

# **Waiheke Island Winegrowers Submission on the Proposed National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land**

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The Waiheke Winegrowers Association has 23 member vineyards representing 97% of all vineyard land on Waiheke Island and Ponui Island. Waiheke Island is internationally recognised as producing some of the finest and most sought after wines in the world. The average bottle price for these wines is higher than any other wine region in New Zealand.

*The Waiheke Wine Growers Association was invited to make a submission to the Local Board on the Proposed National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land with 72 hours' notice before the Local Board's deadline. This is an inadequate amount of notice and in future WWA would appreciate being consulted much earlier on matters relating to farming on Waiheke Island.*

## **Defining Highly Productive Land**

WWA does not agree with the LUC classification system being used as a stand-alone for defining highly productive land. The historic nature of this classification system and its advantages and disadvantages are well described in the ministry's discussion document. However, like the Gimlet Gravels regions of the Hawke's Bay, Waiheke Island vineyard soils would not be 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. Throughout the wine world, the highest quality wine grapes are always found on LUC 4,5, or 6 soils. Although this might seem counter-intuitive, the reason is well known. High quality wine grapes are small and have a very high skin to pulp ratio; all of the flavour is found in the skins. LUC 1 and 2 soils produce large fleshy grapes which make weak dilute flavoured wines. LUC 4,5, and 6 soils cause the vine to struggle and this reduces grape berry size and increases flavour intensity. On Waiheke Island the soils that produce the best wines are therefore characterised by low fertility and high mineral content. This allows the production of small intensely flavoured grapes suitable for premium wine grape production

The values and benefits of protecting highly productive land on Waiheke Island are self-evident

- The creating of 700+ jobs directly in the Waiheke wine industry
- The creation of a large amount of additional prosperity in associated support industries
- The payment of large amounts of tax by workers and owners
- The spin off effects for tourism by brand recognition internationally
- The saving on import receipts by not having to import an equivalent product

- The prestige that accrues to New Zealand as a whole but producing some of the best wines in the world

### **Does the Current RMA Framework Adequately Protect Vineyard land on Waiheke Island?**

The unequivocal answer to this is No. Urban sprawl continues apace and the pressures at the urban rural interface on Waiheke Island intensify year on year. There is a clear financial incentive under RMA rules for councils to allow subdivision of rural land. The income generated to councils is much greater from intensive housing estates than from rural land. It is imperative that the rules be changed to prevent councils from allowing rural lifestyle blocks and urbanisation to occur. Currently the values and wider benefits of Waiheke Island vineyard land are not being considered at all and we have recently lost one major premium vineyard property to subdivision. More will follow if action is not taken.

### **Rural Lifestyle Development**

Unlike some other forms of farming, in the world of vineyards there is nothing intrinsically wrong with small blocks of land. Throughout the old world small vineyards are owned by families and lot sizes are small. Wine grape production is extremely labour intensive and this is especially true on Waiheke Island which is steep land. However, restrictions need to be placed on the types of farming that rural lifestyle block owners engage in. All too often these blocks have a few horses for the pleasure of the owner and thus remove prime vineyard land from production.

### **Reverse Sensitivity Issues**

The current approach where newcomers to an agriculture area can complain about farming activities and have their complaints actioned by restrictions being placed on existing farming activities is intolerable. New Zealand urgently needs “right to farm” legislation similar to that passed in other similar countries. Urban dwellers who move to properties adjacent to vineyards should have no rights to complain over legal farming activities. Local authorities should be incentivised to protect the right to farm and to not incur costs to farmers in the investigation of this type of complaint.

### **National Policy Statement versus the other options**

The Waiheke Wine Growers Association prefers the option of a ***national policy statement*** because it will deliver results in the shortest time frame. However, this **MUST** be followed up with changes to the RMA in due course. A national policy statement **MUST** recognise that for vineyards, the most highly productive land is not LUC 1,2, or 3 and this LUC classification system therefore cannot be taken as the sole measure of productivity. Wine grape production **MUST** be specifically mentioned in a national policy statement for this reason.

**The National Policy Statement should apply nationally and it should be mandatory for Councils to give effect to this statement and to prioritise this statement over other considerations.**

It is short sighted to focus only on Auckland and Christchurch where there are acute problems. In the area of urban development, New Zealand needs to take very seriously the need to start building up rather than out, and this should apply to every town and village as well as to large cities. Given the pressures on councils, they must be directed to give priority to preserving highly productive land ahead of other considerations.

### **How Should Highly Productive Land be Identified and by Whom**

Farmers, especially wine grape growers, must be consulted. Traditional soil analysis is not capable of identifying soils that are highly productive for wine grape production. Only experienced wine grape farmers can identify such soils. In Auckland we have a council which has a very low level of expertise in farming knowledge and experience. Waiheke Winegrowers should be consulted about this and all matters relating to farming on Waiheke Island

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