



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

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Update on the Sexual Violence Court Pilot in the District Court

The District Court has improved the management of serious sexual violence cases after piloting a sexual violence court, says the Chief District Court Judge.

Chief Judge Jan-Marie Doogue says the pilot will continue as usual while its final evaluation is completed, assessed and the next steps are determined. The evaluation report is expected to be delivered in June and final decisions on the pilot's future could take a further few months.

The judge-led pilot has been running in the District Court at Auckland and Whangarei since December 2016. Designed to reduce delays and improve the court experience for all participants, the pilot court proactively applies best-practice trial management to all serious (Category 3) sexual violence cases to be heard by a jury.

Chief Judge Doogue says it is already clear pilot cases are reaching trial sooner. Continuous monitoring through the pilot's 2½ years has demonstrated how intensive case management can significantly reduce timeframes.

Nearly 500 cases have entered the pilot. The average timeframe for those that have so far proceeded to trial and returned a verdict is just under ten months – about half the time commonly experienced in the District Court. *

The independent evaluation will analyse and confirm the detail of the improved timeliness, and drill further into the impacts and benefits, as well as wider implications for court resourcing.

Decisions about whether to extend or discontinue the pilot will be made in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice. In the meantime, Chief Judge Doogue says pilot processes will continue to be used in Auckland and Whangarei and she hopes the innovations the pilot has fostered can eventually go wider.

“For now, it is business as usual for the pilot. But the entire District Court has learned from its work, and whatever the pilot's future, I am confident its general approaches will become a

permanent feature of the District Court over time. They stand to improve the court experience for all court participants,” Chief Judge Doogue said.

The approaches include taking a uniform approach to pre-trial case management, having dedicated case managers where resources permit, enhancing the judicial training on sexual violence, and adopting specially developed best-practice guidelines.

“Together these measures have created a gentler process with more humane timeframes for everyone involved in what can often be difficult or distressing proceedings, especially for child and vulnerable witnesses.”

Chief Judge Doogue leads the pilot with support from a governance board of senior trial judges and the Ministry of Justice. The pilot cases are run within existing law, and fair trial rights remain paramount.

**Note to editors:*

Further detail of the pilot’s figures will be released when the evaluation is complete.

For this reason, the Chief Judge will not be doing interviews before its release.

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