on Geoffrey Palmer “Law – The courts system” Te Ara: The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand www.teara.govt.nz

Note the Employment Relations Authority is a tribunal not a court. Its line of appeal is direct to the Employment Court.

The military justice system is not fully described here.

The courts of New Zealand

There are four main levels in our mainstream court system.

The **District Court | Te Kōti-ā-Rohe** deals with most of the criminal cases in New Zealand. Most cities and large towns have a District Court. The District Court sits in 58 courthouses and hearing centres in New Zealand.

The **Family Court** and **Youth Court** are each divisions of the District Court. Outside of the Family Court, civil cases can be heard in the District Court if the amount in dispute is less than \$350,000. The District Court also hears appeals from some tribunals including the Disputes Tribunal.

The **High Court | Te Kōti Matua** is the next level in our court system. It is the highest court in which cases can be commenced. Courts in which cases can be commenced are referred to as “first-instance courts”.

The High Court hears the most serious criminal cases, and has unlimited civil jurisdiction. The High Court also hears appeals from the decisions of courts and tribunals below it.

The High Court deals with judicial review proceedings. These are proceedings in which the Court is asked to review decisions involving the exercise of public power (including by the executive branch of government), to ensure that the power is exercised lawfully and in a procedurally fair manner.

If one of the parties to a court case is not satisfied with the result, then that case can be appealed to a higher court. A case in the District Court is normally appealed first to the High Court, unless it was heard by jury, in which case it proceeds straight to the Court of Appeal.¹⁹ The **Court of Appeal | Te Kōti Pira** is the intermediate appellate court, and the **Supreme Court | Te Kōti Mana Nui** is the final court of appeal in New Zealand.²⁰

¹⁹ See page 49 for legislative changes enabling a single Court of Appeal Judge to remit a first criminal appeal from the District Court to the High Court.

²⁰ There are three other appellate-only courts – the Māori Appellate Court (which hears appeals from the Māori Land Court), the Court Martial Appeal Court (which hears appeals from the Court Martial), and the Summary Appeals Court (which hears appeals from the disciplinary decisions of military officers).

Courts of general jurisdiction

The District Court and High Court are known as courts of general jurisdiction. This is because of the breadth of their jurisdiction. They undertake criminal, civil, family and some appellate work.

Criminal justice

High Court | Te Kōti Matua

The High Court deals with the most serious criminal cases including murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, and serious sexual, drug and violent offending. It conducts all sentencings in which preventive detention is a possible outcome, as well as all “third strike” trials and sentencings under the Sentencing (Reinstating Three Strikes) Amendment Act 2024. The High Court also hears protocol cases.²¹ In its appellate function, the High Court hears appeals from the District Court. See “Appellate Courts” for more on the High Court’s appellate jurisdiction.

Three trends continued from 2024 in the High Court’s criminal jurisdiction this year: trial duration continues to lengthen, there are a high number of murder cases before the Court, and there has yet again been a record number of criminal appeals (see more on this in “Appellate courts”).

LONGER TRIAL TIMES

The number of criminal trials in the High Court has been consistent over the past two years – the Court has around 170 active cases (criminal trials) on hand each year. However, trial duration remains at high levels, sitting at an average of around 17 days. This is an increase of more than three hearing days since 2019. There are many reasons for this trend – for example, more multi-

defendant trials, a greater number of charges laid against defendants, and trials that have complex and voluminous evidence (particularly from electronic devices) that must be tested in court.

HIGHER NUMBER OF MURDER CASES

Trials for category 4 offences²² remain at high levels, making up around 80 per cent of active criminal trials in the High Court. Category 4 offences are the most serious criminal offences under the Criminal Procedure Act 2011, and include murder and manslaughter. This trend constrains the High Court’s ability to take “protocol” cases from the District Court.

²¹ Protocol cases involve serious or complex offending which are able to be heard in either the District or High Court. In accordance with the Criminal Procedure Act 2011, a High Court judge makes the decision as to whether the case is tried in the High Court or District Court, in accordance with the protocol. The protocol is used to ensure both that cases are heard in the most appropriate court and also to manage the workload between the District Court and High Court.

²² Category 4 offences are the most serious criminal offences under the Criminal Procedure Act 2011. They are defined not by maximum penalty alone, but because of their exceptional seriousness, complexity, or public significance, and are specifically listed in Schedule 1 of the Act.



TIMELINESS

Delay continues to be a concern in the High Court. Delay has a human cost - it adds to the stress and uncertainty experienced by victims of crime, defendants, and their families. There are many factors contributing to that delay. The increasing load of serious crime and increasing length in trial (discussed above) are amongst them.

In addition, in some parts of the country there is a lack of appropriate courtrooms in which to hold criminal jury trials. This continued to be a particular problem in the Hamilton-Rotorua-Tauranga circuit, where there are high levels of category 4 trials on hand, but a small number of jury-enabled courtrooms in which to conduct those trials.²³

Other factors that contribute to delay include resourcing in agencies that support the courts – for example, many hearings, particularly sentencings, require specialist health assessor reports from psychiatrists or psychologists. There is both a shortage of skilled report writers in New Zealand, and a high demand for the reports – see overleaf.

Further details of the criminal work of the High Court are available in the High Court Annual Report.²⁴

JUDGMENT DELIVERY FOR CRIMINAL CASES

The High Court has set judgment delivery expectations in which 90 per cent of judgments are to be delivered within three months of the conclusion of the hearing. In 2025, the High Court delivered 1,937 criminal judgments, 93.8 per cent of which were delivered within one month of the hearing, and 98.5 per cent of which were delivered within three months of the hearing.

²³ There is no jury enabled courtroom available to the High Court in Tauranga, meaning all Tauranga trials must be conducted in either Rotorua or Hamilton. There is only one courtroom available to the High Court in Rotorua, and only two jury-enabled courtrooms available to the High Court in Hamilton.

²⁴ [High Court Annual Report 2025](#).



FITNESS TO STAND TRIAL – A CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF REPORT WRITERS

A critical shortage of psychiatrists, psychologists, and specialist assessors available to prepare mental health reports for the courts is leading to excessive delay in some proceedings. In addition, there is a rise in the number of reports required.

Where mental health concerns have been raised by or about a defendant, the law currently requires judges to receive two specialist reports in order to decide whether the person is unfit to stand trial.²⁵ The Act specifies that these must be prepared by psychiatrists, psychologists or specialist assessors.

Delay in receiving these reports is a significant issue for the courts. It affects the District and High Courts in the full range of criminal proceedings that attract a penalty of imprisonment, disrupting and delaying criminal proceedings. This in turn causes disruption and distress for victims, defendants and their whānau.

The courts depend upon Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand, as well as private providers, to procure the reports for court proceedings. This is a workforce issue over which the judiciary has no control. The Chief Justice has raised the issue with the Minister of Justice and the Attorney-General.

The Ministry has worked with health and justice sector agencies to improve forensic report arrangements, including establishing a National List of approved private report writers and developing a prioritisation framework to guide which reports are completed by Health New Zealand or private providers.

These changes are intended to improve timeliness and consistency, but delays remain.

25 Criminal Procedure (Mentally Impaired Persons) Act 2003.

MAKING CHILDREN VISIBLE IN OUR COURTS

Children whose parents are imprisoned have been described as “invisible victims of crime”.²⁶ They experience significant trauma and upheaval – housing insecurity, disrupted schooling, separation from siblings, increased financial hardship, stigma and shame, and research shows children may experience “confounded grief” (a phrase that describes the ambiguous loss and grief felt by children in this situation).²⁷ Unexpected remands of parents or primary caregivers in prison, even of short duration, can have severe consequences for children, including creating a risk of harm.

Despite this, dependent children are often invisible in their parent or caregiver’s court proceedings. This was one of five critical gaps identified in Dame Karen Poutasi’s report on the “Joint Review into the Children’s Sector: Identification and Response to Suspected Abuse”, in relation to Malachi Subecz’s death. Five-year-old Malachi was murdered by his carer while his mother, who had been unexpectedly refused bail and subsequently sentenced to imprisonment, was in prison.

In a process parallel to the Poutasi Review, the former Principal Youth Court Judge, John Walker, convened the Making Children Visible Working Group. Group membership included Court of Appeal judge, Justice Susan Thomas, and representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Corrections, New Zealand Police, Public Defence Service, New Zealand Law Society, Oranga Tamariki and Crown Law. In March 2025, the District and High Courts introduced new processes in the criminal jurisdiction to help ensure the provision of information about the existence of dependent children was placed before the Court when a primary caregiver was potentially facing a custodial remand or sentence. New practices were also introduced within the Ministry of Justice, Police, Public Defence Service, New Zealand Law Society, Oranga Tamariki and Crown Law.

The judiciary continues to raise awareness of the issue and identify educational opportunities for those involved in relevant decision-making.

In December 2025, the Independent Children’s Monitor published its second review of progress in implementing the 14 recommendations from the Poutasi Report. It acknowledged progress but concluded more was needed. Improving outcomes of dependent children of those involved in our court processes is a priority for the judiciary.

26 Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee. (2022). *Inquiry into children affected by parental incarceration*. Parliament of Victoria.

27 Maslin and Minson, “What about the children? Sentencing defendants who are parents of dependent children” [2022] NZLJ 367 at 369.

District Court | Te Kōti-ā-Rohe

The District Court deals with most of the criminal cases in New Zealand. Most cities and large towns have a District Court. The Family Court and Youth Court are each divisions of the District Court. Outside of the Family Court, civil cases can be heard in the District Court where the amount in dispute is less than \$350,000. The District Court hears appeals from some tribunals including the Disputes Tribunal.

MEASURABLE PROGRESS: DISTRICT COURT TIMELY ACCESS TO JUSTICE PROTOCOL

Five years ago, the District Court established a dedicated initiative to improve timely access to justice when it became apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic would compound existing court backlogs. The Criminal Process Improvement Programme (CPIP) brought together, for the first time, all agencies and actors involved in a court hearing to systematically identify the causes of an increasing number of court events in proceedings. Initiatives and protocols have been introduced in the intervening years with the goal of ensuring that every court

event makes meaningful progress towards disposition of a case. The interests of justice remain the non-negotiable framework for this work.

CPIP became the District Court Timely Access to Justice Programme, and in 2024 the Chief Judge issued the Timely Access to Justice Protocol, which sets out thresholds for different categories of adult criminal cases to progress through the court to completion.²⁸ The Chief District Court Judge has set an expectation that by June 2027, 90 per cent of District Court proceedings will be heard within their timely justice thresholds.

The goal is now within reach. By the end of 2025, 83 per cent of new cases were disposed of within the protocol's thresholds. In addition, the adult criminal case backlog in the court reduced by 22 per cent nationally in 2025.

Initiatives implemented in 2025 to support timely justice were:

- » same-day sentencing policies
- » new protocols covering audio-visual (AVL) participation (see page 61)
- » judge-alone trial protocol
- » trial of a new role of Chief Registrar, based in the Office of the Chief District Court Judge, to assist the Chief District Court Judge in his responsibility for the orderly and efficient conduct of the court's business, and
- » best practice guidelines for case review hearings.

The court is now preparing timely access to justice protocols for the Family Court, Youth Court and civil jurisdictions.

²⁸ For example, judge-alone proceedings involving category 3 offences are expected to be heard within nine months.



TE AO MĀRAMA

Enhancing Justice for All

FOCUSING ON THE QUALITY OF JUSTICE

Te Ao Mārama (which means the world of light) is the new operating model being implemented in the District Court. It has two main goals: to support fair hearings by ensuring full participation of all parties, and to address root causes of offending (in criminal cases) or conflict (in family cases) by connecting defendants and whānau with community and government agencies that can support positive change.

It draws together the best-practice, solution-focused judging principles that have been developed in the Youth Court and other specialist courts within the District Court over the course of 40 years. Timely access to justice is a central feature of the initiative.

The court was funded to embed the initiative in eight locations: Kaitiāia, Kaikohe, Whangārei, Hamilton (including Huntly), Tauranga, Gisborne, Napier, and Hastings. Other courts that were not funded are encouraged to use the best practices of Te Ao Mārama (see overleaf).²⁹

One feature of Te Ao Mārama is to schedule similar types of cases together in dedicated specialist courts or 'lists'. Doing this creates efficiencies. It also makes use of the expert knowledge of the judges, the court staff who assist, and legal counsel and agencies, to address the issues in defendant's lives that have brought them to court. Lists established or extended this year in the criminal jurisdiction were a Young Adult List for 18- to 25-year-olds on victimless driving charges in Whangārei, a refreshed Young Adult List for 18- to 25-year-olds in Hamilton (including Huntly), a Criminal Procedure (Mentally Impaired Persons) List in Gisborne and a refreshed Family Violence List in the adult criminal court in Whangārei.

For more on Te Ao Mārama, see the District Court's Annual Report.³⁰

TE AO MĀRAMA FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICE

A new service in operation in the Whangārei District Court takes a two-pronged approach to family violence – supporting offenders to address their behaviour, and supporting and protecting the victims of that violence.

The service is run by Tai Timu Tai Pari, a collective of non-government organisations, following an agreement with the Ministry of Justice and a test-and-learn phase. The process began three years ago following discussions between local judges, community groups and iwi organisations to gauge community support for Te Ao Mārama. Work with victims, whānau and offenders in the criminal family violence court emerged as a priority.

²⁹ Te Ao Mārama Best Practice Framework.

³⁰ <https://www.districtcourts.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Publications/2026/2025-District-Court-annual-report.pdf>.



TE AO MĀRAMA

Enhancing Justice for All

TE AO MĀRAMA BEST PRACTICES

The District Court has developed eight best practice principles to support the consistent application of Te Ao Mārama across its jurisdictions.

Developing closer connections with the community: An essential component of Te Ao Mārama is to connect the court with the community. Community-based organisations provide knowledge, information, services and support for defendants, victims and whānau.

Improving the quality of information judicial officers receive to inform their decisions.

This includes the use of protocols for sharing information between the adult criminal jurisdiction, Youth Court and Family Court.

Implementing better processes for victims, complainants, children and whānau. This principle includes the requirement for victims to be treated with courtesy and compassion and for their dignity and privacy to be respected. Victims and whānau affected by sexual and family violence are treated with respect and sensitivity.

Encouraging people to feel heard in the courtroom. Supporting people, including defendants and victims, to ensure that they can understand and participate in the proceeding.

Establish alternate courtroom layouts: To reduce unnecessary formality and improve participation.

Using plain language: The language used in court is often complicated and can be meaningless to those unfamiliar with it. Using plain language in court helps people understand what is happening and what is being said.

Toning down formalities: Formalities can be a barrier to full participation.

Adopting solution-focused judging approaches when appropriate and relevant: Solution-focused judging is a judicial approach that, within existing legal frameworks, ensures accountability for offending, but at the same time looks to identify the underlying factors that have brought a person before the court and how to address these so as to reduce the likelihood of further offending or ongoing conflict.

REMAND PRISONERS

New Zealand has a significant and growing remand population. Research shows that spending even a short period on remand in custody has long-lasting effects on a defendant's life outside of prison – such as the loss of employment and housing – and on their family, in particular their children. See page 27.

Some remand prisoners will not be convicted once they come to trial, yet will have already spent time, perhaps long periods of time, in prison. Others will be convicted but will receive non-custodial sentences, or sentences that are shorter than their time already spent on remand.

Year ended	Number of prisoners awaiting trial or sentence	Remand prisoners as a % of total prison population
Dec 2025	4,218	39 per cent ³¹
Dec 2024	4,175	41 per cent
Dec 2023	3,890 ³²	43 per cent
Dec 2022	3,452	43 per cent
Dec 2021	2,797	36 per cent
Dec 2020	2,989	35 per cent
Dec 2019	3,592	36 per cent

31 The most up-to-date figures for the year ended December 2025 are taken from the Department of Corrections' quarterly prison statistics for June 2026. https://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/statistics/quarterly_prison_statistics/prison_statistics_-_june_2026.

32 The data for 2019-2023 has been updated since the publication of the *Chief Justice's Annual Report 2024*. The updated figures are presented here.

Youth Court | Te Kōti Taiohi

The Youth Court is a specialist division of the District Court. It deals with most offending by young people aged 14 to 17 years. In certain circumstances, the Youth Court also deals with serious offending by children aged 12 to 13 years. Some serious offending by 17-year-olds is transferred to the adult criminal division of the District Court. Any child or young person charged with murder or manslaughter is dealt with by the High Court.

Less than 30 per cent of police apprehensions reach the Youth Court – most are dealt with by the police in the community. The cases that do reach the Youth Court tend to be serious and complex, and the children and young people involved often face a number of issues including poverty, neurodiversity, mental distress, addiction, trauma and disengagement from education.

New Zealand's Youth Court has a two-fold approach – holding children and young people accountable to their victims and society, and addressing the underlying causes of offending. A unique feature of the Youth Court process is the family group conference – a gathering of the child or young person, their family and youth advocate (lawyer), any victim(s), Police Youth Aid and other professionals. The parties establish a plan to

address the offending and its underlying causes, provide for the interests of any victim(s), and help the child or young person take responsibility for their actions.

As of 31 December 2025, there were 840 active cases before the Youth Court, down 31 from the end of 2024 and a further drop from the post-COVID high of 1,118 in September 2023. In 2025, the court disposed of 3,713 cases, with 3,803 new cases entering it during the year.

There are around 75 designated Youth Court judges (including acting warranted judges). They are led by Principal Youth Court Judge Ida Malosi. However, youth justice is a collective effort, with others playing a crucial role including those from police, Oranga Tamariki, youth workers, mentors, youth forensic nurses, clinicians, education officers, communication assistants, expert report writers and youth justice-focused community organisations.

The court's successful solution-focused approach is now being incorporated into other District Court jurisdictions through the Te Ao Mārama initiative. The Youth Court's practices are highly regarded internationally. In 2025, delegations from courts in Taiwan, California, Hawai'i, Fiji, Samoa and Kiribati visited the court to learn about its processes.

» [Youth Court statistics](#)

COURTHOUSE SAFETY

People who come to or are brought into courthouses, and people who work in the court, are entitled to be, and to feel, safe from harm.

In recent years, the number of security incidents in our courthouses has increased – a 28 per cent increase in security incidents from 2024.

This increase is concerning for the judiciary and for the Ministry of Justice. In 2025, the Chief Justice and Secretary for Justice signed a memorandum of understanding between the judiciary and the Ministry that outlines responsibilities to ensure for the safe and secure operation of courts.

Judges and judicial officers play a critical role in managing security incidents in court. It is essential that they know the security procedures in every court in which they sit, to help keep themselves and others safe. The judiciary receive site specific health, safety, and security inductions in both base and circuit courts. These inductions are also available to regular people who regularly attend court for work, such as legal professionals and key stakeholders.





Civil justice

Civil proceedings involve the enforcement of rights and obligations outside of the criminal justice system. New Zealanders are most likely to interact with the courts in civil proceedings – for instance, to resolve a dispute between neighbours or with an employer, a debt or insolvency issue or apply for probate, or an issue involving the care of children or relationship property. Civil cases are typically brought by private individuals, businesses or companies, but may include proceedings brought by or against central and local government and regulatory agencies.

The courts discussed in this section are all first-instance civil courts, or courts with a first-instance civil jurisdiction. A “first-instance” court is a court in which proceedings can be commenced. New Zealand’s principal appellate courts, the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court, hear civil appeals. These courts are discussed from page 45.

Cost, and a lack of understanding about how to navigate the civil justice system are recognised as barriers to people accessing civil justice in New Zealand. Initiatives underway to understand and address these barriers are described below under individual courts, and in Part 3: Access to Justice.



High Court | Te Kōti Matua

The High Court has unlimited jurisdiction to hear and determine civil claims that are not within the exclusive jurisdiction of other courts. The judges of the High Court hear a wide variety of cases, including high-value and complex commercial disputes, property disputes, significant regulatory proceedings, defamation claims, intellectual property disputes, disputes arising out of family trusts and wills, claims by the Commissioner of Police in relation to the alleged proceeds of crime, judicial review proceedings, and appeals from other courts and tribunals. The Court also hears urgent applications for interim injunctions and asset freezing orders.

Trends in the High Court's civil jurisdiction for 2025 included a continued increase in the number of company liquidations, and increasing complexity of civil hearings.

The High Court continued work on some significant changes to the civil jurisdiction, aimed at improving timeliness and access to civil justice.

TRENDS IN THE TYPES OF CASES BEFORE THE COURT

The number of insolvency proceedings filed in the High Court increased again in 2025, rising by 11 per cent compared to 2024 and more than doubling the number filed in 2020.

Insolvency work typically reflects the state of the economy, but with a slight lag. That suggests that the economic conditions have contributed to the continuing increase in company liquidations.³³

TIMELINESS IN THE CIVIL JURISDICTION

High Court civil trials can be complex, requiring considerable hearing time – up to several weeks, and in some cases months for some proceedings. Addressing time to trial in the High Court's civil jurisdiction is critical to ensuring timely access to justice. Careful management is required to ensure that cases proceed efficiently and hearing time is not lost.

There are a number of reasons for delay in the civil jurisdiction. As in the Court's criminal jurisdictions, some trials are becoming more complex and getting longer. The Court also continues to see increasing numbers of proceedings conducted by self-represented litigants which can take longer to resolve, with more procedural steps required. In addition, criminal proceedings are given priority over civil because in the High Court criminal trials often involve a defendant in custody.

33 From the High Court Annual Report 2025 on the Courts of New Zealand website.

JUDGMENT DELIVERY FOR CIVIL CASES

Because of the complexities of the issues, civil decisions are often reserved (which means that the judge issues their decision sometime after the hearing has concluded). The High Court has set judgment delivery expectations in which 90 per cent of judgments are to be delivered within three months of the conclusion of the hearing. In 2025, the High Court delivered 2,191 civil judgments, 77.7 per cent of which were delivered within one month of the hearing, and 90.4 per cent of which were delivered within three months of the hearing.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE INITIATIVES IN THE HIGH COURT'S CIVIL JURISDICTION IN 2025

Two significant initiatives to streamline civil justice in the High Court progressed during the year: the introduction of the Auckland Commercial List (see overleaf), and preparatory work to ready the Court and the profession for changes to the High Court Rules, ahead of their introduction on 1 January 2026.

CHANGES TO THE HIGH COURT RULES AIMED AT STREAMLINING CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

In 2022, the Rules Committee in its report *Improving Access to Civil Justice*, recommended “once-in-a-generation” changes to the civil jurisdiction of the High Court.³⁴

Importantly, the Committee recommended that proportionality be included as a guiding principle – this means that the time, cost, and procedural steps used in a case should be reasonable and appropriate to what is at stake in that case.

This, and the Committee’s other recommendations,³⁵ were incorporated into the High Court (Improved Access to Civil Justice) Amendment Rules which take effect on 1 January 2026. Key elements of the reforms include:

- » A new general duty on parties and lawyers to cooperate with each other and with the Court.
- » An “evidence first” model, including the early provision of factual witness statements.
- » The provision of initial disclosure, including known adverse documents, before extensive interlocutory steps.

- » A mandatory Judicial Issues Conference at which the overall issues in the case, any further orders for discovery, other interlocutory orders necessary for the case, and the steps for trial are all addressed.

The changes are designed to bring an earlier focus to the issues of determinative significance in a case, and reduce the time spent on interlocutory disputes, in order to achieve more speedy resolution in all civil proceedings (whether by trial or otherwise). A culture change to the way civil litigation is managed and conducted in the Court is required, and on the part of both the profession and judiciary alike. For more on the steps the High Court took to prepare for the new rules, see Part 3 “Access to Justice”.

ACCESS TO COURT RECORDS FOR ABUSE IN CARE SURVIVORS

In December, the High Court established a centralised process for the consideration of applications to access court records by abuse in care survivors. The purpose of the process is to improve speed of access to documents, where access is granted.

34 For more on the work of the Rules Committee, see page 90.

35 Rules Committee Report on *Improving Access to Civil Justice*.



COMMERCIAL LIST

The new Commercial List was launched at the High Court in Auckland in October 2025. It aims to promote a shorter time to trial, and more efficient resolution of commercial cases. The List represents a significant shift in case management and hearing of commercial cases, by prioritising speed and efficiency, reducing interlocutory delays and moving cases to substantive hearings faster.

The List is modelled on the highly successful Commercial List of the New South Wales Supreme Court. It was developed in conjunction with a profession working group, made up of senior members of the profession specialising in commercial litigation.

Chief High Court Judge, Justice Sally Fitzgerald, and Auckland Executive Judge, Justice Ian Gault, oversee the List.

District Court | Te Kōti-ā-Rohe

The District Court has jurisdiction to hear civil claims up to a value of \$350,000 that are not within the exclusive jurisdiction of other courts. It also hears appeals from some tribunals.

The District Court's civil court resolves disputes between individuals or organisations. Common claims include contractual disputes (where one party has not performed their obligations under an agreement), and negligence claims. Remedies sought commonly include orders to pay damages, and restraining orders (such as where a person is seeking an order to prevent harassment).

The active caseload in the civil jurisdiction of the District Court has increased by 14 per cent over the past five years but this reversed in the last year, with a 35 per cent decrease in cases compared to 2024. New cases were down significantly (45 per cent) compared to 2024.

DISTRICT COURT CIVIL ACTION PLAN

This year the Court developed its District Court Civil Action Plan, which sets out a strategy for improvements for the Court's civil jurisdiction. A focus is to improve timeliness for civil justice in the District Court.

Elements of the plan include developing a national case management best practice, and improving oversight of the central registry.

As part of this plan, Auckland District Court now operates a weekly civil duty judge, and a weekly list for Harmful Digital Communication Act matters.

DISPUTES TRIBUNAL

The Disputes Tribunal is part of the District Court. It provides a process for smaller civil claims (up to \$30,000 in 2025, doubling to \$60,000 in January 2026).

The Tribunal provides an inexpensive and prompt way for people to settle civil disputes. Parties do not need to define their claims in the Disputes Tribunal the way lawyers do in court, nor do they need to know what their legal rights are. Parties are not permitted legal representation (unless the lawyer is a party to the proceeding). The parties tell the Referee what happened, and the outcome they seek. The Referee, an experienced and qualified adjudicator, will then facilitate discussion to help the parties think through their preferred outcomes and where appropriate, reach a settlement. Where the parties cannot settle, or where settlement is not appropriate, the referee will make a decision.

Approximately 40 per cent of claims are resolved either before or at a hearing by settlement, rather than decision. Nearly two-thirds of cases are resolved in 90 days. In 2025, the tribunal disposed of approximately 1,000 more cases than it received. It did this by triaging cases and focusing on efficient use of hearing time. This helped create space for the expected increase in cases in 2026 when the tribunal's jurisdiction rises.

Specialist courts

Several courts have specialist jurisdictions. Their work is explained briefly below, along with significant events that occurred over the last year.

Family Court | Te Kōti Whānau

The Family Court was established in 1981 as a division of the District Court. It deals with matters such as the care of children, care and protection, relationship property, mental health, family violence, substance addiction and treatment, adoption, gender registration and surrogacy. There are 70 permanent and 7 acting judges warranted to sit in the Family Court, and 13 Family Court Associates.

THE WORK OF THE FAMILY COURT

The Family Court deals with more than 60,000 applications each year. These applications require prompt resolution – the care and protection of children, the division of property following the end of a relationship – in order to allow families to move through difficult situations. Therefore, the presence of delay in Family Court proceedings has been a concern, and a focus, of the Court.

In 2025 there was a nine per cent reduction in the Family Court backlog nationally. Two initiatives are making a positive difference: the introduction of Family Court Associates, and the free Family Dispute Resolution mediation service. These are described below.

A further focus for the Family Court in 2025 was Te Au Reka, the digital case management system, which is set to be introduced in the Family Court from late 2026. See Part 3 “Access to Justice” for more on Te Au Reka.

FAMILY COURT ASSOCIATES – ASSISTING WITH TIMELY ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR THE FAMILY COURT

The appointment of seven new Family Court Associates to the Court in 2025 – bringing the total number to 13 – has had a positive impact on the Court.

The Family Court Associate role was established in 2023 to provide additional resource for the overloaded court. Family Court Associates are judicial officers who make decisions at the early stages of proceedings, including conducting interlocutory hearings. In addition they exercise all the powers of a court registrar. The first appointments were made in 2024.

Family Court Associates are now in all main centres as well as Whangārei, Hamilton, Rotorua, Palmerston North, and Invercargill. They frequently travel to smaller courts, working mostly on Care of Children Act (CoCA) applications at the early stages of proceedings.

This increased capacity has resulted in over 40 per cent more CoCA settlement conferences being held since Family Court Associates were established. Judges are therefore able to focus more on hearing family violence and Oranga Tamariki applications.

Looking at Oranga Tamariki applications in particular, this has shortened the time to the first substantive event in court has reduced by 25 per cent. More broadly, the amount of time judges spend on specialised judge-only work has increased since Family Court Associates were appointed, including a greater proportion of time spent in hearings – an increase of 5 per cent.

The Regulatory Systems (Courts) Amendment Bill increases the jurisdiction of Family Court Associates further. Once that legislation is passed, the court expects Family Court Associates to further contribute to the timely conclusion of cases.

CHILD-INCLUSIVE FAMILY DISPUTE RESOLUTION – A FREE OUT-OF-COURT OPTION FOR FAMILIES

On 1 July 2025, the Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) mediation service was made free for all parties. FDR mediation helps parents, guardians, and whānau to agree on how to care for their child outside the formal Family Court process.

Judges can refer families to the service. Many families referred to the service reach parenting agreements without the need for court proceedings.

The service is supported by Child Specialists, a role developed following the enactment of the Family Court (Supporting Children in Court) Legislation Act 2021.

Child Specialists, come from a range of backgrounds including child and family focused clinical psychology, social work, counselling, educational psychology, and child and adolescent mental health services. They use their knowledge of child development to ensure that children's views are safely elicited and children do not shoulder the burden of decision-making about their care. If for some reason the parties cannot reach agreement through mediation, then the FDR provider will refer the case back to the court. The judge or Family Court Associate will then make a decision, taking into account the child's wellbeing and best interests.

Child Specialists work closely with a wider pool of Voice of Child Practitioners to ensure children are engaged with in a safe way that is appropriate for their age, and that is culturally appropriate. They are independent specialists appointed to hear from a child and convey a child's views to the court.

Employment Court | Te Kōti Take Mahi

The Employment Court hears and determines cases relating to employment disputes. These include: appeals from the Employment Relations Authority, questions of interpretation of law and the interpretation and application of collective agreements, disputes over strikes and lockouts, applications for judicial review, and applications for declarations of employment status. The Court hears approximately 200 cases each year, although the numbers continue to trend upwards.

The Employment Court is a specialist court with exclusive jurisdiction. It sits alongside, but separate from, the High Court in the court structure. Appeals from judgments of the Court are to the Court of Appeal on limited grounds.

WORKLOAD OF THE COURT

The Employment Court's new case numbers rose again in 2025, reflecting a substantial increase in the number of cases being dealt with by the Employment Relations Authority. There has been a demonstrable rise in urgent injunctive relief

being sought in the Court, particularly interim reinstatement, without notice applications for freezing and search orders, and stays of execution of orders made by the Authority.

Although the number of cases has increased, the Court has continued to exceed the judgment delivery targets, with 94 per cent of judgments delivered within three months.

ACCOMMODATING SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS IN THE COURT

The number of litigants in person has continued to rise during the course of the last year, and this trend shows no sign of slowing. It is consistent with an increase in litigants-in-person appearing in the Employment Relations Authority.³⁶ This has prompted the Court to consider a range of initiatives, including improving online resources and support for court users, particularly self-represented litigants and non-legally qualified representatives.

TRIAGING FOR TIMELINESS

The Court has also been trialling a triage system to support case management. This has included offering early judicial settlement conferences before significant costs are incurred by the

parties in the proceedings. The results have been encouraging, with high rates of quality resolution. Subject to judicial capacity, the Court is looking to embed the triaging process in 2026.

EMPLOYMENT ADVOCATES

Concerns about the standards of conduct and client care exhibited by some employment advocates gained momentum in 2025, including in the media, and were the subject of comment in a number of Court judgments.

» [Employment Court statistics](#)

WHAT TO EXPECT IN COURT - VIDEO

“What to expect in Court” is a video that shows court users what to expect in a hearing. It shows a mock court hearing, explains the role and processes of the Employment Court – for example, swearing in a witness – and provides practical details, such as where various people sit in court and what the courtroom layout is.³⁷ The video includes captions.

36 See the Employment Relations Authority Annual Report 2024 — <https://www.era.govt.nz/assets/Employment-Relations-Authority-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>.

37 <https://www.employmentcourt.govt.nz/info-guidance/during-a-hearing/>.

TE KOOTI WHENUA MĀORI | MĀORI LAND COURT

The Māori Land Court is New Zealand's longest established specialist court. The court's key purpose is to promote the retention of Māori land in Māori hands, and to support landowners to use, occupy and develop their whenua for the benefit of all landowners, and their whānau and hapū. The court is responsible for the accurate documentation of the succession and management of Māori land.

Māori Land Court judges also sit on the Māori Appellate Court and Waitangi Tribunal, with some judges also sitting as judges of the Environment Court, Niue High Court, and Cook Islands High Court (Land Division).

ADDRESSING BACKLOG

Over recent years there has been a concerning delay in the progress of cases. This is largely due to challenges associated with the implementation of the Court's new digital case management system, Pātaka Whenua. In 2024 a review of the implementation of Pātaka Whenua and changes to the Court's operating model was undertaken, resulting in 41 recommendations to improve performance and timeliness.

One of the key recommendations was to address the backlog of applications awaiting registration. A joint judicial, Ministry of Justice governance group was established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations. This is supported by the Court's Mahi Tahī policy, under which judges and staff work jointly to improve service to Māori landowners and their representatives.

In late 2025, further initiatives were introduced to improve the timeliness and disposal of applications. These included the establishment of Ngā Kuaka, a temporary team focused on the disposal of applications, alongside overtime efforts by kaimahi across the districts.

The Court has had encouraging results from this work in terms of applications completed and looks forward to the continued benefits of both the Mahi Tahī and Ngā Kuaka initiatives in 2026.

LAW REFORM

Māori Land Court judges have also worked as a part of the Māori Land Court Rules committee to prepare updates to the Court's rules and have consulted with Te Puni Kōkiri on amendments to Te Ture Whenua Māori Act 1993.

NGĀ KAIWHAKAWA MĀORI: A HISTORY OF MĀORI JUDGES

In October 2025 a new book, *Ngā Kaiwhakawā Māori: A Brief History of Māori Judges*, was launched at the Hui-ā-Tau of Te Hunga Rōia Māori (the Māori Law Society).

This book, authored by Justice Layne Harvey of the High Court and Judge Aidan Warren of the Māori Land Court, provides an overview of all Māori judges from the first Māori judge, Judge Harold Carr, who was appointed to the Native Land Court in 1923, through to the present day.

50 YEARS OF THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL

The Waitangi Tribunal celebrated the 50th anniversary of its establishment on 10 October 1975. The Waitangi Tribunal is made up of Māori Land Court judges and up to 20 expert members who are appointed by the Minister of Māori Development with expertise in tikanga and mātauranga Māori, history, law, policy and governance.

A number of events and initiatives marked the milestone, including a documentary entitled *Karanga Rā – 50 Years of the Waitangi Tribunal*.

Environment Court | Te Kōti Taiao

The Environment Court is established under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) principally to hear appeals from decisions under that Act and others, such as appeals about the contents of Regional and District Plans, and appeals arising out of applications for resource consents. The RMA also confers jurisdiction on the Court to hear enforcement proceedings.

TIMELINESS IN THE ENVIRONMENT COURT

The Environment Court ended the calendar year with no backlog. This has been achieved by the use of remote hearings procedures and alternative dispute resolution, such as court-assisted mediation, which is popular with parties and has high rates of success.

The RMA contains several environmental concepts drawn from Te Ao Māori. Māori Land Court judges who hold warrants as Alternate Environment Judges bring their expertise to Environment Court hearings. Alternate Judges from the District Court also support the Environment Court in prosecutions under the RMA.

There continue to be some delays for prosecutions under the RMA, some of which are heard by jury trial held in the District Court.



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE: SITE VISITS IN THE ENVIRONMENT COURT

The Resource Management Act authorises the Environment Court to control its own procedure, including the location of court events. Court hearings are generally held close to the area under discussion.

Site visits are a routine part of hearings, whether the proceeding is an application or plan appeal or an enforcement application. Although statements of evidence given in court include maps, diagrams and photographs to illustrate the text, a visit to the subject site or the area of interest aids the court in understanding its context and appreciating how the issues of ecology, landscape, cultural significance, or any other question in the case arise.

» [Environment Court statistics](#)

Coroners Court | Te Kōti Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati

As the judicial officers of the Coroners Court, coroners investigate deaths that are sudden, unexplained, violent, appear to be self-inflicted or that occur in official custody or care. At the end of their inquiry, coroners issue findings into the cause and circumstances of death. These may include recommendations designed to keep the community safer by preventing future deaths in similar circumstances.

Most Coroners Court inquiries are conducted on the papers. The coroner determines and records their findings relating to the cause and circumstances of the death in their chambers without families, other interested parties or the media present. Only 3 per cent of cases proceed to an inquest, which is a public court hearing.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE WORKLOAD OF THE CORONERS COURT

In 2025, the Court's focus shifted from reducing a backlog of older cases to a more strategic approach to managing its overall workload. Increased coronial capacity, alongside targeted efforts by coroners and staff to progress older files, contributed to improved timeliness. This has supported better engagement with families and other interested parties, and the more timely delivery of recommendations aimed at promoting public safety.

At the end of 2025, the number of active cases before the Court was 4,550. This is a reduction of around 1,000 cases (18 per cent) since the same time in 2024 and a 31 per cent reduction since active cases peaked in July 2023.

There are around 1,300 active cases before the Court that are more than two years old. This represents a reduction of 31 per cent compared with 2024, and 42 per cent compared with 2023.

SIGNIFICANT INQUIRIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN 2025

The Coroners Court this year held (or continued) several inquiries that raised issues of significant public interest. These included inquests into deaths resulting from the Whakaari/White Island eruption in 2019 and Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023, the death of Malachi Subecz in 2021, and the death of Ahamed Aathill Mohamed Samsudeen in 2021.



Coroner Emma Hoskin was sworn-in in August of this year.



Tribunals

Tribunals play a critical role in our justice system. Tribunals are specialist bodies set up to deal with specific types of disputes with the intention that they resolve disputes more quickly and less expensively, and with less formality, than the courts.

Apart from the Disputes Tribunal, which is part of the District Court, tribunals are not part of the formal court system. However, they are the primary means for New Zealanders to seek justice and resolve disputes – with more than 100,000 people each year turning to the tribunals for assistance.

The Chief Justice has spoken about the desirability of structural reforms to tribunals that have been recommended by the Law Commission to be put into effect. These reforms would provide tribunals with the institutional structure to ensure independent and effective decision-making – a critical requirement for the rule of law, given the nature and extent of the work before them.

For more information on the Disputes Tribunal, see page 38.

Appellate courts

Supreme Court | Te Kōti Mana Nui

The Supreme Court is New Zealand's apex court – the highest court in the country. It has the role of maintaining overall coherence in the legal system. The principles expressed in Supreme Court decisions are binding on all courts in New Zealand. Each decision, therefore, has an impact beyond the parties directly affected by the decision.

The Supreme Court was established by the Supreme Court Act 2003 with effect from 1 January 2004, replacing appeals to the Privy Council in London, England. The Court began hearing appeals in July 2004.

The Supreme Court Act 2003 provided that the Court was established to recognise New Zealand as an independent nation with its own history and traditions, to improve access to justice and to enable important legal matters, including those relating to the Treaty of Waitangi, to be resolved with an understanding of New Zealand conditions, history, and traditions.

As the court of final appeal, the Supreme Court has the role of maintaining overall coherence in the legal system. Principles expressed in Supreme Court decisions are binding on all courts in New Zealand. Each decision, therefore, has an impact beyond the parties directly affected by the decision.



The Supreme Court bench. From left to right: Justice Joe Williams, Justice Forrest Miller, Justice Susan Glazebrook, Chief Justice Helen Winkelmann, Justice Stephen Kós, and Justice Ellen France.



The Supreme Court has a broad appellate jurisdiction and hears appeals spanning public, criminal, contract, torts, intellectual property, employment, family and resource management law. The Supreme Court, like the High Court and Court of Appeal, can issue a declaration of inconsistency, where it finds a law or part of a law is inconsistent with one of the fundamental rights protected under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.

Appeals to the Supreme Court can be heard only with the leave of the Court. To grant leave to appeal, the Court must be satisfied that to do so is in the interests of justice – that is, it involves a matter of general or public importance or general commercial significance, or because a substantial miscarriage of justice may have occurred or may occur unless the appeal is heard.

There are six permanent judges of the Supreme Court. A panel of five judges is required to hear a substantive appeal – an odd number ensures that the Court reaches a majority decision. On occasion, where more than one permanent judge is unable to sit for any reason, an acting judge (a former judge of the Supreme Court or a sitting Court of Appeal judge) will sit as a member of the appeal panel.

In almost all cases, an appeal to the Supreme Court will involve a case that has already been considered by the Court of Appeal. However, the Court does, in exceptional cases, hear “leapfrog” appeals directly from other lower courts.

WORKLOAD OF THE SUPREME COURT: A SNAPSHOT

- » In 2025, the Court delivered 24 appeal judgments dealing with 33 substantive appeals. Of those substantive appeals, eight (24 per cent) were criminal appeals and 25 (76 per cent) were civil appeals.
- » The Court allowed five criminal and 13 civil appeals, and dismissed three criminal and 11 civil appeals. The Court gave a formal declaration and costs order on one appeal.
- » In 2025, the Court delivered 125 leave judgments, dealing with 170 leave applications. Of those leave applications, 100 (59 per cent) were criminal and 70 (41 per cent) were civil applications.
- » The Court granted 14 criminal and 9 civil applications, and dismissed 86 criminal and 61 civil applications.
- » In 2025 the Court delivered 53 other judgments on interlocutory applications.

SIGNIFICANT SUPREME COURT DECISIONS FROM 2025³⁸

- » *Chief of Defence Force v Four Members of the Armed Forces* [2025] NZSC 34, [2025] 1 NZLR 21.
 - Judicial review of the consistency of a temporary Defence Force Order regarding COVID-19 vaccinations with the rights to refuse medical treatment and to manifest religion under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.
- » *Routhan v PGG Wrightson Real Estate Ltd* [2025] NZSC 68, [2025] 1 NZLR 306.
 - How to calculate damages resulting from inducement to purchase a dairy farm by a negligent misstatement regarding the farm's productive capacity, including by reference to principles of causation and scope of the duty of care.
- » *J, Compulsory Care Recipient by his Welfare Guardian, T v Attorney-General* [2025] NZSC 103, [2025] 1 NZLR 485.
 - How the human rights of an intellectually disabled individual subject to a compulsory care order must be balanced against the health and safety of the individual, and of others, in assessing whether to extend the term of the order.
- » *Rasier Operations BV v E Tū Inc* [2025] NZSC 162.
 - Whether certain drivers on the Uber rideshare platform are employees of Uber or independent contractors under the Employment Relations Act 2000.
- » *Fleming v Attorney-General* [2025] NZSC 188.
 - Whether two individuals providing full-time at-home care for their respective adult disabled children are engaged as "homeworkers" by the Ministry of Health and therefore employees under the Employment Relations Act 2000.

38 All Supreme Court decisions are available on the Courts of New Zealand website.



On 4 June 2025 the Court of Appeal convened a ‘Full Court’ of five judges to hear the appeal *Director-General of Health v New Health New Zealand Incorporated*. For the first time in New Zealand’s legal history, all five judges hearing the appeal were women. From left to right: Justice Jill Mallon, Justice Patricia Courtney, Justice Christine French, Justice Sarah Katz, and Justice Susan Thomas.

Court of Appeal | Te Kōti Pira

The Court of Appeal is New Zealand’s intermediate appellate court. The Court of Appeal has a key role in developing legal principle, correcting errors, and ensuring that the law is applied consistently.

The Court hears appeals from the civil and criminal cases heard in the High Court and appeals from criminal jury trials in the District Court.³⁹ In addition, matters appealed to the High Court from the District Court and certain tribunals may be taken to the Court of Appeal with leave if they are of sufficient significance to warrant a second appeal. The Court may hear appeals against pre-trial rulings in criminal cases.

The Court can also hear appeals on questions of law from the Employment Court and appeals from the Māori Appellate Court and Court Martial Appeal Court. The Court ordinarily sits with a panel of three judges.

The Court’s principal responsibility is to correct errors in conviction and sentence appeals.

Because of the volume of appeals it hears, the Court of Appeal also has primary responsibility for direction and consistency in the delivery of criminal justice. The Court may issue guideline judgments to provide general direction for sentencing for certain categories of criminal offending.

WORKLOAD OF THE COURT OF APPEAL

In 2025, the Court’s criminal and civil workload reached a very high level. At the year’s peak there were 295 active civil appeals and 466 active criminal appeals. Comparison with 2020 shows the extent of the increase in the Court’s workload – in that year, civil appeals peaked at 194, and criminal appeals at 318.

The Court has 10 permanent judges. Over the year, Acting Judges assisted with this increased workload.

The Court is also considerably assisted by the work of High Court judges who sit with Court of Appeal judges in what are referred to as divisional courts.

³⁹ See the sidebar on page 49 for legislative changes enabling a single Court of Appeal Judge to remit a first criminal appeal from the District Court to the High Court.

PREPARATION FOR THE ENACTMENT OF THE JUDICATURE (TIMELINESS) LEGISLATION AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Court of Appeal and the High Court have been preparing for the enactment of the Judicature (Timeliness) Legislation Amendment Act. The Act will allow a single Court of Appeal Judge to remit a first criminal appeal from the District Court to be determined in the High Court.

The majority of first appeals from the District Court are heard by divisional courts which comprise one Court of Appeal Judge and two High Court Judges (see: How cases are heard - Courts of New Zealand website, and s 48 of the Senior Courts Act 2016).

The remitting of these first appeals to the High Court necessarily affects the distribution of workload between both courts. If a sufficient number of first appeals from the District Court are remitted to the High Court for determination, the number of divisional weeks, and High Court Judges assigned to them, will be reduced.

SIGNIFICANT COURT OF APPEAL DECISIONS IN 2025

Criminal:

- » Scott Watson's Governor-General Reference.⁴⁰
- » Upholding the verdict of a jury in respect of one of New Zealand's first convictions for insider conduct.⁴¹
- » Whether the right to a trial by jury was outweighed by the likelihood that jurors would be unable to perform their duties effectively in the context of a complex fraud prosecution.⁴²
- » Whether a gap in offending can be an exception to the mandatory disqualification period applying to repeated drink drivers.⁴³
- » Possible options for reopening an appeal hearing after its conclusion but before judgment had been given.⁴⁴

40 *Scott Watson v R* [2025] NZCA 455.

41 *Huljich v R* [2025] NZCA 155.

42 *Tuira v R* [2025] NZCA 336.

43 *Tahau & Anor v New Zealand Police* [2025] NZCA 278.

44 *Dunn v R* [2025] NZCA 216.

Civil:

- » The interpretation of s 69ZC of the Employment Relations Act 2000 in relation to rest break and meal entitlements for bus drivers.⁴⁵
- » Whether administrative tasks undertaken by lawyers in connection with a grant of legal aid fell within the definitions of “legal aid services” in the Legal Service Act 2011.⁴⁶
- » Whether advice given to the Minister by the Climate Change Commission met the statutory purpose in the Climate Change Response Act 2002.⁴⁷
- » Whether defamatory statements were justified and whether jury award of damages was excessive.⁴⁸
- » Confirming right to claim public law damages for breach of fair trial rights.⁴⁹
- » Judicial review of regulations in relation to vaping products.⁵⁰
- » Whether ACC cover extends to mental injury in New Zealand resulting from physical injury suffered outside New Zealand.⁵¹
- » The considerations applying to decisions of the Department of Corrections to bulk transfer prisoners from one prison to another for a systems-related reason.⁵²
- » Allegations of duress by the Crown in historical land acquisition and the Crown owed a fiduciary duty to Ngāti te Ata.⁵³

45 *New Zealand Tramways and Public Passenger Transport Employees’ Union Wellington Branch Incorporated v Tranzurban Hutt Valley Limited* [2025] NZCA 1.

46 *Legal Services Commissioner v Mauha Huatahi Fawcett* [2025] NZCA 63.

47 *Lawyers for Climate Change Action NZ Incorporated v Climate Change Commission And Anor* [2025] NZCA 80.

48 *Manaia Media Ltd v Cato* [2025] NZCA 233.

49 *Attorney-General v Morrison* [2025] NZCA 240.

50 *ALT New Zealand Ltd v Attorney-General* [2025] NZCA 344.

51 *ACC v D* [2025] NZCA 373.

52 *Chief Executive of Dept of Corrections v Jones* [2025] NZCA 457.

53 *Minhinnick v Attorney-General* [2025] NZCA 584.

High Court | Te Kōti Matua – Appellate jurisdiction

The High Court hears criminal appeals from judge-alone trials in the District Court and Youth Court. It does not hear appeals from District Court jury trials – these are heard in the Court of Appeal (although the enactment of the Judicature (Timeliness) Legislation Amendment Act will enable the Court of Appeal to remit such an appeal to be heard in the High Court. For more on the Act, see page 49). The High Court hears civil appeals from the District Court, the Family Court, the Youth Court and the Environment Court as well as appeals from many administrative tribunals and regulatory bodies. All High Court judges can, and do, hear appeals.

The number of criminal appeals filed in the High Court has again increased. As in 2023 and 2024, criminal appeals continued at record highs. Criminal appeals awaiting hearing judgment increased by 19 per cent (44 cases) in 2025, compared to 2024. Of particular note is an increase in sentence appeals in 2025 (59 per cent on 2024).

Civil appeals nationally awaiting hearing or judgment increased by seven per cent (13 cases) compared to 2024. New business increased by 27 per cent (67 cases), and disposals increased by 19 per cent (46 cases).

District Court | Te Kōti-ā-Rohe – Appellate jurisdiction

The District Court hears appeals from a wide range of administrative tribunals and regulatory bodies, including the Disputes Tribunal, Tenancy Tribunal and Motor Vehicle Disputes Tribunal.

Employment Court | Te Kōti Take Mahi

The Employment Court hears appeals from the Employment Relations Authority. Where an appeal raises an important issue, it will generally be heard by a full court sitting with three or more judges. There are limited rights of appeal (with leave) from the Employment Court to the Court of Appeal and beyond that, to the Supreme Court.

Te Kooti Pira Māori | Māori Appellate Court

Te Kooti Pira Māori | Māori Appellate Court was established in 1894 as the appellate body for all decisions of the Māori Land Court. The Appellate Court bench is made up of the judges of the Māori Land Court, sitting in panels of three or more. Māori Appellate Court sittings are held quarterly, with judges sitting in different panels (appointed by the Chief Judge and Deputy Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court) to hear all appeals filed with the Appellate Court in the previous three-month period. Each appeal is heard in the region to which it relates. The Māori Appellate Court generally hears between 20 and 30 appeals per year. Māori Appellate Court judgments may be appealed to the Court of Appeal.



Military justice appeals

New Zealand has a parallel military justice system. The Court Martial is a specialist court of record that hears cases of serious offending and breaches of military discipline by members of the Armed Forces, and, in rare cases, other persons closely associated with their operations. All its judges are civilians and sit with a panel of military members who are the deciders of fact.

The Court Martial has jurisdiction to hear charges alleging offences against both military and criminal law committed anywhere in the world. Its powers of punishment are equivalent to those of the High Court but include unique sentences, such as detention in the Services Corrective Establishment or dismissal from His Majesty's Service. The Court Martial has adopted the principles of Te Ao Mārama from the District Court in its proceedings.

Although the Court Martial is part of the system of military justice, at the appellate level its appeals come into the civilian court system and are therefore included in this report.

The Court Martial Appeal Court | Te Kōti Pira Whakawā Kaimahi o te Ope Kātua hears appeals from the Court Martial. The Court Martial Appeal Court is summoned by the Chief High Court Judge and consists of current High Court judges and appointed judges (who are either barristers or retired High Court judges). Appointed judges are civilians, but to date have also had previous military experience.

The Court Martial Appeal Court has jurisdiction to determine all questions necessary for the purpose of doing justice in any case before it. Like the Court Martial, the Court Martial Appeal Court hears cases involving offences committed anywhere in the world and may sit in any location in New Zealand or overseas as required. This court can also hear any other case from the Court Martial by special reference from the Judge Advocate General or from the Minister of Defence. The court sits with at least three judges, at least one of which must be an appointed judge. Parties have a further appeal avenue (by leave) to the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court.



PART THREE

Access to justice

The promise of fairness implicit in the notion of the rule of law holds societies together. The ability of those with a strong sense of grievance to bring that grievance to court and have it dealt with in a fair way keeps the peace.

CHIEF JUSTICE HELEN WINKELMANN

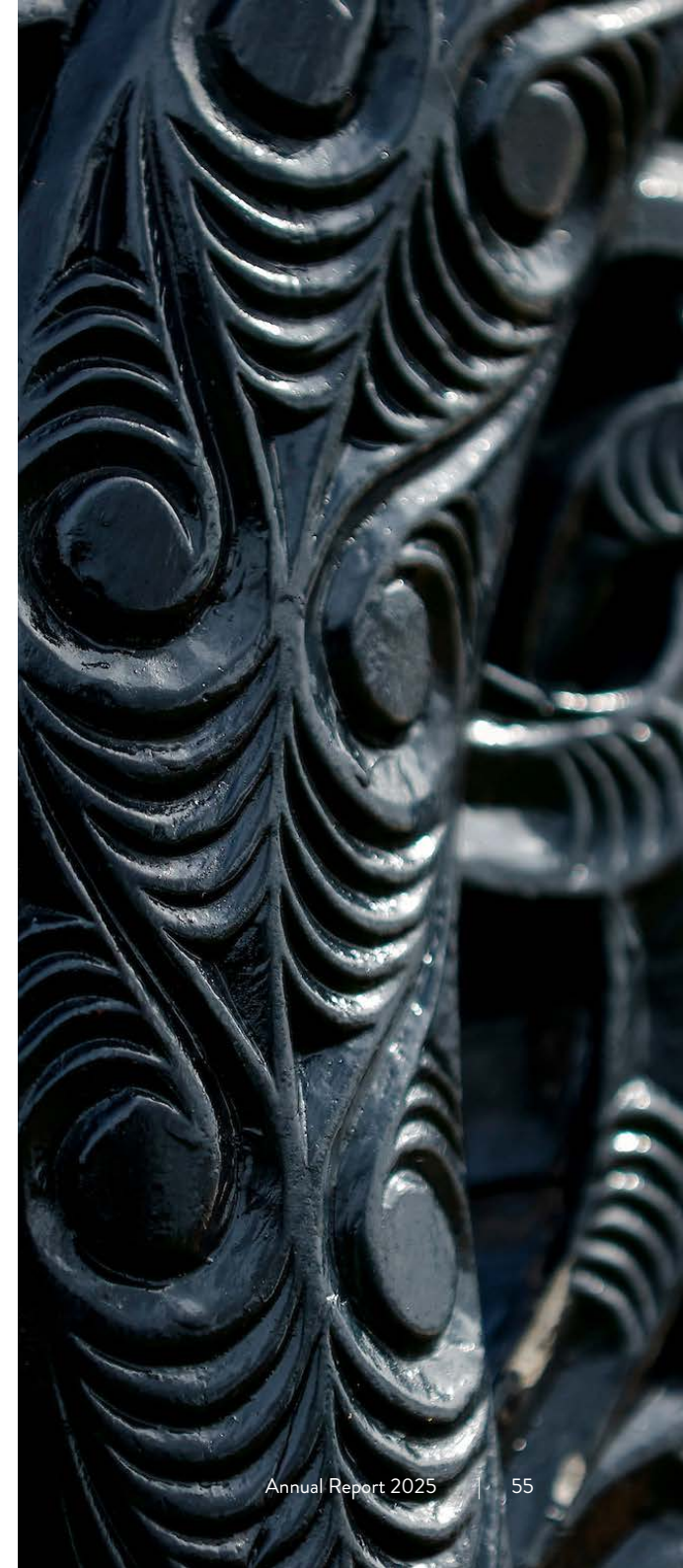
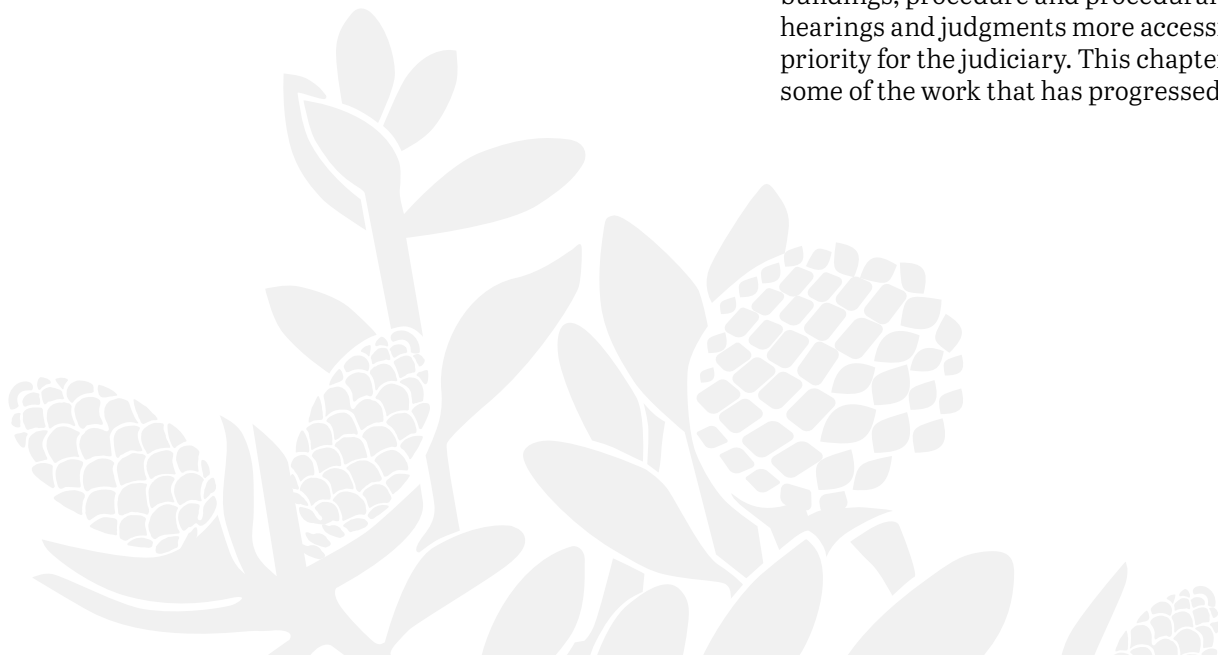
Access to justice

The rule of law is the ideal that every person is equal before the law and entitled to its protection. Access to justice is an important underpinning of the rule of law.

Access to justice requires more than being able to walk through a court door. People directly affected by a court case must be able to participate meaningfully in their proceedings, if the proceedings are to be fair and just.

Not everyone has the same ability to access justice. Inequality of financial resources, inability to access legal information and assistance, and geographic location can all create barriers to obtaining the protection of the law. Features of the justice system can also be barriers to Deaf and disabled people.

Improving access to justice by making court buildings, procedure and procedural information, hearings and judgments more accessible is a priority for the judiciary. This chapter outlines some of the work that has progressed this year.



Advancing accessibility in the courts for Deaf and disabled people

There are an estimated 851,000 disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand — nearly one in every six people.⁵⁴ Disabled people are over-represented in almost every aspect of the justice system. In the criminal jurisdiction, disabled people experience much higher rates of victimisation than the general population,⁵⁵ and a significant proportion of defendants live with disability.⁵⁶ In the civil jurisdiction, disabled communities report greater levels of need to access legal redress because of an increased risk of exploitation.

Deaf and disabled people often encounter barriers when trying to access justice. The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in State and Faith-based Care⁵⁷ found that many of the victims of abuse were made particularly vulnerable through disability, and that when they came to the civil courts to seek compensation and redress, they encountered legal and practical obstacles.

The Chief Justice has said that improving the accessibility of access to the courts for members of the Deaf and disabled communities is part of the core work of the courts. Systems must be designed with disability in mind. It is the duty of judges to ensure that every person who comes before the court, in whatever capacity, is able to participate meaningfully in their proceedings. In this way, judges and judicial officers have a critical role in ensuring that Deaf and disabled people receive adequate support for court proceedings. The needs of Deaf and disabled people have implications for the design of court processes, the way information is provided, the conduct of hearings, and the accessibility of both physical court buildings and digital courtrooms.

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR THE COURTS AND DEAF AND DISABLED PEOPLE

This year, the Tomo Mai judicial committee, chaired by Justice Susan Thomas, released a set of principles for engagement with Deaf and disabled people, developed in consultation with representatives of the Deaf and disabled communities. These draw on best practice from the disability sector, and provide clear and practical guidance to help judges and judicial officers communicate effectively and engage respectfully with Deaf and disabled people. The guidelines have been circulated to all judges, integrated into the bench books and provided to the Ministry of Justice.

The committee has also reviewed and provided feedback on judicial protocols and policies to support the protection of the rights of Deaf and disabled people. In 2025, Tomo Mai submitted feedback to Whaikaha-Ministry of Disabled People on the draft New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026–2030, asking that more concrete goals be set for the justice sector. The strategy sets goals for the justice sector to enable meaningful participation by Deaf and disabled communities.

54 Statistics New Zealand | Tatauranga Aotearoa Household Disability Survey 2023 – findings, definitions, and design summary (27 February 2025) at 7.

55 Ministry of Justice | Tāhū o te Ture New Zealand Crime & Victim Survey key results 2024 (Cycle 7) (February 2025) at 13.

56 Ian Lambie, “What were they thinking? A discussion paper on brain and behaviour in relation to the justice system in New Zealand” (Office of the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor | Kaitohutohu Mātanga Pūtaiao Matua ki te Pirimia, 29 January 2020) at [4] and [15].

57 Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions “Whanaketia: Through Pain and Trauma, From Darkness to Light” (25 June 2024).

JUDICIAL EDUCATION TO BUILD UNDERSTANDING OF THE BARRIERS DEAF AND DISABLED PEOPLE FACE IN COURT

The judiciary continues to build judges' understanding, and to support understanding within the legal profession, about the barriers that disabled people and the Deaf community experience when they try to access courts, and the supports required to enable full participation.

Te Kura Kaiwhakawā | Institute of Judicial Studies continued to deliver education programmes in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in State and Faith-based Care. See Part 1 “The judiciary”.

There remains, however, considerable work to be done to improve access to justice for disabled people and the Deaf community. The judiciary is grateful to Aotearoa Disability Law and other disability advocacy organisations for their willingness to support these endeavours.

See also Part 2 “The work of the courts” for a discussion of Te Ao Mārama that focuses on supporting court participation in a variety of ways.

Bench books on the Courts of New Zealand website

In May, *Te Puna Manawa Whenua | the Māori Land Court Bench Book* was published on the Courts of New Zealand website. It is the second bench book to be published by Te Kura Kaiwhakawā | Institute of Judicial Studies. *The Criminal Jury Trials Bench Book* was published at the end of 2024.

Publication of bench books promotes transparency of the law and court processes.



Judge Tony FitzGerald, who presided over the court from its inception, retired this year. Judges Kevin Muir and June Jelas now preside over the court.

ANNIVERSARY OF THE NEW BEGINNINGS COURT | TE KOOTI O TIMATANGA HOU⁵⁸

On 19 November 2025, Auckland City Mission hosted the 15th anniversary of the New Beginnings Court | Te Kooti o Timatanga Hou. The court was established in 2010 in Auckland District Court to provide better access to justice for people who are homeless and help reduce chronic, lower-level offending in public spaces in Auckland's inner city.

The court is supported by representatives from the New Zealand Police, the Department of Corrections, the Salvation Army, lawyers from Auckland Community Law Centre, a co-ordinator, and a dedicated court registrar.

Many of the practices from this court, and other specialist courts, have informed Te Ao Mārama in the District Court: see page 29.

⁵⁸ Te Kooti o Timatanga Hou - The Court of New Beginnings celebrates 15 years of success | RNZ News.



Auckland High Court

Civil justice – access to justice initiatives underway in 2025

High Court Rules changes – preparing the judiciary and the profession

This year the High Court readied itself, and the legal profession, for new High Court Rules that come into effect on 1 January 2026.

These Rules change the way that general proceedings progress through the court, with an earlier focus on the issues on which a case turns. The Rules aim to reduce the time spent on peripheral interlocutory disputes, so that a timely resolution can be achieved, whether by trial or otherwise.

In 2025, a combined judicial, registry and Ministry working group oversaw planning for the implementation of the new Rules. This included designing process maps and training materials for Registry staff, preparing new forms associated with the Rules, addressing operational

matters such as scheduling new events under the Rules, and creating online content and video presentations to help self-represented litigants understand the new procedures.

In October 2025, a judge-led webinar⁵⁹ was held by the New Zealand Law Society and the New Zealand Bar Association, in conjunction with the Rules Committee, to inform the profession on upcoming changes.

The changes, which were recommended by the Rules Committee in its 2022 *Improving Access to Civil Justice* report,⁶⁰ require a culture change to the way that civil litigation is managed by counsel and conducted in the court.

The judiciary is grateful for the willingness of the profession to engage in these new processes.

59 [A New Regime for High Court Civil Proceedings 2025 - On Demand - On Demand CPD - CLE New Zealand Law Society.](#)

60 *Improving Access to Civil Justice* <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/assets/Rules-Committee-Improving-Access-to-Civil-Justice-Report.pdf>.

Legal profession: Essential to the operation of the courts

Lawyers play a vital role in how our courts function. They help people to understand their legal rights and what is happening in a courtroom, and to engage with each other and with court processes in a way that supports the administration of justice.

The legal profession meets with the judiciary throughout the year in a number of forums. Practitioners have brought a consistent message to these forums: the justice system is operating under sustained pressure, and those pressures are being felt acutely by lawyers working within it. Lawyers are questioning the sustainability of remaining in criminal practice, and in family law practice.

This is a matter of concern to the judiciary. Access to legal representation is essential to access to justice and to the efficient operation of the courts.

A number of factors contribute to this stress: workload, counsel availability, and difficulty in accessing clients in custody and the increased complexity of cases and client needs. Practitioners have highlighted the practical effects of legislative and operational change in the courts – for example, the new court timeliness expectations in the District Court. The Chief District Court

Judge has met with practitioner representatives to discuss these issues and has emphasised the importance of open communication and case-by-case engagement to address them.

Those lawyers who undertake legal aid work face particular challenges, and these are outlined below.

The main forums in which the judiciary and legal profession meet are:

- » the Criminal Practice Committee – see page 90
- » local stakeholder meetings in courthouses with members of the profession and justice sector agencies
- » regular meetings between the Chief Judges of the High and District Courts and legal professional groups, the Police Prosecution Service, Crown Law, and the Department of Corrections.

LEGAL AID REVIEW

Cost is the single most significant barrier to accessing justice in New Zealand. Many people in New Zealand cannot afford legal representation. Legal aid is therefore critical to securing access to justice for some of the most vulnerable in society.

The provision of legal aid is also critical for the functioning of the courts. The courts' operating model assumes that most litigants will be legally represented — the courts are not resourced to run the type of processes and hearings that would be needed if many or most people were unrepresented in court.

This year, the Chief Justice was consulted as part of the Ministry of Justice's triennial review of the legal aid system. She emphasised that the long-term underfunding and cumbersome administrative burden of the legal aid system was an active disincentive to lawyers doing this work. As a result, the pool of practitioners doing legal aid work is reducing, causing knock-on effects for the resilience of the criminal defence bar and the family bar in particular.

Fewer senior practitioners are available to take on more complex and serious cases, and junior lawyers are increasingly missing out on opportunities to serve communities while developing litigation skills and experience.



Planning for the future – ensuring technology used in court supports access to justice

The Chief Justice and heads of bench have a responsibility to ensure that New Zealand's justice system remains fit for purpose, that future courts are equipped to serve their evolving communities, and that court processes support just outcomes for all participants.

Using technology wisely is essential to these goals. Technology has the potential to be transformative; better enabling access to the courts and reducing the cost and complexity of proceedings. However, its use must be consistent with fair process, and with a justice system run by and for people.

The judiciary has identified 13 core principles to guide all decisions about digital technology used in the court system. These are set out in full at Appendix 2.

This section describes work the judiciary and others are undertaking to ensure a modern and responsive court system now and in the future.

Progress on the priority technological initiatives for the court

TE AU REKA

Te Au Reka⁶¹ is the new digital case management system that is intended to modernise the way New Zealand's courts and tribunals function.

The rollout of Te Au Reka will begin from late 2026 in the Family Court. It is a significant investment in the courts' technological infrastructure. The courts have until now relied on paper-based processes.

The judiciary is working closely with the Ministry of Justice to develop and test Te Au Reka in accordance with the principles set out in the *Digital Strategy for Courts and Tribunals*. See Appendix 2.

REMOTE PARTICIPATION IN COURT

The use of remote participation technology in courts is increasing. For some hearings there are considerable efficiencies to be gained by allowing a participant to appear online. At other times, people must appear in person to ensure fair trial rights are maintained and the work of the court is conducted effectively.

The extent to which remote participation can improve access to justice and efficiency in the courts depends on several factors: shared understanding across the justice sector as to when remote hearings are appropriate; minimum standards that protect fair trial rights; and fit-for-purpose infrastructure (technology, facilities, and processes) across the sector.

This year, the judiciary published protocols⁶² for the High Court and District Court that set default presumptions about when the use of remote participation is likely to be appropriate, and in what circumstances a departure from those defaults is likely to be considered. The protocols give clarity and guidance to court participants and justice agencies on these matters.

At all times, the presiding judge or judicial officer retains ultimate control over the conduct of hearings, including whether they can appropriately be held in part or in full using remote participation technology. This is necessary as the judge or judicial officer is responsible for ensuring procedural fairness which requires that every person who comes before the court can meaningfully participate in the proceedings.

A hearing will not be procedurally fair if a party joins a hearing remotely, but is unable to fully participate in that way (perhaps because of the complexity of the hearing, or because of the person's disability).

Minimum standards to protect fair trial rights

The protocols set out how remote participation technology is to be provided and used, with minimum standards for technology, facilities and processes that protect fair trial rights. The standards require, among other things, that a defendant can speak to their lawyer before and after a remote hearing, can review and refer to documents when participating remotely in a hearing, and that everyday disruptions of a hearing – such as a defendant being stood down and recalled the same day – can be accommodated.

⁶¹ Te Au Reka means 'the sweet flow'.

⁶² Protocols for remote participation in High Court civil, and in District Court civil and family, proceedings were published in March 2025 and protocols for remote participation by the defendant in custody in criminal proceedings were published in July 2025. These are available on the Courts of New Zealand website <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/going-to-court/practice-directions/protocols-for-remote-participation-in-court>.



Infrastructure that is fit for purpose

The quality of remote participation infrastructure varies across the justice sector. This means its use also varies, as quality issues hinder the ability to use remote participation to its full potential. If remote participation is to play a significant role in the conduct of hearings, then it needs to be of appropriate quality and its use associated with procedural protections to ensure that the resulting hearing is fair. Investment in technology and processes is necessary. The protocols assist the planning for investment by providing more certainty for the court system as a whole about the circumstances in which remote

participation is likely to be used. Greater certainty will assist justice sector agencies in planning for the infrastructure investment called for in the *Digital Strategy for Courts and Tribunals*.

Monitoring the use of remote technology in courts

In August, the judiciary established the Remote Participation Implementation Group⁶³ to support the implementation of the criminal protocols. The group is responsible for monitoring the use of remote participation in the criminal courts, including the impacts of the protocols, any obstacles preventing its use, and any failure to meet the minimum procedural protections provided for in the protocols.

UPDATING THE COURTS (REMOTE PARTICIPATION) ACT 2010

The work carried out to develop the Remote Participation Protocols has informed the Ministry of Justice's work to update the Courts (Remote Participation) Act 2010. The Courts Remote Participation Bill has been introduced to Parliament and is intended to provide more certainty around the use of remote participation. The Bill enables court rules to set default appearance types for court events, while maintaining the presiding judge's authority to depart from the defaults in individual cases if it is in the interests of justice to do so.

Importantly, this reflects the constitutional requirement that the judge has control over the conduct of court proceedings. The new Act will be accompanied by Court Rules, the development of which will be overseen by the Rules Committee. For more about the make-up of the Rules Committee, see page 90.

63 Members include representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Department of Corrections, New Zealand Police and the legal profession.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE COURTS

The judiciary is planning for a future in which artificial intelligence may support better access to justice and the more efficient operation of the courts. Until the benefits and limitations of generative AI are better understood, a cautious approach to its use is necessary to protect the integrity of the court process.

AI-generated material presented to the courts

Judges have observed an increase in material presented in court that has been developed using generative AI tools.

The use of generative AI to develop material for legal proceedings presents both benefits and challenges to the courts.

Generative AI has the potential to improve access to justice for people attending court who do not have legal representation – for example, generative AI tools can help people prepare applications and submissions for court. Often these submissions are well-written and helpful to the court. However, there have been instances where material has included incorrect or fictional legal references or false information.

All information presented to a court must be accurate and truthful. Misuse of generative AI in legal proceedings has serious implications for the administration of justice and the rule of law, and potential repercussions for the person presenting the information.

In 2023, the judiciary developed and released the “Guidelines on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Courts and Tribunals”, in response to AI-generated submissions and evidence being presented in court.⁶⁴

In essence, the Guidelines say that lawyers may use generative AI tools to prepare material for court, but their obligations to the court remain the same – they are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of information they present, including legal citations. This responsibility extends to self-represented litigants.

The Guidelines are kept under review by the Judicial AI Advisory Group – see below.

Judicial pilot of generative AI tools

In 2025 the judiciary explored, through a pilot involving secure and approved generative AI tools, how the use of generative AI could support judges in some areas of their work. Three key principles underpinned the pilot:

1. Generative AI tools must not be used for judicial reasoning or decision-making. Human reasoning through factual and legal issues is a non-negotiable part of New Zealand’s model of justice.
2. Generative AI tools must not be used in a way that replaces, compromises, or obscures the essential human task of judging. Judges must exercise their own independent judgement when making judicial decisions.
3. Generative AI tools must not be used in a way that could undermine the role, integrity, independence and effectiveness of the New Zealand judiciary and, in particular, the rule of law and the application of the principles of access to justice, open justice and the separation of powers.

The pilot will be continued in 2026.

64 <https://www.courtsfnz.govt.nz/going-to-court/practice-directions/practice-guidelines/all-benches/guidelines-for-use-of-generative-artificial-intelligence-in-courts-and-tribunals>.

Judicial AI Advisory Group

The use of generative AI in the courts is overseen by an advisory group of judges, chaired by Justice Paul Radich in 2025. The advisory group developed the Guidelines on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Courts and Tribunals and keeps them under review. It is assisted in its work by the sharing of information with courts in other countries about the use of generative AI. The advisory group also ensures that risks of generative AI use in court are identified, mitigated and communicated across the judiciary.

GOVERNANCE OF JUDICIAL AND COURT INFORMATION

The judiciary is responsible for the control and supervision of court and judicial information, including information that is managed and stored by the Ministry of Justice and its third-party providers. Heads of bench approve requests to store or transfer court and judicial information on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with the Digital Information Framework (and previously, the Offshore Cloud Risk Assessment Framework).

The Digital Information Framework, for which the judiciary and the Ministry of Justice share responsibility, was finalised in late 2025. It provides a structured approach to managing court and judicial information in digital environments. This framework replaces the Offshore Cloud Risk Assessment Framework, expanding its scope beyond offshore storage to cover all digital court and judicial information.

The expanded scope of the new Digital Information Framework reflects the judiciary's commitment to ensuring that information governance keeps pace with technological change while maintaining the confidentiality and security of judicial data. It introduces a more nuanced approach to risk assessment. For example, where disclosure impact is low (such as for publicly available information), security controls can be proportionate. Conversely, for highly sensitive judicial data, more rigorous safeguards are required.



Courthouses and property projects

New Zealand has more than 100 court buildings across 57 towns and cities. This extensive network reflects a longstanding commitment to access to justice: justice delivered in the communities it affects, and courts that are visibly present as civic institutions. Courthouses are not only places where legal disputes are resolved; they are symbols of the rule of law and the State's responsibility to uphold it.

The condition of our court buildings varies. The effect of under-investment in previous years is that many are no longer fit for purpose and, in some cases, are in disrepair.⁶⁵ In a context of ongoing fiscal constraints, the courts – like other institutions – are being asked to do more with less.

JUDICIAL CONTRIBUTION TO COURTHOUSE DESIGN

The judiciary continued to work with the Ministry of Justice on the planning and design of new and refurbished courthouse facilities, with a focus on ensuring court buildings are safe, accessible, and able to support the effective administration of justice. Through the Courthouse Design Committee and the Courts Strategic Partnership Group Property Planning Subcommittee, judges contributed operational and design expertise to major capital projects, minor works and longer-term property planning.

During 2025, this work included reviewing major new courthouse projects at Tauranga Moana, Whanganui and Papakura, as well as early planning for future projects at Rotorua and Waitākere.

The Courthouse Design Committee also continued to review the Courthouse Design Guidelines, with particular attention to public gallery separation, dock design, specialist court security, and the needs of coronial and tribunal jurisdictions.

⁶⁵ Ministry of Justice A 30-year pipeline for transformative property investment (2025). Around 50 percent of the Ministry's properties are rated 'poor' or 'very poor'.



PART FOUR

Open justice and engagement

“Articulating the role of the judiciary and the courts is a task for all judges, but an important responsibility for judicial leaders. If the public is to value the judiciary as a public institution, then the public must have easy access to information about the role the judiciary and the courts play in supporting a stable, peaceful and prosperous society”.

CHIEF JUSTICE HELEN WINKELMANN, AUSTRALASIAN INSTITUTE
OF JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION ORATION, JUNE 2026

The judiciary has processes – old and new – to give practical effect to the principle of open justice. The judiciary’s work to uphold the principle of open justice serves two objectives. The first, to ensure that justice (including hearings and judgments) is open to public scrutiny so that justice is seen to be done.

The second is aimed at improving public understanding of the content of the law, the role of the judiciary in New Zealand society and in New Zealand’s constitutional arrangements.

Courts are operating in a period of rapid technological change, in which information is communicated more quickly, more widely and often with less context than in the past. These developments create both opportunities and challenges for open justice.

These opportunities, challenges and the connected areas of work are described below.



The principle of open justice and how it works in practice

A fundamental principle of the common law is that justice should be administered in public. This principle underpins the public's right to attend court hearings, the media's right to report on the work of the courts, the public release of reasons for judgment, and rights of access to court documents (subject to some specific statutory exceptions).

The principle of open justice serves an important purpose. In the criminal justice context, open court processes help people see how the law is applied in individual cases – and indeed to know what the law is. Open justice upholds defendants' rights to a fair and public hearing. It can assist the sentencing purpose of holding offenders to account. In this way, the principle of open justice maintains public confidence in the justice system, and supports the rule of law.

There are a number of different, long-established processes that support this principle of transparency. Before a hearing even begins, courthouses display court lists each day so

that people know what is being heard in the court. (Some courts publish these lists online⁶⁶ or provide them to accredited media so they can attend or view hearings). Most courts hold hearings in open court.⁶⁷ At the hearing, the media are given a place in the body of the court, and special privileges in order to be the “eyes and ears” of the public (see more overleaf). The courts publish judgments (see overleaf), and provide access to certain court documents.⁶⁸

These mechanisms do not operate in the same way in every case. For instance, it is not considered to be in the interests of justice to allow the public to attend Family Court hearings,

because the privacy interests of families have legislatively been determined to outweigh the public's interest in attending.

There are also new considerations for open justice in a digital environment. The judicial committee Huakina kia Tika | Open Justice Committee (see page 70) is tasked with considering whether the courts open justice efforts remain consistent, in a digital age, with the interests of justice.

66 See the Courts of New Zealand website: Going to court. Listings are anonymised if suppression orders are in place.

67 Family Court, Youth Court and Disputes Tribunal hearings are not open to the public: see s 11A of the Family Court Act 1980, s 329 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, and s 38 of the Disputes Tribunal Act 1988.

68 Governed by the Access to Court Document Rules 2017.



The Chief Justice giving the 2025 Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration (AIJA) Oration.

Judgment publication

The publication of court judgments is a central component of the courts' open justice framework. It gives the public, the media, and the legal profession ready access to the courts' reasoning and how decisions are reached. This gives effect to the principle that justice must be administered openly and allows scrutiny of the exercise of judicial power and how legal principles are applied.

Judgments of all courts are published on Judicial Decisions Online (JDO). Some senior court judgments, (and all Supreme Court judgments), are available on the Courts of New Zealand website the day that they are released.

In 2025, over 4,000 judgments were published by the courts.

Improving the transparency of judicial administration and court business

The Chief Justice's Annual Report is one way in which the judiciary provides information about itself and the operation of the courts. The Annual Report's purpose is to provide transparency about the work judges do to support the administration of justice in New Zealand, and a judicial perspective on challenges and opportunities the courts are facing.

Court-specific annual reports are listed in Appendix 7.

In addition, as the principal spokesperson for the judiciary, the Chief Justice regularly speaks on issues relating to the courts, and on the judicial branch of government. Her speeches are published on the Courts of New Zealand website. Speeches this year include:

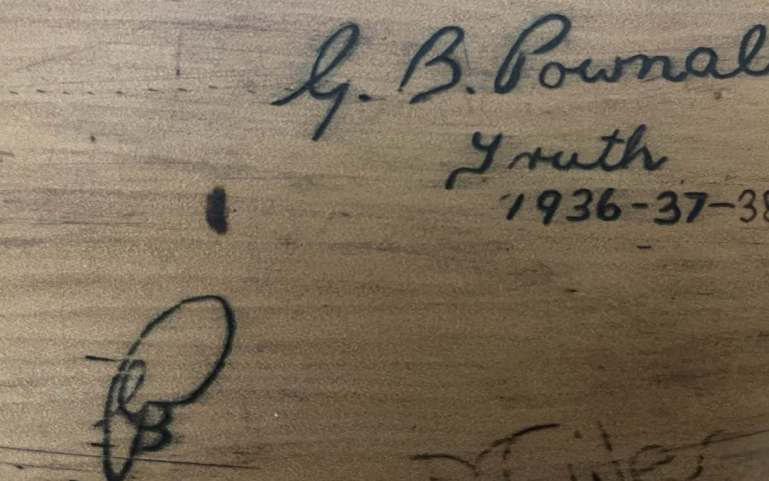
- » Address to the New Zealand Law Society, 15 May 2025.⁶⁹
- » Gender Ratio Report Function, Address to the New Zealand Bar Association, 21 May 2025.⁷⁰
- » 'It's Complicated': Judicial Leadership in the 21st Century, AIJA oration, 6 June 2025.⁷¹
- » Continental Drift: Constitutional Development and Divergence in New Zealand and Australia, Lucinda Lecture, 21 August 2025.⁷²

⁶⁹ <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/assets/speechpapers/25-05-15-Chief-Justice-NZLS-breakfast-speech.pdf>.

⁷⁰ <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/assets/speechpapers/25-05-21-Chief-Justice-speech-Gender-Equity-Ratio.pdf>.

⁷¹ <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/assets/speechpapers/25-06-06-AIJA-speech-Its-complicated-FINAL.pdf>.

⁷² <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/assets/speechpapers/25-08-21-Lucinda-Lecture-FINAL.pdf>.



THE RIGHTS OF MEDIA IN THE COURTS

The accredited media play an essential role in upholding the principle of open justice as the “eyes and ears” of the public. This role is reflected in courtroom design, where reporters are accommodated within the body of the court on the press bench. The press bench in the Wellington Old High Court bears graffiti dating back to 1936, left by a reporter from the Truth newspaper during a quiet moment (above).

The importance of the role is also reflected in legislation. Accredited media are entitled to remain in court in all but the most exceptional circumstances (such as concerns for national security or defence), even where the public has been excluded (Criminal Procedure Act 2011, s 198). The Act also gives accredited media standing to address the court on matters of suppression.

New Zealand has an established forum for engagement between the courts and the media through the Media and Courts Committee, (see “Media and Courts Committee”, right).

A work programme to support open justice

Two committees oversee the work that supports the principle of open justice.

HUAKINA KIA TIKA | OPEN JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Huakina kia Tika is a cross-bench committee involving judges from the Supreme Court, the High Court, the District Court, the Family Court and the Māori Land Court (the last-mentioned also represents the Employment Court, the Environment Court and the Coroners Court), the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the Chief Justice, including Te Kura Kaiwhakawā | Institute of Judicial Studies.

Huakina kia Tika is responsible for promoting and overseeing initiatives to improve public and media access to the courts and public understanding of the courts and their constitutional role. It also provides a judicial perspective on issues relating to access to court records and addresses other issues referred to it by the Chief Justice or heads of bench relating to open justice.

This year Huakina kia Tika undertook two reviews – the first of the process around accessing court documents, and the second a principled review of the courts’ existing open justice initiatives in a digital environment.

MEDIA AND COURTS COMMITTEE

The Media and Courts Committee comprises judges from the High Court, District Court and the specialist courts, senior news leaders from most of the main newsrooms, senior Māori media representatives, a senior registrar and representatives of the Office of the Chief Justice.

The Committee meets regularly in an informal and respectful setting in which judicial and senior media representatives update each other on issues arising between the judiciary and media.

The Committee was formed more than 30 years ago to design and then monitor compliance with, and effectiveness of, an unprecedented pilot initiative allowing television cameras and radio microphones into courts.

Outreach and education

The Chief Justice has spoken of the responsibility that the judiciary has to ensure that people are provided with the means to understand the work of the courts, and the place of the judiciary in New Zealand's constitutional arrangements.⁷³ Public understanding supports confidence in the justice system and helps people know where to turn when legal rights need to be protected or enforced.

Outreach and education initiatives are avenues for the judiciary to support that understanding. Some of these initiatives are described here.

Supreme Court tours and education programme

The Supreme Court tours programme shows more than 3,500 visitors through the Supreme Court buildings each year, with a focus on explaining the role of the courts and the work that they do.

This year, the school tours programme has been expanded. Delivered by an experienced teacher, and developed in consultation with other teachers, the programme supports the civics and citizenship education curriculum for primary and secondary students. Over 2,000 students from Year 5 to Year 13 visited the courts in person. Others joined live virtual tours designed to ensure that schools from further afield can benefit from the free programme.

73 'It's Complicated': Judicial leadership in the 21st Century, Oration, Australian Institute of Judicial Administration (AIJA). <https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/assets/speechpapers/25-06-06-AIJA-speech-Its-complicated-FINAL.pdf>.



Courts Education Officer, Julie Collow, at the press bench in the Old High Court in Wellington with a school tour.



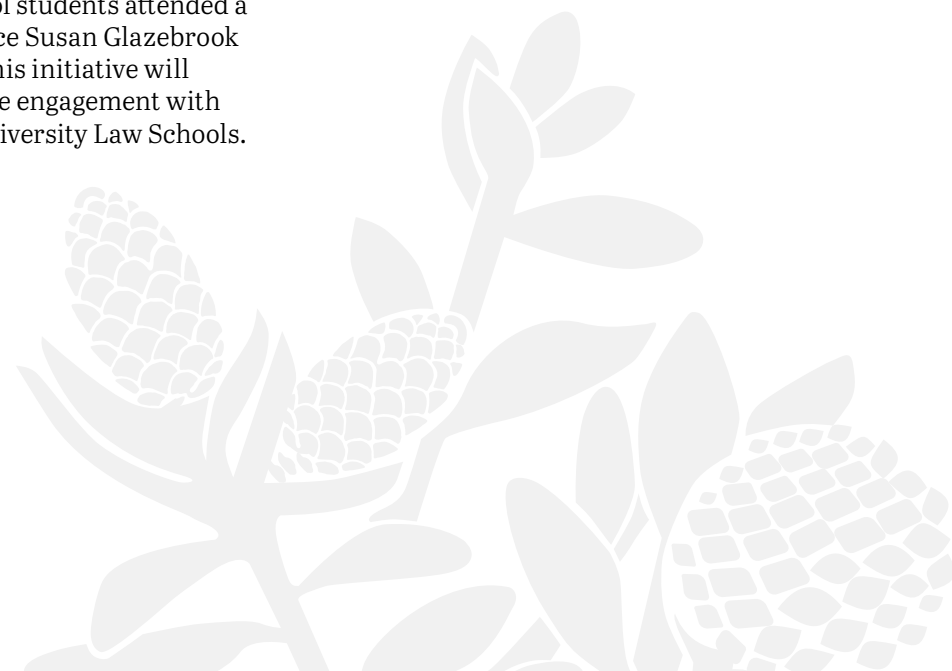
Engaging with future lawyers

The Supreme Court's engagement programme with law students is designed to improve understanding of the Court's role and processes by enabling students to connect what they are learning in class with how law is applied in practice. Through the programme, law students can observe court proceedings in Wellington, or when the Court sits in Auckland or Christchurch. Students also take part in a question-and-answer session with Supreme Court judges and senior legal counsel, followed by an opportunity for informal discussion.

In 2025, the Supreme Court implemented a new initiative for its university outreach programme. Following the remote observation of a hearing, Otago University Law School students attended a seminar presented by Justice Susan Glazebrook and Justice Forrie Miller. This initiative will serve as the model for future engagement with both Otago and Waikato University Law Schools.

Employment Court engagement programme

Chief Employment Court Judge Christina Inglis spent time with students at Te Piringa Faculty of Law at Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato / University of Waikato as part of the University's Judge in Residence Programme, delivering lectures and papers and speaking with various student groups about a career in the law, why employment law matters, and the judicial pathway.



Supreme Court transparency initiatives

The principles expressed in Supreme Court decisions are binding on all courts in New Zealand and have an impact that extend beyond the parties directly involved in the cases it hears. Therefore, it is important that the work of the Supreme Court is readily available and accessible. There are a number of initiatives in place to increase accessibility:

- » **Publishing supporting information about upcoming cases, and about judgments delivered:** To improve public understanding of the work of the Supreme Court, a case synopsis is prepared for each case the court hears. In addition, each judgment issued by the Court is accompanied by an explanatory media release. Case synopses and media releases are published on the Courts of New Zealand website and shared via social media.
- » **Publication of substantive appeal submissions online:** The written submissions of counsel for appeal hearings are published on the Courts of New Zealand website a day before the hearing begins, with limited exceptions. Publishing these documents supports public understanding of a hearing, and particularly supports law schools to teach law, advocacy, and procedure.
- » **Livestreaming of hearings:** Increasingly, hearings of the Supreme Court are livestreamed to the Courts of New Zealand website. Hearings that feature suppressed information are not livestreamed. Live captioning is now provided during Supreme Court livestreamed hearings, utilising voice-to-text technology.
- » **Publication of recorded livestreamed hearings on Courts of New Zealand website:** Livestreamed hearings are published on the Courts of New Zealand website after the hearing has concluded. This gives educational institutions, members of the legal profession and members of the public the ability to view the hearing at any time.

SUPREME COURT'S SITTINGS OUTSIDE WELLINGTON

The Court has adopted a practice of sitting in Auckland and Christchurch each year. Holding hearings outside Wellington enables interested members of the public, the profession, academics and law students to see the court in action.

PART FIVE

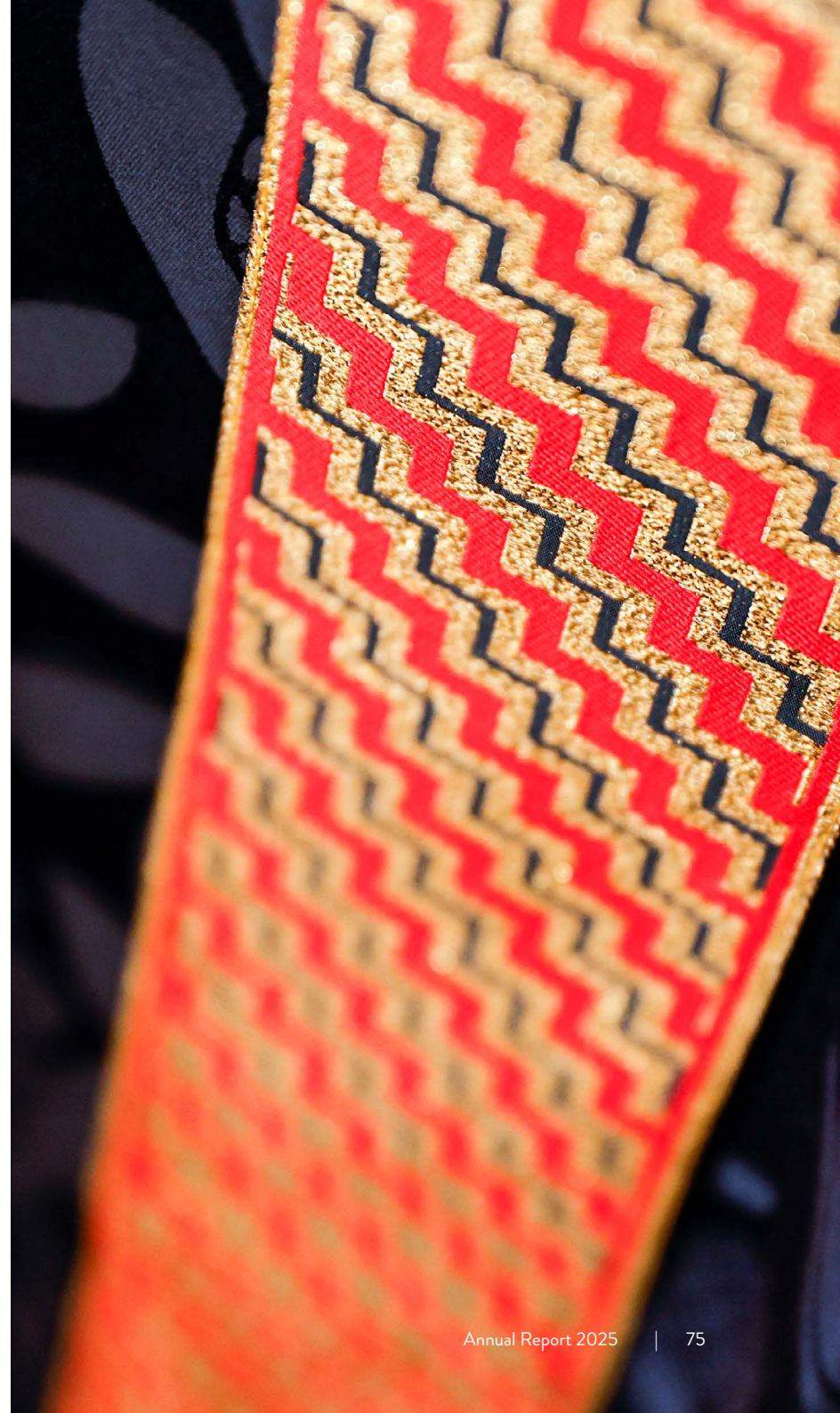
International engagement

“Because together we are much stronger.”

CHIEF JUSTICE HELEN WINKELMANN TO THE PACIFIC
JUDICIAL CONFERENCE, FEBRUARY 2025

The New Zealand judiciary fosters strong links with judiciaries in the Pacific, Australia, and around the world. The Chief Justice regularly engages with international judicial forums, such as the Council of Chief Justices of Australia and New Zealand, and the Chief Justices of the Pacific.

This chapter outlines some of the ways the New Zealand judiciary contributes to these international relationships, including through judicial conferences, regional dialogue, and practical support for courts across the Pacific. It has a special focus on the work of the Pacific Justice Sector Programme – a regional initiative that is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and delivered by Te Kura Kaiwhakawā | Institute of Judicial Studies within the Office of the Chief Justice to support Pacific courts, judges and lawyers.



New Zealand's role in regional and international judicial dialogue



The Pacific Judicial Conference 2025

In February, Chief Justices and judges from across the Pacific region met in Auckland to discuss common issues faced and identify opportunities for greater regional cooperation.

The 2025 Pacific Judicial Conference, held in February, brought together more than 100 judges from 20 countries to discuss the theme of “Strengthening the institution of the judiciary”. The judges present identified many similar issues facing their courts, including the need to preserve and strengthen public confidence in courts. Topics covered included access to justice, the future shape of the courts, and climate change.

Back row, from left to right:
Justice Christian Whata,
Justice Stephen Kós, Justice
David Goddard, Justice
Aidan Xu, and Singapore
High Commissioner to
New Zealand Mr William
Tan. Front row, from left to
right: Justice Valerie Thean,
Chief Justice Sundaresh
Menon, Chief Justice Helen
Winkelmann, and Judicial
Commissioner Alex Wong.



International Judges
Conference, October.
Credit: Erica Sinclair
Photography



The Chief Justice, in her capacity as Chief Justice of New Zealand and Tokelau, also attended the annual Chief Justices' Leadership Forum (CJLF). This one-day forum brought together Chief Justices and senior representatives from the 15 Pacific countries participating in the Pacific Justice Sector Programme (see overleaf) to discuss emerging issues in their jurisdictions and improve coordination of programmes and initiatives.

Issues discussed included: expanding access to judgment writing and leadership development opportunities for judiciaries; litigation skills training for legal advocates and training for registry and court staff; access to justice for women, children and remote communities; judicial wellbeing; and collaboration on the digital transformation of judiciaries and their systems.

Inaugural Singapore- New Zealand Judicial Roundtable meeting

Chief Justice Winkelmann and Chief Justice Menon of Singapore, together with senior judges from Singapore and New Zealand, met in Auckland in February for the inaugural Singapore-New Zealand Judicial Roundtable. The purpose of the meeting was to share information and consider new approaches to common issues. They discussed access to justice, climate change, technology, and judicial wellness.

International Indigenous Judges Conference

In October 2025, Indigenous judges from Canada, the United States, Australia and the Pacific Islands joined Maori judges to attend the first International Indigenous Judges Conference, held at the University of Waikato. This was an opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences and learn from each other.

The conference was held alongside Te Hui-ā-Tau o Te Hunga Rōia Māori, the Māori Law Society's annual conference, which also allowed Indigenous judges and practitioners to meet and learn alongside each other at a number of shared sessions.



The Pacific Justice Sector Programme: Supporting justice in the Pacific



The Pacific Justice Sector Programme (PJSP) is a New Zealand-supported regional initiative that works in partnership with Chief Justices, courts, judicial officers, lawyers and court staff in 15 Pacific countries to strengthen accessible, fair, responsive and efficient justice systems across the region. Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and delivered by Te Kura Kaiwhakawā | Institute of Judicial Studies within the Office of the Chief Justice, the programme provides judicial education, litigation skills training, leadership development, court performance and case-management support, and initiatives to improve access to justice, particularly for vulnerable groups. Its overarching aim is to support strong, trusted justice systems that contribute to a stable, prosperous and resilient Pacific.

An effective justice system depends on a range of people and agencies working well together. Judges, lay judicial officers, court staff, the legal profession, other justice stakeholders, and communities all play a part. PJSP's programme is therefore built around six strategic priorities, or pou, that support the wider justice system: judicial education; litigation skills for lawyers and legal advocates; access to justice for vulnerable groups; judicial leadership; partnerships; and the efficiency and transparency of courts.

PJSP's partner countries are the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN AND OTHER VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN THE PACIFIC

Across PJSP's Pacific partner countries, women, children, remote communities and people with disabilities face specific barriers to justice. These include the distance and cost of travelling from outer islands, under-representation of women in court decision-making, weak enforcement in cases of family violence, and court delays.

PJSP's Ina'ilau programme is funded by the United States Department of State and focuses on improving access to justice for women and children, and on supporting women in leadership roles in Pacific justice sectors.

In June 2025, Ina'ilau supported a five-day training workshop for Northern Outer Islands Magistrates in Tarawa, Kiribati, which brought together 56 lay judicial officers, of whom 20 were women. The training focused on strengthening judicial capacity to deliver rights-based justice, particularly in family protection matters. The workshop covered the rights of children, including children affected by justice processes, disability issues, and persons in custody.

A key resource that participants referred to during case study exercises was the Human Rights Guide for Outer Island Magistrates. The guide forms part of a suite of practical resources developed, published and distributed by Ina'ilau for use across the Pacific, including bilingual human rights guides for Island Court Justices in Vanuatu, sets of relevant human rights legislation for magistrates in Kiribati, and a Magistrates' Induction Guide for newly-appointed judicial officers in Tonga.



“Ina'ilau” is drawn from a well-known Samoan proverb – “E au le ina'ilau a tama'ita'i” – loosely translated as women can do anything, aspire to any heights, and succeed. It is often invoked to recognise strong and dedicated women who lead in their communities.

Northern Outer Island Lay Magistrates with the Human Rights Guide in Kiribati.

Raising the Pacific bar: Empowering Pacific advocates through skills training

Improving the standard of advocacy in Pacific courtrooms improves the court system as a whole and is therefore a focus for PJSP. Supporting the Pacific bar supports better outcomes for parties, reduces delay and expense, and promotes fairer judicial decision-making. Poor advocacy can result in incorrect or incomplete legal arguments being put before the court, leading to delay, increased costs, additional judicial research, and a greater risk of appeal. This can create unfairness for parties and undermine access to fair and timely justice.

Respected members of the Pacific and New Zealand judiciaries and legal profession formed the faculty for the programme. Mock trials, held at the Wellington High Court and presided over by both New Zealand and Pacific judges, concluded the programme.



Thirty-two lawyers from across the Pacific travelled to Wellington in May to participate in a 10-day litigation skills programme provided by PJSP with support from the New Zealand Law Society Continuing Legal Education.

Appendix 1

The Statement of Principles

29 NOVEMBER 2018

The Statement of Principles—Courts of New Zealand (courtsofnz.govt.nz)

1. PURPOSE OF STATEMENT

- 1.1 The constitutional principle of separation of powers requires that the courts be independent of the Executive to ensure impartiality in judicial. As well as requiring freedom from interference in individual judicial decisions, the constitutional principle also depends on institutional independence in organising and managing the work of the courts.
- 1.2 The legislation under which the courts of New Zealand operate places on the judiciary the responsibility for the orderly and efficient conduct of the business of the courts. One of the purposes of the legislation is to improve the transparency of court arrangements “in a manner consistent with judicial independence”.
- 1.3 The judiciary is responsible for the work of the courts, but is supported by the Ministry of Justice, a department of the Executive government. The Secretary for Justice (through the Minister for Courts) is accountable to Parliament for the expenditure of the public funds needed to administer justice in the courts.
- 1.4 The judiciary and the Ministry of Justice therefore share responsibility for delivering justice through the courts. Both have interests in developing and maintaining a system of justice that is just, fair, accessible, modern, and effective, and which delivers timely, impartial, and open justice. The effective and efficient functioning of courts is assisted by the Ministry and the judges maintaining a constructive relationship involving open communication and respect for their respective responsibilities and institutional constraints.
- 1.5 The purpose of this statement of principles is to recognise the respective separate responsibilities of the judiciary and the Ministry, and responsibilities that are shared between the judiciary and the Ministry.

2. THE ROLES OF THE MINISTRY AND THE JUDICIARY

- 2.1 The Secretary for Justice, as Chief Executive of the Ministry of Justice, is responsible to the Minister for Courts. The Minister is responsible to Parliament for the proper use of the public resources used to support and run the courts, and for ensuring that sufficient resources are available to provide an accessible and effective justice system. The Secretary for Justice is formally responsible under the State Sector Act 1988 for employing staff who support the judiciary, including the Registry staff of the courts. Registrars, Deputy Registrars and other officers may be appointed under the State Sector Act 1988 to support the conduct of the business of each court, but act under judicial direction in doing so.
- 2.2 The Chief Justice is head of the judiciary in New Zealand and is also ultimately responsible under the Senior Courts Act 2016 for the orderly and efficient conduct of the Senior Courts' business. The Chief Judge of the District Court is ultimately responsible under the District Court Act 2016 for the orderly and efficient conduct of the business of the District Court. The Chief Judges of the Employment Court, Māori Land Court and Environment Court similarly have statutory responsibilities for the orderly and expeditious discharge of the business of their courts.
- 2.3 In conducting the business of the courts, it is necessary for the judiciary to engage with the Ministry of Justice on matters of overlapping responsibility, including in the assessment of need and in the provision of facilities and resources to support the courts. Where the engagement is in relation to matters affecting all courts, the Chief Justice and the Secretary for Justice need to lead the engagement. This statement addresses the basis for the necessary engagement to ensure that it does not compromise the constitutional principle of judicial independence and is similarly respectful of the Executive's different statutory and constitutional responsibilities.

3. JUDICIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1 The judiciary's responsibilities in relation to conducting the business of the courts include:
- a) the scheduling of sittings of the court, the assignment of judges and judicial officers, and the listing of cases and applications (including those for alternative dispute resolution);
 - b) the use to be made of courts and their precincts;
 - c) the direction and supervision of Registry staff in relation to the business of the court;
 - d) the selection and supervision of immediate judicial support staff such as personal assistants, clerks and other similar staff (subject to paragraph 4.2(d));
 - e) the management of staff to support the Chief Justice and heads of bench;
 - f) the provision of judicial education and training;
 - g) the control and supervision of the use of information technology for the business of the court;
 - h) the custody and control of court records, whether or not held electronically, and control over access to them;
 - i) measuring court performance.

4. MINISTRY OF JUSTICE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COURT SUPPORT

- 4.1 The Secretary for Justice is solely responsible for decisions on all matters of expenditure of public money. The Secretary is accountable to the responsible Minister for the financial management, financial performance, and financial sustainability of the department.
- 4.2 Ministry of Justice responsibilities in relation to the business of the courts include:
- a) providing the judiciary with support to enable heads of bench to discharge their responsibility for the orderly and efficient conduct of court business, including those responsibilities in paragraph 3 above;
 - b) supporting the judiciary in improving access to justice and best practice in the courts;
 - c) the provision, maintenance and operation of technology and buildings for the operation of the courts;
 - d) discharging its responsibilities with respect to staff in accordance with the State Sector Act 1988;
 - e) the maintenance of court registries;
 - f) ensuring security and safety in court buildings;

- g) measuring and reporting on the use of the resources for which it is responsible;
- h) supporting the offices of the Chief Justice and the offices of the heads of the other courts to enable them to discharge their responsibilities.

5. SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

- 5.1 Because the work of the courts draws on public resources, it is necessary for the judiciary and the Ministry of Justice to cooperate so that those resources are used efficiently and effectively.
- 5.2 The Secretary for Justice is responsible for ensuring there is appropriate and timely consultation through the Chief Justice about how its responsibilities for court administration will be provided, including the structuring of staff support and other resources required. Such consultation also includes the design and provision of appropriate court facilities and information technology strategies and initiatives.
- 5.3 The Secretary for Justice will consult the Chief Justice annually about the operating budgets for the courts.
- 5.4 The Secretary for Justice and the judiciary will cooperate in the collection and sharing of information necessary to assist each in their functions consistently with the principle of judicial independence and executive accountability for the expenditure of public funds.

- 5.5 The maintenance of court records is a shared responsibility between the Secretary for Justice and the Chief Justice. The judiciary has the responsibility for the custody and control of records of court proceedings and associated court administration, whether or not held electronically, and control over access to them (subject to any legislative requirements and any policies developed by the judiciary). The Ministry is responsible for the collection and storage of records relating to the use of Ministry resources, including the archiving of court and judicial records on the basis agreed between the Chief Justice and the Secretary for Justice from time to time.

6. STANDING COMMITTEES FOR ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN THE MINISTRY AND THE JUDICIARY

- 6.1 Following enactment of the 2016 legislation and restructuring of responsibilities for operations in the Ministry of Justice, restructuring of the processes of engagement is necessary. Courts administration requires cooperation between the Ministry and the judiciary at the operating level for the Senior Courts, District Court and specialist courts. It is also necessary to ensure that strategic direction for the courts be set by cooperation between the judiciary and the Ministry. The Chief Justice and the Secretary for Justice are to agree on a new structure for engagement between the Ministry and the judiciary at both the operational and at a strategic level (through separate joint committees for the Senior Courts, District Court and specialist courts) and it is agreed that any such means of engagement will be kept under review.

Appendix 2

Principles governing digital technology in the court system

MARCH 2023

Digital Strategy for Courts and Tribunals Aotearoa New Zealand—Courts of New Zealand (courtsofnz.govt.nz)

The judiciary has identified 13 core principles to guide all decisions about digital technology used in the court system. These principles are relevant to the overall approach to developing and implementing digital technology in the court system, and to specific technology initiatives. Every initiative should be assessed against these principles.

The design and implementation of digital technologies for use in the court system must be:

1. Consistent with core values: Technology should support the delivery of justice in a manner that promotes the rule of law and respects human dignity and the values that underpin the legal system of Aotearoa New Zealand, including the values reflected in the common law, tikanga Māori, te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990.

2. Consistent with constitutional responsibilities: Technology solutions should be consistent with the judiciary's constitutional responsibility for court information, judicial information and court business. Judicial control and supervision of court information, judicial information and court business should be preserved and enhanced. The separation of court information and judicial information from Ministry information should be enhanced.

3. People-centred: The design of technology should be centred on meeting the needs of all its users, and based on an accurate understanding of those needs.⁷⁴ Users should be involved in design processes, development and testing. Systems should be accessible, intuitive and easy to use; compatible across different courts and tribunals, in particular along appeal pathways; and compatible with

digital technologies in widespread use by court participants. They should make it easier for people to participate in the court system, and to do the right thing.

4. Inclusive: The adoption of digital technologies should reduce barriers to access to the court system, including barriers currently faced by people with disabilities, people using languages other than English, and people with limited means. There should be a particular focus on people with significant legal needs who experience difficulty in accessing the justice system, or do not access it at all. Technology must not increase barriers to access for people who are digitally disadvantaged – alternative channels for interacting with the court system must remain available for people who are not well placed to use digital technologies. Court staff time and resources freed up by technology

⁷⁴ Users of court system technology include, as noted above, people who interact with the court system including parties, victims, witnesses, jurors, lawyers, justice sector agencies, the media and members of the public; people who are not currently accessing courts and tribunals because existing processes are too complex, costly, slow or difficult to use; and people within the court system including judges and court staff.

should be redeployed to enhance the assistance and support provided to people not using digital technologies, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged by lack of access to those technologies or by difficulties in using those technologies.

5. **Reliable:** Technology used in the courts must be reliable and resilient, appropriately scaled to meet peak demand, and well maintained and supported.
6. **Secure:** Information that is communicated and stored using digital technologies must be appropriately secure. Systems should be designed to manage all relevant data risks including unauthorised access to data; interference with the integrity of data; and loss of data. Systems must enable access to court information to be managed in a way that ensures appropriate protection of privacy and confidentiality interests, and awareness of and compliance with statutory and court-ordered restrictions on publication of information.
7. **Transparent:** People who provide information that is stored digitally should be able to ascertain how that information is stored, who will have access to that information, and the purposes for which that information may be used.

8. **Integrated:** Systems should be appropriately integrated to ensure simplicity, ease of use and efficiency.

9. **Flexible and enabling:** The technology that supports the courts must be capable of iterative evolution to meet changing needs and to generate, and take advantage of, new opportunities for innovation and enhanced delivery of justice. Systems should be designed to facilitate, and must not hinder, changes to court processes and forms.

10. **Implementable:** All technology changes should be accompanied by appropriate organisational and process changes to maximise the benefits from the technology. Careful attention should be given to change management processes, and to initial training and support, especially for major changes such as Te Au Reka.

11. **Properly supported:** In addition to support for the technology itself, ongoing training and high quality and responsive support for users are essential to enable digital technologies to be used effectively across the court system. The timeliness and quality of user support will be critical as technology becomes increasingly central to the courts' ability to conduct hearings and administer justice.

12. **Data-driven:** The ability to gather data and report on the operation of the court system, and to obtain feedback from users, should be a core design feature of all systems. This should enable accurate information to be obtained to assist in assessing the extent to which the objectives identified above are being met, and to identify opportunities for improvement.

13. **Based on proven solutions:** Digital technology solutions should be based on proven solutions, unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise. In general, our court system should aim to be a fast-follower, and to adopt "best of class" solutions that have been deployed successfully in courts and tribunals in other similar jurisdictions. We should maintain a high level of awareness of how courts and tribunals in other jurisdictions are using technology, and learn from their experience. We should be cautious about embarking on attempts to develop our own novel "bespoke" systems, and should do so only for compelling reasons.

Appendix 3

Judicial and shared committees' summaries

PRINCIPAL JUDICIAL COMMITTEES

The cross-court **Legislation and Law Reform Committee** provides the Chief Justice and heads of bench with advice and recommendations on legislation and other law reform proposals that have implications for the operation of the courts and the judiciary.

The Committee comprises judges from the courts of general jurisdiction and, as required, representatives of the specialist jurisdictions.

The Committee advises the Chief Justice and heads of bench about Bills and other law reform proposals on which it may be appropriate for the judiciary to comment.

Matters that the committee considers, and may bring to the attention of the Chief Justice, include:

- » restrictions on accessing the courts, including in particular restrictions on judicial review;
- » provisions affecting access to justice, including matters such as legal aid and court fees;
- » changes to any existing role, function, jurisdiction, or power of all courts of general and specialised jurisdiction, including proposals for new roles, functions, jurisdiction or powers of these courts;
- » measures with implications for the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court;
- » measures affecting the scope and enforcement of the law of contempt;
- » proposals affecting the reporting of or commentary on court proceedings;
- » proposals affecting court procedure, including proposals for separate rules of procedure for a court;
- » proposals involving the disclosure of court record information;
- » proposals affecting the role and powers of court registrars;
- » creation of new offences and penalties and use of the civil jurisdiction to enforce criminal penalties;
- » creation of new powers of arrest and detention;
- » proposals affecting the law of evidence, including self-incrimination and privilege;
- » creation of new powers of investigation, including compulsory provision or sharing of information;
- » implications for the courts of changes in sentencing laws, without comment on government policy motivating proposed changes;
- » proposals involving the status and terms and conditions of appointment of judges;
- » proposals with implications for fundamental rights and freedoms or the rule of law;
- » proposals that would extend a court's workload and require additional resources;
- » proposals concerning cross-border legal cooperation, and in particular cross-border judicial cooperation.

In 2025, the Committee engaged on several law reform proposals, including:

- » **Judicature (Timeliness) Legislation Amendment Bill** – engagement with the Ministry of Justice on the proposals that informed the Bill.
- » **Review of Courts (Remote Participation) Act** – engagement with the Ministry on the reform approach to the remote participation legislation.
- » **Regulatory Systems (Courts) Amendment Bill** – assisted the Chief Justice in the preparation of a submission to the Select Committee.
- » **Triennial Review of Legal Aid** – assisted the Chief Justice to provide feedback to the Ministry of Justice’s public consultation.
- » **Regulatory Standards Bill** – assisted the Chief Justice in the preparation of a submission to the Select Committee.
- » **Out-of-Court Statutory Adjudication Framework** – provided comments to the Ministry of Justice on the proposals included in their consultation paper.

- » **Bringing the Family Court Rules under the jurisdiction of the Rules Committee** – the judiciary and the Ministry of Justice agreed in principle to work towards Family Court Rules being made with the concurrence of the judiciary in the future, noting that this would require legislative change (through the Rules Committee).
- » **Community Magistrates** – provided feedback on the jurisdiction and role of Community Magistrates. Reforms were announced in August 2025.
- » **Mental Health Bill** – reviewed and monitored implications of the Bill for the High Court.
- » **Resource Management Act reforms** – engaged with the Ministry for the Environment on policy work on a proposed Planning Tribunal, which would be established as an autonomous division of the Environment Court.
- » **Adoption Act** – provided feedback on changes to the Adoption Act 1955 (and consequential Family Court Rule changes) to prevent harm coming to children adopted overseas.
- » **Law Commission’s Review of Hate Crime Law** – reviewed the draft discussion paper and provided comment to the Law Commission.

- » **Increase in court and tribunal fees** – provided a response to the proposed increase in court and tribunal fees.
- » **Public Works Amendment Bill** – reviewed the Bill and determined that a Select Committee submission would not be necessary.

Tomo Mai: This committee’s overarching purpose is to:

- » promote a judiciary reflective of and knowledgeable about the communities it serves.
- » promote a court environment in which everyone can meaningfully participate in proceedings.

In 2025, the committee’s working groups made progress on the following three initiatives:

- » *Revising the Guidelines for Courtroom Conduct for Counsel.* Publication of these guidelines is intended for 2026, when they will replace the Etiquette Guidelines for Counsel.
- » *Disability and Access to Justice*

- The working group drafted a paper proposing practical accessibility initiatives for the Ministry of Justice, which led to the Ministry establishing the Disability Governance and Leadership Committee to implement recommendations and broader accessibility projects.
- The working group developed principles for engaging with Deaf and disabled people in court, drawing on best practice from the disability sector.
- The committee submitted feedback to Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People on the draft refreshed New Zealand Disability Strategy.
- » *Judicial diversity.* The working group undertook consultation to better understand how the senior courts' appointment process can support judicial diversity. The group spoke with current and former heads of bench, and senior court judges from non-traditional career backgrounds, to identify practical barriers and consider ways to support a broader and more diverse pool of candidates.

The cross-court **Judicial Wellbeing Steering Group** provides oversight and direction to the whole-of-courts wellbeing work programme, and, in conjunction with the heads of bench, encourages uptake of wellbeing support across the judiciary.

The governing board of **Te Kura Kaiwhakawā | Institute of Judicial Studies** directs the educational programme and under the direction of judicial editorial committees develops judicial reference resources (bench books) for most courts.

Te Kura endeavours to be:

- » proactive – developing programmes and resources that align with significant initiatives and developments for the courts, whilst anticipating future needs and opportunities
- » tailored and personalised – meeting the individual needs of judges, wherever they are in their careers
- » grounded in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific – supporting the judiciary with knowledge and skills to administer the laws of Aotearoa New Zealand; making well-informed decisions, responsive to community needs, in a culturally safe environment and
- » enduring and agile – building sustainable organisational foundations, while preserving flexibility.

For more on Te Kura's 2025 work programme, see Part 2.

SHARED COMMITTEES

Committees made up of judges, registry or ministry staff and, on occasion, members of the legal profession consider strategic and operational matters. The key strategic committee is the Courts Strategic Partnership Group (see page 8). Other committees include the following:

The **Information and Digital Governance Committee (IDGC)** is a joint committee that enables the judiciary to work with the Ministry of Justice to progress the *Digital Strategy for Courts and Tribunals* and to give effect to their separate and shared responsibilities in relation to information management and use and performance of digital technology. The IDGC is responsible for making recommendations and providing advice to the Chief Justice and the Secretary for Justice on relevant topics.

The **Judicial Libraries Management Board** guides the acquisition and provision of online and hard copy research materials for judges. In 2025, the board continued its focus on improving the quality and accessibility of online resources. Group and individual training were provided so that judges can feel confident using online resources effectively and efficiently and increasingly take an online-first approach. Annual reviews of the library material provided for judges' chambers ensure they best reflect individual subject interests and requirements and that they complement rather than duplicate online resources. The Board supports judges' efforts

to increase their knowledge of tikanga Māori and te reo Māori through the implementation of Mātauranga Māori in the Judicial Libraries programme.

Huakina kia Tika | Open Justice Committee is a cross-bench committee which applies an open justice lens to the work of all courts, identifying and promoting practical steps that can be taken to preserve and promote transparency and access. Committee activity is reported in Part 4 Open Justice and Engagement.

The **Media and Courts Committee** reviews the arrangements to facilitate news media reporting of the courts and provides a forum for the judiciary, media and the ministry to discuss related issues such as access to court records. More information about the committee is reported in Part 4 Open Justice and Engagement.

The **Rules Committee** is a statutory body that includes judges, senior law officers, ministry staff and members of the profession. The Committee has responsibility for making rules concerning civil and criminal procedure for most courts. The Committee continued to focus on giving effect to the *Improving Access to Civil Justice* report, released in 2022, by concluding work on the High Court (Improved Access to Civil Justice) Amendment Rules 2025. The amendments substantially reform the procedures for ordinary civil proceedings in the High Court. A series of seminars, in conjunction with the New Zealand Law Society and Criminal Bar Association, took place in 2025, to inform and educate the profession on the upcoming changes before they take effect from 1 January 2026.

In 2025, the Committee also saw the promulgation of rules updating daily recovery rates for costs in the High Court, rules facilitating the new “three strikes” regime, and rules facilitating the more timely filing of victim impact statements.

The **Criminal Practice Committee** reviews matters of criminal practice and procedure at a systemic level, recommending appropriate changes. Committee membership comprises justice sector departmental representatives, members of the legal profession and judges from the criminal trial and appellate courts, uniquely positioning it to encourage collaboration and provide oversight.

Areas of focus for the committee in 2025 included establishing the Remote Participation Implementation Group to monitor and support the implementation of the Remote Participation Protocol for hearings when a defendant is in custody, considering background information for the purposes of sentencing, and seeking to better understand the drivers behind the increasing number of women in custody.

The **Courthouse Design Committee** is responsible for reviewing the planning provision and form of new and refurbished courthouses to ensure fitness for purpose. Its two primary activities are to develop and review the Courthouse Design Guidelines and to review and approve plans submitted by the Ministry of Justice relating to the proposed construction and refurbishment of courthouses.

Projects under consideration this year included:

- » Tauranga Moana Courthouse
- » Whanganui Courthouse
- » Papakura Courthouse
- » Minor works for existing courthouses at New Plymouth, Hamilton and Kaikohe.

The **Strategic Priorities and Budget Group** (SPB, formerly the Judicial Budget Advisory Group) was established in 2024 to support the Chief Justice and heads of bench to engage effectively with the Ministry of Justice and, when appropriate, with Ministers on courts-related budget bids, and on resourcing of the infrastructure to support the judicial branch of government.

Health, Safety, and Security in Courts Forum

The purpose of the Forum is to give effect to the health, safety, and security memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the judiciary and Ministry and to provide input on the development and implementation of systems, policies, and procedures relating to the health, safety and security in court buildings.

CSPG Property Planning Sub-Committee

The purpose of the CSPG property planning sub-committee is to facilitate the full and active involvement of the judiciary in strategic property matters. This includes the development of a long-term property strategy to support CSPG's shared vision for the courts.

The Committee provides a forum for consulting with the judiciary over emerging property needs, major property projects, significant court infrastructure issues, and for the escalation of important property developments or issues that cannot be resolved within individual projects.

AI Advisory Group

The AI Advisory Group was established to provide advice to the Chief Justice and develop guidance for judicial officers and court participants regarding the use of AI in the courts. The *Guidelines for use of generative artificial intelligence in Courts and Tribunals* that the Group developed in 2023 continue to support appropriate AI use.

For more on AI and the courts, see page 63.

Appendix 4

How judges are appointed

THE SELECTION PROCESS

Judges and judicial officers are generally appointed by the Governor-General who acts on the advice of the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General consults with the Chief Justice for appointments to the senior courts, and with the relevant head of bench for appointments to other courts.

There are protocols setting out the process and criteria for appointment to the High Court and the District Court.

- » [Judicial Appointments Protocol – Senior Courts;](#)
- » [Judicial Appointments Information Booklet – District Court; and](#)
- » [Information on Statutory Vacancies \(Ministry of Justice\).](#)

For appointment of the Chief Justice, the Governor General acts on the advice of the Prime Minister. For the appointment of Environment Court judges, the Attorney-General is required to consult with both the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Māori Development before advising the Governor-General. Appointments to the Māori Land Court and the Māori Appellate Court are made by the Minister of Māori Affairs after consultation with the Attorney-General. Appointments to the Coroners Court are made by the Governor-General on the advice of the Attorney-General, after consultation with the Minister of Justice.

QUALITIES OF A JUDGE

The Judicial Appointments Protocol provides clearly defined criteria for assessing whether a person is suitable for judicial appointment. These criteria cover legal ability, qualities of character (including personal honesty and integrity, open-mindedness, impartiality, courtesy and social sensitivity), personal technical skills (such as effective oral communication, mental agility and time management and organisational skills), and reflection of society (the quality of being a person who is aware of, and sensitive to, the diversity of modern New Zealand society).

RECOGNISING PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN JUDICIAL APPLICANTS

The application process ensures that consideration is given to an applicant's previous professional and personal experience, including information about previous service to the community and commitment to access to justice.

The expression of interest form that is filled in by anyone nominating a candidate for, or expressing interest in, appointment to the bench contains specific questions about language and cultural knowledge, life experience, past involvement in access to justice initiatives, and in teaching and learning in the field of legal or judicial education. An example is the High Court judge expression of interest form.

- » [Expression of Interest High Court Judge 2022 \(justice.govt.nz\).](#)

Appendix 5

Current judges and judicial officers of the Courts of New Zealand | Ngā Kaiwhakawā o Ngā Kōti o Aotearoa

As of 31 December 2025 (unless otherwise stated)

SUPREME COURT | TE KŌTI MANA NUI

Chief Justice of New Zealand | Te Tumu Whakawā o Aotearoa

The Right Honourable Dame Helen Winkelmann GNZM

Judges of the Supreme Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Mātāmua o Te Kōti Mana Nui

In order of seniority

The Honourable Dame Susan Glazebrook DNZM

The Honourable Dame Ellen France DNZM

The Honourable Sir Joe Williams KNZM
Ngati Pūkenga, Waitaha and Tapuika

The Honourable Sir Stephen Kós KNZM

The Honourable Justice Forrest Miller

Acting Judges of the Supreme Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Mātāmua Whakakapi o Te Kōti Mana Nui

The Honourable Sir Mark O'Regan KNZM

COURT OF APPEAL | TE KŌTI PĪRA

President of the Court of Appeal | Te Tumuaki o Te Kōti Pīra

The Honourable Justice Christine French

Judges of the Court of Appeal | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Mātāmua o Te Kōti Pīra

In order of seniority

The Honourable Justice Patricia Courtney

The Honourable Justice David Goddard
(until 31 July 2025)

The Honourable Justice Sarah Katz

The Honourable Justice Jillian Mallon

The Honourable Justice Susan Thomas

The Honourable Justice Rebecca Ellis

The Honourable Justice Francis Cooke

The Honourable Justice Matthew Palmer

The Honourable Justice Neil Campbell

The Honourable Justice Christan Whata
(from 1 August 2025)

**Acting Judges of the Court of Appeal | Ngā Kaiwhakawā
Mātāmua Whakakapi o Te Kōti Pira**

In order of seniority

The Honourable Justice David Collins

The Honourable Justice Anne Hinton
(until 30 June 2025)

The Honourable Justice Mark Woolford
(from 3 February 2025 until 1 August 2025)

HIGH COURT | TE KŌTI MATUA

Chief High Court Judge | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o Te Kōti Matua

The Honourable Justice Sally Fitzgerald
Based in Auckland

Judges of the High Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Mātāmua o Te Kōti Matua

In order of seniority, grouped by location

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

The Honourable Justice Geoffrey Venning

The Honourable Justice Graham Lang

The Honourable Justice Timothy Brewer ONZME D
(until 15 November 2025)

The Honourable Justice Mary Peters

The Honourable Justice Christian Whata
Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Tamateatūtahi-Kawiti of Te Arawa
(until 31 July 2025)

The Honourable Justice Matthew Muir
(until 30 May 2025)

The Honourable Justice Rebecca Edwards

The Honourable Justice Mathew Downs

The Honourable Justice Pheroze Jagose

The Honourable Justice Gerard van Bohemen

The Honourable Justice Grant Powell

The Honourable Justice Ian Gault

The Honourable Justice Tracey Walker

The Honourable Justice Michael Robinson

The Honourable Justice Layne Harvey
*Ngāti Awa, Rongowhakaata, Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki, Ngāti
Kahungunu ki Te Wairoa, Te Whānau-a-Apanui*

The Honourable Justice Kiri Tahana
Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Māhino, Tapuika

The Honourable Justice Peter Andrew

The Honourable Justice David Johnstone

The Honourable Justice Andrew Becroft QSO

The Honourable Justice Jane Anderson

The Honourable Justice Laura O’Gorman

The Honourable Justice Michele Wilkinson-Smith

The Honourable Justice Gregory Blanchard

The Honourable Justice Dani Gardiner

The Honourable Justice Simon Mount
(From 1 June 2025)

The Honourable Justice James MacGillivray
(From 1 August 2025)

The Honourable Justice Michael Arthur
(From 1 December 2025)

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

The Honourable Justice Peter Churchman
The Honourable Justice Christine Grice CNZM
The Honourable Justice Cheryl Gwyn
Ngāi Tahu, Ngāpuhi
(until 14 November 2025)
The Honourable Justice Andru Isac
The Honourable Justice Helen McQueen
The Honourable Justice Paul Radich
The Honourable Justice Dale La Hood
The Honourable Justice Karen Grau
The Honourable Justice Jason McHerron
The Honourable Justice David Boldt

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

The Honourable Justice Cameron Mander
The Honourable Justice Rachel Dunningham
The Honourable Justice Melanie Harland
The Honourable Justice Jonathan Eaton
The Honourable Justice Lisa Preston
The Honourable Justice Owen Paulsen
(From 15 November 2025)

Acting Judges of the High Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Mātāmua Whakakapi o Te Kōti Matua *Grouped by location*

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

The Honourable Justice Christine Gordon
(from 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2025)

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

The Honourable Justice David Gendall
(from 14 July 2025 until 31 December 2025)
The Honourable Justice Helen Cull
(from 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2025)

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

The Honourable Justice Rob Osborne
(from 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2025)

Associate Judges of the High Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Tuarua o Te Kōti Matua *In order of seniority, grouped by location*

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

Associate Judge Rachel Sussock
Associate Judge Clive Taylor
Associate Judge Grant Brittain
Associate Judge Paul Cogswell
Associate Judge Elizabeth Gellert
(From 21 July 2025)

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Associate Judge Kenneth Johnston
(Chair, Independent Police Conduct Authority / Mana Whanonga Pirihimana Motuhake)
Associate Judge Andrew Skelton

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

Associate Judge Dale Lester
Associate Judge Owen Paulsen
(until 14 November 2025)

DISTRICT COURT | TE KŌTI-Ā-ROHE

District Court Leadership | Ngā Kaihautū o te Waka o Te Kōti-ā-Rohe

Chief Judge Heemi Taumaunu <i>Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Konohi, Ngāi Tahu</i> Chief District Court Judge Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o te Kōti-ā-Rohe	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Jacquelyn Moran Principal Family Court Judge Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o te Kōti Whānau	General/Family
Judge Ida Malosi Principal Youth Court Judge Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o te Kōti Taiohi	General/Family/Youth
Judge Russell Collins National Executive Judge (until 23 April 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge James Johnston <i>Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-a-Apanui</i> National Executive Judge (from 24 April 2025)	General/Jury/Youth

Judges of the District Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā o Te Kōti-ā-Rohe

In alphabetical order, grouped by location

Kaikohe

Judge Michelle Howard-Sager <i>Te Whakatōhea, Ngāpuhi</i>	General/Family/Youth
Judge Brandt Shortland <i>Ngāti Hine, Ngāpuhi, Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui</i>	General/Jury/Youth

Whangārei | Whangārei-terenga-parāoa

Judge Taryn Bayley <i>Ngāti Mutunga</i>	General/Jury
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Judge Peter Davey	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Greg Davis <i>Ngāpuhi, Ngāi Tai, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Kahungunu</i>	General/Jury/Youth
Judge La-Verne King <i>Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa, Ngāti Paoa</i>	General/Family/Youth
Judge Philip Rzepecky	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Gene Tomlinson	General/Jury
Judge Tania Williams Blyth <i>Ngāti Pūkenga, Te Arawa</i>	General/Family

North Shore | Ōkahukura

Judge Anna Fitzgibbon	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Sarah Morrison <i>Te Arawa, Te Whānau-a-Apanui, Ngāti Mutunga</i>	General/Family
Judge Paul Murray	General/Jury
Judge Dianne Partridge <i>Ngāti Kahungunu</i>	General/Family
Judge Maria Pecotic <i>Ngāti Whakaue</i> (from 12 February 2025 – based at Waitākere District Court until 11 February 2025)	General/Jury

Waitākere

Judge Ophir Cassidy <i>Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara</i>	General/Family
Judge Kiri Lee Guthrie <i>Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Kurauia, Tokaanu marae, Ngāti Pūkenga, Ngāti Porou</i>	General/Jury
Judge Emma Parsons	General/Family/Youth

Judge Maria Pecotic <i>Ngāti Whakaue</i> (until 11 February 2025 – based at North Shore District Court from 12 February 2025)	General/Jury	Judge Nicola Mathers (until 02 June 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Terence Singh	General/Jury	Judge Kathryn Maxwell	General/Jury
Judge Kirsty Swadling	General/Family	Judge Kevin Muir	General/Family
Judge Lisa Tremewan	General/Jury/Youth	Judge Eddie Paul <i>Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Hokopū, Ngāti Rangataua, Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Pūkeko, Ngāti Moewhare</i>	General/Jury/Youth/Civil
Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau		Judge Belinda Pidwell	General/Family
Judge Debra Bell <i>Ngāpuhi</i>	General/Jury	Judge Claire Ryan	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Stephen Bonnar ^{KC}	General/Jury	Judge Belinda Sellars ^{KC} <i>Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāi Tūkairangi</i>	General/Jury
Judge David Burns (until 15 April 2025)	General/Family	Judge David Sharp	General/Jury/Civil
Judge David Clark <i>Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Hāua ki Taumarunui</i>	General/Civil	Judge Mary-Elizabeth Sharp (until 28 August 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Jacqui Clark	General	Judge Pippa Sinclair	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Kate Davenport ^{KC}	General/Jury/Civil	Judge Evangelos (Barney) Thomas	General/Jury
Judge Hana Ellis <i>Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou</i>	General/Family	Judge Robyn von Keisenberg	General/Family
Judge Tony FitzGerald	General/Family/Youth	Judge Peter Winter	General/Jury
Judge Brooke Gibson	General/Jury/Civil	Manukau	
Judge Kevin Glubb	General/Jury	Judge Ali'imua Sandra Alofi'vae ^{MNZM}	General/Youth
Judge Annette Gray (from 16 April 2025)	General/Family	Judge Clare Bennett	General/Jury/Youth
Judge June Jelaš	General/Jury	Judge Frances Eivers <i>Ngāti Maniapoto, Waikato-Tainui</i>	General/Family/Youth
Judge Simon Lance	General/Jury	Judge Janey Forrest	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Kirsten Lummis	General/Jury	Judge Lope Matalavea	General/Family
Judge Andrea Manuel	General/Family	Judge Alan Goodwin	General/Family
		Judge Antony Mahon (until 26 April 2025)	General/Family

Judge Richard McIlraith	General/Jury/Civil
Judge David McNaughton	General/Jury
Judge Soana Moala <i>Ngāti Awa</i>	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Jonathan Moses	General/Jury
Judge Sacha Nepe <i>Ngāti Porou, Rongawhakaatu, Ngāti Tumanuhiri, Te Aitanga a Mahaki, Ngāti Kahungunu</i> (from 23 May until 24 November 2025 – based at Gisborne District Court from 25 November 2025)	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Sharyn Otene <i>Ngāpuhi</i>	General/Jury/Civil/ Family/Youth
Judge Annette Page (from 1 May 2025)	General/Family
Judge Sanjay Patel	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Luke Radich	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Margaret Rogers	General/Family
Judge Tania Sharkey	General/Family
Judge Ngaroma Tahana <i>Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Māhino, Tapuika</i>	General/Jury
Judge Gabrielle Wagner	General/Family/Youth
Judge Nick Webby	General/Jury
Judge Mina Wharepourī <i>Taranaki, Te Ātiawa, Tonga</i>	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Yelena Yelavich	General/Jury

Papakura

Judge Alexander Laurenson <i>Ngāi Tahu, Ngāi Tūmapuhia-a-rangi, Te Āti Haunui- a-Pāpārangī, Ngāti Rangī, Ngāti Tūwharetoa</i>	General/Family
Judge Gerard Winter	General/Jury

Hamilton | Kirikiriroa

Judge Dean Blair	General/Family
Judge Denise Clark <i>Ngāpuhi, Te Rarawa</i>	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Stephen Clark <i>Ngāti Hāua ki Taumarunui, Ngāti Maniapoto</i>	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Tini Clark <i>Waikato Tainui</i>	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Noel Cocurullo <i>Ngāti Pikiao</i>	General/Jury/Family/ Youth
Judge Garry Collin	General/Family
Judge Philip Crayton	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Nicky Grimes	General/Family
Judge Glen Marshall	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Rachel Paul <i>Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Hokopū, Ngāti Rangataua, Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Pūkeko, Ngāti Moewhare</i>	General/Family/Youth
Judge Kim Saunders	General/Jury
Judge Kiriana Tan <i>Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Mutunga</i>	General/Family/Youth
Judge Arthur Tompkins	General/Jury/Civil

Tauranga | Tauranga Moana

Judge Louis Bidois <i>Te Arawa</i>	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Christina Cook	General/Family/Youth
Judge Stephen Coyle	General/Jury/Family
Judge Lex de Jong	General/Family
Judge Paul Geoghegan	General/Family/Youth
Judge Bill Lawson	General/Jury
Judge Melinda Mason <i>Ngāti Tama, Te Ātiawa, Te Arawa</i>	General/Jury/Youth

Rotorua | Te Rotorua-nui-a-Kahumatamomoe

Judge John Bergseng	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Melinda Marama Broek <i>Ngāi Tai, Ngāti Koata</i>	General/Family/Youth
Judge Greg Hollister-Jones	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Anna Skellern <i>Ngāpuhi</i>	General/Jury/Family/ Youth
Judge Jo Wickliffe <i>Ngāti Tuwharetoa and Tuhourangi - Ngati Wahiao</i>	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Alayne Wills <i>Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Waitaha</i>	General/Family/Youth

Gisborne | Tūranganui-a-Kiwa

Judge Turitea Bolstad <i>Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāruahine</i> (until 24 November 2025 – based at New Plymouth District Court from 25 November 2025)	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Warren Cathcart	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Sacha Nepe <i>Ngāti Porou, Rongawhakaatu, Ngāti Tumanuhiri, Te Aitanga a Mahaki, Ngāti Kahungunu</i> (from 25 November 2025 – based at Manukua District Court until 24 November 2025)	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Haamiora Raumati <i>Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāti Toa, Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Kahungunu</i>	General/Family/Youth

Napier | Ahuriri

Judge Peter Callinicos	General/Family/Youth
Judge Russell Collins (from 24 April 2025 – National Executive Judge until 23 April 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Richard Earwaker	General/Jury
Judge Bridget Mackintosh	General/Jury/Civil/Youth

Hastings | Heretaunga

Judge Bernadette Arapere <i>Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga, Ngāti Tuwharetoa, Ngāti Maniapoto</i> (from 29 November 2025)	General/Jury/Youth/Civil
Judge Jacqueline Blake <i>Ngāti Konohi, Ngāti Porou, Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki, Te Whānau-a-Kai</i>	General/Family
Judge Gordon Matenga <i>Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Rongomaiwahine, Ngāi Tāmanuhiri</i>	General/Jury/Youth

New Plymouth | Ngāmotu

Judge Turitea Bolstad <i>Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāruahine</i> (from 25 November 2025 – based at Gisborne District Court until 24 November 2025)	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Tony Greig	General/Jury/Civil/ Family/Youth
Judge Lynne Harrison	General/Family/Youth
Judge Gregory Hikaka <i>Ngā Ruahine, Ngāti Tamaahuroa, Ngāti Tuwharetoa, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāti Ruanui</i>	General/Jury/Family/ Youth

Whanganui

Judge Keryn Broughton <i>Ngā Rauru Kītahi, Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāruahine</i>	General/Family/Youth
Judge Justin Marinovich	General/Jury

Palmerston North | Te Papaioea

Judge Stephanie Edwards	General/Jury
Judge Caroline Hickman	General/Family/Youth
Judge Jonathan Krebs	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Jill Moss	General/Family/Youth
Judge Bruce Northwood <i>Te Aupōuri</i>	General/Jury
Judge Lance Rowe	General/Jury/Civil/Youth

Masterton | Whakaoriori

Judge Barbara Morris	General/Jury/Youth
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Porirua

Judge James Johnston <i>Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-a-Apanui</i> (until 23 April 2025 - National Executive Judge from 24 April 2025)	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Brett Crowley (from 3 June 2025 – based at Wellington District Court until 2 June 2025)	General/Jury/Youth

Hutt Valley | Te Awakairangi

Judge Mike Mika	General/Jury/Youth
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Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Judge Jennifer Binns	General/Family
Judge Tim Black	General/Family
Judge Ian Carter <i>Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Te Rangi</i>	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Brett Crowley (until 2 June 2025 – based at Porirua District Court from 3 June 2025)	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Stephen Harrop	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Bill Hastings	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Peter Hobbs	General/Jury
Judge Susie Houghton	General/Family
Judge Jan Kelly <i>Ngāti Kahungunu</i>	General/Jury/Civil/Youth
Judge Kevin Kelly	General/Civil
Judge David Laurenson (from 12 May 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Alison McLeod	General/Family
Judge Christine Montague	General/Family
Judge Andy Nicholls	General/Jury
Judge Noel Sainsbury	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Tania Warburton	General/Jury
Judge Nicola Wills	General/Jury/Civil

Nelson | Whakatū

Judge Garry Barkle	General/Jury/Civil/ Family/Youth
Judge Joanne (Jo) Rielly	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Richard Russell	General/Family/Youth
Judge Tony Snell	General/Jury/Youth

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

Judge Mike Crosbie	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Michelle Duggan	General/Family
Judge Katie Elkin	General/Jury
Judge Jane Farish	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Tom Gilbert	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Joanne Hambleton	General/Family
Judge Quentin Hix <i>Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Māmoë, Waitaha, Rapuwai, Hāwea</i>	General/Youth
Judge Murray Hunt <i>Ngāi Tahu</i>	General/Civil/Family
Judge Paul Kellar	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Sarah Lindsay	General/Family/Youth
Judge Gerard Lynch	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Traicee McKenzie	General/Family
Judge Jane McMeeken	General/Family/Youth
Judge Raoul Neave	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Stephen O'Driscoll	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Paul Shearer	General/Family
Judge Tony Zohrab	General/Jury/Civil/Youth

Timaru | Te Tihi-o-Marū

Judge Dominic Dravitzki	General/Family/Youth
Judge Campbell Savage	General/Jury

Dunedin | Ōtepoti

Judge Dominic Flatley	General/Family/Youth
Judge David Robinson	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Hermann Retzlaff (from 19 May 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Emma Smith	General/Jury/ Family/Youth
Judge Michael Turner (until 24 November 2025)	General/Jury/Civil/ Family/Youth

Invercargill | Waihōpai

Judge Catriona Doyle	General/Family/Youth
Judge Russell Walker	General/Jury/Family/ Youth
Judge Mark Williams	General/Jury/Civil

Other locations | Ngā wāhi kē

Judge Maree MacKenzie Seconded to the Supreme Court of the Republic of Vanuatu (1 July 2024 until 20 June 2026)	General/Family/Youth
Judge Simon Menzies Chair, Alcohol Regulatory Licensing Authority Te Mana Waeture Take Waipiro	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Anna Tutton Chief Coroner Kaitirotiro Mātewhahatī Matua	General
Judge Martin Treadwell <i>Ngāpuhi</i> Chair, Immigration and Protection Tribunal	General

**Acting Warranted Judges of the District Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā
Whakakapi o Te Kōti-ā-Rohe**

In alphabetical order

Judge Ema Aitken	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Gus Andrée Wiltens	General/Jury/Civil
Judge David Burns (from 16 April 2025)	General/Family
Judge Brian Callaghan	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Mark Callaghan	General/Jury/Civil
Judge David Cameron	General/Jury
Judge Tony Couch	General
Judge Bruce Davidson <i>Ngāi Tahu</i>	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Nevin Dawson	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Keith de Ridder	General/Jury/Civil/Youth
Judge Sarah Fleming	General/Family
Judge Grant Fraser	General/Jury
Judge Chris Harding	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Duncan Harvey	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Denese Henare ^{ONZM} <i>Ngāti Hine, Ngāpuhi</i>	General/Civil/Accident Compensation Appeals
Judge Tom Ingram	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Paul Mabey ^{KC} (until 13 July 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Antony Mahon (from 27 April 2025)	General/Family
Judge Nicola Mathers (from 3 June 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Simon Maude	General/Family

Judge John McDonald	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Ian McHardy	General/Family
Judge Alisdair (Simon) Menzies	General/Jury/Civil/ Alcohol Regulatory Licensing Authority (until 14 June 2025)
Judge Mary O'Dwyer	General/Family/Youth
Judge Diedre Orchard	General/Jury
Judge Geoff Rea	General/Jury
Judge David Ruth (until 27 March 2025)	General/Jury/Youth
Judge Mary-Beth Sharp (from 29 August 2025)	General/Jury/Civil
Judge Allison Sinclair	General/Civil/Accident Compensation Appeals Deputy Chair Alcohol Regulatory Licensing Authority (from 14 June 2025)
Judge Ajit Singh	General
Judge Lee Spear	General/Jury/Civil/ Chair Alcohol Regulatory Licensing Authority (from 15 June 25)
Judge Peter Spiller	General/Civil/Accident Compensation Appeals
Judge John Walker (until 31 December 2025)	General/Jury/Civil/Youth
Judge Noel Walsh	General/Family/Youth

Community Magistrates | Ngā Kaiwhakawā-ā-Hapori

In alphabetical order, grouped by location

North Shore | Ōkahukura

Community Magistrate Lavinia Nathan
Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Whātua

Waitākere

Community Magistrate Russell Bagley
Community Magistrate Fenella Thomas

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

Community Magistrate Terry Bourke
Community Magistrate Rosemary Fitzpatrick

Manukau

Community Magistrate Lauolefale Lemalu
Community Magistrate Jo Sihamu

Hamilton | Kirikiriroa

Community Magistrate Ngaire Mascelle
Te Whakatōhea, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Whakaue, Te Rarawa
Community Magistrate Dr Brenda Midson

Tauranga | Tauranga Moana

Community Magistrate Shaun Cole
Community Magistrate Sherida Cooper
Community Magistrate Lesley Jensen

Palmerston North | Te Papaioea

Community Magistrate Carla na Nagara

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Community Magistrate Jodie Winterburn
Ngāpuhi

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

Community Magistrate Sally O'Brien
Community Magistrate Elder Robati
Community Magistrate Sarah Steele

Acting Community Magistrates

Community Magistrate Kaye Davies
Ngātiwai, Ngāti Porou
Community Magistrate Janet Holmes
(until 5 January 2025)

Family Court Associates | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Tuarua

Family Court Associate Amanda Courtney
(from 18 March 2025)

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

Family Court Associate Johan Niemand
Family Court Associate Johanna Robertson
Family Court Associate Sonya Singh
Family Court Associate Mark Tolich

Hamilton

Family Court Associate Tracey Gunn
(from 21 February 2025)

Family Court Associate Mānia Hope
Waikato: Ngati Mahuta, Ngati Waiere
(from 21 February 2025)

Rotorua | Te Rotorua-nui-a-Kahumatamomoe

Family Court Associate Carlyle Gibson
(from 13 March 2025)

Palmerston North | Te Papaioea

Family Court Associate Sandra Heney
(from 25 January 2025)

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Family Court Associate Claire Mullord
(from 25 March 2025)

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

Family Court Associate Rachel Lohrey
(until 30 June 2025 – based at Invercargill District Court from 2 April 2025)

Family Court Associate Rebecca Murphy

Family Court Associate Lana Paul
Te Awara, Tuwharetoa
(from 27 March 2025)

Invercargill | Waihōpai

Family Court Associate Rachel Lohrey
(from 2 April 2025 – based at Christchurch District Court until 30 June 2025)

MĀORI LAND COURT | TE KOOTI WHENUA MĀORI & MĀORI APPELLATE COURT | TE KOOTI PĪRA MĀORI

Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court & Māori Appellate Court | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o Te Kooti Whenua Māori me Te Kooti Pīra Māori

Chief Judge Caren Fox
Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata
Tairāwhiti District – Based in Gisborne

Deputy Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court & Māori Appellate Court | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua Tuarua o Te Kooti Whenua Māori me Te Kooti Pīra Māori

Deputy Chief Judge Craig Coxhead
Ngāti Māhino, Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Maru
Waieriki District – Based in Rotorua

Judges of the Māori Land Court & Māori Appellate Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā o Te Kooti Whenua Māori me Te Kooti Pīra Māori

In order of seniority

Judge Carolyn Wainwright
Tairāwhiti District – Based in Wellington

Judge Stephanie Milroy
Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Whakaue
Waikato Maniapoto District – Based in Hamilton

Judge Sarah Reeves
Te Ātiawa
Te Waipounamu District – Based in Wellington

Judge Michael Doogan
Aotea District – Based in Wellington

Judge Miharo Armstrong
Te Whānau-a-Apanui
Taitokerau District – Based in Whangārei

Judge Terena Wara
Waikato, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga
Waieriki District – Based in Rotorua

Judge Damian Stone
Ngāti Kahungunu
Aotea and Tākitimu Districts – Based in Wellington

Judge Rachel Mullins
Ngāti Kahungunu, Kāi Tahu
Waikato Maniapoto District – Based in Hamilton

Judge Aidan Warren
Rangitāne, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tahu
Aotea District – Based in Hamilton

Judge Te Kani Williams
Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Manawa, Te Aupōuri, Whakatōhea, Ngāi Tai ki Tōrere, Ngāti Maniapoto, Waikato Tainui
Taitokerau District – Based in Whangārei

Judge Alana Thomas
Ngāpuhi
Aotea District – Based in Wellington

Judge Nathan Milner
Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tahu
Aotea District – Based in Wellington

Acting Judges of the Māori Land Court & Māori Appellate Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Whakakapi o Te Kooti Whenua Māori me Te Kooti Pira Māori

Judge Wilson Isaac
Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Kahungunu
Tairāwhiti District – Based in Gisborne

EMPLOYMENT COURT | TE KŌTI TAKE MAHI

Chief Judge of the Employment Court | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o Te Kōti Take Mahi

Chief Judge Christina Inglis
Based in Wellington

Judges of the Employment Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā o Te Kōti Take Mahi

In order of seniority

Judge Kerry Smith
Based in Christchurch

Judge Joanna Holden
Based in Wellington

Judge Kathryn Beck
Based in Auckland

Judge Merepaia King
Ngāti Māhanga, Ngāti Te Wehi – Tainui
Based in Auckland

Acting Judges of the Employment Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Whakakapi o Te Kōti Take Mahi

Judge Bruce Corkill
Based in Wellington
(until 2 February 2025)⁷⁵

Judge Helen Doyle
Based in Christchurch
(from 28 March 2025)

⁷⁵ Judge Corkill's acting warrant was extended for a further one-year term effective 2 February 2024.

ENVIRONMENT COURT | TE KŌTI TAIAO

Chief Environment Court Judge | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o Te Kōti Taiao

Chief Judge David Kirkpatrick

Based in Auckland

Jury Warranted

Judges of the Environment Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā o Te Kōti Taiao

In order of seniority

Judge Jeff Smith

Based in Auckland

Judge John Hassan

Based in Christchurch

Jury Warranted

Judge Melinda Dickey

Based in Auckland

Judge Pru Steven ^{KC}

Based in Christchurch

Jury Warranted

Judge Lauren Semple

Based in Wellington

Jury Warranted

Judge Sheena Tepania

Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa, Ngāti Kuri, Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi

Based in Auckland

Judge Kelvin Reid

Based in Christchurch

Jury Warranted

Judge David Caldwell

Based in Wellington

(from 15 December 2025)

Alternate Judges of the Environment Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Whakakapi o Te Kōti Taiao

In alphabetical order

Alternate Judge Stephen Clark

Ngāti Hāua ki Taumarunui, Ngāti Maniapoto

District Court Judge

Based in Hamilton

Jury Warranted

Alternate Judge Greg Davis

Ngāpuhi, Ngāi Tai, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Kahungunu

District Court Judge

Based in Whangārei

Jury Warranted

Alternate Judge Michael Doogan

Judge of the Māori Land Court

Based in Wellington

Alternate Judge Caren Fox

Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata

Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court

Based in Gisborne

Alternate Judge Murray Hunt

Ngāi Tahu

District Court Judge

Based in Christchurch

Alternate Judge Paul Kellar

District Court Judge

Based in Christchurch

Jury Warranted

Alternate Judge Jan Kelly

Ngāti Kahungunu

District Court Judge

Based in Wellington

Jury Warranted

Alternate Judge Stephanie Milroy

Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Whakaue

Judge of the Māori Land Court

Based in Hamilton

Alternate Judge Laurie Newhook

Retired Chief Environment Judge
Based in Auckland
Jury Warranted
(until 7 July 2025)

Alternate Judge Stephen O’Driscoll

District Court Judge
Based in Christchurch
Jury Warranted

Alternate Judge Terena Wara

Waikato, Ngāti Raukawa ki te Tonga
Judge of the Māori Land Court
Based in Rotorua

Alternate Judge Aidan Warren

Rangitāne, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tahu
Judge of the Māori Land Court
Based in Hamilton

Alternate Judge Te Kani Williams

*Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Manawa, Te Aupōuri, Whakatōhea,
Ngāi Tai ki Tōrere, Ngāti Maniapoto, Waikato Tainui*
Judge of the Māori Land Court
Based in Whangārei

Environment Commissioners | Ngā Kaikōmihana Taiao

In alphabetical order

Commissioner James Baines

Based in Christchurch
(until 15 August 2025)

Commissioner Ruth Bartlett

Based in Auckland

Commissioner Ian Buchanan

Based in Wellington

Commissioner David Bunting

Based in Wellington
(until 30 May 2025)

Commissioner Rosemary Dixon

Based in Wellington
(from 19 August 2025)

Commissioner Kathryn Edmonds

Based in Wellington

Commissioner Michael Freeman

Based in Christchurch
(from 18 August 2025)

Commissioner Andrew Gysberts

Based in Auckland
(until 30 June 2025)

Commissioner Kim Hardy

Based in Auckland
(from 4 August 2025)

Commissioner Jim Hodges

Based in Auckland

Commissioner Anne Leijnen

Based in Auckland

Commissioner Mark Mabin

Based in Christchurch

Commissioner Shona Myers

Based in Auckland

Commissioner Glenice Paine

Te Ātiawa, Ngāi Tahu
Based in Wellington
(from 9 July 2025)

The Honourable Commissioner Kate Wilkinson

Based in Christchurch

Deputy Environment Commissioners | Ngā Kaikōmihana Taiao Tuarua

In alphabetical order

Deputy Commissioner Victoria Jones

Based in Christchurch
(from 4 August 2025)

Deputy Commissioner Glenice Paine

Te Ātiawa, Ngāi Tahu
Based in Wellington
(until 8 July 2025)

Deputy Commissioner Miria Pomare

*Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāti Whakaue,
Ngāti Kahungunu, Rongowhakaata*
Based in Wellington

Deputy Commissioner Carolyn Wratt

Based in Auckland
(from 4 August 2025)

CORONERS COURT | TE KŌTI KAITIROTIRO MATEWHAWHATI

Chief Coroner | Te Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati Matua

Judge Anna Tutton

Based in Christchurch

Deputy Chief Coroner | Te Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati Matua Tuarua

Coroner Brigitte Windley

Based in Wellington

Coroners | Ngā Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati

In alphabetical order, grouped by location

Whangārei | Whangārei-terenga-parāoa

Coroner Alison Mills

Coroner Tania Tetitaha

Ngāpuhi, Ngāi Tai, Ngāti Raukawa

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

Coroner Janet Anderson

Coroner Tracey Fitzgibbon

Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngare Hauata

Coroner Alexander Ho

Coroner Ian Telford

Coroner Erin Woolley

Coroner Emma Hoskin

(from 18 August 2025)

Hamilton | Kirikiriroa

Coroner Matthew Bates

Coroner Michael Robb

Coroner Peter Ryan

Coroner Louella Dunn

(from 13 February 2025)

Rotorua | Te Rotorua-nui-a-Kahumatamomoe

Coroner Bruce Hesketh

Ngāi Tahu

Coroner Donna Llewellyn

Ngāpuhi

Hastings | Heretaunga

Coroner Heidi Wrigley

Palmerston North | Te Papaioia

Coroner Robin Kay

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Coroner Mary-Anne Borrowdale

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

Coroner Alexandra Cunninghame

Coroner Marcus Elliott

Dunedin | Ōtepoti

Coroner Heather McKenzie

Relief Coroners | Ngā Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati Whakakapi

In alphabetical order, grouped by location

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

Relief Coroner Megan Armistead

Relief Coroner Meenal Duggal

Relief Coroner Andrew Schirnack

Palmerston North | Te Papaioia

Relief Coroner Rachael Schmidt-McCleave

Relief Coroner Ruth Thomas

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Relief Coroner Mark Wilton

(until 15 December 2025)

Relief Coroner Katherine Greig

Dunedin | Ōtepoti

Relief Coroner Amelia Steel

Ngāi Tahu

Associate Coroners | Ngā Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati Tuarua

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

Associate Coroner Hannah Cheeseman

Associate Coroner Dustin Luo

Associate Coroner Jennifer Smith

Te Ātiawa

Associate Coroner Emma van Son

Hamilton | Kirikiriroa

Associate Coroner James Buckle

Associate Coroner Seung Youn

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Associate Coroner Dan Moore

Te Whānau-a-Apanui, Rangitāne, Ngāti Kahungunu

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

Associate Coroner Stephen Burdes

COURT MARTIAL | TE KŌTI WHAKAWĀ KAIMAHI O TE OPE KĀTUA & SUMMARY APPEAL COURT | TE KŌTI PĪRA WHAKARAUPAPA KAIMAHI O TE OPE KĀTUA

Chief Judge of the Court Martial and Judge Advocate General of the Armed Forces of New Zealand | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o Te Kōti Whakawā Kaimahi o Te Ope Kātua me te Kaiwhakawā Ihorei Whānui o Te Ope Kātua o Aotearoa

Chief Judge Kevin Riordan ^{ONZM}

Deputy Chief Judge of the Court Martial and Deputy Judge Advocate General of the Armed Forces of New Zealand | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua Tuarua o Te Kōti Whakawā Kaimahi o Te Ope Kātua me te Kaiwhakawā Ihorei Whānui Tuarua o Te Ope Kātua o Aotearoa

Deputy Chief Judge Heemi Taumaunu
Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Konohi, Ngāi Tahu

Judges of the Court Martial and Summary Appeal Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā o Te Kōti Whakawā Kaimahi o Te Ope Kātua me te Kōti Pīra Whakaraupapa Kaimahi o Te Ope Kātua

In order of seniority

Judge Bill Hastings

Judge Brooke Gibson

Judge Jonathan Moses

Judge Gerard Winter

Judge Mina Wharepourī
Taranaki, Te Ātiawa, Tonga

Judge Tini Clark
Waikato Tainui

Judge Mike Crosbie

Judge Tom Gilbert

COURT MARTIAL APPEAL COURT | TE KŌTI PĪRA WHAKAWĀ KAIMAHI O TE OPE KĀTUA

Chief Judge of the Court Martial Appeal Court | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o Te Kōti Pīra Whakawā Kaimahi o Te Ope Kātua

The Honourable Justice Sally Fitzgerald

Chief High Court Judge | Te Kaiwhakawā Matua o Te Kōti Matua

Judges of the Court Martial Appeal Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā o Te Kōti Pīra Whakawā Kaimahi o Te Ope Kātua

In order of seniority

Judge James Wilding ^{KC}

Judge Robyn Loversidge ^{VRD*}

Judge Craig Ruane ^{ED**}

Appendix 6

Judges and judicial officers who retired, resigned or were elevated during 2025

COURT OF APPEAL | TE KŌTI PĀRA

Judges of the Court of Appeal | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Mātāmua o Te Kōti Pāra

The Honourable Justice David Goddard
Retired on 31 July 2025

HIGH COURT | TE KŌTI MATUA

Judges of the High Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Mātāmua o Te Kōti Matua

In order of seniority, grouped by location

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

The Honourable Justice Timothy Brewer ONZME D
Retired on 15 November 2025

The Honourable Justice Christian Whata
Ngāti Pikiao, Ngāti Tamateatūtahi-Kawiti of Te Arawa
Appointed as a Judge of the Court of Appeal effective 1 August 2025

The Honourable Justice Matthew Muir
Retired on 30 May 2025

Wellington | Te Whanganui-a-Tara

The Honourable Justice Cheryl Gwyn
Ngāi Tahu, Ngāpuhi
Retired on 14 November 2025

Associate Judges of the High Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā Tuarua o Te Kōti Matua

Christchurch | Ōtautahi

Associate Judge Owen Paulsen
Appointed as a Judge of the High Court effective 15 November 2025

DISTRICT COURT | TE KŌTI-Ā-ROHE

Judges of the District Court | Ngā Kaiwhakawā o Te Kōti-ā-Rohe

In alphabetical order, grouped by location

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

Judge David Burns
Retired on 15 April 2025
(Appointed as an Acting Warranted Judge effective 16 April 2025)
General/Family

Judge Nicola Mathers
Retired on 2 June 2025
(Appointed as an Acting Warranted Judge effective 3 June 2025)
General/Jury/Civil

Judge Mary-Beth Sharp
Retired on until 28 August 2025
(Appointed as an Acting Warranted Judge effective 29 August 2025)
General/Jury/Civil

Manukau

Judge Antony Mahon
Retired on 26 April 2025
(Appointed Acting Warranted Judge
effective 27 April 2025)

General/Family

Dunedin | Ōtepoti

Judge Michael Turner
Retired on 24 November 2025

General/Jury/Civil/
Family/Youth

**Acting Warranted Judges of the District Court | Ngā
Kaiwhakawā Whakakapi o Te Kōti-ā-Rohe**

In alphabetical order

Judge Paul Mabey QC
Retired on 13 July 2025

General/Jury/Civil

Judge David Ruth
Retired on 27 March 2025

General/Jury/Youth

Judge John Walker
Retired on 31 December 2025

General/Jury/Youth/Civil

Community Magistrates | Ngā Kaiwhakawā-ā-Hapori

Auckland | Tāmaki Makaurau

Community Magistrate Janet Holmes
Retired on 5 January 2025 as an Acting Warranted Community Magistrate

EMPLOYMENT COURT | TE KŌTI TAKE MAHI

Judge Bruce Corkill
Based in Wellington
Retired on 2 February 2025

ENVIRONMENT COURT | TE KŌTI TAI AO

**Alternate Judges of the Environment Court | Ngā
Kaiwhakawā Whakakapi o Te Kōti Taiao**

Alternate Judge Laurie Newhook
Retired Chief Environment Judge
Based in Auckland
Jury Warranted
Retired on 7 July 2025

Environment Commissioners | Ngā Kaikōmihana Taiao

Commissioner James Baines
Based in Christchurch
Retired on 15 August 2025

Commissioner David Bunting
Based in Wellington
Retired on 30 May 2025

Commissioner Andrew Gysberts
Based in Auckland
Retired on 30 June 2025

Deputy Environment Commissioners | Ngā Kaikōmihana Taiao

Deputy Commissioner Glenice Paine
Te Ātiawa, Ngāi Tahu
Based in Wellington
Appointed as a permanent commissioner
Effective 9 July 2025

CORONERS COURT | TE KŌTI KAITIROTIRO MATEWHAWHATI

Coroners | Ngā Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati

Relief Coroner Louella Dunn
Appointed as a permanent coroner
Effective 13 February 2025

Relief Coroner Mark Wilton
Retired on 15 December 2025



Appendix 7

References and further information

COURT WEBSITES

Supreme Court, Court of Appeal and High Court
[Courts of nz.govt.nz](https://courts.fnz.govt.nz)

District Court
[Districtcourts.govt.nz](https://districtcourts.govt.nz)

Māori Land Court
[Maorilandcourt.govt.nz](https://maorilandcourt.govt.nz)

Employment Court
[Employmentcourt.govt.nz](https://employmentcourt.govt.nz)

Environment Court
[Environmentcourt.govt.nz](https://environmentcourt.govt.nz)

Coroners Court
[Coronialservices.justice.govt.nz](https://coronialservices.justice.govt.nz)

COURT CONTACT DETAILS

Contact a court
0800 COURTS (0800 268 787)

ANNUAL REPORTS AND STATISTICS

Supreme Court | Te Kōti Mana Nui
[2017 to 2025 statistics](#)
[Earlier statistics](#)

Court of Appeal | Te Kōti Pira
[Statistics](#)
[2025](#)
[2024](#)
[2023](#)
[2022](#)
[2021](#)
[2020](#)
[2019](#)
[2018](#)
[2017](#)
[Earlier statistics](#)

High Court | Te Kōti Matua
[Annual reports](#)
[2025](#)
[2024](#)
[2023](#)
[2022](#)
[2021](#)
[2020](#)
[2019](#)
[2018](#)
[2017](#)
[Earlier reports](#)
[Statistics](#)
[2025](#)
[2024](#)
[2023](#)
[2022](#)
[2021](#)
[2020](#)
[2019](#)
[2018](#)
[2017](#)
[Earlier statistics](#)

District Court | Te Kōti-ā-Rohe[Annual reports](#)[2025](#)[2024](#)[2023](#)[2022](#)[2021](#)[2020](#)[2019](#)[2018](#)[2017](#)[Earlier reports](#)[Statistics](#)[2023, 2024, 2025](#)[2022](#)[2021](#)[2020](#)[2019](#)[2018](#)**Māori Land Court | Te Kooti Whenua Māori**[Annual reports](#)[2025](#)[2024](#)[2023](#)[Māori Land Update – Ngā Āhuatanga o te whenua](#)[2025](#)[2024](#)[2023](#)[2022](#)[2021](#)[2020](#)[2019](#)[2018](#)[Earlier updates](#)**Employment Court | Te Kōti Take Mahi**[2015 to 2025 statistics](#)**Environment Court | Te Kōti Taiao**[Annual reports](#)[2024/2025](#)[2023/2024](#)[2022/2023](#)[2021/2022](#)[2020/2021](#)[2019/2020](#)[2018/2019](#)[2017/2018](#)[Earlier reports](#)**Coroners Court | Te Kōti Kaitirotiro Matewhawhati**[Annual reports](#)[2024/2025](#)[2023/2024](#)[2022/2023](#)[2021/2022](#)[2020/2021](#)[2019/2020](#)[2018/2019](#)[2017/2018](#)**OTHER USEFUL LINKS**[Digital Strategy for Courts and Tribunals of Aotearoa New Zealand](#)[Rules Committee Improving Access to Justice Report](#)**Tribunals**justice.govt.nz/tribunals**Office of the Judicial Conduct Commissioner**jcc.govt.nz[Annual reports](#)**Criminal Cases Review Commission | Te Kāhui****Tātari Ture**ccrc.nz**Question trails**courtsfnz.govt.nz**Te Ara Ture**[Te Ara Ture FAQs](#)





CHIEF JUSTICE OF NEW ZEALAND | TE TUMU WHAKAWĀ O AOTEAROA

