

**BEFORE THE HEARINGS PANEL FOR THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES  
PROPOSED DISTRICT PLAN**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource Management  
Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of Hearing Stream 13 –  
Queenstown Mapping

**BETWEEN** **GIBBSTON VALLEY  
STATION**

Submitter (#827)

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**PLANNING EVIDENCE OF CHRISTOPHER KEYS  
ON BEHALF OF GIBBSTON VALLEY STATION**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 My name is Christopher Keys. I am the Chief Winemaker for Gibbston Valley Wines (“GVW”), a position I have held since 2006. I am authorised to provide this evidence to the Hearings Panel on behalf of GVS (submitter 828) in relation to our company’s submission in the Queenstown-Lakes District Plan Planning Maps.

## **2. PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND & EXPERIENCE**

### Qualifications

- 2.1 I hold a Bachelor of Arts in (English and Russian) from the University of Otago, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Viticulture and Oenology from Lincoln University.
- 2.2 From 1998 to 2002 I worked at Brookfields Vineyards in Hawke’s Bay. During my time there I was responsible for a number of roles, including working in the vineyard, winery and cellar door.
- 2.3 In 2002 I moved to Sileni Estate, where I began to focus on Pinot Noir production. My 2005 vintage, Sileni EV (Exceptional Vintage) Pinot Noir, was the first pinot noir from Hawke’s Bay to win an overseas gold medal.
- 2.4 In addition to the roles above, I have made wine in Oregon (Adelsheim 1999, Rex Hill 2003, R. Stuart and Co 2005), and Burgundy (Domaine Dujac, 2008).
- 2.5 I joined GVW in 2006, where I am currently the Chief Winemaker. In the 11 years I have been here, I have worked with fruit and vineyards from the majority of Central Otago’s subregions, for both GVW and other winery labels. This incorporates Bendigo, Bannockburn, Lowburn, Alexandra and Gibbston.
- 2.6 My experience at GVW has given me intimate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of vineyards within these sub regions. The sites that GVW draws its fruit from are diverse, each with their own unique soil type, aspect and microclimate.

### **3. SITE REQUIREMENTS**

- 3.1 I have read the evidence provided by Mr Grant Taylor at the resource consent hearing in 2007. This evidence emphasises the requirement for good site selection and vineyard design for GVW to be able to produce quality wine.
- 3.2 I endorse Mr Taylor's evidence entirely. Gibbston has proven itself to be the most marginal sub region of all the regions GVW cultivates. Whilst capable of producing very high quality wine, it cannot do so throughout the sub region, nor in every vintage. The Gibbston region is vulnerable to unfavourable fluctuations in microclimate, soil fertility and aspect.
- 3.3 It is clear that Gibbston possesses a complex array of sites, ranging from very good to very unsuitable. Being so marginal, minor variations in soil or slope define the land's capacity to produce top class Pinot Noir. Seasons are frequently truncated by cool weather in early April, shaving weeks of necessary ripening time. There is nothing one can do when faced with a collapsing canopy except pick the fruit, regardless of its lack of development.
- 3.4 Recognising this, in his 2007 evidence, Grant Taylor stated that the north side of the state highway was unsuitable for the planting of Pinot Noir. Nestled closer to the Crown Range, certain areas on this side of the road are in shade for longer, and are blanketed by huge pockets of cold air. Other areas, on the south side of State Highway 6, were indicated as being suitable. These are indicated on the Structure Plan.
- 3.5 However, some of the areas on the north side may be suitable for the production of sparkling and Rosé wine. I consider that the areas shown for development on the north side of the highway (areas AA2 and AA5) would be unsuitable for vines.

#### Production Since 2008 Consent

- 3.6 Since the 2008 resource consent was granted, GVW has phased in a high quality sparkling wine programme. GVW has made a larger volume of non

vintage, and larger volumes of two vintage wines – being Rosé, and Blanc de Blancs. These wines are positioned at the premium end of the market (the non vintage sells for \$45, and the vintage wines sell for \$110). There is a proven demand for these wines.

- 3.7 Additionally, our Rosé production has tripled in volume, and our premium Pinot Noir production increased from 5,000 cases per year, to between 9,000 to 10,000 cases.

#### Variety Requirements

- 3.8 Due to a growing demand and production, GVW has a requirement for a cool climate fruit suitable for Rosé and sparkling wines. GVW has identified that Gibbston's cool conditions can be suitable for Rosé and Methode Traditionelle cultivation.
- 3.9 This does not alter the fact that Gibbston's suitability for viticulture is site specific. GVW's warmer and more consistent sub regions provide the majority of our fruit for premium Pinot Noir. The marginal sites still will be marginal, and the unsuitable sites still unsuitable.
- 3.10 However, with sparkling wine and Rosé, the requirement for a long growing season is dramatically reduced. Fruit is harvested at a specific sugar content level measured in "Degrees Brix" (°Bx). Sparkling wine is harvested at 18 to 20°Bx, and 22°Bx for Rosé.
- 3.11 This means that the period of ripening during April, so critical for sugar accumulation, is of less importance. This means that sites which would otherwise be too cool for varieties such as Pinot Noir, would be suitable for Rosé and sparkling wine production.
- 3.12 For example, the region of Champagne, in north-eastern France, is unsuitable for still Pinor Noir production. This is due to its cool climate, limited sunshine, and steady rain. However, Champagne's cool climate is ideal for premier sparkling wine production.

#### Suitable Sites

- 3.13 GVW has investigated land on the station which is suitable for sparkling wine and Rosé production. We have reviewed the land with assistance from our viticultural management team, Vinewise. Vinewise, a highly

regarded company headed by Grant Rolston and Gary Ford, manage vineyards throughout Central Otago for a number of top producers (Quartz Reed, Valli, Surveyor Thompson).

- 3.14 We have identified the areas as being suitable for viticulture. These areas are indicated on the structure plan. I understand that some of these areas may be used for orchard plantings, which are also an expected outcome in the Gibbston region. Implementation of these areas would allow Gibbston Valley winery to meet its current and future requirements for Rosé and Methode Traditionelle.
- 3.15 On the north side of the road, sun exposure is crucial. Shadow cast by the Crown Range ensures pockets north of State Highway 6 are unsuitable for viticulture.
- 3.16 The proposed vineyard area at the western end of the station is the least affected by shadow. It has longer hours of morning and evening sun, and most of the vines will be planted on a favourable north-west facing slope.
- 3.17 Area AA3 is similar in positioning to our established vineyards (Home Block and Glenlee) on the southern side. It has some evening shadowing from the ridge adjacent to Tom's Creek, but this will not prevent ripening for sparkling and Rosé production. The ridge will also provide protection from the prevailing Westerly.
- 3.18 Gibbston Valley Station's upper plateau in the Rabbit Ridge area has considerable viticultural potential. Whilst higher in altitude than existing Gibbston Valley Winery blocks (around 400m), it is on a similar plateau to established vineyards in Coal Pit Road and Gibbston Back Road. There are long expanses of flat land that will be suitable for a practical, workable vineyard.
- 3.19 GVW is proposing to install the infrastructure for these vineyards plantings in preparation for the planting of the grapes in the spring of 2018. These plantings would therefore be put in and established prior to any development occurring.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 In summary, Gibbston as a subregion is not uniform, and not all areas are suitable for viticulture. However, we have identified the areas outlined as productive planting areas as being suitable for viticulture and horticulture. Additional vine plantings would allow us to meet the growing requirements for Rosé and Methode Traditionelle production.

**DATED** 12 June 2017

**Christopher Keys**