



JUDICIAL OFFICE FOR SENIOR COURTS
Te Tari Kaiwhakawā mo ngā Kōti Mātāmua

Press statement

17 December 2018

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, has today announced the appointment of Justice Helen Winkelmann to succeed Dame Sian Elias as Chief Justice on her retirement in March 2019.

Justice Winkelmann, 56, has served as a judge for 14 years. She was brought up in Blockhouse Bay, Auckland, educated at Lynfield College in Mt Roskill, and went to Auckland University where she studied law and history. She was made a partner in a major commercial law firm (now DLA Piper) at 25-years of age. She accepted appointment to the High Court in 2004, and as Chief High Court Judge in 2009. In 2015 Justice Winkelmann was appointed to the Court of Appeal.

Justice Winkelmann said the appointment as the next Chief Justice was a great honour, bringing with it significant responsibility. She noted the importance of the role to the functioning of our judicial system.

The Chief Justice presides at hearings of the Supreme Court, New Zealand's most senior court. The Supreme Court replaced the Privy Council as New Zealand's final court of appeal in 2003. It was established by Parliament to recognise New Zealand as an independent nation with its own history and traditions, and enable important legal matters, including issues relating to the Treaty of Waitangi, to be resolved with an understanding of New Zealand conditions, history, and traditions.

The Chief Justice also has a role in leadership of the broader judiciary. Justice Winkelmann said the courts, like the other branches of government, face the challenge of responding to an increasingly complex and diverse society. As Chief Justice, she intends to continue the work of the present Chief Justice, Dame Sian Elias, in supporting the judiciary's response to these challenges while preserving its critical independence.

“An independent, and skilled judiciary is vital to the health of our democracy. So too a judiciary that has a good understanding of, and remains connected to the communities which make up New Zealand.”

Justice Winkelmann said the legitimacy and authority of the courts depended on public trust and confidence.

“I believe that it is part of the role of judicial leaders to promote understanding of the role of the courts, the work that judges do and the importance of having courts that are accessible to all.”

Justice Winkelmann intends to continue her focus on issues affecting people's ability to access the courts to seek justice.

“Access to justice is the critical underpinning of the rule of law in our society: it is the notion that all, the good, the bad, the weak, the powerful, exist under and are bound by the law. That condition cannot exist without access to courts, and without the ability to obtain a just resolution of claims before those courts. Cost, delay and a lack of representation all can act as barriers to justice.”

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download : [PM's press statement](#)

download Winkelmann J's : [bio](#)

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N.B. Justice Winkelmann will not be giving any media interviews until she after assumes the role of Chief Justice in March 2019.