

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF NEW ZEALAND
WHANGAREI REGISTRY**

**I TE KŌTI MATUA O AOTEAROA
WHANGĀREI-TERENGA-PARĀOA ROHE**

**CRI-2024-088-2226
[2026] NZHC 1326**

THE KING

v

ANARU IHAKA MORUNGA

Hearing: 15 May 2026

Appearances: B M O'Connor and D M Soich for Crown
A B Fairley and M R Ridgley for defendant

Sentence: 15 May 2026

SENTENCING REMARKS OF JOHNSTONE J

Solicitors:
MWIS, Whangārei
Thomson Wilson, Whangārei

[1] Anaru Ihaka Morunga, as you know, I am about to sentence you for your murder of Jasmine Reihana,¹ and for the other offences you committed as you tried to escape from what you had done.² Towards the end of this hearing when I am about to impose a sentence on each of those offences, I will ask you to stand up.

[2] I start by describing what you did.

Offending

[3] In early September 2024, you were 34 years old, and living with your mother and her partner at a farmhouse on the Pouto peninsula.

[4] You had been in an on/off relationship with Ms Reihana for around nine years. Ms Reihana had borne you two children. But over the years you had behaved badly towards her, as well as others. I will say more about that later.

[5] Despite your bad behaviour, Ms Reihana maintained contact with you and your mother, with whom she shared something of a bond. When a cousin of yours died, Ms Reihana agreed to travel with you to the tangi in Otorohanga, held over the weekend of 6 to 8 September 2024. She drove you down there in her white SUV.

[6] At the tangi, you smoked methamphetamine and embarrassed yourself by your poor attempt to give a speech. You have a higher sense of respect for yourself, and your own feelings and capacities, than you have respect for others. When Ms Reihana was good enough to drive you home on 8 September, you were upset, and I believe you were brooding, about your shortcomings being exposed in front of a number of people, especially whānau. That, combined with your significant methamphetamine use, inspired a false sense of persecution; in other words, a false feeling on your part that there might be people in your vicinity who were out to get you. Your thinking was disordered.

[7] When you and Ms Reihana got home to Pouto at around 4.30 in the afternoon, you both started a few drinks with your mother's partner, Michael Jones, who had

¹ Murder (Crimes Act 1961, ss 167 and 172. Maximum penalty: life imprisonment).

² Identified sequentially, below.

stayed to look after the farm. Mr Jones realised you were “fried”, and he became worried about the danger you were presenting, especially once you picked up and started scratching your head with a knife. Mr Jones made an excuse and left the farmhouse, using his cell phone, first to call your mother (who was taking an extra night to travel home from the tangi) and then to call the police.

[8] This left you alone with Ms Reihana, sitting at or standing near the dining table. Without any form of provocation from Ms Reihana, you decided to (and you did) kill her, using the knife.

[9] In a police interview that you gave a few weeks after the murder, you described yourself deciding to kill Ms Reihana. You suggested this was because she had aligned herself with those imagined people who were out to get you, and that their plan was, at some unknown time in the future, to kill you, your mother, and other relatives of yours. You said that you knew Ms Reihana (along with the others, who were nearby but out of sight) had guns, although the impression you gave was that Ms Reihana’s gun was in her car. You told the police that, “after a big argument” about the plan to kill your relatives, you “just walked over to [Ms Reihana], grabbed her and then pulled out a knife and then just cut her throat”. You told the police that Ms Reihana did not scream. The following are your words:

She accepted her fate. She understood it was either me or her. I told her they shoulda shot me.

[10] During your trial, you gave evidence about, and made an attempt to justify, what you did to Ms Reihana. You refused to accept that, when you cut Ms Reihana’s throat, an action which you elected to demonstrate while standing in the witness box, you intended to kill her. But, in light of the whole of your evidence and the account you gave to the police, it was no surprise that the jury found you did intend to kill Ms Reihana.

[11] You also gave evidence, adding to what you had said to the police, that Ms Reihana had her gun in her backpack, and that she tried to get it “at the same time” as you cut her throat.

[12] I do not believe that you thought Ms Reihana had a gun in a backpack she was wearing inside the farmhouse. I believe you added that part at least while you were giving evidence, because you wanted to rely on the legal justification known as self-defence. But, as you know, and as can now be mentioned in public, I made a legal ruling at the point in the trial when all the evidence had been given that the jury would not be asked to consider that issue.

Reasons for not putting self-defence

[13] The issue of self-defence should only be put to a jury where the evidence discloses a credible or plausible narrative which might lead them to entertain the reasonable possibility of self-defence.³ In your case, there was never any suggestion that you believed you (or anyone else) were in such immediate danger that cutting Ms Reihana's throat might possibly have involved reasonable, defensive force. You knew it was just you and Ms Reihana at the farmhouse. Assuming, for the sake of this legal issue, that you might have thought Ms Reihana had a gun in her backpack, even then your evidence was that she did not try to get it until "the same time" as you moved towards her with the knife. So, you could have just left, say with Mr Jones. And even if you were truly worried about your relatives being in danger, nothing suggested that killing Ms Reihana might have changed that: the relatives you say you had in mind weren't there.

After the murder

[14] Mr Jones made his call to the police at about 5.20 pm. By then, or at least by the time Mr Jones drove back to the farmhouse a few minutes later, Ms Reihana was already dead. When Mr Jones drove up, you came over, yelling and swearing at him. You left some of Ms Reihana's blood on the door of the car Mr Jones was in as you forced him to drive off again. It seems Mr Jones may have interrupted you as started the process of trying to clean the farmhouse of Ms Reihana's blood, and attempting to dispose of her body.

³ *R v Tavete* [1988] 1 NZLR 428 (CA) at 430–431.

[15] Here, you went to great lengths. You used a wet and dry vacuum cleaner to try to conceal what must have been a substantial quantity of blood. You put Ms Reihana's body in her car, and drove it to a nearby farm on which you had worked. Along the way, you stole two 20-litre fuel containers from a large shed, and a lighter from a smaller smoko shed. The car was unable to travel the full distance you had in mind. So, you committed the offence of converting the farm owner's tractor.⁴ And you used the tractor to tow the car with the body inside, around five kilometres over very difficult terrain, to and then along the west coast beach on the farm's other side.

[16] You told the police you took the car to a remote location because you wanted to preserve evidence of what the people who were out to get you had been planning and doing. That part of your account was false. In fact, you took the car there because you wanted to dispose of Ms Reihana's body and other evidence of the murder you had just committed. The jury was sure you then committed the further offence of arson by setting the car on fire.⁵ You set the fire at or near where Ms Reihana's body lay in the back passenger seat after you had doused it with fuel. The fire was so intense that it in effect incinerated the body.

[17] You got the tractor stuck in sand dunes. So you walked back, on the way going by a shed from which you took the farm owner's four-wheel, all-terrain vehicle: your second offence that night of converting a motor vehicle. You rode the four-wheeler back to the farmhouse. There, it is likely you continued your clean-up efforts.

[18] While you had been away, police officers had visited the farmhouse in response to Mr Jones' call, but they had left after seeing Ms Reihana's blood on a wall and that there was no-one present or nearby.

[19] Overnight, your mother had stayed in Auckland on her way home from the tangi. But she reached Pouto before 8 am on Monday, 9 September. By then, you had wiped down various surfaces in the dining area of the farmhouse, and the smell of bleach in that area was strong.

⁴ Conversion of vehicle (Crimes Act, s 226(1). Maximum penalty: seven years' imprisonment).

⁵ Arson (Crimes Act, s 267(1)(b). Maximum penalty: 14 years' imprisonment).

[20] When you heard the police speaking on your mother's phone, you drove away in your ute, in which you had put parts of the vacuum cleaner with Ms Reihana's blood on them.

[21] You drove at speed, including past a police car carrying officers making their way to the farmhouse. They turned around and followed you. A lengthy police pursuit, involving numerous vehicles, ensued. You offended by driving dangerously and through a closed section of road in Dargaville, causing workers to take evasive action.⁶ And, as you did so, by failing to stop for the pursuing red and blue flashing lights.⁷ Your dangerous driving continued as you drove out of Dargaville and along State Highway 12, over deployed road spikes and thus on shredded tyres and then wheel rims, weaving into traffic and contrary to signals at a one-way controlled section of road works, almost to the highway's intersection with State Highway 1 just south of the Brynderwyn hills. On the way, you assaulted a police officer who was positioning a car to block your exit from a service station you had driven into.⁸ Doing that amounted to the offence of aggravated assault, as your intention was to flee from the murder you had committed the previous evening.⁹

[22] It was only once your ute could drive no further that you steered it to the far side of the road and stopped, and you were arrested.

Sentence of life imprisonment

[23] Now that I have described your offending, I can confirm that the legal presumption, that offenders convicted of murder should be sentenced to imprisonment for life,¹⁰ applies in your case. You could only be sentenced in some other way, if a sentence of life imprisonment would be manifestly unjust. As your lawyer (Mr Fairley) responsibly accepts, life imprisonment will not be manifestly unjust. The evidence in this case confirms that, as a mature man, you simply elected to end Ms Reihana's life because you saw that as the right thing to do in response to

⁶ Dangerous driving (Land Transport Act, s 35(1)(b). Maximum penalty: three months' imprisonment or \$4,500 fine, and six months' disqualification).

⁷ Failing to stop when signalled and driving dangerously (Land Transport Act 1998, ss 52A(1)(a)(ii), 52A(3), 52A(6) and 114(2). Maximum penalty: six months' disqualification and \$10,000 fine).

⁸ Aggravated assault (Crimes Act, s 192(1)(c). Maximum penalty: three years' imprisonment).

⁹ See addendum.

¹⁰ Sentencing Act 2002, s 102(1).

self-generated and plainly incorrect thoughts and feelings about how she and others were and had been behaving.

Minimum period

[24] When I sentence you to life imprisonment, it will mean that you will serve a lengthy period in prison, and after that you will remain on parole (subject to being recalled to prison) for the rest of your life. Because I will be imposing a life sentence for committing murder, I must also identify a minimum period you will serve in prison under that sentence.¹¹

Does s 104 apply?

[25] The Crown submits that s 104 of the Sentencing Act applies in your case, and that it requires a minimum period of 17 years.¹² The Crown acknowledges that all murders are, in a sense, brutal, cruel, depraved or callous.¹³ It says, however, that s 104 applies in your case because you committed this murder “with a high level of ... callousness”.¹⁴

[26] Mr Fairley submits that the murder was not committed with a high level of callousness, so s 104 does not apply.

[27] In my view, the murder was committed with a high level of callousness:

- (a) In this context, “callousness” is about the killer’s attitude to their offending. Callousness can be described, appropriately, as involving “a want of feeling or insensibility amounting to a numbness of the soul”.¹⁵ The actions and words of a murderer, undertaken and offered after the murder is committed, can be taken into account to the extent that they indicate whether the offence was committed callously.¹⁶ This includes

¹¹ Section 103(1).

¹² Section 104(1).

¹³ *R v Slade* [2005] 2 NZLR 526 (CA), at [40]; *R v Kinghorn* [2014] NZCA 168 at [46].

¹⁴ Sentencing Act, s 104(1A).

¹⁵ *K v R* [2020] NZCA 656 at [164], approvingly citing *R v Mason* [2012] NZHC 1849 at [44(b)].

¹⁶ *R v Marong* [2020] NZCA 179 at [32]–[33]; *R v Frost* [2008] NZCA 406 at [40].

the way in which an offender later describes their emotions at the time of the murder.¹⁷

- (b) Your actions taken after the killing, to destroy Ms Reihana’s body for the sake of helping yourself, indicate a level of callousness. What confirms that there was a high level of callousness in this murder is your account to the police, less than three weeks later, of why and how you went about the killing and the clean-up. On your account, you were entitled to choose that Ms Reihana, the mother of two of your children, should die, for no reason other than that you thought (wrongly) Ms Reihana had aligned herself with people who were out to get you or your relatives. I need to be cautious in assessing your mindset. I am not assisted by any expert psychiatric evidence. But the disordered thinking I have described is at least consistent with the experience of paranoid delusions which are well-known to be associated with excessive methamphetamine consumption. Yet, to the extent you may genuinely have felt under threat, this does not make your decision-making about Ms Reihana’s existence any more sympathetic or otherwise emotionally sensitive. To the contrary, you have throughout adopted an entirely un-feeling approach to the question of life or death for Ms Reihana. You described killing her using disgraceful language. You said—these are your words—you “just fucken stabbed her in the neck and just cut her right open like a sheep”. You said that you “chucked her in [a] blanket” and that you “just picked up the whole blanket and threw it in the back of the car”. And when you said to the police you were sorry “for [Ms Reihana] being gone”, that was when you sought to justify her death by saying you made a decision to benefit your kids, and that “what ... happened was in the greater good”.

¹⁷ *R v Frost*, above n 16, at [41].

- (c) Overall, I consider the way in which you murdered Ms Reihana to be similar to other murders which the courts have found to involve a high level of callousness:
- (i) In one of those cases, the offender had killed a sexual partner by slitting her throat and stabbing her through her back. The sentencing Court’s finding that the murder was highly callous relied substantially on what the offender said to a neighbour the next day about what he had done and intended to do, and how much he had enjoyed it.¹⁸
 - (ii) In another case, the way in which a strangled woman’s body was treated, including by setting it alight, together with the offender’s comments to prison officers about what committing the murder was like, similarly formed a substantial part of the Court’s reasoning.¹⁹
- (d) On the other hand, Mr Fairley’s argument on this point relies most strongly upon another case, where a woman was stabbed to death, and her body was burned inside a car that the offender set ablaze. The sentencing Judge found the ‘high callousness’ part of the Sentencing Act did not apply “on the facts before the Court” in that case.²⁰ However, in that case, the offender surrendered to the police at the scene and made an admission of his involvement but did not go on to explain in any detail the way in which he went about his offending or his thought processes in doing so. He said only to a report writer that he committed the murder “in a moment of uncontrollable rage”. The evidence of the callousness with which you committed your murder goes much further.

¹⁸ At [35] (quoting from the sentencing Judge’s decision at [22]), and [41].

¹⁹ *R v Marong*, above n 16, at [33].

²⁰ *R v Marsters* [2021] NZHC 2117 at [73].

Notional minimum period of imprisonment

[28] Because of your offending's high level of callousness, s 104 requires that I impose a minimum period of 17 years, unless that would be manifestly unjust. The need to avoid manifest injustice means that I need to pause here, to assess what minimum period would be appropriate independently of s 104.²¹

[29] Independently of s 104, the minimum term of imprisonment that I must order is the minimum term necessary to hold you accountable for the harm done to Ms Reihana, her family and the community, to denounce your conduct, to deter you and others from committing the same or similar offences, and to protect the community from you.²²

[30] Of course, the harm done to Ms Reihana and her family has been, and will continue to be, immense. I acknowledge the heavy burden this offending has placed upon Ms Reihana's entire whānau, including her mother, father, sisters, and children. I note, in particular, the heartfelt and moving victim impact statements which Ms Reihana's mother, father and a sister provided on behalf of the family, which I have read, and listened to being read, carefully.

[31] The Crown submits that, independently of s 104, the appropriate minimum period would be one of 16 years and nine months, or more. Mr Fairley submits that, taking into account your other offending, the minimum period of imprisonment you should serve is in the region of 12 to 14 years.

[32] Your offence of murder is aggravated by your brutal and unprovoked use of the knife that you got from the kitchen and had been brandishing. It is aggravated by your callousness. It is aggravated by your abuse of the trust Ms Reihana placed in you by driving you home to the remote Pouto farmhouse. It is aggravated by Ms Reihana's vulnerability as she sat at the dining table, after Mr Jones understandably left to try to get help but regrettably left her alone with you, exposing her to your cowardice. It is aggravated by the extensive further offending you embarked upon immediately after

²¹ *Davis v R* [2019] NZCA 40, [2019] 3 NZLR 43 at [25]–[30].

²² Sentencing Act, ss 103(2).

the murder. If your offence of arson was sentenced on its own, on the basis you simply set fire to a car for the purpose of concealing any unknown evidence it might contain, it might have called for a starting point of around three years' imprisonment.²³ But of course your offence of arson was more serious because you knew the evidence you were trying to conceal included Ms Reihana's body.

[33] Adding to the culpability of the offences themselves, your personal circumstances significantly aggravate the overall gravity of your conduct, and increase the minimum period needed to satisfy the purposes I have listed. In particular, you have an extensive history of previous offending, dominated by offences of violence. And, of special relevance:

- (a) You were convicted in April 2016 and sentenced to two and a half months' imprisonment, for threatening to kill Ms Reihana. Ms Reihana's complaint about this offending included that you had threatened to kill her with a knife.
- (b) You were also convicted in December 2016 and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment, for assaulting Ms Reihana on two consecutive days that June. During that two-day episode, you said to Ms Reihana "I own you", and you threatened her with further violence.
- (c) And you were convicted in October 2022 for breaching a protection order made in favour of Ms Reihana.

[34] Mr Morunga, it appears you had thought about killing Ms Reihana with a knife, on occasion, for around eight years before you did kill her with a knife. This substantially adds to the minimum period needed to denounce your conduct and to protect to the community from you.

[35] Beyond these matters, your personal circumstances do not entitle you to any reduction of the minimum period that might otherwise be appropriate. You were exposed to violence during your childhood, and you do appear to have had social

²³ *R v Heremaia* [2025] NZHC 892 at [66].

deprivation in your upbringing. But in your mid-30s, and with your track record of violence, you have plainly failed to respond to life lessons about how you should behave and you must be held accountable. You pleaded guilty to the two offences of conversion, but only after all the evidence in the trial (including yours, confirming that you took the two vehicles without permission) had been given. The jury found you guilty of the others the next working day. You have no remorse: no insight into the appalling nature of your conduct. Quite wrongly, you told the probation officer who wrote to me about your background that “[i]n all aspects you were righteous in what [you] did”.

[36] In my view, independently of s 104, the minimum term of imprisonment necessary for the purposes I have mentioned approximates to 17 years. Since s 104 does apply, I do not consider it necessary to undertake any more detailed analysis. The short point is that the minimum period arising presumptively under s 104 is shown, by the analysis I have conducted, not to be manifestly unjust.

Result

[37] Mr Morunga, please stand up.

[38] For murdering Ms Reihana, I sentence you to life imprisonment. Under this sentence you must serve a minimum period of 17 years.

[39] For the arson, I sentence you to five years’ imprisonment.

[40] For converting the vehicles, I sentence you to two years’ imprisonment.

[41] For the aggravated assault, I sentence you to a year’s imprisonment.²⁴

[42] For your dangerous driving, I sentence you a month’s imprisonment.

[43] You will serve all of these sentences concurrently; that is, at the same time.

²⁴ See addendum.

[44] The law requires me to make orders disqualifying you from driving. For your dangerous driving I order you to be disqualified from driving for 12 months. For your failing to stop while driving dangerously, I order you to be disqualified from driving for six months, cumulative on the 12-month disqualification.

[45] Stand down.

Addendum

[46] I retired briefly having made the above remarks. Counsel then saw me in chambers, reminding me that the jury had acquitted Mr Morunga of the charge of assaulting the driver of the police car in his way at the service station.

[47] I recalled Mr Morunga to court, and explained the fact of my error and its effect. I said that in my view the jury must have been left with a reasonable doubt whether Mr Morunga intended to apply force to the body of the driver in the police car, when Mr Morunga drove so as to collide with the police vehicle on his way out of the service station. I confirmed that my remarks about sentencing him for aggravated assault would not take effect. I confirmed that my error made no difference to my overall assessment of his culpability and that the other sentences imposed on him were unaffected.

Johnstone J