



The Right Honourable Dame Helen Winkelmann

CHIEF JUSTICE OF NEW ZEALAND | TE TUMU WHAKAWĀ O AOTEAROA

20 DECEMBER 2023

MEDIA STATEMENT

Chief Justice welcomes judicial appointments

The Chief Justice welcomes the Attorney General's announcement today of the following appointments:

- Justice Forrest Miller as a Judge of the Supreme Court
- Justice Susan Thomas, Justice Rebecca Ellis and Justice Francis Cooke as Judges of the Court of Appeal
- Justice Sally Fitzgerald as Chief Judge of the High Court of New Zealand
- Justice Karen Grau as a Judge of the High Court of New Zealand

Biographies

Justice Forrest Miller

Justice Miller was admitted to the bar in 1981, and initially worked for Alexandra firm Bodkins Solicitors, before commencing practice with Chapman Tripp in Wellington in 1984. He joined the partnership in 1987, with a commercial litigation practice focused on securities, regulatory and competition law.

Justice Miller was appointed to the High Court bench in 2004 and was executive Judge for the Wellington circuit until 2012.

Justice Miller was appointed a Judge of the Court of Appeal in 2013. In the Court of Appeal Justice Miller was responsible for developing electronic casebooks for daily use in criminal and civil jurisdictions. During the Covid-19 pandemic Justice Miller worked with the Ministry of Justice and the profession, leading initiatives to allow courts to operate remotely and to allow courthouses to operate safely under various alert levels. In 2019 the University of Otago awarded the Judge an honorary doctorate for his services to the courts.

In 2022 the Judge was the Inns of Court Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London.

Justice Miller's appointment as a Judge of the Supreme Court is effective immediately.

Justice Susan Thomas

Justice Thomas graduated with an BA/ LLB (Hons) (Senior Scholar) from Auckland University in 1982 and was admitted to the New Zealand bar in the same year. She practised as a solicitor with Holmden Horrocks in Auckland before relocating to London the following year.

Justice Thomas was admitted as a solicitor in England and Wales and spent almost ten years practising as a commercial lawyer, in-house and as a solicitor and partner in a legal firm in London.

On her return to New Zealand in 1995 Justice Thomas joined Minter Ellison Rudd Watts as a senior associate and was admitted to the partnership the following year.

Justice Thomas was appointed a District Court Judge in 2005. During her time as a District Court Judge she was involved in solution-focused judging and in 2012 started the Special Circumstances Court in Wellington to focus on the most challenged and marginalised offenders.

Justice Thomas was appointed to the High Court in 2014 and was appointed Chief High Court Judge in 2020, leading the Court through the Covid-19 pandemic. She has taken a leadership role in work underway within the justice system to improve access to justice and to improve the courts' processes in the areas of criminal and civil justice.

Her appointment as a Judge of the Court of Appeal is effective immediately.

Justice Sally Fitzgerald

Justice Fitzgerald graduated with an LLB (Senior Scholar) from Victoria University of Wellington in 1992 and was admitted to the New Zealand bar in the same year.

Justice Fitzgerald joined the Wellington office of Russell McVeagh as a solicitor in 1992, before relocating to London in 1994, where she was admitted as a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of England and Wales in 1999. She worked as a Senior Solicitor at Clifford Chance until 1997, and then at Debevoise & Plimpton from 1998 to 2001.

In 2001 Justice Fitzgerald returned to Russell McVeagh in Wellington. In 2003 she became a Senior Associate, Dispute Resolution at Sydney firm, Mallesons Stephen Jaques, and was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of New South Wales in 2003.

She returned to Auckland in 2006, and joined the partnership of Russell McVeagh in 2007, specialising in complex commercial dispute resolution, including regulatory investigations and proceedings, tax litigation, and arbitration law and practice.

Justice Fitzgerald was appointed a Judge of the High Court in 2016. From February 2020 to August 2023, she was the Auckland Criminal List Judge, with oversight of all criminal jury trials in the Auckland High Court. Her appointment as Chief Judge of the High Court is effective immediately.

Justice Rebecca Ellis

Justice Ellis was admitted to the Bar in 1989. She was a Legal Advisor with the Law Reform division of the Department of Justice from 1987 to 1992 and a senior litigation solicitor at Chapman Tripp in Wellington from 1992 to 1996.

In 1996 Justice Ellis joined the Crown Law Office and was employed as Crown Counsel in that office until her appointment as Director, Legal Services at the Ministry of Economic Development in 2004.

In 2005 Justice Ellis re-joined Crown Law. In 2006 she became a Team Leader of Crown Law's Tax and Commercial Team and during 2008-2009 she was Manager of the Crown's Structured Finance Litigation.

Justice Ellis was appointed a Judge of the High Court in 2009. Her appointment as Judge of the Court of Appeal will take effect on 15 January 2024.

Justice Francis Cooke

Justice Cooke graduated with a LLB with honours from Victoria University of Wellington in 1989, and with a LLM from Cambridge University in 1990. He worked for a period as a foreign solicitor with Ashurst Morris Crisp in London, before returning to New Zealand in 1992 where he had earlier been admitted to the bar.

From 1992 to 1994 Justice Cooke was a solicitor with Chapman Tripp in Wellington.

He went to the independent bar in 1994 and acted as junior counsel assisting the Winebox Inquiry between 1994 and 1997. He was subsequently involved in a range of public law and commercial litigation. He was appointed a Queen's Counsel in 2004.

Justice Cooke was appointed a High Court Judge on 24 April 2018. He is Chair of the Rules Committee. His appointment as a Judge of the Court of Appeal will take effect on 19 March 2024.

Justice Karen Grau

Justice Grau graduated with an LLB (Hons) from Victoria University of Wellington in 2002, and an LLM from the University of Cambridge in 2014.

She initially worked as a Judge's Clerk for Hon Justice Glazebrook in the Court of Appeal from 2003 to 2004. From 2005 to 2006 she was Legal Counsel in the Commerce Commission, before commencing practice as a barrister in Stout Street Chambers in Wellington assisting (then) Stephen Kós QC.

Between 2007 and 2015 Justice Grau worked as a Crown Prosecutor at Wellington Crown Solicitor's office, Luke Cunningham and Clere.

In 2015 Justice Grau joined Crown Law as a Crown Counsel in the Criminal Group. She was appointed a District Court Judge in 2021.

Justice Grau's appointment as a Judge of the High Court will take effect from 29 January 2024. She will sit in Wellington.

Helen Winkelmann
Chief Justice | Te Tumu Whakawā

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