

BEFORE THE HEARING PANEL

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of Proposed Plan Change 25 to the Waipā District Plan

HEARING OF WAIPĀ DISTRICT COUNCIL PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE 25

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF CHLOE TRIM ON BEHALF OF NEW ZEALAND
KIWIFRUIT GROWERS INC

Dated 17 August 2026

1. My name is Chloe Trim. I am a Senior Policy Advisor with New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers Incorporated (NZKGI).
2. NZKGI is the industry body representing New Zealand kiwifruit growers. NZKGI works to advocate for, protect and enhance the commercial and political interests of growers and to support the continued success of the kiwifruit industry. NZKGI's vision is for New Zealand kiwifruit growers to be the most successful and future-ready producers in the world.
3. I provide this evidence on behalf of NZKGI in relation to the provisions of Waipā District Plan Change 25 relating to shelterbelts and artificial crop protection structures.

NZKGI's Interest in Plan Change 25

4. The kiwifruit industry is one of New Zealand's most valuable horticultural industries and contributes significantly to regional economies, employment and export earnings. Continued growth and investment in the industry depends on growers having access to suitable land and a regulatory environment that supports productive and resilient horticulture.
5. There are approximately 770 producing hectares of kiwifruit in the Waikato region. This has increased by more than 200 hectares over the past five years, demonstrating the sector's growth and the importance of planning provisions that continue to support productive horticultural land use. That growth is not just about more orchards. It also brings investment, jobs, demand for contractors and services, and wider economic benefits for the Waikato region.
6. NZKGI has an interest in planning provisions that affect the ability of growers to establish, operate and invest in orchards. This includes rules relating to shelterbelts and artificial crop protection structures, which are important components of modern horticultural production systems.
7. NZKGI's interest is not limited to achieving favourable outcomes for growers. We recognise that district plans must balance a range of interests, including those of neighbouring landowners, rural communities, infrastructure providers and the wider environment. We support planning provisions that deliver fair and practical outcomes for everyone affected while continuing to enable productive use of rural land.

The importance of shelterbelts, artificial crop protection structures and crop support structures

8. Shelterbelts and artificial crop protection structures (shelter) and crop support structures are critical infrastructure for modern kiwifruit orcharding.

9. Shelter provides protection from prevailing winds, assist in creating suitable growing conditions and contribute to orchard productivity and fruit quality.
10. Artificial crop protection structures are increasingly important as growers respond to changing climatic conditions and increased exposure to weather-related risks. They also provide some protection against pests, such as birds, passionvine hopper and cicadas, that can damage fruit, and may assist in reducing exposure to biosecurity threats such as brown marmorated stink bug.
11. They are critical investments that support crop protection, business resilience and long-term orchard productivity.
12. Crop support structures are also fundamental to orchard layout, plant health, canopy management and efficient harvesting. These structures are not optional. They are part of the core infrastructure required to establish and operate a productive kiwifruit orchard.
13. Enabling growers to establish and maintain appropriate protection infrastructure contributes to the sustainability of horticultural production and supports the economic contribution that the sector makes to local communities.

Clear, practical and consistent rules for rural zones

14. NZKGI supports clear, practical and consistent rules for rural zones that enable rural activities, including productive horticulture, to occur as intended.
15. The kiwifruit industry operates across a number of districts and regions. Growers often own, lease or invest in orchards located in different territorial authority areas and are required to navigate multiple planning frameworks.
16. While local circumstances will always justify some variation, significant differences in rules between districts can create uncertainty, increase compliance costs and make investment decisions more difficult.
17. A rural zone planning framework should recognise that productive activities are an expected and appropriate use of rural land. Rules should manage genuine effects, but should not unduly constrain ordinary rural production or make productive land more difficult to use.
18. Growers generally seek access to suitable horticultural land with planning rules that are straightforward and reasonably consistent across territorial authorities. Consistency provides greater certainty, reduces unnecessary complexity and allows growers to focus on productive outcomes rather than navigating differing regulatory requirements.
19. This issue is particularly important because kiwifruit growers already operate within a highly regulated environment. Growers must comply with a wide

range of requirements relating to resource management, environmental management, biosecurity, labour (including employment and immigration), health and safety, food safety and export standards. The cumulative effect of these regulatory obligations is significant.

20. NZKGI therefore supports planning approaches that are practical, efficient and accessible to plan users while still appropriately managing adverse effects.

Setbacks for artificial crop protection structures and crop support structures

21. NZKGI understands that Council is seeking to ensure land users manage the effects of their activities within their own boundaries. We support a fair outcome for all parties and appreciate the effort to find an appropriate balance between rural production and neighbouring amenity.
22. However, NZKGI considers that the recommended setbacks for artificial crop protection structures and crop support structures are excessive. We acknowledge that the recommended shelterbelt setback has been reduced, but remain concerned that the setbacks for artificial crop protection structures and crop support structures would unnecessarily restrict the use of productive land.
23. In NZKGI's view, the proposed setbacks place too much weight on amenity at the expense of enabling rural activities. In rural zones, structures that support productive land use should be anticipated and provided for, particularly where they are essential to orchard establishment and operation.
24. NZKGI also considers that the setbacks for artificial crop protection structures and crop support structures appear arbitrary. Whether a structure is set back 3 metres, 4 metres or 6 metres, the practical difference to amenity is likely to be limited. The structure will still be visible and present in the rural environment.
25. By contrast, the impact on growers can be significant. Larger setbacks can remove usable land from production, affect orchard layout and reduce the efficiency of productive land use. For kiwifruit orchards, where canopy layout, shelter, support structures and crop protection systems need to work together, these restrictions can have real operational and economic consequences.
26. NZKGI therefore seeks setbacks that are targeted and focused on managing actual adverse effects rather than imposing broad restrictions that materially constrain productive land use without delivering a corresponding amenity benefit.

Height restrictions for artificial shelter and shelterbelts

27. NZKGI considers that a 6 metre maximum height is overly restrictive for modern horticultural operations. Shelter needs to be effective in practice, and

in some circumstances a greater height may be necessary to provide suitable protection for kiwifruit orchards from adverse weather and pests, support crop health and maintain productive growing conditions. Also, as a mitigation to spray drift.

28. Height restrictions also leave little room for innovation in orchard design and production systems. The kiwifruit industry is actively trialling new approaches, including vertical growing systems, which can be up to 3 metres high, and drone spraying. In our view, allowing some additional height would also help growers make more efficient use of land by growing upward, rather than needing to use more land area. These systems may require greater flexibility than a fixed 6 metre height limit allows, including to provide for safe spraying practices that help mitigate spray drift.
29. A more flexible height framework would better support the industry's ability to adapt, improve productivity and respond to future growing conditions. Rules that are too restrictive risk locking in current production methods and may limit the uptake of innovation that could improve orchard resilience, efficiency and the productive use of land.
30. NZKGI also notes that a 6 metre height limit would be more restrictive than the approach taken by a number of other councils throughout New Zealand.
31. However, NZKGI acknowledges that height and setback requirements need to be considered together. If the maximum permitted height were increased and the required setback were reduced, there may be greater potential for effects on neighbouring properties, particularly where a dwelling is located close to the boundary.
32. In that specific circumstance, NZKGI considers that an exception rule would be appropriate and fair. This would allow the general rule framework to better enable productive rural activities, while providing additional protection where a taller structure or shelterbelt close to a boundary may have a more direct effect on a neighbouring dwelling.
33. This approach is consistent with the position set out in NZKGI's expert evidence. It would provide a more targeted and balanced planning response than applying a broad 6 metre height restriction in all circumstances, regardless of the actual context, the level of effect, or the need to provide for innovation in modern horticulture.

Conclusion

34. NZKGI supports planning frameworks that enable productive horticulture and provide certainty for growers while also recognising the interests of neighbouring landowners and the wider community.

35. Our vision is for New Zealand kiwifruit growers to be the most successful and future-ready producers in the world. Achieving that vision requires regulatory systems that are practical, efficient and supportive of long-term investment in horticulture.
36. Shelterbelts, artificial crop protection structures and crop support structures are essential components of modern kiwifruit production and should be recognised as important orchard infrastructure.
37. Growers benefit from access to land with planning rules that are clear, easy to interpret and reasonably consistent across territorial authorities. This is particularly important given the significant and complex regulatory environment within which the kiwifruit industry already operates.