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**CHIEF JUDGE CHRISTINA INGLIS**  
on behalf of  
Te Kōti Take Mahi o Aotearoa | the Employment Court of New Zealand

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E ngā mana e ngā reo, e rau rangatira ma, tēnā koutou.

Tuatahi e mihi ana ki a Tuheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero te tuawhita te Kīngi Māori rāua ko te Makau Ariki Atawhai me te kāhui Ariki nui tonu.

Tuarua, Waikato taniwha rau he piko he taniwha he piko he taniwha, mihi mai rā.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

Greetings to all assembled here. Firstly, I acknowledge King Tuheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Māori King and the Kīngitanga.

Secondly, to the people of the Waikato. I acknowledge the welcome afforded to us to be present here today, at this very special and historic sitting of Te Kōti Take Mahi o Aotearoa – the Employment Court of New Zealand.

Before I go further, I will take the appearances of senior counsel as is customary at formal sittings of the Court such as this.

The new Judge will take her oaths of office later, after a number of speakers have been invited to address the Court. She will then be offered the opportunity to speak in reply.

First, I wish to say a few words.

I acknowledge members of the new Judge's whānau who are here with her today, particularly her partner (Josh Rerekura); mother (Paea King); sister and brother (Melissa and Charles), together with what has been described as "a multitude of nieces and nephews", and friends. This is a very proud day for each of you. Judge King's appointment to the Court reflects on the influence you have had, in your own way, on her journey to the bench.

The importance of this occasion is underscored by the constellation of Judges who have travelled to support the latest member of our judicial whānau – the Judges of the Employment Court, Judges Holden, Beck and Corkill; the Chief Judge of the Māori Land Court and Chair of the Waitangi Tribunal, Judge Fox; the Chief Judge of the Environment Court, Judge Kirkpatrick; judges of the Environment and District Courts.

And it is underscored by the presence of senior Ministry of Justice officials, including Jacqueline Shannon and Harry Johnson. The large number of practitioners here today marks the esteem and affection within which the new Judge is held by the profession.

A number of organisations are also represented, including the New Zealand Law Society, the Auckland District Law Society, Te Hunga Rōia Māori, the Employment Law Institute of New Zealand, the New Zealand Bar Association, Business New Zealand and the Council of Trade Unions. I will invite them to address the Court shortly, as well as Ms Walker from the Crown Solicitor's office on behalf of the Attorney-General.

There are people who cannot be here today, including Judge Smith, senior Judge of the Employment Court, who is currently overseas, and has asked me to express his sincere regret at not being here to welcome our new colleague and to do so in such special surroundings. Former Chief Judge of the Employment Court, Graeme Colgan (who is also overseas), had this to say:

“Please convey my regrets to those gathered for this special occasion and pass on my best wishes to the new Judge, my confidence that hers will be a great appointment and my confidence that she is joining a supportive and collegial bench in her important role.

I am very sad I will not be able to join you but this will not detract from what I am sure will be a memorable and milestone event in the Court's long history.”

The former Chief Judge had an uncanny habit of being right – sometimes seeing the lie of the legal landscape well before anyone else, including (on the odd occasion) some appellate Court Judges.

I respectfully agree with his prediction that Judge King's appointment by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Attorney-General, will be a “great one” and I do not think anyone could quibble with his observation that this is truly a milestone event in the Court's long history.

Today represents a milestone event for two reasons. This is the first time we have had the privilege of swearing in a Judge of our Court on a marae. I speak for all Judges of the Court when I say that we feel very privileged to be here. And can I say that the paintwork (which Judge King tells me she and others have been feverishly working on over the last week or so) looks great. Such multitasking abilities will stand her in very good stead for her new role on the bench.

The second reason why this is a milestone event is related to the first - Judge King is the first Māori Judge to be appointed to this Court, in its 129 years of existence.

Judge King will be the 55th Judge appointed to the Employment Court. And, of the 55 Judges appointed, she will be the fifth female Judge.

The first female Judge of the Employment Court (Judge Coral Shaw, who now chairs the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in State and Faith-based Care) was appointed to the Employment Court bench 105 years after the Court was established. Her appointment too was a first.

Change takes time; when it occurs it is worth celebrating. Today is truly a day of celebration.

Much has happened in Aotearoa over the last 129 years, and employment law and practice has not been immune from change. It continues to evolve and modernise; it must unless it is to ossify and become irrelevant.

The Court too must adapt if it is to be accessible to all, and effectively discharge its functions. It should not be forgotten that the Employment Court exists to serve all employees and all employers across the entire spectrum in our country.

The role that Judge King has been asked to take on is not easy – people sit at the heart of employment law and practice and with people comes complexity; no two cases are exactly the same; the issues are often underpinned by competing, sometimes starkly conflicting, rights and interests; and the law flexes and develops, as the legislation changes and as society's norms, expectations and the way in which working relationships are viewed, evolve.

The role of Employment Court Judge requires an unusual mix of acumen, cross-disciplinary skill, technical ability, an understanding of the reality of working relationships, of human nature and its

frailties and (from my vantage point at least) it not infrequently requires very high levels of sheer grit, determination and endurance.

Fortunately for the Court I am told by a number of sources – who will remain strictly confidential until (perhaps) later this evening – that the new Judge has inherited many of her mother’s allegedly gritty and determined characteristics.

As the Chief Justice has previously observed, judges need to be humble. They need the humility to understand that they may get it wrong; to see the human dignity in every person who appears before them; and to take the time and care to deal with each person and each situation as they present, without preconceptions or prejudice.

I am confident that Judge King will bring these important attributes to her new role; that she will take care with the work she does to serve those who come before the Court, with an understanding of the contribution the Court can and does make to the lives of ordinary everyday New Zealanders (often sitting in the shadow of the law) and society more generally.

All of this will take time and energy, and it can take a personal toll. There will be times when it will likely feel very isolated; that the weight of expectation and responsibility is heavy; the demands are great; and the (sometimes personalised) criticisms will sting.

Judge King is blessed to have the love and support of her family and community. That sort of comfort and support helps. It helps a great deal.

Judge King will also have the support of her sibling Judges, both on our Court, and across the other Courts; and the support of our wonderful judicial support staff.

And in our special jurisdiction she will have the support of a tightly knit, collegial, respectful and respected bar, which the Judges of the Employment Court very much appreciate. We value highly our constructive engagement with the employment representatives and various organisations, such as Business New Zealand and the Counsel of Trade Unions (who are here today).

At the end of the day the Court can only be effective if it is respected – and respect is earned, not demanded. We must as individual judges do our conscientious best in each case that comes before us, to do right by all people according to the law, to be diligent and humane, and to apply the highest

levels of intellectual honesty to what we do so that people can understand (and challenge if they wish) our decisions and how we have come by them. And we must continue to strive to find ways to enhance our accessibility to all.

At its heart, the Employment Court serves people.

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people who are, and must remain, centre stage.

Finally, there is one person who is not here today who I wish to acknowledge, and that is Judge King's father, Hendry King, who recently passed away. He would, of course, be exceptionally proud of you.

I believe that he is with us in spirit.

He aha te mea nui o tēnei ao, he tangata he tangata he tangata.

Nō reira

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa