



NEW ZEALAND
PAROLE BOARD

Annual Report **2023-2024**

Te whanaketanga o te whakaaro:
Change the mindset, the person will follow.



This design reflects on changing of pathways, individual growth, thus encouraging whānau growth. This talks to the many pathways one can walk in life; helping one to change their mindset is a major way to help an individual walk a new path.



Chairperson's foreword



On behalf of the New Zealand Parole Board, it is my pleasure to present this annual report covering the 2023/24 year. As always, my thanks to you for your interest in our activities.

During the 2023/24 year the Board conducted a total of 8,261 hearings.

These hearings involved a total of 4,234 offenders serving long-term sentences. Long-term sentences are in excess of two years imprisonment. The Board does not have any involvement with offenders who are sentenced to two years or less or community-based sentences.

In comparison, in the 2022/23 year the Board conducted 8,045 hearings and saw 4,062 offenders. The small increases in hearings held and offenders seen in the last 12 months – up 2.7% and 4.2% respectively, coincide with an increase in the prison population.

In what has been another busy year for the Board, there have been a number of highlights I would like to comment on.

In the last year we have seen the return to in-person hearings in prisons after three years of holding hearings via MS Teams as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We staggered the process starting in late 2023, with in-person hearings being held at all prisons from March 2024. This was a major undertaking, and I am grateful to the Department staff around the country who supported this work.

Significant progress was made on the new operating model. This will enable the administrative team supporting the Board to move away from manual, time-consuming processes, with the new digital solution on track to be delivered later in 2024.

In our work to improve the experience for victims when engaging with the Board, a short video explaining the parole process was added to the NZPB website. Many of our letters to victims were rewritten in simpler and clear language. With this latter work we applied the same principles used when updating the Victim Notification pack the previous year. It was gratifying to see the work in this critical area acknowledged at the 2023 Plain Language Awards, where the updated Victim Notification pack won the Best Plain Language Turnaround category. In presenting the award the judges noted:

“This is an outstanding example of a plain language turnaround. Your document pack deals with a hugely sensitive topic - informing victims or survivors of a crime about the impending review by the parole board of the person who committed the crime. You gently and respectfully turned the pack from something that may have been seen as ‘triggering’ or impersonal into something that respectfully gives victims a voice. Your turnaround also recognises the user’s role as integral in this part of the justice system.”

A particular highlight for me was the opportunity in March 2024 to visit five prisons with fellow Board members Judge Tania Blyth-Williams and Lawrence Tawera to meet with offenders to understand more about their knowledge of and experience with the Board. At each prison we met with five offenders individually. They were all volunteers and had a variety of sentences, crimes, and ages. All had appeared before the Board at least once; some many times. Following these meeting we spent time with local community rehabilitation and reintegration organisations to understand the challenges they faced. We greatly appreciate the frankness with which people spoke to us. The findings have given us much food for thought about what and how we communicate with offenders ahead

of their parole hearing, particularly for those seeing the Board for the first time. *[Read more about the findings on pages 6–9].*

I’d like to acknowledge the contribution of Board members Judge Charles Blackie (2017 - 24), Judge David Mather (2012 - 24) and Michael Quigg (2018 – 24), who all completed their terms with us in the last year. Further, current Board members Associate Professor Philip Brinded, Bryan McMurray and Alan Ritchie have also signalled their intent to step down from their roles by the end of 2024. In each case their experience and wisdom will be greatly missed, and I thank them for the contribution they have made to the Board.

This will also be my last report as Chair of the Board, as my current term ends later this year. I’m grateful for what has been a unique opportunity. I can say sincerely that Chairing the New Zealand Parole Board for the last six years has been the most rewarding of all my roles in the justice sector.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members, past and present, for their commitment and hard work. My thanks also to the many Department of Corrections staff who contribute to our hearings and especially to NZPB Director Karyn McLean and her team for the support they provide to the Board, the care they bring to their work and their willingness to try new ways of doing things to improve the parole experience for both offenders and victims.



Sir Ron Young
Chairperson

Photo by Dave Bull, University of Otago

Director's report

The NZPB administrative support team is made up of 35 staff, based in Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and the Hawke's Bay.

Our work on behalf of the Chair and Board members includes:

- rostering the 40 plus Board Members based throughout Aotearoa to attend three/four-person boards, 12 months of the year across 17 different boards
- scheduling all hearings and supporting over 8,000 hearings across the country, either in prison or via MS Teams
- producing and issuing notifications, material and decisions to people in prison (with the support of Parole Board Liaison Officers based in each prison) and victims
- making over 12,000 NZPB victim contacts every year via email, correspondence, and phone calls; managing face-to-face meetings between registered victims and the Board and personally communicating hearing outcomes

A particular highlight for the team in the 23/24 year was managing the return to in-person hearings in prisons, after two and a half years of running all hearings online via MS Teams due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Working closely with the Board and with our departmental colleagues, we developed a comprehensive plan for the return, taking a staggered approach, with one to two panels on-site around the country each week from November 2023.

This enabled us to progressively visit and test processes and services at all prisons. All Boards have been able to hold hearings in all prisons since March 2024.

Another priority for the team has been progressing the development of our new Parole Board Hearing System. Introducing modern and fit-for-purpose technology will facilitate a smooth and predictable end-to-end operation. We will have an easy-to-use, end-to-end digital system that will automate a range of key tasks and pre-populate information from the Department of Corrections' Integrated Offender Management System. At time of writing the build is well on track for implementation in late 2024.

A highlight has been the establishment of a dedicated Victim Advisor (VA) position to proactively engage with victims connected to the Extended Board (people on life or preventive detention sentences). The VA seeks victims' consent for their address information to be provided confidentially to the Parole Board to inform their decision-making. The VA also speaks to victims about the Board submission process, updating their contact details, advising victims of hearing outcomes and linking victims to other support services.

Another highlight was receiving the "Best Turnaround" award at the 2023 Plain Language Awards for our victim notification pack. Working collaboratively with Victim Support's Homicide Service team, and a very brave group of New Zealanders who formed the Victim Support Homicide Advisory Group, we comprehensively updated each of the documents.

We knew we were on the right track when one of the victims involved said to us, *'I was so moved by the effort and dedication of the team I cried. You have given me hope and made me feel seen and valued'*.

I would like to thank our NZPB administrative support team for their work throughout the year. The care and dedication they bring to their mahi every day, to provide quality support services that people can have trust and confidence in, is greatly appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank Sir Ron Young and all the Board members for their support over the past 12 months.

Karyn McLean
Director, NZPB Administrative Support Team



Receiving the Best Turnaround award at the 2023 Plain Language Awards. From left: Emma Harding from category sponsor Streamliners, Parole Board member Neville Trendle, and NZPB administrative support team members Steven Rendall (Business Lead – NZPB Future Operating Model), Geordie Cassin (Communications Manager) and Karyn McLean (Director).

Photo by Crystal Richardson | [2023 Plain Language Awards](#)

New Zealand Parole Board Membership

Chairperson		
Sir Ron Young		
Panel convenors		
Judge Gus Andrée Wiltens	Judge Jane Lovell-Smith	Judge Tania Sharkey
Serina Bailey	Richard Marchant	Judge Anna-Marie Skellern
Judge Louis Bidois	Annabel Markham	Kathryn Snook
Martha Coleman	Judge David Mather	Carolina Tiumalu
Judge Michael Crosbie	Mary More	Judge Arthur Tompkins
Judge Geoff Ellis	Judge Stephen O'Driscoll	Neville Trendle
Judge June Jelas	Judge Eddie Paul	Judge Tania Williams-Blyth
Judge Jan Kelly	Alan Ritchie	
Forensic psychiatrists		
Associate Professor Philip Brinded	Dr Jeremy Skipworth	
Community members		
Karen Coutts	Dr Julia Ioane	Major Campbell Roberts
Dr Greg Coyle	Chris King	Alistair Spierling
Dr Sally Davis	Marian Kleist	Waimarama Taumaunu
Materoa Dodd	Bryan McMurray	Lawrence Tawera
Paul Elenio	Sam Perry	
Alan Hackney	Fiona Pimm	

Board membership as at 1 August 2024

Year in review

1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024

This year saw increases in both the number of Parole Board hearings held and offenders seen.

Hearings went up from 8,045 in 2022/23 to 8,261 in 2023/24, while the number of offenders rose from 4,062 in 2022/23 to 4,234 in 2023/24.

Total hearing count*

8,261^{*1}

Offenders seen

4,234



Parole hearings

Total parole hearings	5,517
Hearings for offenders on determinate sentences	4,968
Hearings for offenders on indeterminate sentences	549
Parole approved	1,088
Parole granted for offenders on determinate sentences	1,012
Parole granted for offenders on indeterminate sentences	76
Offenders released on conditions on completion of their sentence.	472

Their sentence has expired therefore these offenders cannot be recalled to prison for breaches.

*1. This figure includes cases where a person in prison may have **two** or **three** hearings recorded against their name even if they only appeared before the Board once. For example, one person may have had a parole hearing (which was declined) and a SRD conditions hearing at the same time. This is recorded as two hearings. With those duplicates removed, this figure drops to the "Final unique hearing count" number, **7,698**.





Recalls

While the vast majority of the Board’s work is considering whether to grant parole, it also has significant other work.

In 2023/24 the Board heard 375 applications to recall offenders from parole to prison, compared with 428 in 2022/23. It granted 329 of those applications, compared with 374 in 2022/23.

Recall applications made by the Department of Corrections	375
Number of hearings as a result	454
Applications granted	329
Recall applications for offenders on determinate sentences	304
Number of hearings as a result	358
Applications granted	267
Recall applications for offenders on indeterminate sentences	71
Number of hearings as a result	96
Applications granted	62

Applications for recalls are triggered by Community Corrections. Typically, an offender is either not coping on parole, not complying with their special conditions or in some cases they have committed further crime. The Board considers, within hours, any application for a recall from Community Corrections and may grant an interim recall application. If it does so, then a warrant is issued for the offender’s arrest and they are taken back to prison. A full hearing is held within a month to decide whether or not the recall should be made final.



Monitoring hearings

The Parole Board likes to understand how offenders are coping in the community after release. The Parole Act 2002 allows the Parole Board to monitor an offender’s progress for up to one year after parole is granted. Monitoring hearings give the Board an opportunity to talk to an offender and their probation officer to understand what is working and what might need further support in the community. It is also an opportunity, if the Board is concerned, to recall an offender, although this is a rare event.

Monitoring hearings enable the Board to assess the offender’s progress on parole **513**

In 2023/24, the Board saw 513 offenders who had been granted parole, on monitoring hearings, to see how they had managed their parole. This compares with 540 hearings in 2022/23.





Varying conditions (excluding Compassionate Release)

Applications to vary parole conditions	160
Number of hearings as a result	172
Applications granted	150



Discharging conditions

Applications to discharge parole conditions	126
Number of hearings as a result	133
Applications granted	115



Varying and discharging conditions combined

In the year under review the Parole Board varied or discharged 663 special conditions. It did so to ensure that the conditions better reflected the offender's risk and public safety.

Applications to discharge and vary parole conditions	286
Number of hearings as a result	305
Applications granted	265



Extended Supervision Orders

Applications by the Department of Corrections for the Board to impose special conditions	24
Number of hearings as a result	33
Applications granted	22
Biennial reviews of ESO conditions	65



Compassionate release

Offenders who are seriously ill and unlikely to recover can apply to the Parole Board for an early compassionate release.

These are always difficult decisions. If risk can be managed in the community and then the Board's preference is always to safely release an offender who has such a serious illness and where recovery is unlikely. Often offenders are close to death when released. The Board received 10 such applications in the 2023/24 year and granted eight.

Offenders who have given birth to a child in prison can also apply for compassionate release. The Board received no applications on these grounds in 2023/24.

Applications received	10
Number of hearings as a result	11
Applications granted	8





Requests for an earlier hearing

Where an offender appears before the Parole Board for consideration of parole, the Board would typically set an offender a series of tasks. For example, psychological counselling, and alcohol and drug programme counselling, to be undertaken in prison to reduce their risk and to develop a release plan for a safe release into the community. Sometimes, the offender completes these tasks earlier than anticipated. In such cases, the Board can see offenders earlier than anticipated to consider parole. In the last year the Board considered 105 such applications and granted early hearings in 46 cases.

Applications for an earlier hearing under section 26 of the Parole Act **105**

Cases heard earlier than scheduled **46**



Reviews

Offenders can request to have their decision reviewed under Section 67 of the Act.

Applications to the review board decisions during the year **77**

Decisions that were then amended, quashed or referred to the Board for reconsideration **6**

Decisions that were confirmed **71***

* 1 Amended, 5 Referred back to the Board



Revocation orders

The Board may revoke or amend a direction to release an offender at any time before parole commences. If a decision is revoked another hearing must be held as practical.

Decisions revoked this year **34**



Parole postponement

The Board can postpone a hearing for a maximum of five years where it is satisfied that, in the absence of any significant change in their circumstances, an offender will not be suitable for release when they are next due to be considered for parole.

Parole postponements this year **4**



Victim submissions

Verbal submissions made to the Board by registered victims.

Verbal submissions made this year **379**

Parole Board engagement roadshow

In mid-March 2024 Parole Board Chair Sir Ron Young, with Board members Judge Tania Blyth-Williams and Lawrence Tawera, visited five North Island prisons to meet with offenders.

The prisons visited were:

- Auckland Mens
- Auckland Womens
- NRCF
- Rimutaka
- Waikeria.

At each prison the Board interviewed five offenders individually.

The purpose of the interviews was to understand more about the offenders' knowledge of and experience with the Parole Board.

All those interviewed were volunteers. They had committed a wide variety of crimes with sentences ranging from relatively short, just over the two-year cut-off point, to life imprisonment.

The offenders ranged in age from early 20s through into the 60s.

All the offenders had appeared before Parole the Board at least once. Some had had many appearances before the Board.

The offenders were asked about their experience of Parole Board hearings, what went well, what they considered could be improved any other thoughts they might have.

The questions were sent to the offenders before the meetings so they could think about their answers.

Overall, a significant number of offenders spoke very positively of their experiences with the Parole Board. They thought panels were, on the whole, respectful and considerate, that matters were explained fully and carefully and that the Board's written decisions set out a clear way forward for them.

The interviews did, however, identify a number of areas that need be addressed, particularly in relation to what and how the offenders are communicated with.

Many offenders wanted to be more prepared for their hearing, not understanding what parole and early release was about, why they were before the Board and what the purpose of parole and early release was.

While the Board has produced a booklet for offenders explaining the parole process, many said it was not easy to understand.

Some found the Parole Board's hearing decisions were too complicated and used difficult language. They asked that the Board decisions be written in a way that was easier to understand.

The findings from the interviews have been provided to all Parole Board members and will be discussed further at the Parole Board's annual conference in September.

The results have also been shared with the Department for Corrections and the Board will work with departmental staff on opportunities to improve processes.

The information booklet for offenders is being reviewed and will be rewritten to make it easier to understand – a similar process to the one taken with the victims' notification pack.

The Board is also looking at other possible channels for communicating with offenders.

An update on this work will be included in next year's annual report.



Following the meetings with offenders Sir Ron, Tania and Lawrence met with local community rehabilitation and reintegration organisations to understand the challenges they faced. Here they are pictured with stakeholders from Northland.

The Parole Board in the news

Last year's Annual Report noted the increasing level of media interest in the Parole Board's activities and decisions.

That interest has continued to grow in the last 12 months.

In 2023-24 the Board released **330** decisions in response to requests from journalist, a **27%** increase on the **259** released the year before.

Further, **25** parole hearings were attended by journalists in 2023-24, compared with **12** in 2022-23, an increase of **108%**.

Media attendance at a parole hearing is at the discretion of the Panel Convenor for that hearing and subject to the journalist's agreement to the conditions set by the Board.

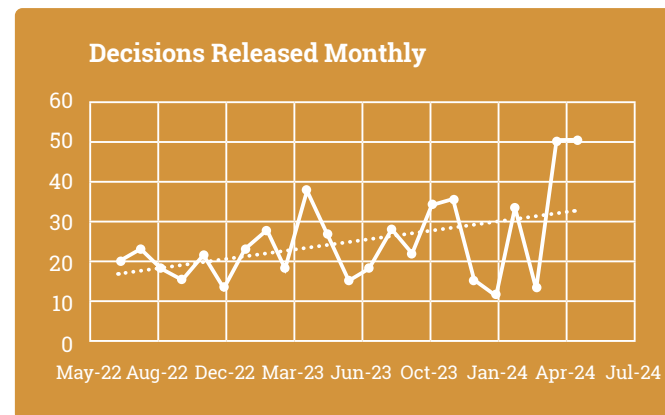
When the Board receives an application from a reporter to attend a hearing, feedback is sought from:

- the offender's Case Manager if they are in prison or their Probation Officer if they are currently on parole
- their counsel, if the offender has one, or the offender directly
- any registered victims.

This feedback is then provided to the Panel Convenor to assist in their consideration of the application.

To ensure the feedback process and consideration of the application can occur in a fair and considered manner, the Board has recently reviewed and updated its guidelines and timeframes.

Applications from reporters wishing to attend a hearing must be received no later than 10 working days prior to the Monday of the week in which the hearing they wish to cover is allocated.



Extended Board

The Extended Board considers parole for offenders serving life sentences or preventive detention.

As the name suggests the panel for the Extended Board has four Board members, instead of the usual three, and includes a forensic psychiatrist.

As Chairperson, Sir Ron Young generally leads the Extended Board hearings.

The prisoners who come before the Extended Board have often been in custody a lot longer than those that appear before the other boards.

For that reason, Extended Board hearings are scheduled for 45 minutes, rather than the standard 30 minutes. This allows the Board to have a more in-depth conversation and get a greater understanding of the prisoner's risk and reintegration needs.

During the 2023/2024 year, the Extended Board convened **714** times and saw **487** offenders.



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