

Waiheke Local Board Feedback on a proposed national policy statement (NPS) on highly productive land

The proposed NPS is focused on maintaining highly productive land for “primary production” into the future to ensure that the NPS does not favour a particular primary sector at the expense of others. It is primarily directed at regional policy statements (RPS) and district plans and sets out the considerations and requirements to be included in these policies to manage urban development and subdivision on highly productive land. The issue is relevant to Waiheke as there are a number of highly productive lots on the rural side of the Rural Urban Boundary which in particular support the island’s hill country farms and world-renowned wine industry.

According to the 2017 Local Board Plan (p.15), the board recognises “Essentially Waiheke as our community voice and as a guide for future planning and development. We expect it to be at the forefront of decision-making for our islands, and we are committed to ensuring its values and principles are considered and central to the Hauraki Gulf Islands District Plan and succeeding planning documents.”

Adopted in 2000, and refreshed in 2016, the Essentially Waiheke strategy sets out a community-approved framework for achieving sustainable development and environmental outcomes.

The Essentially Waiheke 2016 Refresh states the Waiheke community wishes to maintain the existing land use pattern of discrete villages surrounded by areas of rural land and a clear distinction between urban and rural environments. Activities aimed at protecting the environment and reducing the impact of development are encouraged including sustainable farming, local crop production systems which will improve island food security.

The previous Essentially Waiheke 2000/2005 documents included a goal to maintain minimum lot sizes for subdivision to preserve rural character.

Themes for feedback

Is there support in principle for national direction on highly productive land?

Agreed, the Waiheke Local Board supports the principle of preserving highly productive land for primary production, which is consistent with community feedback through progressive Essentially Waiheke consultations. Highly productive land needs to be protected for the future food security of the island and to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the wine industry and other land-based activities with economic potential.

The protection of productive land on Waiheke will result in the retention of local jobs in primary production, additional prosperity in associated support industries and spin-off effects for tourism through brand recognition internationally.

Is a National Policy Statement the best tool?

Agreed, the NPS is the best overarching tool as it can provide clear direction on preservation of productive land whilst giving council the flexibility to respond to local conditions.

However, this must be followed up with changes to the Resource Management Act in due course, which should introduce stronger protections for productive land. Wine grape production should be specifically mentioned in a national policy statement to recognise that the wine industry, and certain other primary industries such as olives, do not require the most fertile land.

Should any National Policy Statement apply to existing urban zoned land / Future Urban zoned land / Countryside Living zoned land?

No comment on this question.

Is there support for some scope for the council to enable urban and/or lifestyle development on highly productive land or do you prefer an absolute protection of it?

No comment on this question.

Is there support for the process of Auckland Council identifying highly productive land for Auckland (based on criteria) or do you prefer the approach of using the interim LUC1-3 method being made permanent?

The board believes that Auckland Council should identify highly productive land using the Land Use Classification System as one input but should include other regionally relevant criteria such as lot size, availability of water, soil type, access to transport routes and labour, and any special environmental attributes which require protection. Note that Waiheke Island vineyard soils are not classified as LUC 1, 2, or 3 and so the classification system does not recognise the unique considerations of quality soils when related to wine grape production.

What other areas outside LUC1-3 would you consider might be worthy of being covered by the National Policy Statement (i.e. what criteria would you use to define highly productive land)?

For Waiheke, the board would define highly productive land as any land which has the potential to grow crops which would improve the food security of the island and land which has soil and fertility profiles which make it suitable for other types of primary production.

What sort of buffers might be necessary around identified highly productive land?

In order to mitigate the effects of spraying and other horticultural or agricultural impacts, the board recommends that buffer zones be required which will be made up of fast-growing native species to support reforestation.

Waiheke Winegrowers Association Feedback

The Waiheke Winegrowers Association offered the attached feedback on the NPS which the board supports.

20 September 2019