

Brakes put on lifestyling

04 Feb 2010

Rule changes to stem the tide of urban growth over productive land are significant changes the Western Bay of Plenty District Council is making to its Proposed District Plan.

Rural subdivisions will now be determined by the land's productive ability and will be aimed at creating productive units rather than small unproductive lots.



Rural zoning rules are in the process of changing in the Western Bay of Plenty.

This will be achieved by creating a new 'Lifestyle Zone' that ensures productive land is not lost to small, non-productive units.

These zones are located in Katikati at Busby Road), Te Puna on the Minden, and Te Puke at Te Puke Quarry Road. The subdivision layout in each area will be determined by structure plans.

A 'Rural Zone' will also be made by combining the old Rural G and H to ensure retention of the land's highly productive land for farming.

If land is classified as highly productive "versatile land" for horticulture, the new rules allow landowners to subdivide to a minimum of 8ha, down from 10ha under the notified Plan. Under this rule landowners must have a minimum of 16ha of versatile land to subdivide.

If land is classified as pastoral, the same rule applies as under the former Plan – a minimum lot of 40ha.

Under the new rules it will be up to each landowner to provide sufficient evidence of the land's productivity level when making subdivision applications. They will have to provide expert advice on the horticultural capacity and soil quality with every subdivision application.

The decision to combine the two former rural zones was in response to a number of submitters who told council that the nature of the district's soils and topography made it difficult to delineate zones that clearly defined the margins

between high and lower productive land.

The new subdivision criteria will enable council to focus on the whole prime land resource and will leave decisions on subdividing to be determined at the time of an application.

The change is driven by the need to protect the Western Bay's economy which is based on horticulture and pastoral farming, and is unlikely to change in the next 10-20 years.

The primary industries have a huge flow-on effect in employment and businesses that make their income from horticulture and agriculture in the Bay.

If rural land is subdivided in to small, uneconomic blocks, the productive potential of the land is lost forever and this would severely compromise the region's economic growth and the survival of professional and service industries related to the rural productive sector.

The Western Bay of Plenty's combined agricultural and food industry output is more than \$900m annually.

In 2007 10.3 per cent of the workforce was employed in the agricultural sector, compared with the national average of 7.5 per cent.

Kiwifruit contributes 37.7 per cent of the sub-region's agricultural output with dairy farming comprising 20.8 per cent.

Zespri International, based in Tauranga, has net sales of \$895m per annum and 80 per cent of the national kiwifruit crop is grown in the Western Bay of Plenty District by more than 2000 growers.

Avocado plantings are increasing with a prediction the sub-region will be the largest avocado producer in the country in the future. Floriculture and hydroponic are also growth industries.

SmartGrowth requires robust rural planning and has specified that the region's productive capacity – its "versatile soils" – must be protected from the ad hoc spread of rural residential subdivision.

Source: <http://www.sunlive.co.nz/12301a1.page>