



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

Media Release

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Kaitāia District Court next to adopt the “Te Ao Mārama - Enlightened Justice for All” initiative

The Chief District Court Judge, Judge Heemi Taumaunu, along with the Principal Youth Court Judge, Judge John Walker and the Acting Principal Family Court Judge, Judge Stephen Coyle, have announced the Kaitāia District Court as the next location to implement the Te Ao Mārama - Enlightened Justice for All model.

The judicially-led Te Ao Mārama - Enlightened Justice for All initiative was first announced in 2020 by Chief District Court Judge Heemi Taumaunu in response to long-standing calls for transformative change to Aotearoa’s justice system.

Te Ao Mārama literally translates as the “world of light”. For the District Court it means “enlightened justice for all” where judges adopt best practices predominantly used in the District Court’s specialist courts and a solution-focused judging approach for all New Zealanders. Supported by the Ministry of Justice and working together with local iwi and community, the District Court’s vision is for the Te Ao Mārama model to be implemented across all court sites and divisions including criminal, family, youth, civil and the Disputes Tribunal.

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

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

Kaitāia District Court has embraced the initiative for a number of reasons. According to District Court Judge, Judge Davis, the court is well supported by its local community. “Kaitāia has services and agencies willing and available to help ensure that the underlying needs of those affected by the business of the court can be addressed, including very active Māori social and health services.”

“The implementation of the Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata programme in Kaitiāia in late March 2022, a whānau-centred initiative to support offenders, victims and whānau through the court process, marked the first milestone on the journey to a more enlightened approach to justice for everyone affected by the business of the court and for the region as a whole. It is an important part of the wider Te Ao Mārama model,” Judge Davis says.

Chief Judge says that for Te Ao Mārama to succeed, it needs to invite the strength and wisdom of iwi and community input into the courtroom.

The Te Ao Mārama – Enlightened Justice for All initiative is being developed by working together with local iwi and local communities, justice sector representatives and representatives of the legal profession, both nationally and locally. The next step to implement the Te Ao Mārama model in Kaitiāia is for everyone to work together to make the Kaitiāia District Court better reflect and address the needs of the local community.”

The establishment of Te Ao Mārama model is also currently underway in Gisborne and Hamilton.

Ends

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Background to Te Ao Mārama – Enlightened justice for All

The Te Ao Mārama initiative seeks to enhance access to justice for all people.

Implementation is focused on:

- ensuring that all people who appear in mainstream courts, regardless of whether they are defendants, victims, complainants, witnesses, parties or support people, are provided opportunities to benefit from best practice lessons established in specialist courts
- inviting the strength and support provided by local iwi and local communities into the court
- restoration and rehabilitation for all people affected by the business of the court.

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

- using plain language and toning down formalities in court
- increasing community involvement and voice
- improving availability of information
- addressing ‘drivers’ of offending
- coordination between justice sector agencies
- judges taking on a more active role
- infusing te reo and tikanga Māori.

Implementation is guided principles which are applied with specific court protocols. These include:

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

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

Further detail on Te Ao Mārama – Enlightened justice for All is available on the Ministry of Justice website.

[Te Ao Mārama | New Zealand Ministry of Justice](#)

Background to Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata

The overarching aims of the Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata initiative are to:

- reduce the imprisonment rates for Māori in the target courts by providing Judges with better information about offenders' backgrounds, circumstances and facts contributing to reoffending, as well as the support available and plans to address those factors
- reduce the reoffending rates for Māori in the target courts by supporting community involvement, wraparound services for participants and keeping whānau together
- humanise the court experience by seeing people in a context that is wider than their alleged offence.

Te Tāhū o te Ture, the Ministry of Justice is committed to building strong, meaningful partnerships with iwi mandated service providers and supports the implementation of Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata at a local level.

Iwi mandated service providers identify any factors contributing to offending and work with offenders, victims and whānau to understand their needs and circumstances. They are connected to the appropriate services to address those needs and, where necessary, assist in the creation and implementation of a support plan with the whānau.

Where required, information will be provided to the Court about the circumstances and the support available to address identified needs.

Victims, like whānau, are included and supported to ensure their views and needs are addressed.

Over time, Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata will be available in more locations, to be confirmed in due course.

Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata contributes to the realisation of the [Te Ao Mārama](#) vision for the District Court, and the overarching outcomes of meeting the needs of local iwi and communities, by tailoring services in each Court, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata, gifted the name Tuteāniwaniwa by Kaitiāia service provider Waitomo Papakāinga Development Society Inc, was implemented in the Kaitiāia District Court in late March 2022.

Further information relevant to Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata is available on the Ministry of Justice website.

[Whakaorangia te Mana Tangata | New Zealand Ministry of Justice](#)