

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Newsletter #3 – May 2020

Kia ora koutou

I appreciate it has been a challenging time for everyone as New Zealand has had to adjust to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, but hopefully the move to Alert Level 3 means we've reached a turning point, even if only a gentle one. Despite the disruption to normal work routines I am pleased to report that work to establish the Criminal Cases Review Commission, the new miscarriage of justice body, has remained largely on track. It is now less than two months until we hit our target date for taking applications - 1 July.

Since I was last in touch we've taken some key decisions.

Recruitment of Commissioners

During April the interviews for the Commissioner roles were completed. We were fortunate to have such an impressive list of candidates to consider. The selection panel has now submitted names to Justice Minister Andrew Little for his consideration. The next step will be a recommendation to the Cabinet Appointments and Honours Committee, and from there to Cabinet. It is my hope that appointments will be made and announced by late May.

The Minister must appoint a Deputy Chief Commissioner and up to five other Commissioners, to join me in making up the Commission and the Board. In keeping with our statutory requirements, at least one member will have knowledge or understanding of te ao Māori and Māori tikanga, a third of us will be legally qualified with a minimum of seven years' experience, and two-thirds will have criminal justice experience or expertise relevant to the CCRC'S functions.

I am confident that we are going to have a very capable Commission which will have the skills, knowledge and experience to manage the CCRC's primary function, which is to investigate and review convictions and sentences and to decide whether or not to refer them back to the appeal court.

Property

The CCRC has now secured a property in central Hamilton to serve as our base. A lease agreement has been signed and hopefully fit-out planning can get under way shortly, so we can be ready for the scheduled start-up date of 1 July. But like with everything in life at present, the Covid-19 lockdown environment could impact on the timeline we've set for ourselves. I will let you know if anything changes.

There has been a lot of interest in the decision to have our office in Hamilton. As I noted in an earlier newsletter, this reflects a desire to operate at arm's length from government and away from the major judicial centres in Auckland and Wellington. The independence of the CCRC is something I continually stress in interactions with our stakeholders.

Advisory Group

I have had very useful meetings with our six-member Establishment Advisory Group over the past month, as we put the CCRC's building blocks in place. The group's purpose is to advise concerning all of our establishment work, so that we are properly set up to give effect to the Criminal Cases Review Commission Act 2019. I am finding the Advisory Group adds real value to the steps we have been taking.

We have been working our way through a substantial agenda, including how the CCRC will operate, the application process, strategy, governance, and look and feel of the CCRC website and the other communication tools we will use.

The development of our website is progressing well, and we should be in a position to launch an interim site shortly. It will have the CCRC application form on it, which will enable those wanting to apply for a review of their conviction or sentence to start preparing applications to be received on 1 July. I will report when this becomes available.

Finally, please forward this newsletter to anyone who you think may be interested. If you no longer wish to receive the newsletter, please message us at the email address below.

Ngā mihi nui,

Colin Carruthers QC
Chief Commissioner, Criminal Cases Review Commission

Questions? Email us at ccrcimplementation@justice.govt.nz or write to us at:

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