

Rt Hon Dame Helen Winkelmann, Chief Justice of New Zealand

King's Counsel Call to Inner Bar
Anna Adams

Auckland Old High Court

Friday 1 May 2026

Kei te koroua whare o ngā whare kōti o Aotearoa, e tū, e tū, e koro e.

Ki ngā mana whenua o Tāmaki Makaurau, tēnei rā te mihi

E tangi ana ki ngā mate o te wā; haere ngā mate, haere, oti atu.

Ki a koutou te hunga ora; ngā māreikura, ngā manukura, te hunga rōia, tēnā koutou,

Tēnā koutou, otirā tēnā tātou katoa.

I welcome you all to this special sitting to mark the call to the inner bar of Anna Adams.

Sitting with me on the bench today is the Chief High Court Judge and other judges of the High Court. We are joined by AVL by judges from the Court of Appeal, including the President, Justice French.

I welcome Ms Adams' family and the extended whānau of relatives and friends who attend today.

I acknowledge distinguished guests, noting the presence amongst counsel of the Attorney-General, the Hon Chris Bishop MP and previous Attorney-General, the Hon Judith Collins MP. I also acknowledge the Minister of Justice, the Hon Paul Goldsmith MP and the retired judges in attendance today.

We have assembled here today for the call of Ms Adams to the "inner bar". This is the name of the ceremony in which the rank of King's Counsel is formally conferred. There is some other terminology you will hear today that I should explain. King's Counsel are sometimes referred to as "silks", because they are entitled to wear a silk robe rather than the usual black cloth gown worn by lawyers. You will also hear me refer to King's Counsel as "senior counsel". That is because the rank confers upon them seniority amongst counsel, including the right to be heard first in court.

Appointment as King's Counsel is acknowledgment of the lawyer's standing in the profession. It is the highest honour that can be conferred upon a lawyer.

While it is an honour for any counsel to be appointed King's Counsel, such an appointment is not about prestige or flattery — it is about service. King's Counsel must represent their clients in compliance with the law, in accordance with their ethical duties, and to the high standards expected of senior counsel. Still more fundamentally, they must do so in service to the administration of justice and to the rule of law. It is expected that those who carry the rank will be guided by those two imperatives in all actions they take in a professional capacity. The independence of the profession and of the judiciary are cornerstones of the rule of law and the

due administration of justice. Because of this, it is expected that those who carry the rank will be active in their support of these principles — that they will be their fiercest defenders.

In 10 days' time, Ms Adams will take up the role of Solicitor-General. As the junior law officer of the Crown, she will bear a particular responsibility to uphold the rule of law and the administration of justice.

It is therefore appropriate that eligible Solicitors-General should bear the rank of King's Counsel. In taking silk today, Ms Adams joins the ranks of her predecessors such as Sir John Salmond, Sir Richard Wild and Sir John McGrath, and of course her immediate predecessor, Ms Una Jagose, in taking silk.

To outline the formal ceremony you are about to see, we will begin by taking appearances of those who have a right of precedence before the Court. By convention this includes the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General. This is because, as the senior and junior law officers of the Crown, the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General are leaders in the profession. Ms Adams does not take up her role as Solicitor-General for another 10 days, and accordingly Mr Martin, as Acting Solicitor-General, is accorded that precedence today. We will then take the appearances of King's Counsel who attend today to show their support for Ms Adams and their support for the administration of justice through the courts.

Ms Adams will then tender her credentials to be called to the inner bar. These credentials are in the form of a patent from the Governor-General. Ms Adams will make the declaration required of all senior counsel and then join the ranks of her fellow King's Counsel.

It is a slightly peculiar ceremony. It is short — particularly when only one counsel is called to the bar. Moreover, it is a ceremony in which I get to do almost all the speaking. Other than the few words she will utter during the formal ceremony, Ms Adams will not speak. This is in accordance with tradition. I expect she will find that challenging — all counsel do. But Ms Adams can take some comfort in the knowledge that the words spoken about her will be kind.

Those of you who are not lawyers, or who do not practise before the courts, may also think the ceremony is peculiar because of the rituals associated with it. As you watch it you will observe quite a lot of bowing. The process you will see play out reflects the rituals that were brought from England by lawyers when they arrived here in the nineteenth century.

We have kept these rituals because they symbolise the very mindful courtesy that is shown in our courts between counsel, and between counsel and the bench. Courtesy enables issues of great difficulty, of great importance and, at times, of great emotion to be talked through and resolved peacefully by the courts.

And so, to the ceremony.

Personal Remarks

Ms Adams, I congratulate you on your call to the inner bar. This is an important and fitting appointment — an appropriate reflection of the role that the Solicitor-General plays in our system of justice.

When you take up the role of Solicitor-General in just over a week's time you will take on, quite literally, awesome responsibilities.

Together, the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General are charged with ensuring that government is conducted according to law — the Cabinet Manual reflecting the particular responsibility these two law officers have for maintaining the rule of law.¹ While the Attorney-General is the government’s principal or senior legal adviser, in practice it is the Solicitor-General who does the day-to-day work of providing legal advice to government. This has been the established pattern in our constitutional settlement for over 150 years.² The advice the Solicitor-General gives must be independent advice, in keeping with the requirements of the rule of law, no matter the pressures of the moment.

The Solicitor-General also performs the important task of settling the Crown’s view of the law, and has the additional role of ensuring that litigation on behalf of the Crown is conducted to meet the standard of the model litigant.

Traditionally, the Solicitor-General also appears for the Crown as counsel in the most important and difficult litigation. They should therefore be a knowledgeable, skilled and versatile lawyer. They must have sound judgement and excellent skills as an advocate. At times that advocacy will be difficult. But, to quote Sir David Baragwanath KC, a Solicitor-General must sail out in all weathers.

Finally, the Solicitor-General has formidable leadership responsibilities, as head of Crown Law and as the leader of the Government Legal Network.

This brief outline of the role demonstrates just how demanding the role of Solicitor-General is, and how central to the administration of justice. The Solicitor-General truly is a leader in the profession, and it is therefore appropriate that they hold the rank of King’s Counsel.

Ms Adams, your appointments as Solicitor-General and to the role of King’s Counsel are expressions of the government’s confidence that you have the qualities needed for both demanding roles. Your credentials, experience and reputation within the profession provide compelling evidence that this confidence is well placed.

You are known to be learned in the law. An excellent degree at Auckland University earned you a role clerking in the Court of Appeal. After a time as a litigation solicitor at Chapman Tripp you travelled to the United States, studying for a Master of Laws at Yale Law School.

Following graduation and for the next four years you worked at law firms in the United States, studying for and passing the New York Bar Exam — a famously challenging exam. During your time in the United States, you had the opportunity to appear before both state and federal courts.

In 2003 you returned home to New Zealand, joining Meredith Connell and becoming a partner in 2008. Your practice at Meredith Connell was extensive and varied.

You undertook a considerable volume of criminal prosecution work, including the prosecution of serious crime. You developed expertise in regulatory advice and prosecution. You also led the development of the firm’s public law practice, focusing on advice and representation of public sector agencies. At the same time, you led the firm’s busy health law practice.

¹ Cabinet Office *Cabinet Manual 2023* at [4.3]–[4.7] and [4.10(b)]. See also s 9A of the Constitution Act 1986.

² John McGrath “Principles for Sharing Law Officer Power: The Role of the New Zealand Solicitor-General” (1998) 18 NZULR 197 at 204 citing FM Brookfield “The Attorney-General” [1978] NZLJ 334 at 336.

In your years at Meredith Connell, you appeared in over 100 civil and criminal trials or hearings in the District Court, High Court and Court of Appeal, together with providing representation in numerous coronial inquests and public and private inquiries.

Across this varied career you have accumulated a great breadth and depth of experience in civil, commercial, criminal and public law. You have carried the responsibility of providing advice and representation in matters of great public interest and sensitivity. You have worked with or engaged with a wide variety of people — clients, experts, public officials, victims, and witnesses. This path you have travelled through the law will have honed your judgement — and good judgement is the characteristic of all truly outstanding counsel.

You have a reputation for excellence in the practice of the law — all I spoke to about you described you as having a prodigious intellect. You use this ability to great effect — working hard and with great focus. Your work ethic is as well-remarked upon as your intellect. So too your integrity. You deal honestly and fairly with all you come across. You have the courage to make the difficult calls in litigation, and to carry the responsibility for those calls.

In 2015 you became Chair of the management board of Meredith Connell. I have no doubt that leading a firm largely made up of litigation lawyers takes great leadership skills and was undoubtedly good preparation for the leadership role you take on at Crown Law. As Chair of Meredith Connell, you gained experience in leading an important institution. I describe that firm as an important institution because, as the long-time holder of the Auckland Crown warrant, Meredith Connell played (and indeed continues to play) an integral role in the administration of justice in this region.

Your time as Chair coincided with a period of change and challenge for the firm. During your tenure, Simon Moore KC, as he then was, resigned as Crown Solicitor, having been appointed a judge of this Court. The firm also faced the government's decision to put the Auckland Crown warrant out for tender, and ultimately to split it between Auckland and South Auckland. You led the firm's response to these events. Your colleagues credit you with having played an important role in successfully carrying the firm through it all. They describe you as a strategic and decisive leader, who has an eye for simplifying and modernising process, and who is not afraid to make hard decisions, but with an empathy and warmth that enables you to carry others with you.

To complete your professional journey up to this point, in 2023 you went to the independent bar, joining Bankside Chambers. There you carried on your public law practice, until your recent appointment as Solicitor-General.

You are a proud New Zealander — fifth generation. As Solicitor-General, and as King's Counsel, you will have an opportunity to serve New Zealand.

Ms Adams, the rank of King's Counsel is reserved for the strong, the upright, the learned and the brave amongst counsel. It is right that you join these ranks.

The senior bar is strengthened by your addition to it.

Kia kaha, kia māia, kia manawanui.
Tēnā tātou katoa.