

Mediterranean Food Warehouse

Alcohol in the lives of responsible New Zealanders... and the contribution of specialty liquor outlets to lifestyle choices

Submission to the Law Commission into Alcohol Law Reform
September, 2009

Mediterranean Food Warehouse Overview

Mediterranean Food Warehouse was built on foundations laid in the 1950's by Italian immigrant Tony Cuccurullo. From being one of Wellington's most popular fish outlets, Tony's sons Joe and Gino have expanded and diversified the business into what is now a truly authentic Mediterranean shopping and eating experience.

Anchovies to wine and everything between, on offer are hundreds of products personally selected by Gino and Joe Cuccurullo to bring to New Zealand the true taste and flavours of the Mediterranean. The brothers' expansion has now taken them beyond Wellington's Newtown to the Kapiti Coast where they have opened another Mediterranean Food Warehouse.

Joe and Gino enthusiastically describe walking into a Mediterranean Food Warehouse as stepping into an environment that immediately excites the senses. Shelves of products and labels not seen on supermarket aisles or delicatessen departments. Beverages with names like Limoncello, Marsala Cremova, Fernet Branca, Maraschino, Amaro Montenegro. The aroma of freshly made pizza and just-frothed cappuccino.

The Kapiti Coast Mediterranean Food Warehouse is also the model for future outlets, which the Cuccurullo brothers confidently predict will bring a unique food/alcohol shopping and wood-fire pizzeria/cafe dining and take-out experience to wherever they are established in New Zealand. The next store to open is a fully franchised enterprise in Lower Hutt. Opening is scheduled for October 2009. Discussions are currently progressing to appoint a franchisee to open a Mediterranean Food Warehouse in Palmerston North.

Speaking as business owners, Gino and Joe are confident the demand for foods, ingredients and alcoholic beverages that contribute to the Mediterranean dining and social experience is stronger than ever and that there will always be a healthy sized market segment who go out of their way to make these choices.

They both express concern that a blanket approach to any alcohol law reform will, because of the behaviour of a minority, severely limit lifestyle choices of responsible
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New Zealanders as well as placing severe restrictions on their capability to sell a range of alcoholic beverages. This, they say would have a major impact on the credibility of not just Mediterranean Food Warehouse but all other specialist outlets.

American Journal Of Clinical Nutrition...

Alcohol in the Mediterranean diet

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With the evidence currently available, we conclude that alcohol, when consumed responsibly in most populations, is an important component of the Mediterranean diet and a component of a healthy lifestyle.

Moderation in all things, including law reform.

Mediterranean Food Warehouse Key Concerns About Aspects of Alcohol Law Reform

1/ The Terms of Reference and Summary of Issues are generally written using negative language.

Random examples...

i/ When referring to liquor outlets, using 'proliferation' rather than widespread growth; growth having more positive connotations.

ii/ No recognition that the liquor industry is a major employer or positive reference the wine industry's contribution to GDP through sales as well as tourism dollars.

iii/ How we are drinking... does not acknowledge the high probability that the 80% of New Zealand adults who drink occasionally do so in moderation, very often as part of their dining experience.

iv/ Risks and benefits... the writers of these documents appear unwilling or unable to concede that there is such a thing as alcohol in moderation or recognise pleasures of taste, much preferring to label alcohol a 'toxic substance'.

Drinking Alcohol in Moderation Benefits Brain Functioning

Two recent medical studies have added to the evidence that drinking alcohol in moderation is associated with better cognitive or thinking ability.

Researchers in Australia studied 7,485 people age 20 to 64 years. They found that moderate drinkers (males who consumed up to 14 drinks per week and females who consumed up to 7) performed better than abstainers on all measures of cognitive ability.

References:

- Rodgers, B., *et al.* Non-linear relationships between cognitive function and alcohol consumption in young, middle-aged and older adults: The PATH Through Life Project. *Addiction*, 2005, *100*(9), 1280-1290; Anstey, K. J., *et al.* Lower cognitive test scores observed in alcohol are associated with demographic, personality, and biological factors: The PATH Through Life Project. *Addiction*, 2005, *100*(9), 1291-1301.

v/ A case for change... the wording of this section does not make any attempt to define 'the many positive changes associated with the liberalisation of drinking laws' choosing to focus on the negatives.

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2/ The anti-social behaviour of a minority will restrict lifestyle choices of responsible New Zealanders

Examining The Options Available makes some positive points but equally as owners of a business so obviously meeting market demand, we are concerned at the impact on our customers lifestyles and the livelihoods of ourselves, franchisees and staff should some of the options set out be adopted.

We do not believe blanket legislation is in the best interests of NZ society.

1/ How can a sugary sweet alcopop drink be grouped with a Brandy XO Bossard or Liqueur St Antonia? They can't. Different markets. Different consumers. Not all alcoholic beverages are the same and distinctions should definitely be made between liquor products. Not all alcohol beverages are just for drinking, many are used in cooking, particularly Mediterranean style cooking(Tiramisu with Marsala or Vermouth, Panettone drizzled with Maraschino and topped with Italian crème, Veal Marsala)

2/ How can a business such as Mediterranean Food Warehouse be grouped with supermarkets, grocery stores, superettes, etc as an outlet for spirits-based drinks? It can't. Customers do not come into Mediterranean Food Warehouse for soap, toilet paper or other everyday items. Typically they come specifically for food and alcohol products not available on supermarket shelves or at traditional liquor outlets.

3/ What happens to sought after European and other alcohols and spirits if blanket legislation stops the Mediterranean Food Warehouse and other specialist businesses from their importation and sale? **They disappear. The reason for this is these brands and types of beverage are either too different or too expensive and definitely too slow moving to justify shelf space in traditional liquor outlets.**

4/ How can difference or specialness be accommodated under blanket legislation? It can't. The risk is that legislation introduced as an over reaction to the behaviour of a minority will impact on the freedoms of choice of the average New Zealander.

Benefits Mediterranean Foods Warehouse brings to responsible New Zealanders

- Customers are typically middle to upper income, generally 30 plus, usually with tertiary qualifications and well travelled.
- Delivering to an expectation by New Zealanders who have travelled to Mediterranean countries to have easy access to food products and alcoholic beverages
- Adding to the cosmopolitan flavour of the urban shopping landscape... Eurodell(Auckland), La Cloche French Specialty Store & Cafe(Wellington), the Dutch Shop(wellington), Asian supermarkets and many more.
- Contributing to healthier eating habits of New Zealanders

(HealthCastle.com) An European study published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2003 followed more than 22,000 people living in Greece and investigated their eating habits. During the ...4

4 years of the study, researchers found that the closer people followed the so called "Mediterranean diet", the less likely they were to die from either heart disease or cancer.

(WebMD) Studies show the Mediterranean diet's protective effect against obesity and type 2 diabetes is likely due to its high proportion of plant foods, fish, and olive oil, along with moderate consumption of alcohol.

Mediterranean Food Warehouse

MEDITERRANEAN FOOD WAREHOUSE

NEWTOWN

Introduction

My name is Joseph Cuccurullo. I am joint Managing Director and co owner with my brother Gino, of the Mediterranean Food Warehouse. We have 3 x franchise retail/pizzeria stores and 1 pizzeria with a second opening in the city this November.

We started our store in 1999 and since then have seen an influx of ***Specialty stores*** not only in Wellington, but throughout the country. Our long term aim is to roll out Mediterranean specialty food stores throughout New Zealand. We were also involved early on in advising the owner of the Vetro Mediterranean store in Ahuriri, Napier. He now has stores in New Plymouth, Gisborne, Hamilton and Rotorua.

We opened our store in 1999 and apart from the local health permit application, our liquor licence was applied for soon after. We saw the alcohol as a complimentary, but necessary part of the business we were endeavouring to create.

It must also be noted that in the last 14 years we have never been, as a result of trouble or illegal activity approached by either the police or DLA.

The relationship between alcohol and the food we sell in our retail stores is a direct relationship. From an aperitif before dinner, a veal marsala for a main through to the dessert which may include a limoncello sorbet, vermouth flavoured trifle or the most well known, tiramisu with varying amounts of marsala. And of course a small French brandy or a dash of grappa with your coffee before bed.

Issue

How do we as a community reduce the harm from alcohol?

Preference

Sir Geoffery Palmer and his team spent some considerable time trying to come up with an answer. When I met with him at the town hall, I explained to him the issue of ***Specialty Stores*** being grouped in with supermarkets and the impact that would have on the products we sell and their availability long term. After listening for a few minutes he turned to his colleague and commented, “that shouldn’t be too difficult.” As things have transpired, it seems that it was.

I can only speak for Wellington, as this is where I was born and have grown up. This is our patch. All my 4 children have attended local schools and are still here. This is where we have operated our business from for the last 25 years. Initially employing 5 people out of a fish shop in Cuba Street to a specialty Mediterranean food store in

Newtown, importer, wholesaler and distributor, now employing 16 full timers and 9 part timers.

Food like coffee, is now part of the internal fabric of Wellington. Utilisation of specialty drinks and liqueurs are interwoven within this fabric.

This is what we are. This is what we grew up with. This is our culture. This is what makes this great little city cosmopolitan. How can we claim Wellington to be referred to as the cultural capital of Aotearoa, while allowing central government to undermine us with blanket legislation meant for South Auckland? However, this forum which was borne out of Sir Geoffery's review I believe, is the place to fine tune what has now been put into place. Most districts throughout the country have different issues/problems/tastes. Wellington is different from South Auckland.

If Specialty Stores are not able to sell liqueurs which originate from the areas they represent, then it would be left up to the likes of corporates such as Liquorland and the like to decide whether that particular product has a high enough stock turn to justify space on the shelf. While we may retain a couple of the specialty liqueurs I suggest it would mean some more variations of the same. Johnny Walker black, blue, orange..... Jim Beam black, classic.....

This opportunity is the perfect platform for Wellington to show some leadership and tell the rest of New Zealand that we are serious about limiting the harm alcohol has on our younger population and wider community. Conversely, it will also show that we are able to exhibit an element of finesse, and ensure that we keep the important things like Specialty Stores without trying to solve the problem with a sledgehammer. We are not supermarkets, nor do we pretend or want to be, but are businesses that have evolved from the very people who are now part of our community here in Wellington.

Conclusion

Our parents like many others, were a wave that immigrated to New Zealand in the 1950's and later. With them and others, Greek, Irish, French, etc. brought a different flavour to our shores. One that we now in these past 20 or so years have started to embrace. Not acknowledging the contribution that Specialty Stores like ours have played in being part of our city growing up, would be a retrograde step. **Alcohol does play a part** in this cuisine and **needs to be available** if we are to keep growing culturally and want to consider ourselves truly cosmopolitan.

Thanks for listening.

Questions