



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

**Monday 24 May 2021**

*Statement from the Chief District Court Judge*

## **Gisborne District Court next in line for Te Ao Mārama model**

The Chief District Court Judge, Judge Heemi Taumaunu, along with the Principal Family Court Judge, Judge Jacquelyn Moran and the Principal Youth Court Judge, Judge John Walker have announced the Gisborne District Court will implement the Te Ao Mārama model, designed in partnership with iwi and community engagement.

The Te Ao Mārama kaupapa for the District Court was first announced in November 2020 during the annual [Norris Ward McKinnon lecture](#). It is inspired by the concept “mai te pō ki te ao mārama” meaning “the transition from night to the enlightened world.” Implemented with support of the Ministry of Justice, it will use a solution focused judging approach in mainstream courts and will draw on best practice used in the District Court’s specialist courts.

The model, which will involve working closely with iwi, community and government, represents a response to longstanding calls for transformative change to the justice system and will reflect the needs of a modern-day Aotearoa New Zealand where everyone can seek justice and feel they are heard and understood.

“Te Ao Mārama means the world of light. For the District Court, it means a more enlightened approach to justice to help make New Zealand a better place to live in. It means a court where all people may seek justice, regardless of their means or abilities, their ethnicity, language or culture, and who they are or where they are from,” Chief Judge Taumaunu says.

“Its focus will be centred on all people affected by the business of the court, including defendants, victims, complainants, witnesses, parties to proceedings, whānau support people, and wider justice sector stakeholders by helping to ensure that barriers to meaningful participation in proceedings are identified and overcome.

“Late last year, I first announced Te Ao Mārama would be launched in Hamilton, which is also the location for a new alcohol and other drug treatment court, a project that is being enabled by government and the Ministry of Justice.

“Following hui with iwi leaders and justice sector agencies, the Kaihautū [leadership] of the District Court are pleased to announce we will now commence the design of the Te Ao Mārama model at the Gisborne District Court.

“I would also like to acknowledge Toitū Tairāwhiti Iwi Chairs and Chief Executives for their support and look forward to our ongoing engagement with them.”

The Chief Judge says Gisborne District Court has been chosen for a number of reasons.

“While Hamilton is a larger metropolitan court, Gisborne provides an opportunity for a smaller, regional court to adopt this new approach. The Gisborne District Court is well supported by its local community, with services and agencies willing and available to help ensure that the underlying needs of those affected by the business of the court can be addressed.

“New Zealand’s first Te Kooti Rangatahi court opened in Gisborne 13 years ago – almost to the day - and it also hosts a family violence intervention court,” says the Chief Judge.

The Te Ao Mārama model will likely differ from place to place, to enable it to accurately reflect the different strengths of local iwi and local communities in each District Court location.

“For the Te Ao Mārama model to succeed, it needs to invite the strength and wisdom of iwi and community input into the courtroom. In that respect it will be developed in a spirit of partnership with local iwi and through engagement with local communities, justice sector representatives and representatives of the legal profession, both nationally and locally, to create a process that works for each court and addresses the needs of each community,” says the Chief Judge.

The Te Ao Mārama model also aims to infuse tikanga and te reo into mainstream court proceedings. This is to recognise the importance of creating a court environment that looks and feels unmistakably like Aotearoa New Zealand and reflects the two founding cultures in a spirit of partnership under the Treaty of Waitangi.

It is intended to be rolled out to all District Court locations in stages, starting with Hamilton and Gisborne this year.

**ENDS**

## **Background to the Te Ao Mārama model**

The Te Ao Mārama model seeks to enhance access to justice for all people and implementation of the vision will focus on: ensuring that all people who appear in mainstream courts, regardless of whether they are defendants, victims, complainants, witnesses, parties or support people, are provided opportunities to benefit from best practice lessons established in specialist courts; inviting the strength and support provided by local iwi and local communities into the court; and restoration and rehabilitation for all people affected by the business of the court.

The vision will be implemented by mainstreaming the best practice lessons learned from our courts, particularly our specialist courts. The best practice lessons are:

- Using plain language and toning down formalities in court.
- Increasing community involvement and voice.
- Improving availability of information.
- Addressing 'drivers' of offending.
- Coordination between justice sector agencies.
- Judges taking on a more active role.
- Infusing te reo and tikanga Māori.

The implementation of the vision will be guided by the following principles, which will be applied with specific court protocols: These include:

- Providing equitable treatment to all people by recognising that people come from different starting points.
- Increasing procedural fairness by ensuring that all people who enter the court are seen, heard, understood and able to meaningfully participate.
- Enhancing substantive fairness by ensuring that judicial officers are provided with the best information to enable well informed decisions to be made.
- Enhancing the connections between the court and the community thereby enhancing respect for the rule of law.

The Chief District Court Judge has a statutory obligation to ensure the orderly and efficient conduct of the court's business. This includes setting standards for best practice. The Te Ao Mārama model is being developed within existing legal frameworks.

Further detail on Te Ao Mārama, is available on the [District Court website](#).

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