

LawTalk

KŌRERO MŌ TE TURE

SPRING
2026



2026 Election Special

Political parties respond to questions
about justice and legislation

Leadership

Introducing Solicitor
General Anna Adams

Technology

Human judgement
and AI

Diversity

Our Profession, Our
Future – a new strategy



New Zealand
Law Society
Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa



Canterbury Westland Branch Annual Dinner, August

Above: David Campbell and Canterbury Westland Branch President Amy Keir

Left: Guest speaker Justice Rob Osborne



Memorandum of Understanding with Te Hunga Rōia Māori o Aotearoa signing event, September

Below: David Campbell, Wi Pere Mita



Tikanga and the Law Wānanga, delivered in partnership with Te Hunga Rōia Māori o Aotearoa, September

Right: Tai Ahu, Whāia Legal; Puna Wano-Bryant, Parininihi ki Waitōtara; Natalie Coates, Thorndon Chambers; Horiaan-Irwin Easthope, Whāia Legal, Una Jagose KC, Clifton Chambers



From the President

BY **DAVID CAMPBELL**

Six years ago, just before the pandemic changed the world, the New Zealand Law Society signed a Memorandum of Understanding with our friends at Te Hunga Rōia Māori o Aotearoa. Last month, I was pleased to sign the renewal of that agreement, reaffirming our shared commitment to working together in support of a legal profession that serves all of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The word *all* is important.

The legal profession has a responsibility to serve an increasingly diverse society. To do that well, we must continue to foster a profession that is inclusive, resilient, and trusted. A profession that reflects the communities it serves is better equipped to understand different perspectives, respond to changing needs and maintain public confidence in the administration of justice.

Consideration of diversity, equity and inclusion is therefore not simply about representation. It is about ensuring the profession remains strong, sustainable and relevant for future generations of lawyers and the public they serve.

This commitment is reflected in the New Zealand Law Society's diversity,

equity and inclusion strategy, *Our Profession, Our Future*, which we launch in this issue (page 34). The focus of the strategy is to support a profession where all lawyers can participate, grow and succeed at every stage of their careers and contribute their talents. It will be accompanied by an action plan for the profession that provides a practical roadmap for achieving meaningful and measurable progress.

Success will require a collective effort. Law firms, barristers, in-house legal teams, professional associations, regulators and individual practitioners all have a role to play. While the strategy will provide a clear direction, its success will ultimately depend on the commitment of the profession to turn good intentions into lasting change.

As this edition goes to print, New Zealand is also preparing for a General Election. Elections provide an opportunity for New Zealanders to engage with the issues that shape our democracy, including access to justice, the rule of law and the effective functioning of our legal system. In this issue, we hear from political parties about their justice policies and priorities for the next parliamentary term.

Whatever the outcome of the election, certain principles must endure. Public confidence in the justice system, an independent legal profession, and a strong commitment to the rule of law are fundamental to a healthy democracy. As lawyers, we play an important role in upholding those principles and maintaining a legal system that serves the public fairly, effectively and impartially. ■





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ABOUT LAW TALK

LawTalk is published three times a year by the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa for the legal profession. It has been published since 1974 and is available to every New Zealand-based lawyer who holds a current practising certificate.

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PRINTING AND DISTRIBUTION

Blue Star, Petone, Wellington
ISSN 0114-989X (Print) · ISSN 2382-0330 (Digital)



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STORY SUGGESTIONS

Do you have a suggestion for a story idea you think would be interesting for an upcoming issue of LawTalk?
Email: publications@lawsociety.org.nz

Election 2026 Special Feature

The General Election will be held on 7 November 2026. In keeping with *LawTalk* tradition, we invited political parties to respond to five questions relating to their justice policies and legislative agendas.

LawTalk sent the same five questions to each of the parties registered with the Electoral Commission Te Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri on 10 August. Each party was given a 200-word limit for each answer. Where an answer was longer, sentences over the word limit have been removed, and this is noted. Responses are reproduced as received, with any obvious spelling or minor errors corrected.

The following registered parties did not respond: Conservatives NZ, Te Pāti Māori and the Women's Rights Party.



Political Parties



ALLIANCE



Green



1.

What are your party's key objectives in the justice portfolio?



ACT New Zealand

ACT's objective is a justice system that puts victims first, restores consequences for offending, and delivers justice without unnecessary delay.

We have already restored Three Strikes and strengthened the response to gangs and illegal firearms. Next term, ACT will go further. Our Three Strikes for Burglary policy will impose a minimum three-year sentence without parole on offenders convicted of burglary three times. We will also crack down on rural crime with 100,000 additional rural Police patrol hours each year, stronger penalties for poaching and livestock theft, and better access to Text 111 in areas with poor coverage. We will make changes to address coercion by animal abuse and criminalise deepfake pornography.

We also want to build on Nicole McKee's record as Courts Minister. The District Court criminal backlog fell 22 per cent in the year to December 2025, alongside improvements in the Family, civil, Disputes and Coroners Courts.

More broadly, ACT will strengthen the rule of law, equality before the law, property rights, and Parliament's responsibility for making clear and certain laws.

Alliance

The Alliance believes that judges must have unfettered discretion to apply judicial knowledge and skills to the sentencing process. When in Coalition Government, the Alliance was responsible for the introduction, as a sentencing principle, of the need for a sentencing court to take account of a restorative justice process.



The Alliance opposes any legislative provision that prevents unfettered judicial discretion in the sentencing process. Judges need to be able to take account of special circumstances of an offender and extend mercy and compassion when appropriate.

The existing provisions of the Sentencing Act 2002 enabling inquiries as to the most suitable method of dealing with a case (s25) must prevail over any particular sentencing principle. Similarly, consideration of any processes available to resolve issues relating to the offence must prevail over any particular sentencing principle.

This view is held because simply imprisoning offenders for repeat offending (three strikes) will fail to address the causes of offending and will not serve the need for those suffering the effects of crime to be healed of the effects of the offending.

The ultimate objective of sentencing must be healing the effects of crime leading to safer communities and reduced offending.

Animal Justice Party Aotearoa New Zealand

The Animal Justice Party Aotearoa NZ (AJP) believes the law should evolve alongside scientific understanding of sentience, public health and environmental sustainability.

Animals are currently treated as property under the law, despite being recognised as sentient beings. Legal scholarship and overseas jurisprudence are increasingly examining legal standing, personhood and independent representation for animals, reflecting the continued evolution of animal law.

Our priorities are to strengthen the Animal Welfare Act, begin moving towards abolishing the legal classification of animals as property and establishing a legal framework that consistently recognises animal sentience, establish an independent Commissioner for Animals, improve enforcement, and ensure legislation reflects contemporary science on animal sentience.

We also support the internationally recognised One Health and One Welfare frameworks, recognising that animal welfare, environmental protection and human health are interconnected. Better protection for animals strengthens biodiversity, biosecurity, public health and community wellbeing.

Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party

The key objective for the Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party (ALCP) is to end the injustice of cannabis prohibition. Since the failed 2020

cannabis referendum convictions are back on the rise. The ALCP point to The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 – Part 2 – Civil and Political Rights:

“9. Right not to be subject to torture or cruel treatment, disproportionately severe treatment or punishment”

ALCP say – Arrests, fines, confiscations, imprisonment and convictions will destroy a person’s life and future work or travel potential. Tantamount to torture and cruel treatment.

“13. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion and belief including the right to adopt and hold opinions without interference”

The cannabis community experiences interference from the State for their opinion to choose cannabis use.

“14. Freedom of expression – freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind or form”

“19. Freedom from discrimination”

The cannabis community do not have freedom of expression and are discriminated against by the State.

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 contravenes these rights by punishing citizens for using cannabis herb.

Free Palestine

The purpose of forming the Free Palestine Party was primarily to hold the existing parliamentary parties to account over New Zealand’s commitment to its international obligations around Palestine and the Palestinians. Our priority is in the area of international justice. High on our agenda is ensuring New Zealand adheres to the commitments it has signed up to under international law. This includes UN Resolution 194

CONTINUED

1. What are your party's key objectives in the justice portfolio?

(1948) concerning Palestinian Right of Return (the guaranteed right of refugees to return to their homes and land if they have left it due to conflict), for which New Zealand voted in favour.

Also, as New Zealand is a signatory to the Genocide Convention the New Zealand government is obligated to do everything in its power to prevent genocide and must not act in any way that supports genocide. This includes signing off on satellite launches that assist the IDF in targeting missiles in pursuit of its genocidal objectives.

We would also amend the Bill of Rights to strengthen its freedom of expression provisions. Freedom of expression has been undermined in other countries such as Germany, and especially the UK and Australia with similar legal systems to ours.

Greens

The Green Party want to see Government be tough on the drivers of crime – by ensuring everyone has adequate income to live with dignity, access to healthcare, mental healthcare and drug and addiction services, inclusive education, and secure, safe and stable housing. We want to see prisons used as a last resort, with rehabilitative, restorative, evidence-based justice processes made available to more people to drive direct accountability to victims of crime.

Labour

Labour wants our communities to be safe and equitable access to justice. Our vision is of a New Zealand that achieves real public safety rather than reactive policies that are not evidence based.

National

National is fixing the basics in law and order and building a future where all New Zealanders feel safe in their communities. A future National Government will stay strong on law and order.

We've already scrapped taxpayer cultural reports and Labour's prison reduction target, given police additional powers to go after gangs, and toughened up our sentencing laws. We've restored Three Strikes, ensured people convicted of sexual violence cannot receive permanent name suppression unless the victim agrees, and made stalking a criminal offence. We've just expanded citizens' arrest powers and created new offences for coward punches and attacking first responders. We're committed to passing move-on orders into law before the House rises.

There are now 37,000 fewer victims of crime than when we took office, and youth offending is down 25 per cent.

We will make many law and order policy announcements throughout the election period. National has already committed to modernising consent laws so that there must always be, "yes," rather than the absence of a "no." We'll also abolish character assessments at sentencing for all sexual offending.

We'll continue to focus on speeding up the processes of the court, so that people get access to more timely justice.

New Zealand First

Prioritising the victim and the community ahead of the offender under the Sentencing Act.

Toughening consequences for serious crimes through mandatory minimum sentences, cumulative sentencing, creating a "degrees of murder" regime, and removing community sentence discounts like cultural reports for violent offenders.

Cracking down on gangs by banning them, designating them as terrorist organizations, strengthening legislation to seize criminal proceeds and introducing gang-only prisons.

Addressing youth offending early through a Youth Justice Demerits system and secure training orders.

NZ Loyal

NZ Loyal's justice policy begins with protecting life, liberty, property and fundamental rights. We support a written Constitution, while strongly valuing New Zealand's common law tradition and judicial independence.

Parliament should legislate clear principles, not attempt to prescribe every possible human circumstance. Courts need latitude to apply those principles to the facts before them, drawing on evidence, natural justice, legal history and judicial expertise. Through reasoned judgments and precedent, the law can evolve alongside society.

We also want clearer legal definitions distinguishing natural persons, companies, trusts and other legal structures so that legal abstraction does not obscure ownership, responsibility or individual rights.

Justice should focus primarily on resolving disputes and remedying harm. Where an individual or entity

causes loss, nuisance or other negative externalities, intentionally or unintentionally, those harmed should receive fair and proportionate restitution or compensation, with all relevant circumstances considered.

The justice system exists to provide peaceful resolution. When people believe lawful processes cannot deliver timely, fair remedies, confidence collapses and incentives grow to seek resolution outside the law. A functioning justice system is therefore fundamental to social order.

NZ Outdoors and Freedom Party

The NZ Outdoors and Freedom Party “FREEDOM” seeks to reform the NZ constitution to: a) prevent government overreach, b) enhance protection of fundamental rights and freedoms and c) to introduce “Direct Democracy” to give the public far more input into law reform and policies.

Opportunity

Opportunity will release its full ‘Smart on Crime’ policy soon, but our key focus is on delivering proven solutions that reduce rates of offending and reoffending. This means intervening early, addressing the drivers of offending and rehabilitating and reintegrating offenders during and after sentences. Our recently released Honouring Te Tiriti policy also describes Opportunity’s commitment to restoring and maintaining existing aspects of the Crown-Māori relationship and progressing a longer-term process to address key constitutional questions around the role of Te Tiriti.

Te Tai Tokerau Party

My mind will always turn to wahine Māori who dominate the justice system. Māori women make up 65 percent of the female prison population despite Māori women comprising only a fraction of the total female population. It disproportionately compounds at every stage of the justice system pipeline, with wahine Māori incarceration rates sitting at eleven times that of non-Māori women.

Socioeconomic disadvantage and survival driven offending has been identified as a key driver behind wahine Māori incarceration. This includes our wāhine engaging in theft-related offences to provide for their babies. That is deeply concerning.

The Government’s newly introduced Crimes Amendment Bill will only amplify this issue with new infringement regimes.

Our objective is to close the gap between political promises and legislative effect. That means backing early intervention models, including Te Pae Oranga, that keep whānau together. The inclusion of specific references to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) throughout justice legislation is crucial for addressing systemic disparities. Māori women have not received the dedicated attention this disparity demands. A justice system that works for our wahine must focus on the drivers of crime rather than punishing survival-based offences. Our focus will start here.

Vision New Zealand

Vision NZ will restore law, order and public confidence in New Zealand’s justice system, putting the safety of people, families and communities first.

Our justice policy will put victims before offenders, strengthening their rights, protection and support throughout the justice process. Serious and repeat offenders must face meaningful consequences, with stronger action against violent and sexual crime, particularly offences against women, children and vulnerable people.

Vision NZ will strengthen bail and parole laws, making community safety a priority and ensuring release is based on demonstrated responsibility. We will take a firm stand against gangs and organised crime, targeting violence, intimidation, drugs, financial activity and the recruitment of young people.

We will make communities and businesses safer by tackling burglary, retail crime, ram raids and public disorder, while strengthening frontline Police with the resources and powers needed to prevent and solve crime.

Prisons must restore discipline, demand personal responsibility and provide effective rehabilitation. We will work to break cycles of reoffending, particularly among young people, through education, skills, intervention and accountability. This will be supported by funding and deploying grassroots organisations with proven records of success.

Above all, Vision NZ will uphold equality before the law: one law for every New Zealander.

2.

How would your party improve access to justice and the legal aid scheme?

SPECIAL VOTES

Electoral Commission

ACT New Zealand

Access to justice means little if people wait years for their case to be resolved. ACT's first priority is therefore to keep reducing court delays.

Under Nicole McKee as Courts Minister, the District Court criminal backlog saw consistent improvements, but still needs more work. There have also been significant improvements across the civil jurisdiction, Disputes Tribunal, Family Court and Coroners Court. We thanks those frontline staff who's efforts have been critical in this progress. ACT would continue to make changes, working with the whole justice sector to improve scheduling, reduce unnecessary adjournments, make better use of technology and deploy judicial resources where they are most needed.

We have also supported expanding the Disputes Tribunal's jurisdiction and allowing successful parties to recover their filing fee, making it easier for people to resolve lower-value disputes without the cost of full court proceedings.

Legal aid remains essential for people who cannot afford representation. The Government invested an additional \$30.28 million in legal aid for 2026/27 and begun work with the profession, judiciary and justice agencies on the drivers of rising costs. ACT supports ensuring the scheme is accessible, efficient and

financially sustainable, including removing unnecessary barriers to lawyers becoming approved legal aid providers.

Alliance

The Alliance believes that justice cannot be equal if quality legal representation is available only to those who can afford it. The Alliance understands the current government is yet to announce membership of the Practitioners Advisory Group (PAG) working with the Ministry of Justice on the current Government's Accessible and Affordable Justice programme. The Alliance will engage with the PAG findings in due course.

The Alliance has reservations that trying to "fix" the current model of legal aid is the best approach.

The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 provides for the right to criminal legal aid without cost if the interests of justice require. Criteria for legal aid should always focus on "unmet legal need", and the interest of justice should be the key criteria for access to legal aid. Criteria such as "insufficient means", "efficiency" and "effectiveness" do not necessarily always address an unmet legal need.

A new model might comprise a combination of the current system complemented by expansions involving Community Law Centres, Public Defender Offices, development of competent paralegals and expanded

pro-bono services provided by all law firms.

An extension of the current low-cost Disputes Tribunal system to more civil cases should be explored.

Animal Justice Party Aotearoa New Zealand

Access to justice should never depend on income. We support reviewing legal aid eligibility, ensuring sustainable remuneration for providers, and expanding access to early legal advice to resolve disputes before they escalate.

We also recognise that justice includes those whose interests cannot be represented directly. Animals cannot vote, instruct counsel or participate in democratic processes, yet legislation affects their lives. Democratic systems already provide representation for those unable to advocate for themselves, such as children, and political theory increasingly supports extending that principle to animals.

We would establish an independent Commissioner for Animals to provide expert advice to Parliament, oversee and monitor the implementation of animal welfare legislation, promote effective enforcement, and advocate for evidence-based policy across government.

Access to justice is also preventative. Strong animal protection contributes to healthier communities, improved environmental outcomes and better public health.

Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party

Ending prohibition of cannabis will save thousands of dollars, and free up access to Justice and the Legal Aid Scheme. The cannabis

community has no protection while the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 is being used against them. Justice needs to be restored to this community who are being criminalised for their beliefs. Cannabis Law Reform should proceed by parliamentary process like the other recent social reforms for Homosexuals and Prostitutes, who did not have to go through a referendum.

Free Palestine

The Free Palestine Party has not developed policy on this issue.

Greens

It is vital that there is equitable access to justice for all of us. The Green Party would extend legal aid and duty lawyers, better resource community law centres and make applications for protection and parenting orders free.

Labour

Legal aid and community law must be properly supported, so that everyone has access to justice. Labour believes that financial means should never be a barrier to justice.

National

We've conducted the first review of the legal aid scheme since 2018, and National will ensure this important work continues and gets implemented.

Legal aid is demand driven and spending reflects what is happening in the courts. In recent years we have seen significant increases in spending and those costs are expected to continue to rise. We have a duty to ensure all New Zealanders have access to justice by means of a

fair and open process. To do so, we need a scheme that is efficient and sustainable.

We've heard from the judiciary, lawyers, and others that changes are needed to address difficulties facing providers and those who need assistance. This review will provide an opportunity to ensure the scheme is efficient, is of good quality, and promotes access to justice in a way that is sustainable and cost-effective.

New Zealand First

Reintroducing the right of accused persons to choose publicly funded private defenders for serious crimes, ensuring proper representation of choice.

Reducing legal costs by mandating greater use of alternative dispute resolution processes (like mediation and arbitration) and creating online tools to review lawyers' fees. The Government completed its triennial legal aid review and has launched the Accessible and Affordable Justice programme. Some practical reforms are already underway, including more flexible provider-approval requirements and administrative improvements including greater efficiency achieved through using AVL as it reduces the need to transport remand prisoners, speeds up the process and allows more timely access to justice.

Streamlining the legal aid system through more discretionary decision-making, direct consultations with applicants' lawyers, and online applications.

Restoring lay representation alongside lawyers on the Legal Aid Review Tribunal to ensure a broader perspective.

CONTINUED

2. How would your party improve access to justice and the legal aid scheme?

NZ Loyal

Access to justice requires competent representation, timely decisions and a system focused on resolving disputes rather than generating process.

We do not believe government should routinely fund private legal services. However, where the State prosecutes someone, or where liberty, property, family or fundamental rights are genuinely at stake, access to an impartial advocate capable of properly presenting the case is essential.

Self-representation is often a poor substitute. People personally involved in disputes may lack the legal knowledge, objectivity or advocacy skills needed to present their case effectively, creating both poor outcomes and a lasting belief that justice was not properly considered.

We would review legal aid around case throughput, quality of representation and timely resolution.

We would also explore a publicly funded early-career advocacy pathway for newly admitted lawyers, linked to a period of supervised public service. In return, participants could receive assistance with the cost of legal study and a genuine pathway into practice without being dependent on securing employment with an established firm.

That could simultaneously expand representation, develop practical advocacy skills and reduce barriers for new lawyers entering the profession.

NZ Outdoors and Freedom Party

FREEDOM would facilitate access to justice by making crown legal advice more transparent, particularly where it impacts on fundamental rights and / or the rights of private individuals. The public and community interest groups must be able to access the courts without fear of fees or costs in public interest cases, to enable the courts to undertake their constitutional role as a check and balance on abuse of legislative and executive power.

Opportunity

Opportunity has no specific policy on this but is open to measures to expand legal aid and other supports that address legitimate barriers to accessing the justice system.

Te Tai Tokerau Party

Access to justice depends on having people with the capacity to provide it. We must recognise how critical our lawyers, experts, advisors, and community organisations with lived experience are when it comes to understanding who the system is failing. Legal aid is a clear example of this. Remuneration pressures have contributed to a workforce decline. Government has provided a short-term funding injection that may provide temporary relief, but it does not offer a durable fix.

A legal aid system cannot be accessible if there aren't enough workers to support demand. This should be

especially concerning considering that demand is increasing with the women's prison population having doubled under this government's term. Appropriate funding must be provided to legal aid systems to improve outcomes for all.

Vision New Zealand

Justice for Every New Zealander.

Vision NZ believes justice should not depend on a person's income, location, ability to understand the legal system or ability to find a lawyer. Every New Zealander deserves timely, affordable and impartial access to justice, with courts that protect victims, uphold the rule of law and treat every person with dignity.

We will strengthen legal aid by regularly indexing eligibility thresholds, guaranteeing early legal advice for serious legal problems and simplifying applications. We will support legal-aid lawyers through fairer payments, faster processing, regional incentives and reduced administrative burdens.

We will expand Community Law, legal-information services, mediation and family-law support, and establish regional Justice Hubs connecting people with legal aid, advocacy, victim support, family services and court information. Plain-English information about legal rights will be available nationwide and in major community languages.

Vision NZ will reduce unnecessary delays, backlogs and court complexity through measurable case-resolution targets, improved case management and sufficient resources for judges, court staff and essential services. We will maintain strong independent quality assurance, so people receive competent representation.

3.

What are your party's key policies in the courts portfolio, including for courthouse buildings and facilities?

ACT New Zealand

ACT will build on Nicole McKee's practical record as Courts Minister of reducing delays, modernising court processes, and investing in the infrastructure needed to deliver timely justice.

Legislative priorities include expanding the role and powers of Community Magistrates, progressing the Regulatory Systems (Courts) Amendment Bill, and replacing outdated remote-participation legislation. The new remote-participation framework will establish clearer defaults for when audio-visual technology should be used, improving consistency and efficiency while preserving judicial discretion where an in-person appearance better serves justice.

Court buildings matter too. Budget 2026 committed \$100 million toward two new Rotorua court-houses, providing additional court-room capacity and safer separation

between victims, witnesses, jurors and defendants.

Nicole has visited almost every courthouse in New Zealand and has seen first-hand the condition of the estate. ACT wants to continue prioritising essential maintenance, repairs and replacement of failing facilities. That will require disciplined government spending and finding savings in bureaucracy so resources can be directed toward core public services such as functioning courts.

Alliance

The Alliance believes that judges must be appointed on a criteria reflecting experience, skill and competence, together with cultural awareness.

All key infrastructure delivering service to the community must be accessible, safe and welcoming. The Alliance KiwiWorks entity will be responsible for regularly



CONTINUED

3. What are your party's key policies in the courts portfolio, including for courthouse buildings and facilities?

maintaining all key government infrastructure including courthouses. Courthouse buildings and facilities must provide for safe and healthy working environments for court staff and those using them.

Technology, AI, and audio-visual links should be used to enhance access to justice, but should not be used when rae ki te rae (face to face) interaction is required in the interests of justice.

Facilities and resources made available to the Crown at court buildings, should also be made available to the defence.

Animal Justice Party Aotearoa New Zealand

We support a modern, accessible and well-resourced court system that delivers timely, independent and affordable justice.

We also support ensuring New Zealand's courts are equipped to respond to the continued development of animal and environmental law. Issues such as biodiversity loss, wildlife crime, intensive farming and biosecurity increasingly raise complex legal questions that cross traditional legal boundaries.

Courts have an essential constitutional role in interpreting evolving legal principles. Overseas decisions considering legal standing and habeas corpus applications for individual animals demonstrate that animal law is becoming an

increasingly significant area of jurisprudence.

Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party

The Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party key policies are to legalise cannabis for R18 Recreational – 1.4 million people voted YES in the 2020 Referendum. Affordable Medicinal Access – 265,000 registered medicinal users and development of the Hemp Industries. Together these industries are worth Billions – See Deloitte Canada Cannabis Report showing millions of tax dollars revenue and scale it to the New Zealand population. Our policy indicates there will be increased government tax income to improve courthouse buildings and facilities.

Free Palestine

The Free Palestine Party has not developed policy on this issue.

Greens

We would expand Te Ao Mārama to all courts in Aotearoa and ensure specialist youth courts including the Rangatahi and Pasifika Courts, Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court, and New Beginnings Court are available to all who wish to access them. We should also adopt the recommendations of the Chief Justice to have more senior court judges, as well as reintroduce a requirement ensure the pool of judges we have reflects our population.

Labour

Justice infrastructure must be properly maintained. We support commitments to improve justice

infrastructure that have been made recently and acknowledge that properly maintained buildings and facilities will require commitments by successive governments, whatever their political stripes.

National

The National-led Government has already made strong progress on improving court timeliness, but faster justice requires adequate infrastructure to support it.

Budget 2025 invested \$246 million over four years to improve the operational capacity of the court system, and Budget 2026 has invested in the construction of two new courthouses in Rotorua. We're also rolling out the digitising of the courts initiative – Te Au Reka, which will transform the courts from being a paper-based system to an electronic one. We know this will make an enormous difference.

National will continue to invest in our court system and infrastructure to make sure that justice is delivered in safe, modern, fit-for-purpose facilitates. However, the details of those specific investments will need to be announced in due course when appropriate.

New Zealand First

Streamlining court systems by supporting Modernisation of Courts legislation, promoting online document submission, and expanding technology to reduce hearing times.

Optimizing judicial resources by employing senior administrators to handle case management and interlocutory matters in civil and Family courts.

Addressing rural facility shortages by partnering with community Playcentres to use their buildings for supervised after-hours parent-child visits.

NZ Loyal

NZ Loyal regards the courts as a core institution of a free society and a core function of government. They should be funded accordingly.

We support clearer jurisdictional treatment of disputes involving natural persons, their liberty, property and fundamental rights, and disputes arising primarily from companies, trusts, contracts and other commercial relationships.

We also support a stronger physical court network. Courthouses should generally be smaller, modern, secure and more widely distributed so people can access justice without unnecessary travel or delay. We would invest in additional courtrooms, upgraded facilities, reliable technology, private lawyer-client consultation areas and sufficient judicial and administrative capacity to improve case throughput.

Commencing and progressing a legitimate dispute should be clear and efficient. Procedure exists to support justice, not become the object of the system.

We also want jury service restored as a respected civic duty. Jury participation should be actively promoted, properly supported and appropriately remunerated. We would restrict jury eligibility to New Zealand citizens.

Citizens should be able to take pride not only in having access to an independent justice system, but in being called upon to participate directly in its operation.

NZ Outdoors and Freedom Party

FREEDOM priority is providing speedy access to justice for all.

Opportunity

Opportunity's broader approach to infrastructure emphasises timely investment in maintenance and upgrades to enable more effective and intensive use of existing infrastructure and reduce longer-term costs. We know that court infrastructure is ageing and has not been sufficiently maintained, so are supportive of a robust long-term plan to lift investment levels.

Te Tai Tokerau Party

Te Tai Tokerau is disadvantaged because of its location. Access to justice means more than having laws and courts. In principle it means having appropriate facilities, services, and resources available to our communities.

Current departmental capital expenditure sits at \$251.5 million for courthouse buildings and facilities across Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Tauranga, and Whanganui. It is important that Te Tai Tokerau are not left behind in this space. We are closely watching the future of Te Ao Marama a court led, whānau centred model that directly reflects what our communities are asking for. We support the continuation of this work. Our approach is straightforward.

Decisions regarding justice infrastructure and services must be informed by the communities who use them.

Vision New Zealand

Restoring Confidence, Access and Efficiency in New Zealand's Courts.

Vision NZ believes every New Zealander deserves timely, affordable and impartial access to justice, with a court system that protects victims, upholds the rule of law and treats every person with dignity.

We will strengthen the Courts portfolio by reducing unnecessary delays and backlogs, improving case management and ensuring sufficient resources for judges, court staff, legal aid and essential court services.

Courthouse Buildings and Facilities: Vision NZ will undertake a nationwide assessment of courthouse buildings to identify facilities that are unsafe, overcrowded, outdated or unsuitable for modern justice. We will prioritise upgrading or replacing these facilities, with particular attention to seismic safety, security, accessibility, privacy, appropriate victim and witness areas, secure holding facilities, family-friendly spaces and reliable technology. New courthouses will be designed for long-term community needs and value for taxpayers.

We will protect and maintain significant historic courthouse buildings where practical, while ensuring they remain safe and fit for purpose.

Technology will be used to improve efficiency and access, including secure digital filing, case management and appropriate audio-visual facilities, while retaining the right to have matters heard in person where justice requires it.

Vision NZ will ensure justice is accessible, timely, secure, accountable and properly resourced.

4.

What policies does your party have to strengthen and uphold the rule of law, including throughout the legislative process?



ACT New Zealand

ACT believes the law should be clear and certain, apply equally to every New Zealander, and ultimately be made by the democratically elected Parliament.

Our 'One Law for All' policy would put three principles into the Constitution Act: Parliament is sovereign, the rule of law is fundamental, and all New Zealanders are equal before the law. We would also add property rights to the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, strengthening scrutiny when governments interfere with people's homes, farms and businesses.

ACT would amend legislation to reinforce Parliament's responsibility for making the law and ensure clear statutory language cannot be displaced by judge-made presumptions. ACT will make clear that tikanga should apply only where it is directly relevant to the case (for example, a dispute between iwi), or where Parliament has expressly provided for it.

We would also require much greater discipline when legislation refers to the Treaty. Cabinet would have to identify the specific interests and obligations involved before drafting begins, rather than inserting vague clauses and leaving their practical meaning to officials or courts after enactment.

ACT's Regulatory Standards ACT will improve the quality of lawmaking and regulation.

Alliance

The rule of law must be upheld. This requires adherence to the well-established principles arising from the Separation of Powers.

While the Alliance recognises that Parliament is the supreme law-making body, its functions should always respect the rule of law. In particular, the Alliance will ensure that the Executive does not interfere with the proper administration of the Judiciary.



Electoral Commission

Urgency will be used only when necessary. Otherwise, the use of urgency removes and/or frustrates public scrutiny and input into the select committee process. Adequate time must be given to the select committee hearing processes.

Retrospectivity effect of new law must be rarely used. If the Executive wants to change legislation, it should not interfere with existing court proceedings unless there was deemed to be a national emergency and, in the safety, and security of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The court system is the proper forum for determining liability in tort law. The Alliance will reinstate the right to sue corporations or individuals in respect of damage caused by emissions-related climate change effects. Judiciary are well qualified to make findings or assess quantum of damages in circumstances when public interest consideration/consequences need to be taken in to account.

Animal Justice Party Aotearoa New Zealand

We support robust select committee scrutiny, meaningful public consultation, independent regulatory impact analysis, and legislation that is clear, evidence-based and enforceable.

We also support legislation that is drafted and administered in a way that places the protection of sentient animals at its centre, free from undue influence by industries that profit from their exploitation. Existing exemptions, inconsistencies and ambiguities that permit animal cruelty should be removed, and legislation should be supported by effective compliance monitoring, appropriate penalties and robust enforcement.

Scientific understanding of animal cognition and sentience has advanced considerably, and our laws should evolve accordingly. We support strengthening the Animal Welfare Act and developing a more coherent legal framework that removes exemptions and ambiguities that enable harmful practices to continue.

We also support establishing an independent Commissioner for Animals to provide independent oversight and ensure the interests of animals are properly considered throughout policy and legislative development.

AJP supports evidence-based law-making that respects democratic institutions while recognising the growing importance of Global Animal Law, including international cooperation to address transboundary issues such as biodiversity loss, wildlife trafficking and environmental degradation. We support

exploring an international treaty on animal rights to establish stronger and more consistent protections across jurisdictions.

Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party

Ending prohibition of cannabis will strengthen and uphold rule of law. People will be more respectful and helpful to the police. Currently the 'fear factor' of being connected to cannabis holds people back from assisting the police. Even though there is a directive from government, not to arrest unless in the public interest, this still relies on police discretion, which is not clear cut, keeping the cannabis community in the shadows for proper legislative process. The 2011 Law Commission Report recognised cannabis as a health issue not a criminal matter.

Free Palestine

Our priority in relation to the rule of law relates primarily to the international sphere. A focus, as noted in Question 1 above is New Zealand's parliament honouring its signed international conventions and agreements regarding genocide, UN declarations on Palestinian Right of Return and the New Zealand cosponsored Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement building activities in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Domestically, we would repeal New Zealand's existing Terrorism laws, including the list of banned terrorist groups. These laws are not fit for purpose as they serve primarily to tie New Zealand into the USA's global "war on terror", a partisan push to expand and entrench US global dominance.

CONTINUED

4. What policies does your party have to strengthen and uphold the rule of law, including throughout the legislative process?

Greens

We will protect judicial independence and discretion in sentencing, including by abolishing mandatory minimum sentences, life sentences, preventive detention, limits on sentence discounts, three strikes and limits on when home detention can be imposed instead of imprisonment. We will ensure legislation is evidence-based, rights-consistent, Tiriti-informed and subject to public participation and thorough select committee process.

Labour

Labour has consistently stood up and defended the rule of law when it has been under attack by this current Government. Whether that is opposing retrospectivity, the inappropriate use of urgency, or calling out inappropriate criticism of the judiciary. We are committed to a legislative process that respects the rights of communities and affected parties to have their say to laws that will affect them, and to a robust and considered legislative process. We believe it's important for bills to have a robust select committee process, where New Zealanders have an opportunity to have their say.

National

National is committed to the rule of law, independent courts and stable democracy. Under the National-led

government, New Zealand has risen to 5th in the 2025 World Justice Project Rule of Law index. We will continue to uphold our democratic processes, equality before the law, and transparency.

Our reforms are ensuring electoral law remains comprehensive, clear and enforceable. Strengthening and expanding the offences of treating, bribery, and undue influence to prevent importer influence over enrolment and voting decisions has improved trust in our electoral system. Law changes to the resilience of the electoral system ensure that electoral processes are fit for purpose and obligations are well understood.

We take democratic transparency seriously, which is why we have reinstated the ban on prisoners voting in elections, and strengthened democratic accountability by ensuring local government decision-makers are answerable to ratepayers.

New Zealand First

Ensuring equal treatment before the law for all citizens, resisting co-governance models or legal privileges based on race or culture.

Protecting constitutional rights by requiring a comprehensive review of the Bill of Rights Act and opposing rushed legislation that subverts the presumption of innocence.

Strengthening democratic mandates by replacing parliamentary conscience votes with binding public referenda on constitutional and major social issues.

Securing institutional integrity by establishing an independent anti-corruption commission.

NZ Loyal

For NZ Loyal, the rule of law begins with government itself being subject to law and with genuine separation between Parliament, the executive and an independent judiciary.

Parliament increasingly produces legislation that is sometimes excessively prescriptive and at other times too vague, leaving fundamental questions to regulation or administrative discretion. We want legislation built around clear, coherent principles applying equally to New Zealanders.

Parliament and the common law should operate as complementary evolutionary mechanisms. Parliament should establish durable principles and lawful boundaries. Courts should then apply them to the particular facts of real cases, informed by statutory purpose, common law, evidence, natural justice and accumulated judicial expertise. Through reasoned judgments and precedent, the law can adapt to circumstances Parliament could never sensibly enumerate in advance.

We support clearer legal definitions of natural persons, companies, trusts and other legal constructs. Where foundational questions remain genuinely unsettled, they should be properly argued before independent courts, including ultimately the Supreme Court where appropriate, without Parliament directing the outcome.

Political attempts to engineer particular judicial results undermine this separation and risk unintended consequences. Strong institutions require each branch to respect both its authority and its limits.



Electoral Commission

NZ Outdoors and Freedom Party

FREEDOM will introduce an independent and transparent judicial appointments and promotions panel to enhance independence from the executive and public confidence in the administration of justice.

Opportunity

Opportunity is generally speaking supportive of the rule of law. Examples include our opposition to the current fast-track consenting regime on rule-of-law grounds, opposition to the excessive use of urgency and limitations on public consultation and defence of statutory bodies such as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the environment. Our Clean up Politics policy proposes regulating lobbying and donations and establishment of an independent anti-corruption body. These are broadly aimed at preserving democratic norms and preserving the rules of law.

Te Tai Tokerau Party

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is at the forefront of our Party's policies. Upholding the rule of law cannot be separated from Te Tiriti and the constitutional obligations of the Crown.

Our justice system has consistently produced inequitable outcomes for Māori. The persistence of these disparities requires us to redefine the way justice is administered. We will push for legislative and policy approaches that give actual effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi so that Māori rights and interests can be recognised in full. This means we must move beyond reference to Te Tiriti and instead embed it into law and practice. If we want different outcomes, we must be willing to change the way the system currently operates.

Vision New Zealand

A Fair, Independent and Accountable Justice System.

Vision NZ believes the rule of law is the foundation of a free and democratic New Zealand. Laws must apply equally to everyone, protect fundamental rights, and be administered by independent courts free from political interference. Parliament, ministers, public agencies and enforcement bodies must all act within clearly defined legal powers and remain accountable for their decisions.

We will protect judicial independence, strengthen the separation of powers and ensure courts have the resources required to deliver timely, impartial and accessible justice. We will maintain effective legal aid, expand Community Law and provide plain-English information so people can understand and enforce their rights.

Throughout the legislative process, we will support transparent, evidence-based law-making. Bills should be publicly available in accessible language, receive meaningful consultation and undergo rigorous scrutiny by select committees. Parliament must have adequate time to examine proposed laws, hear expert and community evidence, consider regulatory and human-rights impacts, and debate amendments openly. Urgent legislation will be used only when genuinely necessary, with clear reasons and subsequent review.

All legislation should be consistent with fundamental rights, constitutional principles and international obligations, or clearly explain any justified limitations.

5.

Outside of the justice and courts portfolios, what are your party's key legislative priorities for the first year of the parliamentary term?



ACT New Zealand

We are asking New Zealanders to give their Party Vote to ACT to Lock Labour Out and Unlock New Zealand's potential. We will unlock New Zealand's potential through a smaller, more effective Government, less red tape, better public services and equal rights. We will cut the waste and grow the country in order to balance the books with no new taxes.

We would begin implementing our plan to simplify central government, consolidating overlapping departments and portfolios and making Ministers more clearly accountable for spending and results.

We would continue replacing the RMA with a property-rights-based planning system that makes it easier to build homes, infrastructure and businesses while protecting people from genuine harm.

Other priorities include welfare reform that strengthens expectations on people who can work; continuing the successful roll-out of charter schools; increasing medicines funding every year to close the gap with Australia; expanding the role of community pharmacies to take pressure of GPs; and further reducing unnecessary regulation on businesses.

We would also legislate for equal rights and stronger property rights through our One Law for All programme.

Alliance

New Zealanders desperately need assistance with the current cost of living crisis and the Alliance's legislative priority will address that by legislation geared towards easing the cost of living for the majority of earners including a tax revenue for



Government from sectors not currently contributing to a fair progressive tax system, thereby giving cost of living relief where needed.

The Alliance will legislate for the formation of an Aotearoa Investment Bank, consolidating existing Crown investment functions into a single mission-aligned (i.e. having economic, social and environmental benefit) lender for clean manufacturing, regional industry and cooperatives.

Together with the above, a legislative programme designed to return previously State-owned assets to public ownership and control, thereby providing an increased revenue stream for Government and decreased costs to the public of essential services (e.g. power).

The Alliance will review all legislation passed by the current Government under urgency with a view to, where practicable, enable

public input for necessary changes arising from the democratic process.

Review of all legislation that has negated positive honouring of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Animal Justice Party Aotearoa New Zealand

Our first-year legislative priorities focus on strengthening animal protection while improving environmental sustainability, public health and community wellbeing.

We will strengthen the Animal Welfare Act to better recognise animal sentience, establish an independent Commissioner for Animals, and strengthen compliance, monitoring and enforcement.

We will also begin the process of removing the legal classification of animals as property and establishing

a consistent legal framework that recognises animals as sentient beings entitled to legal protection.

As part of reforming animal welfare legislation, we will work to remove exemptions, inconsistencies and ambiguities that allow harmful practices to continue, while strengthening compliance monitoring, penalties and enforcement.

We will also advance responsible companion animal management and national no-kill standards for council pounds, alongside stronger biodiversity protection, freshwater restoration and a fair transition towards sustainable plant-based food systems.

We will consider measures to prevent the import or sale of animal products produced to standards below those required of New Zealand producers.

These priorities reflect the growing recognition that the wellbeing of people, animals and the environment is interconnected. Better animal protection delivers broader benefits for biodiversity, public health, biosecurity and resilient communities.

Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party

The Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party's key legislative priorities are to legalise Cannabis for R18 Recreational, grow your own, affordable medicinal access and abolishing the outdated, expensive, not fit for purpose, Misuse of Drugs Act 1975. Our policy also advocates to expunge

CONTINUED

5. Outside of the justice and courts portfolios, what are your party's key legislative priorities for the first year of the parliamentary term?

all cannabis convictions like The Criminal Records (Expungement of Convictions for Historical homosexual Offences) Act 2018.

Our policy will end the current regime wasting millions of dollars in futile pursuit of ordinary citizens – 80% who have tried cannabis. The Party promotes saving taxpayer dollars by ending prohibition, along with the economic development of the three sustainable cannabis industries of Recreational, Medicinal and Industrial Hemp, delivering untapped wealth to the New Zealand economy, while contributing to saving the environment.

Free Palestine

We would introduce legislation to support the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. We would commit to an independent foreign policy by withdrawing from all formal security alliances with the U.S. and by distancing our foreign policy from the orbit of Anglo-U.S. economic hegemony and military interventionism. We would close the Israeli Embassy and expel the Israeli Ambassador. We would recognise a Palestinian State from the river to the sea.

Greens

Our manifesto for this year's election represents our priorities; this includes prevention of family and sexual violence, drug law reform, as well as our specific policies relating to justice, courts, corrections and Police. Our manifesto also contains commitments to address the root causes of crime; ensuring everyone has liveable incomes, access to healthcare, mental healthcare and addiction support, and somewhere warm and safe to call home. You can access our manifesto at greens.org.nz/manifesto2026.

Labour

For Labour, victims and survivors are the priority for our justice system. We will work to increase support for victims and tackle the drivers of crime and violence with evidence-based policies. Labour is committed to significantly reducing domestic and sexual violence statistics and the level of reoffending by people who have previously been dealt with by the justice system. Our justice system should protect and support victims of crime and provide access to justice for all. Labour knows that a fair and just society is critical to a democracy.

National

If re-elected, National will continue our sensible management of the economy to lift wages, create jobs and invest more in public services. Introducing no new taxes, capping council rates, and reducing student loan repayments are all policies that will help Kiwis with the cost of living.

National will also secure New Zealand's financial future by

reforming Kiwisaver by making it compulsory and raising Kiwisaver contributions to 12%, so that Kiwis will have more money to buy their first home or retire. New Zealanders who do the right thing by working hard, saving up and investing deserve a Government that backs them. With National, they will get that backing as part of our wider plan to fix the basics and build the future for all New Zealanders.

New Zealand First

New Zealand First's priorities include restoring economic productivity, reducing unnecessary regulation, strengthening infrastructure and public services, improving health and education outcomes, supporting regional New Zealand and maintaining controlled, sustainable immigration.

We also prioritise strengthening democratic accountability, protecting New Zealand's national interests and ensuring government policy delivers practical benefits for New Zealand citizens and communities.

New Zealand First will drive a cohesive government response to disrupt organised crime ensuring New Zealand's national interests are protected and that New Zealand is the hardest country in the world for organised criminal cartels to operate.

NZ Loyal

Outside justice and the courts, NZ Loyal's first-year legislative programme would be guided by one test: does the change improve New Zealand's long-term sovereignty, resilience, productive capacity and prosperity?

A central priority is replacing the existing tax structure with our proposed 1% transaction tax,

substantially reducing tax complexity and compliance costs while the wider monetary framework continues to be carefully reviewed.

We would begin rebuilding national resilience across the essential systems on which an independent country depends, including energy, water, transport, communications, food production and financial infrastructure. Domestic productive capacity and infrastructure investment should be assessed over decades, not electoral cycles.

International agreements and institutional commitments would be reviewed against New Zealand's long-term national interest. We support voluntary international trade and cooperation, but not unnecessary transfers of decision-making authority away from New Zealand.

Immigration settings should reflect infrastructure capacity, genuine skills requirements and the long-term interests of existing New Zealand communities.

We would also strengthen domestic defence, civil-defence capability and protection of territorial waters, critical infrastructure and natural resources.

The common principle is long-term stewardship. Government should stop optimising for the next election and start building institutional, economic and physical resilience for future generations.

NZ Outdoors and Freedom Party

To enhance fundamental rights and democracy by educating on opportunities for direct democracy so local communities can create their own laws to enhance the rights and lives of local people, the environment and our future.

Opportunity

Opportunity's priorities are to fix politics, build the next economy and restore nature. All of these will involve legislative change. Read more about our detailed policy positions at opportunity.org.nz/policy.

Te Tai Tokerau Party

Our direction is guided by the voice of our community. We have organised these around three Pou: Whare, Whānau and Whenua. That means housing security, meaningful employment for our rangatahi, accessible health services, reducing the pressure of the cost of living and improving our regions resilience against climate change.

All policies give practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi while bringing decision making closer to the people most affected by it. Under a government that has prioritised economic growth, our position is that this must be measured against whether it delivers secure housing, stable employment, and opportunity for the next generation.

Vision New Zealand

A Stronger, Safer and More Prosperous New Zealand.

In the first year of the parliamentary term, Vision NZ will focus on practical legislation that strengthens New Zealand's families, economy, communities, national resilience and national identity.

- Entrench the Bill of Rights into Supreme Law.
- India Free Trade Agreement Legislation Repeal Bill.
- Legislate the transition from the minimum wage to an annually adjusted living wage to protect

working families from inflation.

- Legally define and protect biological sex strictly as male and female based on objective scientific reality.
- Introduce a Parental Rights Bill to fully restore parental authority over the health and wellbeing of children up to the age of 16 years.
- Review and repeal aspects of the Birth, Deaths, Marriages, and Relationships Registration Act 2021 that undermine biological definitions.
- Prohibit all medical interventions for gender transition in minors.
- Protect fairness in women's sport by restricting participation to biological categories.
- Review and reform existing legislation that endangers the lives of unborn children.
- Remove the MMP system and reduce the number of MPs in Parliament. ■

Notes

Responses from the following parties exceeded the word limit, and the final statements removed to fit within the 200-word count:

- Free Palestine, Q1
- Vision New Zealand for Q1, Q3 and Q4.

New Zealand First also supplied this disclaimer: *As a disclaimer, please note that for a lot of areas, the party has yet to finalise its policies. The questions answered draw inspiration from publicly announced policies for the upcoming elections, party principles and past party policies – which may or may not be part of NZ First Election Manifesto for 2026.*

“Rookie” Solicitor-General decades in the making

Solicitor-General Anna Adams KC may jokingly describe herself as a rookie. Yet despite being new to the public service, she brings decades of legal and leadership experience to one of New Zealand's most demanding legal roles.

During her call to the Inner Bar (King's Counsel ceremony) at the Auckland High Court, before taking office, Chief Justice Helen Winkelmann observed that the position carried “quite literally, awesome responsibilities”. Three months in, Anna is beginning to appreciate the full scope of the job.

“It’s a very big role,” she says. “There is a huge amount of accountability for how the Government legal system is run and how it performs.”

The former Meredith Connell partner and Yale Law School Master of Laws graduate says what comes across her desk these days eclipses anything she encountered in private practice.

“The type of legal issues that I end up dealing with in a week are the things that ordinarily would have been the highlight of a year,” she says.

Despite the pace change, Anna says the fundamentals of legal practice remain the same.

“You focus on the main issues, you look after your client’s interests and you strive to deliver excellence,” she says.

“What is different is the complexity and scale of the legal issues the Government faces. Government has to be very attentive to the risks and consequences of its legal choices because, fundamentally, our client is the public.”

Anna describes herself as a traditional “black letter” lawyer, guided by principles of liberty, equality and solidarity.

“The law should deliver certainty, predictability and the equal application of principles to like cases.

“People organise their lives according to what they understand the law to be. We shouldn’t interfere with that without proper process. If there is to be change, there are established ways to achieve it, often through legislation.”

Her interest in constitutional law stretches back to the very beginning of her legal career. She started law school in 1990, the same year the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act was passed.

As a graduate, she clerked at the Court of Appeal under President Sir Robin Cooke and later Sir Ivor

“Government has to be very attentive to the risks and consequences of its legal choices because, fundamentally, our client is the public.”





Tenille Rudsdale, Smoke (smoke.co.nz)



Richardson. The Court was issuing some of its first significant Bill of Rights decisions.

“It was a wonderful experience,” she says. “I wrote my honours dissertation on the constitutional discourse that emerged in the Court of Appeal’s first five years with the Bill of Rights, and it was later published in the *New Zealand Law Review*.”

Having argued more than 100 cases, represented victims of the Whakaari eruption and assisted the coroner following the New Lynn terrorist attack, Anna is acutely aware that legal proceedings are often among the most significant events in a person’s life.

“The individual perspective in the justice system really matters,” she says. “Whether it is employment, criminal or family law, for many New Zealanders it is the only time they experience the justice system.

“When people come into contact with the law, it can be an intense and sometimes traumatic experience. We should never lose sight of that.”

As both Solicitor-General and chief executive of Crown Law she hopes

to foster a culture that combines professional excellence with intellectual openness.

“There is a real commitment to open debate, discussion and diversity of thought,” she says. “I want to discourage any sort of mandatory thinking or expression.”

She acknowledges there are challenges ahead, particularly when it comes to infrastructure and technology in the justice system.

“We’re hearing concerns about court capacity, digital systems, lawyer resilience and shortages in some specialised areas of practice.”

Despite those challenges, she remains optimistic. Various projects are being developed including the Court digitisation initiative Te Au Reka and Crown Law itself is looking to its future legal practice and technology base.

“We have a wonderful reservoir of talent in Crown Law – brilliant hard-working public-spirited lawyers and support people.”

Success within her five-year tenure will mean continuing to deliver Crown Law’s core functions exceptionally well, and supporting the Government to advance its policies lawfully.

“Being the Solicitor General is a privilege. You have to stay open to different ideas, experiences and perspectives from across the profession if you want to make the best decisions. And while it’s a demanding workload, it’s also extremely rewarding.” ■

The judgement layer

What AI changes and what it doesn't

AI can draft, analyse and automate, but it can't replace human judgement. Natalie Kim explains why the next generations of successful lawyers will be those who embrace technology while sharpening the skills that machines can't replicate, ahead of her upcoming Law Society webinar and masterclass.

After almost two decades working at the intersection of law and technology in the United States, New Zealander Natalie Kim has returned home with a clear view of where artificial intelligence is taking the legal profession. The opportunity, she says, is much bigger than doing today's legal work faster.

When Natalie talks about artificial intelligence and the law, she's less interested in whether AI can draft a contract than in what happens to the lawyer when it can.

Much of the conversation has focused on substitution: which tasks can AI perform and could it eventually replace work undertaken by lawyers?

Natalie believes that risks missing the bigger change. "I think we're overestimating on output substitution," she says. "Is it going to write the contract instead of me? Is it going to replace the associate?"

What lawyers may be underestimating is how work itself changes. As AI allows organisations to create information, analysis and requests at far greater speed, the genuinely

scarce resources may become something much more human: a lawyer's attention and judgement.

An Aucklander who spent almost two decades in the United States, Natalie worked in private practice and with technology businesses including Apple and Cisco. Most recently, she was Head of Legal at Seattle-based clean technology company Omnidian, where she also led AI transformation.

Now back in New Zealand, she sees an opportunity to think deliberately about what good AI-enabled legal practice should look like.

From doing the work to designing the work

Natalie expects AI to become an "exoskeleton" around the lawyer, taking on appropriate parts of legal work. That doesn't mean handing everything to a machine. Instead, human judgement moves upstream.

The lawyer increasingly decides how work should be done: what can safely be automated, what requires human review, where risk sits and where expertise is most valuable.

"AI is not the right solution for everything," Natalie says. "The critical skill is knowing the difference."

That requires lawyers to make visible the small judgements embedded in their expertise: knowing when a standard matter isn't standard, what context matters and when an approach needs to change.

What happens to junior lawyers?

If AI takes over repetitive work traditionally given to junior lawyers, how will they develop that judgement?

Natalie sees an opportunity to rethink training.

As a junior mergers and acquisitions lawyer, she spent countless hours reviewing contracts and completing signature blocks. There was learning in the repetition, but it was largely incidental.

"We never really thought about that from a pedagogical or training perspective," she says.



AI forces firms to be more deliberate. There remains enormous value in an experienced practitioner sitting alongside a junior lawyer and explaining not simply what something says, but how they think about it: what matters, where the risks are and when the usual rule doesn't apply.

Human-to-human learning may become more important, not less.

Redesigning the work

Natalie has seen what this can look like in practice.

As sole legal counsel, she developed an AI process for reviewing non-disclosure agreements. It evolved from a reusable prompt into a tool that could check agreements, suggest edits and prepare responses.

The bigger change came when she redesigned the process so the sales team could use it directly, with guardrails escalating unusual or risky agreements to her.

AI learning 2026

AI is beginning to reshape how legal services are delivered, priced, managed and experienced by clients. The Law Society is responding to both the practical and leadership challenges with learning opportunities for lawyers and leaders.

Here's a snapshot of upcoming learning offered by the Law Society including CLE in 2026.

Webinar – AI and automation for family lawyers: What you actually need to know

Thursday 5 November 2026, 1–2pm. With Charlotte Price, Hannah Hardy-Hones and Colin Abernethy.

The most compelling case for technology in family law is not efficiency for its own sake, but the space it creates for deeper client relationships and human connection. In this practical session, participants will be introduced to pain point mapping, encouraged to examine their working day and explore where and which tools can help.

Webinar – The AI-ready legal team: leadership, capability and the future profession

Wednesday 18 November 2026, 10–11.30am. With Natalie Kim and panellists.

This session connects the commercial and workforce shifts with the leadership decisions that firms and legal teams need to make now. Hear from Natalie and panellists as they examine the people, leadership and operating-model implications for firms, in-house teams and legal careers.

Webinar – Does AI actually lighten the load, or just raise the bar?

Thursday 12 November, 1–2pm. With Ali Dibbenhall and Elizabeth Bing from LexisNexis.

Leading legal and technology experts Ali and Elizabeth will examine the impact of AI on productivity, performance, wellbeing, and the evolving nature of legal work. Attendees will gain practical insights into where AI is delivering value today, where human judgement remains essential, and what sustainable AI adoption could look like for the future of legal practice.

Masterclass – Agentic AI in legal practice

Thursday 10 December 6–8pm. Auckland. With Natalie Kim.

For lawyers, the challenge is not simply understanding agentic AI. It is knowing how to move from experimentation to supervised, responsible use in real legal workflows.

This practical masterclass uses a crawl-walk-run framework to help participants understand their current level of AI capability, identify the next step, and apply that learning through a hands-on workflow design exercise.

For all AI Learning, see the AI Hub.

lawsociety.org.nz/aihub



The result, she says, was a 99% reduction in NDA review turnaround time.

The significance isn't really the NDA. It's the method: understand the decisions within the work, determine what AI can safely handle, build in human oversight and redesign the workflow.

"AI transformation cannot stop at doing the existing work faster; it needs to reimagine the work," Natalie says.

That human oversight remains critical. AI can produce remarkably useful work and still be wrong. For Natalie, responsible use means designing review around the work and its risk rather than simply trusting the technology.

"No technology in the world is going to force humans to have integrity and thoroughness," she says.

An opportunity to shape what comes next

For New Zealand firms wondering whether they are already behind, Natalie's message is reassuring. This is still early.

There is no settled model for the AI-enabled law firm. The more important divide, she believes, is between lawyers who understand how to direct and interrogate these tools and those who accept what the technology gives them at face value.

Clients, too, are increasingly arriving with AI-generated answers and asking lawyers: "Is this right?"

Rather than diminishing the lawyer's role, Natalie sees an opportunity. The conversation can move to what context is missing, why an answer changes when that context is added and where professional judgement makes the difference.

AI can remove work that consumes time without making the best use of legal expertise. It can make services faster and more accessible and give smaller teams capabilities previously available only with greater resources.

But perhaps its greatest opportunity is to allow lawyers to spend more time on the things for which clients genuinely need them: understanding context, solving difficult problems, exercising judgement and building trusted relationships.

Natalie's philosophy is that technology should ultimately direct the best human thinking to where it matters most.

The future is unlikely to be lawyers on one side and machines on the other. It is more likely to belong to practitioners who understand both: who know what technology can do, recognise what it cannot, and have the confidence and judgement to decide where each belongs.

For a profession built on judgement, that is not a diminishment of the lawyer's role.

It may be an opportunity to put judgement and human interaction back at its centre. ■

While AI can support aspects of legal practice, lawyers remain responsible for exercising professional judgment, protecting client confidentiality, and verifying the accuracy and appropriateness of all content generated by AI.



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CLIFTONCHAMBERS

We are delighted to welcome Una Jagose KC
to the independent bar.



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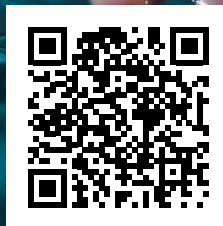
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Peter Castle	Alison Gordon	Ben Hamlin
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		Steve Wragg

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Putting legal AI within reach

With the introduction of LexisNexis Protégé, lawyers have access to more AI tools through the Law Society library network.

The Law Society is making quality AI-enabled tools easier for lawyers to access, regardless of firm size, location or budget, says Representative Services and Strategy General Manager Amanda Woodbridge.

“We already offer several AI-enabled research tools in our libraries and lawyer rooms across the motu and we’ve been looking to extend those”, she says.

Protégé is an AI-powered assistant designed to support legal professionals to undertake research, prepare client documentation and complete complex legal tasks in a secure

AI legal environment. Grounded in authoritative legal content, it’s designed to complement traditional legal research methods.

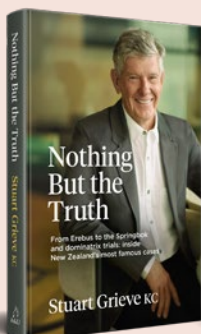
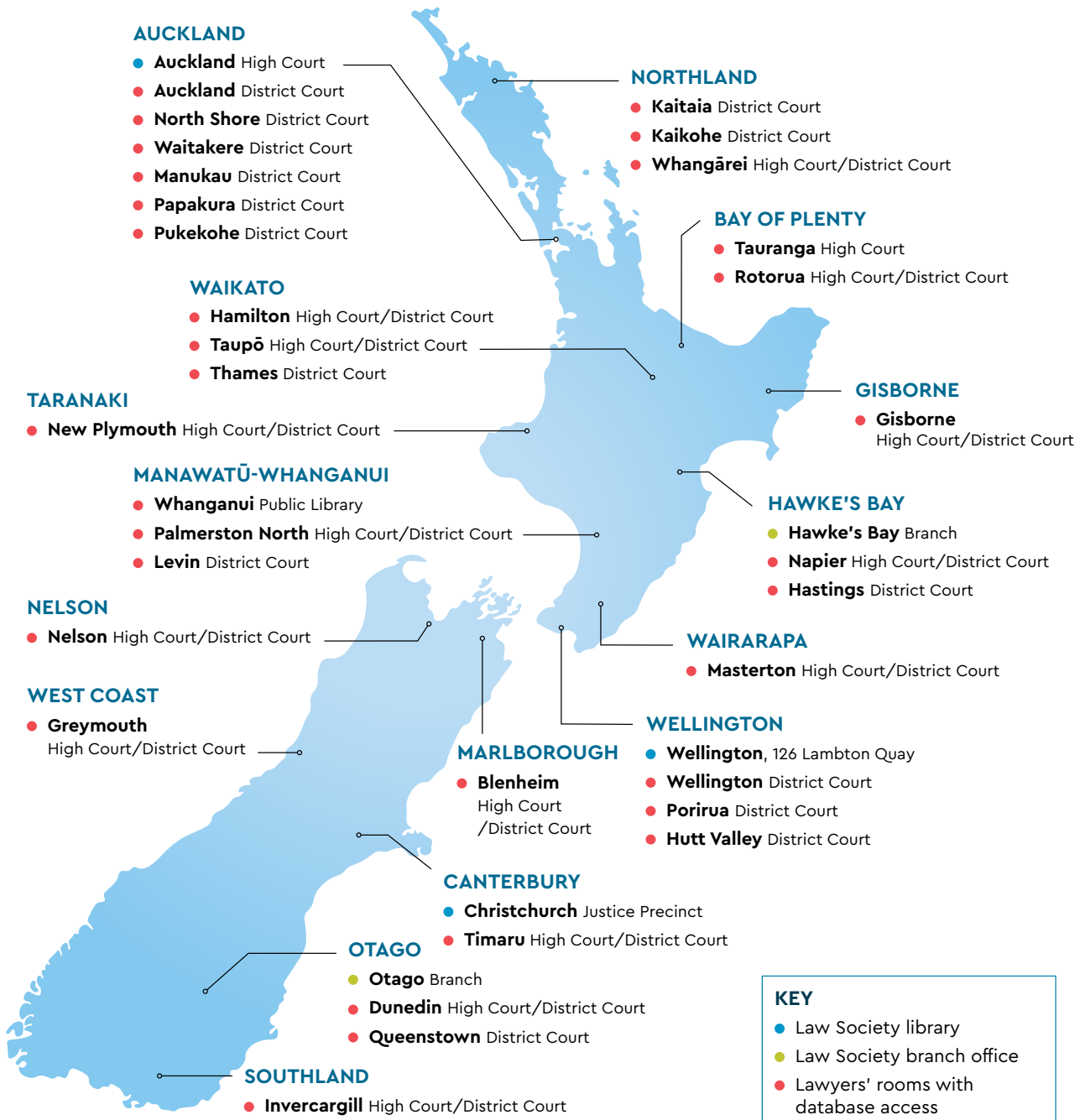
“Protégé gives lawyers another practical way to explore how AI may support their work, alongside the research services and professional guidance already available through the Law Society,” Amanda says.

Any practising lawyer can access Protégé using their own device and connecting to the Law Society wi-fi at any of the Law Society’s 36 locations across the motu – Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch libraries as well as lawyers’ rooms.

Protégé adds to a suite of AI-enabled services already available through the Law Society Library. These include Lexis Argument Analyser and CCH iKnowConnect as well as case citation checking services. Lawyers can also request Law Society library staff to conduct legal research using Westlaw’s AI-Assisted Research on their behalf. ■

For guidance about using AI in your practice, as well as information on AI resources, tools and learning, visit the AI Hub lawsociety.org.nz/aihub

Library locations across the motu



An inside look at two extraordinary legal careers

ALLEN & UNWIN
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Right: Katie Rusbatch speaking at the New Zealand Law Society Volunteer Appreciation Evening in March.

Our Profession, Our Future: a shared strategy for lasting success

An invitation to help build the profession for tomorrow – one that's stronger, fairer and inclusive.



Chief Executive Katie Rusbatch says a new strategy, *Our Profession, Our Future*, is an invitation to every part of the legal community to help build an inclusive, resilient and trusted profession that can serve Aotearoa New Zealand well for generations to come.

Our Profession, Our Future has been developed by the profession for the profession.

“Diversity, equity and inclusion are central to the profession’s long-term strength,” Katie says. “Our early career lawyers are more diverse and reflective of our communities. Differing perspectives strengthen analysis and decision-making, while inclusive workplaces help attract, retain and develop talent.”

Evidence shows that organisations with diverse leadership teams are associated with stronger organisational performance, more satisfied workforces, and greater social impact. These factors help a

profession remain relevant, credible and trusted by the clients and communities it serves.¹

Our Profession, Our Future is the culmination of engagement since March this year with more than 600 members of the profession. Their contributions helped shape a shared direction and inform the development of a practical framework that that will support the profession to support people to participate, grow and succeed at every stage of their careers.

“This is a shared endeavour,” Katie says. “No single organisation can achieve the change required, and progress will not look identical everywhere. What matters is that legal workplaces and individuals have the confidence and support to take meaningful steps suited to their people, clients and communities.”

The Law Society will help create the conditions for action – bringing the profession together around a shared

direction, providing practical guidance, tools and resources, tracking progress over time, and connecting the conversations that shape the future of the profession.

One of the first actions for the Law Society will be to expand and strengthen the Gender Equality Charter, to support a shared framework for commitment and accountability.

The strategy takes a flexible approach, recognising the different size, structure and capability of law firms, in-house teams, sole practices, barristers’ chambers and other legal workplaces. It is accompanied with a profession-wide action plan that translates the strategy into practical opportunities and show how leaders, workplaces and individual practitioners can contribute.

Katie says it’s encouraging that change is already happening across different parts of the profession, meaning the strategy can build on



momentum. “As well as increasingly diverse early career cohorts, there are more diverse judicial and leadership appointments, mentoring and sponsorship programmes, employee-led networks, flexible working approaches and organisations taking deliberate steps to strengthen inclusion within their workplaces.”

The engagement process

From April to July, more than 500 people responded to a profession-wide survey, over 90 representatives took part in interviews and workshops, and an external advisory panel provided ongoing guidance. Research into leading practice in other jurisdictions and professions also added further perspectives.



“Pacific navigators crossed vast oceans not because one person knew the way, but because many travelled together, guided by shared knowledge, purpose and trust. The engagement process reflected that same spirit. What stood out was the willingness of people across our profession to share their experiences honestly and help chart a better course. Our Profession, Our Future creates an opportunity for legal workplaces to draw strength from our diversity, ensuring every person can see themselves in the profession and contribute to its future. As we navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead, our profession will be strongest when everyone has a place in the va’a/waka and a hand in steering its direction.”

Tiffany Sauni

Special Counsel, Shine Lawyers

Tiffany was part of the external advisory group that guided the development of *Our Profession, Our Future*.

Actions for a more inclusive workplace – take three



FOR EVERY LAWYER

1

Practise active inclusion: listen to experiences different from your own, challenge bias respectfully and help create space for others to contribute.

2

Make pathways visible: share knowledge, mentor others and be transparent about opportunities, expectations and routes to progression.

3

Keep learning: build capability in inclusion, cultural competence and bias, then apply that learning in everyday decisions and relationships.

FOR EVERY WORKPLACE

1

Review recruitment, progression, flexibility and leadership processes to identify and remove avoidable barriers.

2

Assess workplace culture and strengthen environments where people feel safe, respected, valued and able to contribute fully.

3

Measure and share progress through consistent workforce data, clear indicators and accountable leadership commitments.



“Having a profession that enables all of us to succeed and thrive is fundamental to the profession being able to meet the needs of our clients and communities in the future. We all come from different starting points, and the strategy provides clear direction and support wherever that point might be.”

Hayden Wilson

Chair, Dentons New Zealand

Hayden was part of the external advisory group that guided the development of *Our Profession, Our Future*.

What we heard

While there is broad support for creating a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable legal profession, there's no shared view of the profession's current state.

Five key themes

- Access to the profession is not experienced equally.
- A sense of belonging and feeling included and supported influence whether people stay and progress.
- Experiences of inclusion differ significantly across the population.
- The profession wants practical action, not aspiration alone.
- Lasting change will require leadership and accountability.

From the survey specifically

- Women were almost three times more likely than men to disagree that the legal profession is an equitable, inclusive and safe place to work.
- Respondents with disabilities reported some of the least positive experiences, while Māori, Pasifika, Asian and LGBTQIA+ respondents also reported fewer positive experiences than the profession overall.

Find out more

Our Profession, Our Future is available on the Law Society website. ■



1. McKinsey & Company. (2023). *Diversity Matters Even More: The Case for Holistic Impact*.



Staying well, not just getting through

BY **HOLLY BARNARD**

Thriving in law takes more than resilience – it requires workplaces, connections and ways of working that sustain people throughout their careers.

Many lawyers find their work meaningful but high workloads, stress, workplace culture and psychological health can affect whether legal practice remains sustainable.

Findings in the *Law in Distress* report released in July are largely consistent with our 2023 Workplace Environment Survey and our engagement activity – to inform the strategy, *Our Profession, Our Future* – earlier this year. Many survey respondents identified wellbeing as an important factor in whether people remain and progress in the profession.

Some of the key themes I'm coming across in my interactions with the profession include burnout and workload, mental health literacy, psychologically healthy workplaces, leadership capability, connection and belonging, and help-seeking and support pathways.

While challenge and pressure are a normal part of legal practice, maintaining wellbeing requires ongoing attention. It is not something that

can be addressed through a single initiative or annual awareness campaign. Wellbeing depends on how legal work is organised, the support available and the habits that help people manage pressure throughout their careers. Creating healthy workplaces, maintaining professional connections and developing sustainable ways of working all contribute to wellbeing over time.

The annual Mental Health Awareness Week is an opportunity to encourage conversations and reduce stigma, yet equally important is what happens throughout the rest of the year.

We are focusing on developing a more substantial and coordinated wellbeing programme that seeks to support both individual wellbeing and the wider systems, environments, and professional practices that influence it.

This builds on the good work that has already taken place – such as our mentoring programme, access to free counselling, and our partnership with Optimally to deliver the *Optimising Performance*



“Wellbeing depends on how legal work is organised, the support available and the habits that help people manage pressure throughout their careers.”



and Wellbeing webinar series over the last 18 months. Sessions have focused on practical, evidence-based approaches to maintaining wellbeing, managing professional pressures and building sustainable careers.

Watch out for more on wellbeing as we progress, including further resources and support on the Law Society website. ■

Holly is the Programme Manager Wellbeing, Diversity and Inclusion. She joins the Law Society from The Diversity Agenda, where she led an industry-wide movement driving collective, systemic change across the engineering and architecture professions.

Free, confidential counselling is available for all lawyers through Vitae. Call 0508 664 981 or visit vitae.co.nz to make an appointment. Make sure you mention you're accessing the 'Legal Community Counselling Service'.

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Te Au Reka and the Courts Portal

What Family Court lawyers need to know

Te Au Reka, the courts' new digital case management system, is coming to the Family Court, with lawyers being required to use the new system from March next year.

Te Au Reka replaces many paper-based manual court processes, giving lawyers a secure online way to interact with the court. Lawyers and parties will access Te Au Reka through the new Courts Portal.

Lawyers will use the Courts Portal to file documents and deal with the Family Court in all new cases following rollout in their region. In the lead-up to its deployment, lawyers will continue to use existing filing and case management processes.

The Ministry of Justice and the judiciary have been working closely to deliver the new system. Wellington Family Court Judge Tim Black has played a key role in shaping the design of Te Au Reka and gave an early demonstration at the Law Society's 2025 Family Law Conference with Judge Belinda Pidwell.

"Te Au Reka is the biggest change in the operations of the courts in a generation," he says. "It is truly transformational in its effect and scope."

Representatives of the legal profession have been involved in ensuring that the associated communications, learning and support will reflect the needs of legal practitioners.

Lawyers will receive information and support before Te Au Reka is introduced in their region – including online learning, instructional videos, practical demonstrations and supporting guidance materials. Access to the Courts Portal will require a verified RealMe account and more information about these requirements and account setup will be provided ahead of rollout.

Designed with input from the legal profession

Reference groups made up of lawyers from different practice types, including small and large firms, Oranga Tamariki as well as sole practitioners, have been instrumental in developing the new system – including to review features, workflows and design options, and provide feedback throughout development.

"You're going to be able to get in and see all of your active cases, your active tasks, when things have to be filed and upcoming court events. It's a one-stop shop."

The Court Portal

Lawyers will use the Court Portal to:

- file documents online
- view upcoming court events
- track the progress of cases
- receive reminders and notifications
- access court documents and communications
- manage active cases and tasks in one place.



Wellington Family Court
Judge Tim Black



Amy Gulbransen, Tiaki Family Law



Liz Lewes, Cuba Family Law

Family lawyers Amy Gulbransen (Tiaki Family Law) and Liz Lewes (Cuba Family Law) are members of the reference groups.

Amy says the opportunity for lawyers to provide feedback throughout the design has helped create a system that reflects how practitioners work. Based on demonstrations she's seen, the system is user-friendly and logical. "It will be much less likely for things to get lost or be mis-diarised. You log in and all your communications are there, all your dates are there. It will be a huge time-saver."

Liz says one of the biggest benefits will be improved visibility of case information and court deadlines. "You're going to be able to get in and see all of your active cases, your active tasks, when things have to be filed and upcoming court events. It's a one-stop shop."

She says the ability to customise notifications will help practitioners manage their workload and keep track of important deadlines. "You can set notifications and tailor those to suit the way you like to work."

Lawyers won't need extra technology: they can just do the work on their laptop or phone, she says.

Benefits for practitioners and the court

The new system is expected to improve access to information, provide greater transparency of case progress, and reduce delays associated with paper-based administration.

Judge Black says immediate benefits will include greater accessibility of court information and reduced reliance on physical files.

"People sometimes ask me what benefits we'll see straight away. We won't have to wait for a file to be sent from another courthouse to be able to work on it. If I'm in Porirua and my court case finishes early and I want to do some preparation for a list in Wellington that I've got the next day, I can start doing that from Porirua rather than having to drive into Wellington and then see if the trolley is ready for the list.

He says the system has been designed to be intuitive and easy to use. "I tell my colleagues that if they can do their banking on their phone, they can use the system."

Find out more

More information about Te Au Reka, including implementation updates, training opportunities and guidance for legal practitioners, will be made available through the Ministry of Justice in the lead-up to rollout. ■

This article has been supplied by Te Au Reka Programme at the Ministry of Justice.

A progressive rollout

November 2027 –
Christchurch and Ashburton
(Judges and Court staff)

March 2027 – South Island

April 2027 – Central and
Lower North Island Regions

May 2027 – Northern Region

Law reform and advocacy update

Our activities from June to September 2026



The Law Society has now made over 130 submissions on bills during the 54th Parliament. This includes 16 submissions made on bills over the last three months. In that period, 18 submissions were also made on discussion documents and other consultations.

Recent notable submissions

The Disability Support Services Bill. We identified impacts on the rule of law and the separation of powers between Parliament and the judiciary, as well as limits on the right to justice and freedom from discrimination. Our submission also queried how the Bill would operate alongside other employment and health and safety legislation and recommended the Bill should not proceed until further policy work was completed.

The Conservation Amendment Bill. Our submission identified various concerns arising from the Bill, including in relation to the policy development process and lack of early public engagement, changes which would weaken checks and balances on Executive power, and the need to provide

suitable processes for introducing the National Conservation Policy Statement.

The Climate Change Response (Tort Liability) Amendment Bill.

We raised significant concerns about the rushed process under which the Bill has progressed, the principle that Parliament should not generally interfere with particular cases before the courts, and the implications for development of the common law of pre-empting the *Smith v Fonterra* proceedings.

The Legislation (Definitions of Woman and Man) Amendment Bill.

We identified serious concerns regarding the Bill's potential to create uncertainty and perverse outcomes across statute law and recommended it should not proceed.

The Fair Trading Amendment Bill.

We identified several drafting and practical workability concerns which would need to be addressed if the Bill is to proceed.

The Overseas Adoptions

Legislation Bill. This submission, prepared with the Family Law Section, noted that restricted access to adoption orders from the Family

Court could give some adopted children lesser rights than those they would enjoy if not for the circumstances of their birth and adoption.

The Deepfake Digital Harm and Exploitation Bill. While we supported the underlying objective of the Bill, our submission identified various issues with the drafting, the possible effect of the proposed changes regarding satire and political speech, and issues of consent and penalties.

The Drug Overdose (Assistance Protection) Legislation Bill. While supporting the underlying aim of the Bill, we raised numerous concerns arising from the drafting of the Bill which would mean that, as drafted, the Bill would not achieve its stated aim.

Proposed Protocol for Remote Participation by Criminal Defence Lawyers in the District Court, which would clarify when criminal defence lawyers can appear remotely in District Court hearings. We supported the creation of this protocol and identified a few additional matters that could be clarified.



An exposure draft of the **Insurance (Prudential Supervision) Amendment Bill**. We identified several matters in an exposure draft of this Bill which should be addressed. These included removing potential inconsistencies with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, ensuring the penalties for strict liability offences are proportionate and providing safeguards within the Bill to ensure transparency and accountability within the proposed distress management framework.

The Concealment of Location of Victim Remains Bill. Our submission identified serious flaws in this Bill, including inconsistencies with rights affirmed in the Bill of Rights Act and with the parole regime, and recommended the Bill should not proceed.

Other advocacy work and stakeholder engagement

Work continues with several projects to improve access to justice.

- We are engaging with the profession to map current issues with accessing clients in Corrections custody. We recently extended the deadline for the profession to

provide feedback on issues with accessing clients. We are now working towards organising meetings with the profession and other legal professional organisations to share the feedback we have received, and to discuss possible solutions.

- Our Youth Justice Committee has been working with the Principal Youth Court Judge and members of the profession to produce the *Youth Advocate Best Practice Guidelines*, which aim to promote best practice among lawyers appointed as Youth Advocates, encourage a consistently high standard of practice, and demonstrate the importance and scope of the role of a Youth Advocate.

- The Law Society including the Family Law Section continue to engage with the Ministry of Justice about the implementation of Te Au Reka (the new digital case management system) in the Family Court from March 2027 (see Page 40 for information about the roll-out). We are also liaising with the Ministry to ensure the lawyers' rooms in the new Papakura and Whanganui Courthouses will be fit for use when the courts open to the public in 2027.
- Regular engagements continue with various Ministers, Government departments, and the Courts. ■

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FROM THE PROFESSION

Legal adventures in the South Pacific

Auckland barrister Adam Holland shares his experiences of working as defence counsel in Samoa – including the difference in process, the collegiality and footwear.

Around about two years ago an email arrived in my inbox from Samoan solicitor, Komisi Koria, enquiring whether I would be able to act as defence counsel on a local intra-family sexual assault trial in Apia. I sent a short response indicating some interest and wondered if anything would come of it – little did I know that email would lead to one of the most stimulating weeks of my legal career.

After a few more emails and confirmation that I had been engaged, my first conversation with Komisi was on the issue of trial election. He explained that we had the choice of electing a Judge-alone trial or “trial by assessor”, meaning receiving five members of the public taken from a national assessor’s pool of around 250 (a lot of repeat business apparently). I was a little taken aback when Komisi explained that a Judge-alone election had already been made – this is contrary to the New Zealand approach where a large majority of sex cases are run in front of a jury. Komisi explained to me that assessors tend to come from rural parts of the island and they are typically religious and conservative, so he liked our chances better with a Judge.

The next thing to adjust to was disclosure. Despite the alleged offending occurring over many years and involving two complainants, the initial statements were very brief and were drafted by the complainants themselves, with no input from the police whatsoever. Some supplementary statements were eventually obtained (with some Police input), but the level of information to work with was limited.

Briefing meetings then took place on zoom, which made trial prep across the Pacific reasonably seamless. After much debate, at the eleventh hour we decided to move over to an assessor’s trial. The court were only notified of this change in election a few days before the trial, but they didn’t bat an eyelid and duly arranged for assessors to be made available.

I arrived in Samoa in late July, the best time to visit apparently because of the “moderate” temperatures (27 degrees). The assigned prosecutor was Pip Currie from the Crown Solicitor’s office in Christchurch who had been brought over to prosecute four back-to-back trials due to the lack of local senior local prosecutors. This reciprocation with New Zealand

was a real feature of my trip with senior counsel having flown over a week earlier to train the Attorney General’s office and then another group of lawyers and Judges headed by the indomitable Elaine Ward running a litigation skills programme for local solicitors.

Day One of the trial on Monday involved admission to the local bar. Sweltering in a suit and gown, Pip and I were each required to take an oath in front of a packed mentions list. The presiding Judge then welcomed us and dryly noted that it was the annual law society golf tournament on Friday and our trial Judge, Justice Roma, was the four-time reigning champ so “please ensure the trial is completed by Thursday.” Pause. Big belly laughs.

We then entered the trial court and were greeted by five stoney-faced assessors. Before we started, it was casually mentioned one of the chosen assessors was the former Samoan Commissioner of Police and after some discussion, Justice Roma agreed he should be replaced!

Most assessors do not speak English fluently, so every word of the trial, including closing addresses, was translated line by line by a handful



L-R: Court registrar (name unknown), local prosecutor Faye Tiafau, assigned prosecutor Pip Currie, Justice Roma, Adam Holland, instructing solicitor Komisi Korua, and Court registrar (name unknown).

“I asked him what shoes I should wear, and he said jandals were fine. Things were looking up.”

of hand-picked registrars who sat or wandered around the court as they translated each spoken sentence. I did notice that the Samoan version tended to be significantly longer than the English sentence that preceded it and was later told it was not really a “line by line” translation, but more of a “line by vibe” approach which was designed to capture the general flavor of what was being said. I have to say the translators were absolutely brilliant.

In the breaks I wandered around the court building – a bright yellow monolith built by the Chinese and looking like something out of Saudi Arabia or Soviet Russia. I was told in the battle for local diplomacy the Chinese prefer building infrastructure and there were several examples of somewhat dubious architecture scattered around Apia.

At the end of the first day, Komisi told me I needed to get into the local swing of things, and he kindly purchased me a lavalava to wear with shirt and tie. I asked him what shoes I should wear, and he said jandals were fine. Things were looking up.

The trial itself was intense and difficult and at the end of formal proceedings I was told it was a

Samoa tradition for defence counsel to take the Judge, prosecutor and all the court staff out for drinks while we waited for verdicts. Now it did occur to me later that this could have possibly been a “tradition” the Judge and staff thought up about ten minutes earlier when they had a hankering for a nice cold (free) frosty one, but we all dutifully went off to a local bar.

The assessors had been released to consider their verdicts at 5pm and I wondered what would happen if they were hung, only to be told that no one could recall an assessor’s trial that did not result in verdicts.

After 40 minutes in the bar, all the registrars started looking at their watches and said it was very unusual we hadn’t received verdicts yet. After 90 minutes they said it was unprecedented and any delay was usually a better sign for the defence (which is often the reverse in New Zealand). We eventually received verdicts on 22 counts shortly after that, which was one of the longest deliberations anyone could recall. Luckily for my client, the verdicts went his way.

Although the whole process was strikingly different from New

Zealand in many ways, I was struck by the level of collegiality and warmth of everyone I encountered in Samoa. Socialising with court staff, the Judge and lawyers after the trial was refreshingly egalitarian, with everyone being given a platform to contribute and shine and all sprinkled with the Samoan sense of humour, which is hilarious.

It was a real privilege to take on this brief and to work with Komisi, who is a great man if you ever need to instruct local counsel in Apia. It was also a career highlight to complete a jury trial in jandals. ■

We welcome stories from the profession

If you have a story you'd like to share with the profession, please email us at editor@lawsociety.org.nz.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the New Zealand Law Society.

BOOK REVIEW

An amusement on law and literature

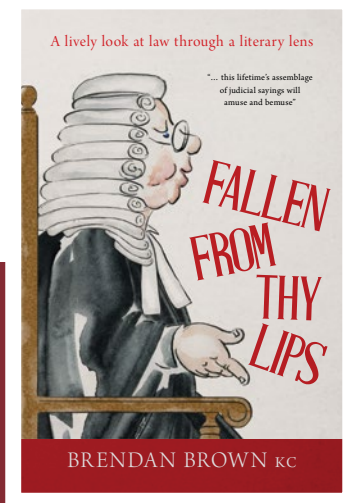
This new book is perfect for those who love words, literature and the law

BY **BRONWYN JONES**

Fallen from thy lips

Author: Brendan Brown KC **Publisher:** The Copy Press, 2026

Format: Print **Law Library:** Wellington



If you've ever come across a few lines in a judgment that made you chortle, and wished you'd jotted them down, then *Fallen From Thy Lips* is for you.

This book is in three parts, each of which stands on its own. Part one is anthological in nature, part two relates to the "judicial resolution of disputes" (as described by the author), and part three is a mélange of legal topics that took the author's fancy.

My favourite is the first part and especially the chapter 'For the Young at Heart: a trip through childhood with a legal lens'. Who knew the Brothers Grimm studied law or that the Pied Piper appears so often in it? The Wombles, Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan, Pinocchio and even Harry Potter all feature. Classics fans

will love the 'Myths and Fables' chapter. There's a section devoted to Shakespeare and thespians and theatre goers will enjoy the 'Stage and Screen' chapter.

My pick from part two is 'Playing by the Rules', where judges cover some legal fundamentals in memorable and entertaining ways. This includes the importance of "common sense", the rule of precedent, ratio decidendi and obiter dicta and "judges make law".

In part three, the final chapter 'May it Please the Court' offers a window into advocacy: when to stop, how to interpret a judicial compliment (these nearly always include the word "succinct"), and how to reject an argument with diplomacy and wit. The examples of parrying between counsel and the bench are especially amusing.

Do not let the footnotes put you off. Far from being patronising as the author feared, they provide helpful elucidation. His admission of bending the style guide caused me slight palpitations, but he is right – it serves readability.

This book is like a warm, amusing meandering conversation on a summer afternoon: uplifting and a reminder of why you love your profession. I was unprepared for how much I enjoyed it and I kept picking it up to reread little witticisms. Sadly, I had to return it to the Law Society Library, but I'll be buying my own copy. ■

Bronwyn Jones is an avid reader as well as General Manager Policy, Courts and Government at the Law Society.

OFF THE SHELF

Win a book

The New Zealand Law Society Library is giving one lucky reader the chance to win a copy of *Parliamentary Privilege in Aotearoa New Zealand* by Sir Geoffrey Palmer. Kindly supplied by Te Herenga Waka University Press.

To enter the draw, email library@lawsociety.org.nz with:

- "LT966 Win a Book" in the subject line
- Your first and last name
- The correct answer to this question: Which Law Society Library holds a copy of *The Cambridge Handbook of AI and Technologies in Courts*?

Only complete and correct entries will be accepted.

Winter LawTalk winner:

Congratulations to barrister Sudha Durlabh, who won a copy of *Sentencing Law in New Zealand*.

T&Cs

Only one entry per person. Entrants must hold a New Zealand postal address.

Entries close at 5pm on Monday 30 November 2026. Winner will be drawn at random on Tuesday 1 December 2026. The prize is not transferable or redeemable for cash, nor can it be exchanged for any other product or service. The judge's decision is final.

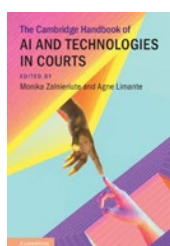
Your personal information will only be used for purposes relating to the draw. The winner will be notified by email, and if they agree, their name will be published in LawTalk.

Further information about how the Law Society handles information including personal information is set out in the Law Society's Information Handling Policy.



Read the Information Handling Policy.

New titles at the Law Society Library



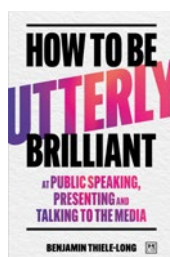
The Cambridge Handbook of AI and Technologies in Courts

Author: Monika Zalnierlute & Agne Limante

Publisher: Cambridge University Press, 2026

Format: Print **Law Library:** Auckland

Explores how AI is reshaping courts and judicial processes globally, treating its adoption as a challenge that goes beyond technology alone. This handbook examines AI assisted judicial decision making, case management, evidence and sentencing as well as the safeguards needed to protect transparency, accountability and the rule of law. International comparison includes Australia and New Zealand.



How to be utterly brilliant at public speaking, presenting and talking to the media

Author: Benjamin Thiele-Long

Publisher: LID Publishing, 2025

Format: Print **Law Library:** Wellington

Written by a former barrister and communications adviser, this practical guide demystifies public speaking, presentations and media interviews. Packed with actionable techniques rather than theory, it shows how to communicate with clarity, confidence and persuasion. A useful resource for lawyers looking to strengthen advocacy, client engagement and their professional profile. ■

The Law Society Library continuously adds to its collection with new editions and the latest titles. These titles are just two of our recent acquisitions. Search the Law Library Catalogue available on the Law Society website or email us at library@lawsociety.org.nz to obtain book excerpts through our Document Delivery Service.

Upcoming CLE events

Asset Protection Update

18 February 2027

International Trust Disputes in the New Zealand Courts

25 February 2027

Legal Executives Conference

24-25 May 2027



Register
now at
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