



The Right Honourable Dame Helen Winkelmann
Chief Justice of New Zealand
Te Tumu Whakawā o Aotearoa

23 March 2020

Media statement

The Prime Minister has announced the alert level for COVID-19 is at level 3 - Restrict and this will rise to Level 4 - Eliminate on Wednesday at 1.30 pm. This effectively shuts down all but the provision of essential services.

Courts are an essential service. It is essential that New Zealand courts continue to uphold the rule of law and to ensure that fair trial rights, the right to natural justice and rights under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act are upheld.

However, the move to level 4 will be extremely disruptive to everyday court practices. It is my expectation that for the remainder of this week courts will operate only in the priority areas I identified on 22 March, namely proceedings that affect:

- Liberty of the individual
- Personal safety and wellbeing
- Matters in which resolution is time critical.

Proceedings in the following courts will not go ahead this week:

Supreme Court

Court of Appeal

Employment Court

Environment Court (exception of one proceeding, ENV-2020-AKL-025, Environmental Protection Agency)

Māori Land Court

Waitangi Tribunal

Coroners Court

To the maximum extent possible, and to avoid the need for people to attend court in person, the courts will use remote participation to hear matters. Remote participation may involve AVL where that is possible, telephone or email.

However, in the District Court in-person attendances may be required in some cases. Where court attendance is unavoidable, the safety of the public, court staff and members of the legal profession is paramount. Measures have been taken to achieve physical distance and to improve courthouse hygiene.

I acknowledge and appreciate the levels of concern amongst the public, court staff and the legal profession. These are unprecedented times for New Zealand, and we would not be human if we were not worried.

I deeply appreciate the commitment that the people who work in our court buildings have shown over the last two weeks. Our frontline court staff and members of the legal profession have continued to serve the interests of justice, and their constructive approach to the necessary changes we have implemented, and will continue to implement, has kept the courts operating and will continue to see justice administered.

The Courts of New Zealand website will continue to provide information how each court expects to operate during this time of heightened alert. Information about the individual arrangements for each court can be found at this site.

<https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/publications/announcements/covid-19-coronavirus/>.

The site will be regularly updated

Regular updates will continue to be sent out through the Courts of New Zealand twitter account: @CourtsofNZ.

Hei konā mai i roto i aku mihi,

[signed]

Helen Winkelmann
Chief Justice/Te Tumu Whakawā