



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

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Sexual Violence Court Pilot at 12-month milestone

After its first year, a pilot to test a sexual violence court in the District Court continues to show potential for improved timeliness in the jury trial process.

The pilot is running at the District Court in Auckland and Whangarei. It applies pro-active, best-practice trial management to all serious (Category 3) sexual violence cases in those courts to be heard by a jury, combined with enhanced judicial education, to reduce delays and improve the court experience for participants.

Chief District Court Judge Jan-Marie Doogue leads the pilot and is advised by a governance board of senior trial judges who have developed best practice guidelines to drive tighter pre-trial case management.

Chief Judge Doogue says at this early stage the data is too provisional to draw firm conclusions, but it suggests there is good reason to continue with the pilot's aspirational goal of bringing cases to trial within six months of callover.

“Initial data indicates that cases in the pilot courts are proceeding to trial faster than sexual violence trials were in the previous year, and also faster than jury trials not in the pilot in Auckland and Whangarei,” Chief Judge Doogue said. “And judges are reporting that having dedicated case managers for pilot cases is contributing to better case management.”

Chief Judge Doogue said the pilot was producing benefits in addition to those related to trial management, especially by enriching judicial knowledge and understanding of sexual

complaints and witnesses through enhanced education. A second, specially devised education programme is due to start in January, and again includes District Court judges outside the pilot.

“Judges also report that the quality of witness evidence has improved across both pilot and non-pilot courts as a result. This augurs well for the pilot to drive improvements right across the entire District Court.”

The pilot cases are run within existing law, and Chief Judge Doogue stresses that fair trial rights remain paramount.

The pilot is scheduled to continue for at least another 12 months.

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