



**CHIEF DISTRICT COURT JUDGE FOR NEW ZEALAND
TE KAIWHAKAWĀ MATUA O TE KŌTI-Ā-ROHE**

Judge Jan-Marie Doogue

20 October 2016

District Courts to Pilot Sexual Violence Court

District Court jury trial judges are about to lead an initiative that aims to improve the way the courts respond to sexual violence cases.

From December 2016, the District Courts will pilot new court processes for sexual violence cases in Auckland and Whangarei.

The pilot will bring like cases together and take simple, practical steps that help cohesive and consistent application of existing law. To reduce delays and improve the court experience for participants, it will apply pro-active, best-practice trial management and also improve judicial education.

The Chief District Court Judge, Judge Jan-Marie Doogue, says District Court judges have been listening closely to concerns about the court process for people involved in sexual violence cases. “Timeliness is clearly an issue. Research tells us that lengthy proceedings may delay recovery when people have to keep fresh in their minds over a long period past distressing experiences. The pilot will test steps to improve that.”

Central to the initiative is an education programme on sexual violence for trial judges to start in the New Year. Judges will also be able to draw on Best Practice Guidelines developed by the pilot’s governance board to drive tighter pre-trial case management.

Providing specialised education and reducing delays addresses two elements of the Law Commission report, *The Justice Response to Victims of Sexual Violence: Criminal Trials and Alternative Processes*.

“We are always exploring ways to improve processes in our courts within the current law,” Chief Judge Doogue said. “The pilot is an example of District Court judges doing what we can where we can. All court participants can rest assured there will be no departure from Bill of Rights principles relating to a fair trial.”

The pilot will cover all serious (Category 3) sexual violence cases to be heard by a jury in Whangarei and Auckland District Courts. It will last 2 -2½ years and, potentially, the first cases could come to trial by mid-2017.

The Office of the Chief District Court Judge has worked with the Ministry of Justice on the project and together they will keep it under constant evaluation.

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