Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board

DUNCAN v LAWRENCE

Plumbers, Gasfitters & Drainlayers Board Disciplinary Decision (2026/3)

Summary

Thomson Lawrence, Certifying Plumber, Certifying Gasfitter, was charged with issuing a false or misleading return and failing to comply with terms or conditions of his licence in relation to supervision. The charges related to gasfitting work carried out by Mr Lawrence's supervisee in and around Northland.

Mr Lawrence pleaded guilty to the charges.

The Board considered Mr Lawrence's offending was moderately serious as it had been systemic. The Board considered there were no aggravating factors in the case and recognised there were a number of mitigating factors including Mr Lawrence's guilty plea, cooperation and lack of previous disciplinary history. Mr Lawrence was also remorseful, the work had been remediated, and Mr Lawrence had changed his practices so he was no longer supervising anyone.

The Board ordered Mr Lawrence to pay a fine of $2,900 and $6,200 towards costs.

IN THE MATTER OF a disciplinary hearing pursuant to section 101 of the Plumbers, Gasfitters, and Drainlayers Act 2006

BETWEEN **CATRIONA DUNCAN**

Investigator

AND **THOMSON WHETUMARAMA LAWRENCE**
Certifying Plumber, Certifying Gasfitter, of Perth, Australia

Registered Person

DECISION OF THE BOARD
7 MAY 2026

Hearing:	Held on 12 February 2026
Members sitting:	Martin De Gouw (Chair), Beth Healy, James Smith, Jason O'Connor, Tofa Suafole Gush
Counsel:	Sean McCusker for the investigator Mr Lawrence was self-represented
Legal advisor:	Michael Hodge

Disciplinary hearing

1. On 12 February 2026, the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board (**Board**) held a disciplinary hearing on the papers to consider a complaint by Nikolas Laver against Thomson Lawrence, Certifying Plumber, Certifying Gasfitter. The complaint related to certification of gasfitting work carried out by Mr Lawrence's supervisee at a number of properties in and around Northland.

Guilty plea

2. On 6 November 2025, Mr Lawrence pleaded guilty to charges of providing false or misleading returns and failing to comply with terms or conditions of his licence and signed an agreed summary of facts, the material parts of which were as follows:

    a. Mr Lawrence is a registered and licensed Certifying Plumber and Certifying Gasfitter.

    b. Between 9 June 2023 and 27 March 2024, Mr Lawrence was the supervisor of a licensed gasfitter. From 9 June 2023 to 18 October 2023, the supervisee was a Restricted Gasfitter (formerly Journeyman), and from 18 October 2023 to 27 March 2024, they were a Gasfitter (formerly Tradesman).

    c. In early 2024, the supervisee commenced employment with a new workplace. His employer did not arrange for a supervising gasfitter so the supervisee contacted Mr Lawrence, a former colleague, and asked whether he could supervise him remotely. At the time, Mr Lawrence was living in Australia however he had not updated his contact details on the Board's database which showed him as still living in Northland.

    d. On 22 March 2023, the supervisee contacted the Board about the proposed supervision arrangement, but the Board holds no record of any discussion with the supervisee about being supervised by Mr Lawrence.

    e. Mr Lawrence and the supervisee entered into a supervision agreement on 24 May 2023 which provided:

        i. the supervisee would carry out the gasfitting work

        ii. photographs of the work and a description would be sent to Mr Lawrence by email, along with a "filled out" Certificate of Compliance and/or Gas Safety Certificate

        iii. within 20 days of the work being completed, Mr Lawrence would review the work and sign the certificate provided the work met the requirements of the Gas (Safety and Measurement) Regulations 2010 (**Regulations**)

        iv. Mr Lawrence would invoice the supervisee on completion of the certificate.

f. Between 29 May 2023 and 5 December 2023, Mr Lawrence completed 17 Certificates of Compliance as part of the supervision arrangement. One certificate issued on 29 May 2023 was for gasfitting work done by the supervisee when they did not hold a current practising licence. Eleven certificates were issued between 9 June 2023 and 18 October 2024 when the supervisee was a Restricted Gasfitter and provided the supervisee had commissioned the installation.

g. During an assessment, a technical advisor engaged by the Board identified the following issues with the work done by Mr Lawrence's supervisee:

   i. A freestanding gas cooker at one property was positioned on an angle in the corner of a kitchen and was capable of being moved. If the cooker had been moved hard into the corner up against the back and side walls, it would not comply with combustible surface clearance requirements under clause 6.10.1.1 of AS/NZS 5601.1: 2013 (**Standard**). The technical advisor considered that the potential risk from the gas cooker was high as it had been installed in a manner that could cause damage to the property. The supervisee subsequently remediated the work but after Mr Lawrence had already issue a Certificate of Compliance on 18 October 2023.

   ii. At another property, a gas water heater was installed behind an outdoor roof deck and was not in an accessible location with sufficient clearances to allow access to, and removal of serviceable parts as required under clause 6.3.3 of the Standard. The supervisee said he had not installed the appliance in that location and had only carried out maintenance and repairs. Mr Lawrence issued a Certificate of Compliance for the installation on 5 December 2023.

h. The technical advisor also considered that six of the certificates issued by Mr Lawrence incorrectly identified the risk of the relevant work as low when it was general or high risk. These certificates were therefore false or misleading. In addition, certificates for work that was actually high risk would not have been entered on the WorkSafe Electricity and Gas High-Risk Database as required under the Regulations. Mr Lawrence's supervisee told the investigator he had filled in the risk classifications on the certificates before sending them to Mr Lawrence, but Mr Lawrence accepted he had not reviewed the classification carefully enough.

i. Under the Plumbers, Gasfitters, and Drainlayers Board (Gasfitting Registration and Licensing) Notice 2016 (**Notice**), it was a condition of Mr Lawrence's licence that he ensure all gasfitting carried out by his supervisee complied with the requirements of the Regulations. Mr Lawrence was also required to ensure that the supervisee was competent to perform the work they carried out, and was adequately supervised while carrying out gasfitting.

j. In respect of the gasfitting that did not comply with the Standard, Mr Lawrence did not comply with the condition that all work carried out by his supervisee complied with the Standard and therefore the Regulations.

k. Mr Lawrence also did not comply with the condition that he ensure his supervisee was competent to perform the work he carried out and was adequately supervised while carrying out the work because he was not present when they tested and/or commissioned the work. In addition, the use of photographs and emails was insufficient to ensure the work was compliant at two of the properties and the certificates with the incorrect risk identifications were not false or misleading.

3. The Board was satisfied that the facts in the agreed summary of facts meant that Mr Lawrence had committed disciplinary offences under sections 89(f) and 89(c) of the Act.

Summary of investigator's submissions on penalty

4. Mr McCusker submitted that the Board could make one or more of the orders under section 106 of the Act if satisfied that the registered person was guilty of a disciplinary offence. He submitted that it was well established that the purposes of professional discipline were to ensure public protection and maintenance of proper industry standards through both specific and general deterrence. The purpose was not to punish. He submitted that other principles relevant to assessing penalty were the importance of treating practitioners consistently where possible and the need to impose the least severe penalty appropriate to achieve the purpose of the disciplinary hearing.

5. Mr McCusker submitted that Mr Lawrence's offending was moderately serious. Given the inadequate supervision, he submitted the duration of the supervision arrangement was significant. In addition, the work carried out by the supervisee at two properties was found to have defects and, in one of those cases, there had been a risk of property damage from the manner of installation. Finally, six of the 17 certificates issued by Mr Lawrence had misidentified the risk classification as a result of him not properly reviewing them. Mr McCusker submitted that this suggested a high level of carelessness on his part, if not a conscious disregard for his obligations as a certifying gasfitter.

6. While noting that each case must be determined on its own facts, Mr McCusker referred the Board to its previous decisions in *Radovich v Blackman* (2024/3), *Radovich v Frogley* (2022/1), and *Pidgeon v Whitehead* (2024/15). In *Blackman*, Mr Blackman pleaded guilty to carrying out and causing negligent or incompetent gasfitting in relation to work carried out by his supervisee remotely. Mr Blackman relied on photographs and videos of the work, supplemented by telephone and conference calls with his supervisee. There were compliance issues with four out of the five installations. The Board considered Mr Blackman's offending was moderately

serious and adopted a starting point for the fine of $3,500. In *Frogley*, Mr Frogley pleaded guilty to failing to supervise properly and issuing a false or misleading gas certificate when he certified a gas installation carried out by his supervisee remotely. The supervisee failed to install an appliance regulator on the gas hob. The Board considered Mr Frogley's offending was moderately serious and adopted a starting point for the fine of $4,000. Finally, in *Whitehead*, Mr Whitehead pleaded guilty to supervision failings in respect of a trainee who carried out gasfitting on two occasions without Mr Whitehead's awareness. Mr Whitehead mistaken believed he was supervising the trainee for training purposes at Unitec only. The Board considered Mr Whitehead's offending was moderately serious and adopted a starting point for the fine of $4,500 in his case.

7. Mr McCusker submitted that Mr Lawrence's offending was similar to Mr Blackman's in terms of the supervision arrangement in each case, but Mr Lawrence's case was more serious given the longer duration of the arrangement, the high risk defect in one case, and the misleading risk classifications on six certificates. Mr McCusker submitted that Mr Lawrence's offending was also more serious than in *Frogley* because it had involved 17 installations rather than just one. Mr McCusker submitted that Mr Lawrence's conduct was similar in terms of seriousness to Mr Whitehead's as, while there was no supervision in the *Whitehead* case, Mr Lawrence was aware of his obligations but failed to fulfil them in numerous significant respects. He submitted that a comparable or slightly higher starting point fine than in *Whitehead* was therefore appropriate.

8. In the circumstances, Mr McCusker submitted that an appropriate starting point for the fined was in the range of $4,500 – $5,000. Mr McCusker submitted that the investigator was not aware of any personal aggravating factors in the case and recognised that a discount was available to recognise Mr Lawrence's guilty plea, cooperation in the proceeding, and lack of any disciplinary history.

9. Mr McCusker submitted that under section 107 of the Act, the Board could require Mr Lawrence to pay a reasonable sum towards the costs and expenses of the investigation, prosecution, and hearing. He submitted that the starting point for an order of costs was typically half of the costs but it was a matter for the Board in its discretion to determine. Mr McCusker submitted that it was open to the Board to reduce the amount of costs ordered to reflect the mitigating factors in the case.

Summary of Mr Lawrence's submissions on penalty and name suppression

10. In terms of penalty, Mr Lawrence asked the Board to impose no financial penalty, submitting that he was willing to undertake training or some other appropriate outcome. He submitted that he took this matter extremely seriously because the potential consequences were serious. He submitted that all issues with the work had been rectified when they became aware of them and he was no longer supervising

anyone. Mr Lawrence also advised that he would ensure that all certificates would be done properly in the future and he would clarify any issues he had.

11. Mr Lawrence described his personal circumstances and asked that the Board consider name suppression. He submitted that he was in a small community and if word got around it could end his ability to earn an income.

12. Mr Lawrence submitted that the investigation had been going on for well over two years and he had complied with everything that had been asked of him during that time. He described the significant emotional impact the process had had on him and his anxiety at not knowing what was going to happen to him and the impact it could have on his family.

Decision on penalty

13. When it comes to imposing penalties in disciplinary cases, the Board's primary considerations are the need to protect the health and safety of the public and maintain industry standards. Any disciplinary penalty should aim to ensure the competency of a practitioner by holding them to account, assist with their rehabilitation, and deter them and other practitioners from disciplinary offending.

14. The Board considered that the systemic nature of Mr Lawrence's offending meant it was moderately serious. The Board determined that there were no aggravating factors in the case and Mr Lawrence was entitled to credit for pleading guilty, cooperating in the process, and having no previous disciplinary history. The Board also recognised that Mr Lawrence was remorseful, the non-compliant work had been remediated, and he had changed his practices and was no longer supervising anyone.

15. Given the duration of the supervision arrangement and the number of properties involved, the Board determined that the appropriate penalty was a fine and adopted a starting point of $4,500. Recognising the significant number of mitigating factors, the Board reduced the fine to $2,900.

Costs

16. Section 107 of the Act provides that, in addition to any penalty imposed, the Board may order a registered person to pay a reasonable sum towards the costs and expenses incidental to the investigation of the complaint, prosecution, and hearing. The Board noted that any costs not paid by a practitioner who has committed a disciplinary offence had to be borne by all registered and licensed practitioners as a whole.

17. The Board was provided with a schedule of estimated costs for the investigation, prosecution, and hearing amounting to $15,664.92.

18. The Board accepted that Mr Lawrence's guilty plea had contributed to keeping the costs of this matter down. The Board also took into consideration Mr Lawrence's

financial circumstances and ordered that he pay $6,200 towards costs, which was around 40 percent of the total costs.

Name suppression

19. The Board accepted that it had authority under section 113 of the Act to grant suppression orders, including in respect of Mr Lawrence's identity. The test for granting suppression orders was whether the particular circumstances of the person requesting such an order outweighed the wider public interest in knowing the identities of practitioners who had been found guilty of disciplinary offences.

20. The Board recognised that complaints, investigations, and disciplinary hearings were extremely stressful and was concerned at the impact this matter had had on Mr Lawrence. The Board also understood and was sympathetic to Mr Lawrence's concerns that publication of his name could impact his reputation and livelihood. However, the Board concluded that the high threshold for granting a suppression order was not met in this case. The Board also considered that publication of a full account of this case, including Mr Lawrence's conduct throughout and the many mitigating factors present, would better provide any person with a full and balanced account of the circumstances of this case.

Publication

21. In accordance with the requirements of the Act, the Board ordered that details of the action taken against Mr Lawrence should be recorded on the register of plumbers, gasfitters, and drainlayers in the usual way. Any other publication of the Board's orders would be at the discretion of the Registrar of Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers.

Board orders

22. Being satisfied that Mr Lawrence was guilty of disciplinary offences under sections 89(f) and 89(c) of the Act, the Board made the following orders:

    a. Pursuant to section 106(1)(f) of the Act, Mr Lawrence pay a fine of $2,900.

    b. Pursuant to section 107 of the Act, Mr Lawrence pay $6,200 towards the costs of the investigation, prosecution, and hearing.

    c. Pursuant to section 74(1)(c)(viii) of the Act, details of the Board's orders in respect of Mr Lawrence be published on the register.

Appeal

23. If Mr Lawrence is dissatisfied with the whole or any part of this decision or these orders, he may appeal to the District Court under section 162(1)(f) of the Act. Any appeal must be brought within 20 working days from the date on which this formal

written decision is received, or within any other timeframe the District Court may allow.

Dated 7 May 2026

Signed



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Martin De Gouw
Chair
Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Board