

Big Changes Coming to the Disputes Tribunal in 2026!

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The Disputes Tribunal has long provided an accessible and cost-effective way to resolve civil disputes. From 24 January 2026, significant changes under the Disputes Tribunal Amendment Act 2024 will expand its financial jurisdiction, aimed at making justice more accessible and reducing pressure on the District Court system.

What's Changing?

The maximum claim limit for the Disputes Tribunal will increase from $30,000 to $60,000. This means individuals and businesses can now resolve disputes of up to $60,000 without going through the more formal (and often costly) District Court process.

Why It Matters

Parties with mid-range claims now have an affordable forum where they can have a dispute determined. Tribunal proceedings are usually significantly cheaper than court litigation and hearings are typically scheduled sooner than court cases, reducing delays.

What Types of Disputes Can the Tribunal Hear?

The Tribunal can hear a wide range of civil disputes, including consumer and trade disputes, property damage claims, contractual disagreements, certain tenancy-related claims (excluding those under the Tenancy Tribunal) and neighbour disputes.

With the higher financial threshold, more substantial contractual and commercial disputes can now be resolved through the Tribunal.

Potential Risks and Business Impact

While the expanded jurisdiction has the potential to offer clear benefits, there are important risks to consider (especially for businesses):

- Tribunal decisions can only be appealed on grounds of unfairness, not on legal errors. If the referee misinterprets the law, you generally cannot challenge the decision.
- Parties must represent themselves, which can be challenging in complex disputes. Poor preparation can significantly impact the outcome.

- Tribunal orders are enforceable through the District Court, but this adds time and cost if the other party does not comply voluntarily.
- Larger claims often involve more documentation and technical issues. Without legal guidance, parties may struggle to present their case effectively.
- Being on the wrong side of a Tribunal order for up to $60,000 can have serious financial and reputational consequences. Businesses should approach these disputes strategically and seek advice early.

Let us Help

Our litigation team regularly assists clients with assessing whether the Disputes Tribunal is the right forum for their dispute. If it is, we can prepare and structure claims or responses, draft submissions and gather evidence, and advise on strategy and settlement options.