



Annual Report of the

**NEW ZEALAND
LAWYERS AND CONVEYANCERS
DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL**

For the 12 months ended 30 June 2025

Presented to the Minister of Justice, the Hon Paul Goldsmith
The New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa
The New Zealand Society of Conveyancers

Pursuant to section 259 of the Lawyers and Conveyancers Act 2006

Dale Clarkson

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New Zealand Lawyers and Conveyancers Disciplinary Tribunal

Introduction

The New Zealand Lawyers and Conveyancers Disciplinary Tribunal (the Tribunal) was established with effect from 1 August 2008 by the Lawyers and Conveyancers Act 2006 (the Act).

The formal functions of the Tribunal are, broadly, to hear and determine: professional disciplinary charges of a more serious nature laid against a legal or conveyancing practitioner; applications to have persons restored to the roll or register of practitioners, or to allow their employment by a practitioner; appeals against a refusal to issue a practising certificate to a practitioner; and, various associated applications, including orders affecting non-practitioner employees of practitioners.

Indirectly, it is to be hoped that the processes and determinations of the Tribunal assist the two professions in maintaining the high standards of conduct, which the public are entitled to expect.

The Tribunal may impose a range of sanctions in relation to its determinations including suspension of a practitioner from practice, striking off from the roll of barristers and solicitors, cancelling registration as a conveyancing practitioner, the imposition of a fine of up to \$30,000 as a fiscal penalty, and the prohibition of employment in respect of non-practitioner employees working in a legal or conveyancing practice.

The Act has a more consumer-oriented approach than its predecessor, the Law Practitioners Act 1982, providing a “more responsive regulatory regime”. This responsive regulatory aspect is reinforced as part of s 231 “responsibilities of chairperson” where subsection (1)(a) refers to the “orderly and expeditious discharge of the functions of the Disciplinary Tribunal”.

The purposes of the Act are set out in s 3 as follows:

“3 Purposes

- (1) The purposes of this Act are—
 - (a) to maintain public confidence in the provision of legal services and conveyancing services;
 - (b) to protect the consumers of legal services and conveyancing services;
 - (c) to recognise the status of the legal profession and to establish the new profession of conveyancing practitioner.
- (2) To achieve those purposes, this Act, among other things, —
 - (a) reforms the law relating to lawyers;
 - (b) provides for a more responsive regulatory regime in relation to lawyers and conveyancers;
 - (c) enables conveyancing to be carried out both—
 - (i) by lawyers; and
 - (ii) by conveyancing practitioners;
 - (d) states the fundamental obligations with which, in the public interest, all lawyers and all conveyancing practitioners must comply in providing regulated services;
 - (e) repeals the Law Practitioners Act 1982.”

Executive summary

While we consider that face to face hearings is the preferable process, we have built on our experience of remote hearings from Covid days. The use of technology to allow remote participation in hearings has reduced costs for the parties and witnesses, and has enabled hearings to proceed when a participant is ill, or unable to travel, thereby avoiding adjournments.

The Tribunal's processes are flexible enough to accommodate overseas participants, by sitting outside of conventional hours.

The number of cases has continued to be a low proportion of the number of lawyers and conveyancers practising in New Zealand. But at the same time those cases with which the Tribunal deals can be difficult, involving complex issues of law. They often require an individualised approach. Occasionally, they can involve long hearings. Sensitive cases involving allegations of, for example, sexual harassment, require careful management.

Processes

The Chair and Deputy Chair convene pre-hearing conferences for each case, in order to isolate the issues to be determined, and identify any areas of agreement. Directions are made for the filing of evidence and other matters required to progress to a hearing.

A later, setting-down conference is held, to accurately estimate the duration of the hearing.

These conferences are usually conducted by telephone, to minimise costs. Sometimes both the issues and setting down matters can be dealt with in the one conference, which reduces costs.

We aim to keep each matter moving steadily to a hearing at the earliest possible opportunity. Obstacles to swift disposition do occur, quite properly, from the need at times to receive expert evidence, and because of the commitments of counsel representing the parties. Those counsel are normally at a senior level in the profession, and often have limited availability when scheduling hearings.

The lawyer and lay members of the Tribunal take pains to be available promptly, even where a hearing is lengthy. Hearings vary in length from half a day to multiple days.

Hearing time is kept to a minimum by the Tribunal's practice of taking all evidence in chief "as read", and directing that affidavits are filed well in advance of the hearing. This means that the hearing can proceed on the basis of cross-examination of witnesses, where required, questions from the Tribunal, and submissions from the parties.

Unless the person charged has indicated in advance that he or she acknowledges the charges, penalty hearings are normally held separately from the liability hearing, so that the Tribunal has the opportunity of first providing a reasoned decision as to the level of liability, and the submissions on penalty can thereby be more focussed.

There are often interlocutory applications requiring adjudication prior to hearing, some of which (of a procedural nature) can be considered by the Chair alone, and some of which require the convening of the full, or reduced number Tribunal.

A reduced quorum, consisting of three members (Chair, one lay member and one lawyer member), is permitted under the Act to consider applications for Interim Suppression of Name and for Interim Suspension Orders. These provisions allow speedier consideration of such applications at a considerably reduced cost.

At times, in order to achieve speedier consideration and reduced costs, with agreement of the parties, some hearings have been held remotely (by audio-visual link), or by telephone, or considered on the papers.

Cost recovery

The Tribunal has the jurisdiction (s 249) to order costs against the person charged (and in certain cases against other parties), to reimburse in full, or in part, the costs to the profession as a whole, of upholding disciplinary standards.

In addition, there is a mandatory requirement to order the costs of the Tribunal itself, against the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa (s 257).¹ In the year to 30 June 2025, these orders totalled \$203,904.

The efficient operating of the Tribunal means that this partial-costs-recovery model has been successful in minimising costs to the taxpayer.

The model could be further enhanced by a legislative amendment broadening the range of cases where a s 257 order is mandated.²

Numbers and type of caseload

The pages following summarise the cases received and disposed of during the reporting period.

The Tribunal continues to hear cases within a wide variety of contexts. Those involving sexual harassment attract media attention. However, cases involving misuse of funds, conflicts of interests and other breaches of professional standards comprise the bulk of the work undertaken.

We note that there can be a delay of some years before a complaint, having been through Standards Committee and Legal Complaints Review Officer (LCRO) processes, reaches the Tribunal in the form of charges.

¹ Lawyers and Conveyancers Act 2006.

² At present s 257 only applies on the determination of **charges**, leaving out appeals from refusal to issue a practising certificate, applications for reinstatement to the roll and removal of other practising restrictions.

Summary of caseload activity in the reporting period

Proceedings before the Tribunal fall into three categories: Charges, Appeals and Applications.

- **Charges**

Laid by a Standards Committee of the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa or the New Zealand Society of Conveyancers, or the Legal Complaints Review Officer.

- **Appeals**

A person may appeal to the Tribunal against any decision of the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa or the New Zealand Society of Conveyancers to decline to issue, or to refuse to issue, a practising certificate to the person.

- **Applications**

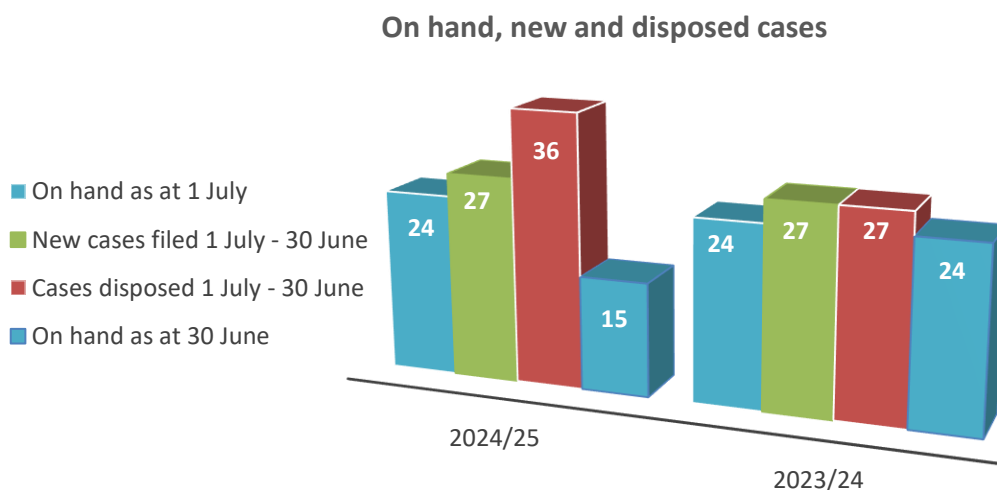
Various applications including:

- restoration of name to the roll or register
- consent to employ
- revocation of an order in respect of an employee
- to practise on own account

Below is a snapshot of the caseload activity during the reporting period, which is broken down in a bit more detail over the following pages:

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Cases on hand as at 1 July 2024 | 24 |
| New cases filed 1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025 | 27 |
| Cases disposed 1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025 | 36 |
| Cases on hand as at 30 June 2025 | 15 |

The bar chart below shows a comparison of the on hand, new and disposed cases for this reporting period, as against the last reporting period.



New cases filed

The breakdown of the **27** new cases filed during the reporting period is:

- **26** cases of charges
- **1** appeal against a decision of the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa declining to issue a practising certificate

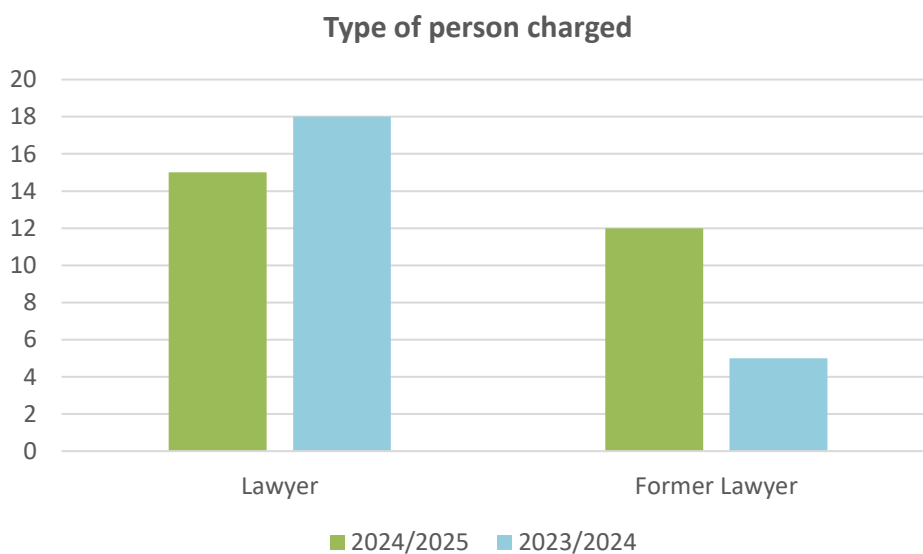
For the **26** cases of charges, these were all cases of charges laid by a Standards Committee of the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa.

For the **26** cases of charges, the breakdown of the type of person charged is:

- **15** lawyers
- **12** former lawyers

The number of type of person charged is higher than the number of cases of charges as in one case charges were laid against two lawyers.

The bar chart below shows a comparison of the type of person charged for this reporting period, as against the last reporting period.



The charges laid arose either from complaints and/or own motion investigations by a Standards Committee of the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa. The number of charges laid in each case is variable and may include charges laid in the alternative. Where this occurs, we have counted the alternatives as one charge.

In the **26** cases of charges filed, the breakdown of the origin of the charge is:

- **6** cases arose from complaints against a lawyer
- **6** cases arose from complaints against a former lawyer
- **8** cases arose from own motion investigations against a lawyer
- **6** cases arose from own motion investigations against a former lawyer

Cases disposed

During the period **36** cases were disposed. Hearings were completed for 34 cases (either face to face or remote), 1 case was determined on the papers, and 1 case was withdrawn.

The breakdown of the **36** cases disposed during the reporting period is:

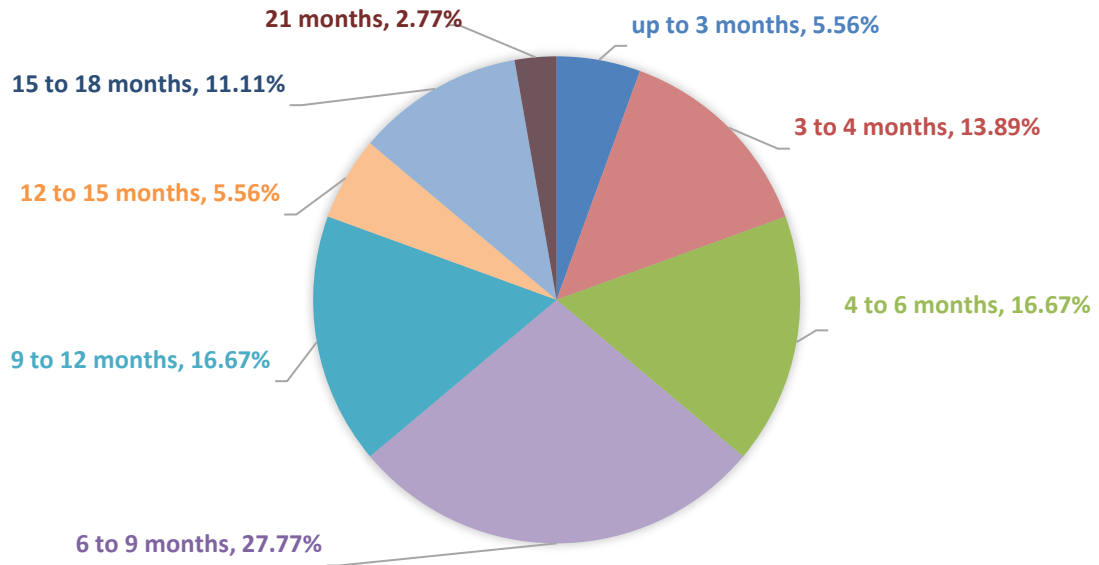
- **34** cases of charges (see breakdown below)
- **2** applications for restoration to the roll (granted)

The **34** cases of charges, were disposed of in the following manner:

| Manner in which disposed | Number of cases |
|---|-----------------|
| Charge/charges were admitted and required a hearing as to penalty only | 16 |
| Charge/charges were admitted at a lower level and required a hearing to deal with the level of liability and penalty together (in each case the charge/s were found proven at higher level than admitted) | 2 |
| Charge was admitted and penalty was determined on the papers | 1 |
| Charge/charges were defended, required a hearing on liability, followed by a separate hearing on penalty, as in each case the charge/charges were proven | 9 |
| Formal proof hearing to deal with both liability and penalty (in each case the charge/charges were proven) | 4 |
| Charges were dismissed following a defended hearing | 1 |
| Charges were withdrawn by consent of the Tribunal at the request of the Standards Committee (to give effect to an LCRO decision) | 1 |

The pie chart on the following page shows a breakdown for the 36 disposed cases, as to the length of time from the date a case was received, to the date it was disposed. As can be seen, **80.56%** were disposed of in less than 12 months, **36.12%** in less than six months.

Number of days from date received to date disposed



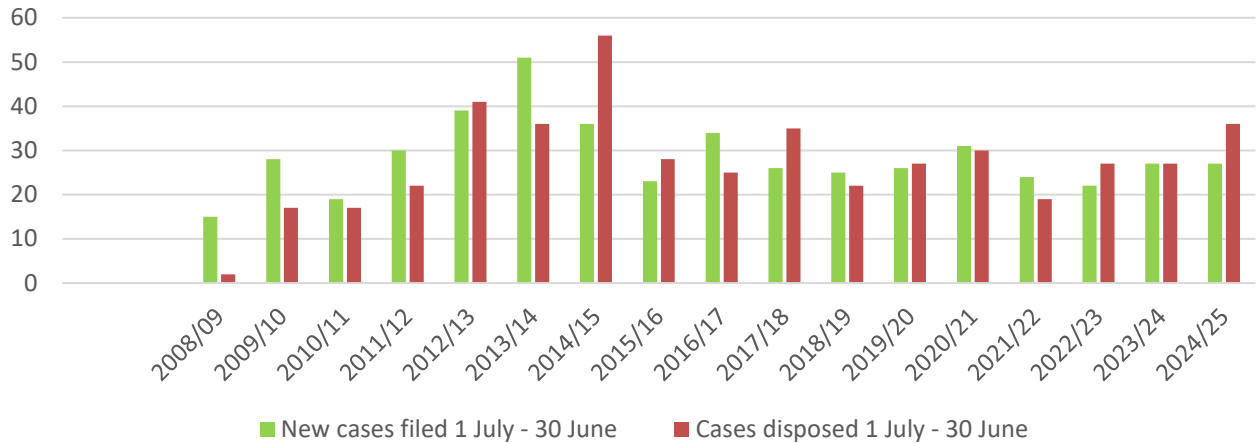
The information in the pie chart above, in table form.

| Timeframe | Number of cases | Percentage of total disposed |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| up to 3 months | 2 | 5.56% |
| 3 to 4 months | 5 | 13.89% |
| 4 to 6 months | 6 | 16.67% |
| 6 to 9 months | 10 | 27.77% |
| 9 to 12 months | 6 | 16.67% |
| 12 to 15 months | 2 | 5.56% |
| 15 to 18 months | 4 | 11.11% |
| 21 months | 1 | 2.77% |
| | 36 | 100% |

Comparison of new and disposed cases

It is of interest to observe the variations in the number of new cases filed and cases disposed each year, as shown in the bar chart on the following page, since the Tribunal was established.

Comparison of new cases and disposed cases 1 July 2008 - 30 June 2025



Hearings

During the period the Tribunal held **44** hearings (this includes face to face and remote hearings), over **31** sitting days. Where the person charged has more than one set of proceedings against them, where possible, the proceedings will be heard at the same time, and are counted as one hearing.

The *viva voce* hearings varied in length from half a day to three days. On some days more than one matter was heard, in order to best utilise the time of the members and minimise any travel costs.

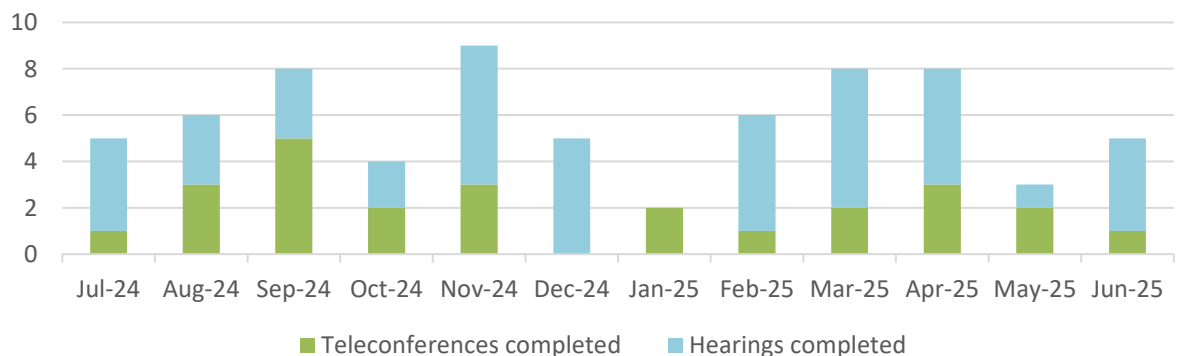
In addition to the hearings, the Tribunal determined one case of charges on the papers, as well as some interlocutory applications.

Upcoming hearings are listed on the Tribunal’s website and can be found at the link below:

<https://www.justice.govt.nz/tribunals/lawyers-and-conveyancers/lc-disciplinary-tribunal/about/upcoming-hearings/>

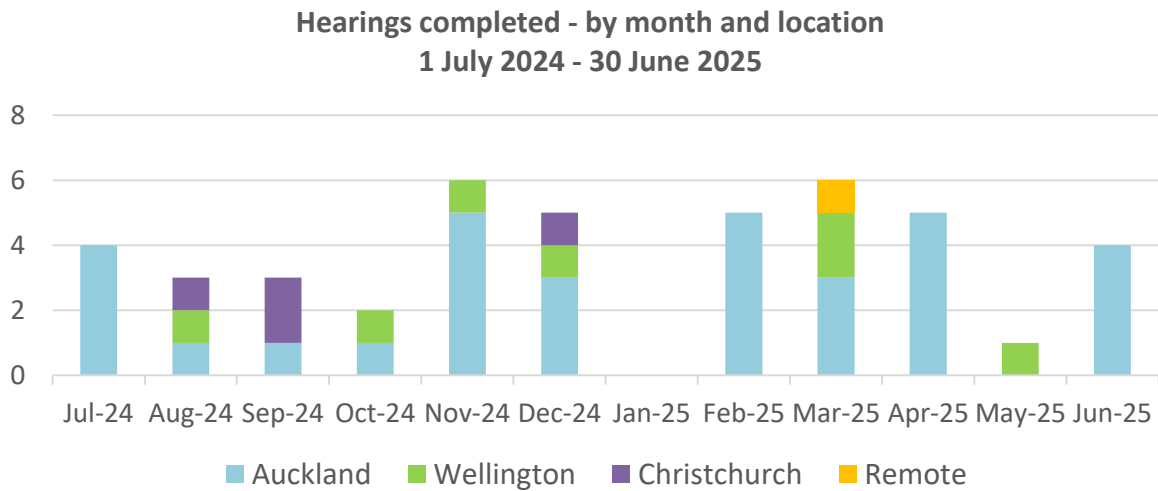
The bar chart below shows the number of hearings and teleconferences completed for the reporting period.

Hearings and Teleconferences completed
1 July 2024 - 30 June 2025

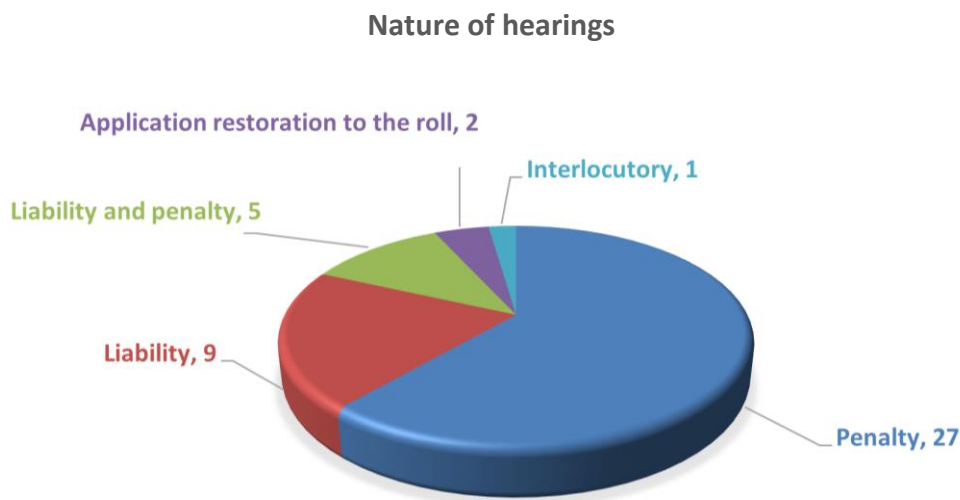


Nature of the hearings

The bar chart below shows the breakdown of the **44** hearings held, by month and location.



The pie chart below shows the breakdown as to the nature of the **44** hearings held, categorised as to the purpose of the hearing.



Decisions

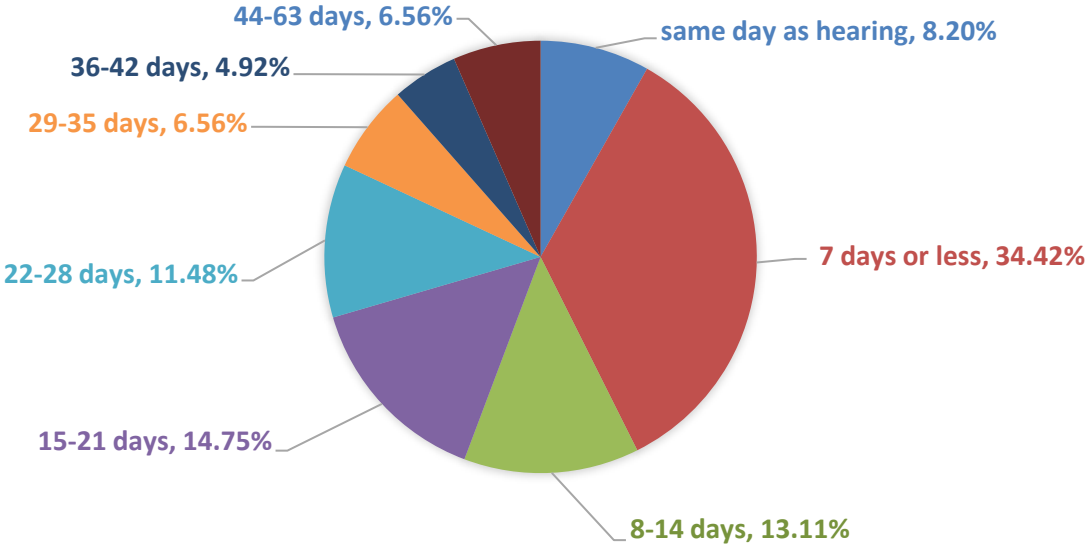
During the period **61** decisions were issued.

These were decisions concerning:

- liability (charges proven or dismissed)
- penalty (for charges admitted or charges proven)
- applications for restoration to the roll
- interlocutory applications (various)

The pie chart below shows a breakdown of the 61 decisions as to the length of time from when a hearing was completed, or if being done on the papers, from when the last of the relevant documents were filed. It can be seen that **93.44%** of the decisions were issued within 6 weeks or less. These figures do not adjust for cases where the decision was delayed because written submissions were filed after the hearing. If those adjustments were made, the issue of decisions would be revealed as uniformly prompt.

Length of time to issue decision



The information in the pie chart above, in table form.

| Duration | Number of decisions | Percentage of total number of decisions |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|
| Same day as hearing | 5 | 8.20% |
| 7 days or less | 21 | 34.42% |
| 8-14 days | 8 | 13.11% |
| 15-21 days | 9 | 14.75% |
| 22-28 days | 7 | 11.48% |
| 29-35 days | 4 | 6.56% |
| 36-42 days | 3 | 4.92% |
| 44-63 days | 4 | 6.56% |
| | 61 | 100.00% |

Penalty orders

The table below shows a breakdown of penalty orders made during this period.

| Type of order | Number of orders |
|--|------------------|
| Struck off the roll of barristers and solicitors | 7 |
| Suspended from practice | 9 |
| Censure | 14 |
| Pay a fine to the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa | 12 |
| Pay compensation | 6 |
| Refund monies paid | 3 |
| Cancel fees | 1 |
| Undergo training/education | 2 |
| Advice to be taken | 1 |
| Apology | 2 |
| Other | 4 |
| Pay or contribute to the costs of the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa | 30 |
| Reimburse the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa for the Tribunal costs | 30 |

The category of "Other", includes conditions imposed regarding disclosing disciplinary history to future employers, mentoring arrangements and supervision.

The Tribunal made **31** mandatory orders in respect of the Tribunal costs, against the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa. The quantum of that figure is noted in the Executive Summary section, on page 4, under the heading 'Costs recovery'.

Interim suspension orders

During the period the Tribunal made an order for interim suspension of **1** practitioner, pending determination of the charges laid against them.

Non-publication orders

Normally, suppression of complainant and client names and details is agreed. In addition, there are instances where personal or medical information about practitioners is not published.

Less frequently, suppression of the respondent's name is also granted, at times on an interim basis. In less than 10% of cases was permanent suppression granted.

During the period applications for suppression of the respondent's name were determined as follows:

| Type of order | Declined | Granted |
|----------------------------|----------|---------|
| Interim name suppression | 1 | 3 |
| Permanent name suppression | 4 | 3 |

Once again, I record that all of the Tribunal's work has related to the legal profession, with no matters coming forward in respect of the relatively small conveyancing profession.

Appeals

A summary of the appeals during the period is as follows:

| Description | Number |
|--------------------|--------|
| Decisions appealed | 11 |
| Appeals withdrawn | 1 |
| Appeals dismissed | 1 |
| Appeals allowed | 1 |

Membership and recruitment

The Tribunal comprises of a Chair, Deputy Chair, law and conveyancing practitioners, and lay members. The practitioner members volunteer their services without reward, and their commitment and contribution is of enormous value to the Tribunal. They are senior practitioners who are appointed by the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa Board. They have a broad range of experience and are located in different centres of the country. In convening a panel of members to sit, effort is made to use local members in order to minimise costs, provided no conflict of interest arises. Parties are advised in advance of the hearing of the composition of the Tribunal, to ensure an unanticipated conflict does not arise.

The conveyancing practitioners are appointed by the New Zealand Society of Conveyancers Board. While there are conveyancer members appointed and ready to assist, there has been no need to convene a tribunal using these members because no charges have yet been laid against a conveyancing practitioner under the Act.

The Chair and Deputy Chair both record their thanks to the members for their continued diligence and commitment to the difficult and important work of the Tribunal. In particular, it is noted that the lawyer members give their time without charge and willingly make themselves available, at times for extended periods, while still maintaining their busy practices.

Dale Clarkson, Chair

Dale Clarkson is the first Chairperson of the Tribunal, having been appointed at its inception in 2008. She retired as a full time District Court judge in 2006, then held an acting warrant and sat regularly in the District Court. She is now fully retired as a District Court judge. She graduated with a Bachelor of Laws from Auckland University in 1978 and was admitted to the Bar in 1979. She was appointed to the Bench in 1989 and served more than 32 years as a judicial officer. Ms Clarkson has presented papers on Family Law, Mediation and Professional Discipline topics nationally and internationally. She was the inaugural President of the New Zealand branch of the International Women Judges Association.

Dr John Adams, Deputy Chair

John Adams was appointed as a District Court judge (with Family Court warrant) in 1995. He retired as a fulltime District Court judge in 2014, finally retiring in 2022. He graduated with a Bachelor of Laws from Auckland University in 1970 and was admitted as a barrister and solicitor in the same year. He has considerable experience in teaching a variety of topics, including programmes for the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa and Te Kura Kaiwhakawā/Institute of Judicial Studies. He has degrees in English from Auckland University including Masters of Creative Writing (2010) and PhD (Auckland 2020). He is a published poet.

Lawyer members

As noted above, the lawyer members are appointed by the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa Board.

At the start of the reporting period there were 13 lawyer members. Twelve of those members had been reappointed, and one new member, Ingrid Taylor, had been appointed with her term beginning 1 July 2024. In October 2024 Renika Siciliano was appointed, her term beginning 7 October 2024. All lawyer member appointments were through to 30 June 2025.

Thirteen lawyer members were reappointed on 27 June 2025, through to 30 June 2026 and one new member, Zane Kennedy KC was appointed, with his term beginning 1 July 2025, for the same term.

Hon Paul Heath KC did not seek reappointment, following his appointment to sit as a Judge of the Abu Dhabi Global Market Courts. We congratulate Paul on this important appointment. We shall badly miss Paul's extensive judicial experience, his thoughtful approach and willingness to work collaboratively.

Conveyancing practitioner members

These members are appointed by the New Zealand Society of Conveyancers Board. There have been no changes during the reporting period.

Lay members

At the start of the reporting period there were eight lay members. In October 2024 three new lay members were appointed – Karissa Hyde, Dr Brian McCulloch and Judith Varcoe. Further recruitment is underway.

Appendix 1 lists the names of members during the reporting period.

Performance standards of members

Members are kept apprised of recent decisions and a comparative study of those decisions assists them in achieving consistency of decision-making. In training we have discussed the implications of recent High Court and Court of Appeal decisions on disciplinary issues.

New members are inducted by the chairperson, with a full review of the governing legislation, procedural rules and court etiquette. Ethical duties of members are also carefully outlined, as are evidential rules and the rules underlying natural justice.

Administration

The Tribunal's Case Manager, Ms Susan Knight has continued to efficiently co-ordinate all of the administration including the complex task of organising 5-member hearings, at various hearing venues.

The Chair and Deputy Chair wish to record their particular gratitude to Ms Knight for her exceptional performance in her role, and for the ongoing support she provides to all Tribunal members. Her personal skills are very much appreciated by all members. Ms Knight has now been with the Tribunal for 14 years, and her experience, in particular her attention to detail in proof-reading decisions, is hugely valued. Members continue to be awed by her ability to detect errors in a decision which has already passed five sets of eyes a number of times.

The Tribunal sits in different venues according to the location of the relevant practitioner, complainant and/or Standards Committee. The Tribunal lists upcoming hearings on the Ministry of Justice's Lawyers and Conveyancers Disciplinary Tribunal website. In determining venue, we also attempt to locate the most cost-effective venue for the hearing.

The very peripatetic nature of the Tribunal and the large sitting numbers (a quorum of five members is required) does create difficulties for locating hearing rooms from time to time.

To ensure efficiency in dealing expeditiously with case load two divisions were established in 2009 under s 229 of the Act. The divisions are chaired by the Chair and Deputy Chair respectively.

Determinations and Transparency

The Tribunal posts its substantive decisions on the Ministry of Justice website promptly, so that they are generally accessible to the public and the profession. This requires careful editing to preserve anonymity in some cases, particularly to prevent the identification of complainants where suppression has been ordered.

The Chair and Deputy Chair aim to build up a body of consistent and credible decisions as an essential database for the Tribunal's work. The careful editing skills of the Tribunal's Case Manager are an integral part of this process.

There are significant public interest issues arising in the matters before the Tribunal in its substantive hearings, as well as at some of its pre-trial hearings, particularly in relation to intervention and suppression. Accredited members of the media attend regularly to report proceedings. Permission is also commonly granted to media representatives to attend hearings by audio-visual link. This enables the transparency and openness of process contemplated by s 240.³ While privacy of complainants, and of practitioners - whose personal and medical information is generally protected - the tribunal regards openness of the process as an important component of professional discipline. The public has a right to scrutinise the process, particularly at the hearing.

Hearings often involve complex factual and legal issues, frequently involve Senior Counsel, and can extend for some days. That complexity is reflected in the length and style of the Tribunal's written judgments.

Tribunal decisions are normally written by the Chair or Deputy Chair in respect of hearings they have chaired, but I should also express my thanks and appreciation for the significant input of Tribunal members, both lay and lawyer, as their contribution is invaluable in completing any decision.

Tribunal decisions are published on the Ministry of Justice website. They can be accessed at:

<https://www.justice.govt.nz/courts/decisions/>

³ Lawyers and Conveyancers Act 2006.

Performance of the Act

The consumer focus of the Act is a consistent theme in the determinations of the Tribunal and appellate court decisions. The Act would appear to be achieving its aims in this regard, but also in ensuring the continuing high reputation of the profession. It is well understood that the reputation of the legal profession is its greatest asset and that there is a collective responsibility amongst lawyers to uphold professional standards.

As stated in one of the leading cases in lawyers' discipline, a person entrusting a lawyer with possibly the most important transaction or problem of a lifetime, must be able to trust that lawyer "to the ends of the earth".⁴

As at 30 June 2024 there were 17,506 lawyers holding practising certificates⁵. The very small number of lawyers (less than 0.2%) appearing before the Tribunal in comparison with the total number of lawyers practising in New Zealand suggests that these high standards are being upheld.

Looking ahead

The Tribunal is becoming more widely known as an independent statutory tribunal as it becomes involved in more professional disciplinary cases and applications. We note, however, that the news media, and even members of the legal profession can still refer to the Tribunal as the "Law Society Disciplinary Tribunal", or similar, which tends to confuse the independent nature and role of the Tribunal.

There could perhaps be greater recognition by the media that we operate as a separate judicial body outside the regulatory organisations we oversee. That separation enhances public confidence in the disciplinary regime applicable to lawyers and conveyancers.

We observe that the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa is very efficient at providing press releases following the release of Tribunal decisions, which assists the transparency of the process and provides important information to the public.

A recent comprehensive review of the regulatory functions of the New Zealand Law Society, has recommended sweeping changes. Such changes do not impinge upon the work of the Tribunal.



D F Clarkson
Chair

⁴ *Bolton v Law Society* [1994] 2 All ER 486.

⁵ Statistic provided by the New Zealand Law Society Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa.

Membership during the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025

Chair

Dale Clarkson

Deputy Chair

Dr John Adams

Lawyer Members

Hon Paul Heath KC

Ian Hunt

Stephen Hunter KC

Susan Hughes KC

Kristine King

Tim Mackenzie

Graham McKenzie

Niamh McMahon

Gaeline Phipps

Mary Scholtens KC

Renika Siciliano

Nura Taefi KC

Ingrid Taylor

Reina Va'ai

Lay Members

Karissa Hyde

Amanda Kinzett

Hector Matthews

Dr Brian McCulloch

Marjorie Noble

Kenneth Raureti

Professor Dugald Scott

Susanna Stuart

Dr Daniel Tulloch

Judith Varcoe

Pele Walker MNZM

Conveyancing Practitioner Members

Stefanie Crawley

John de Graaf

Simon Penketh