

Winemaker fined \$15,000 for smuggling vines into New Zealand

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A Blenheim-based winemaker who smuggled Australian vines into New Zealand and planted them has been placed on 5 months of community detention and fined \$15,000.

James Garry Milton was sentenced on 2 charges under the Biosecurity Act that he pleaded guilty to in the Blenheim District Court, following a successful prosecution by the Ministry for Primary Industry (MPI).

In June 2019, Milton took 2 cuttings from a Savagnin grapevine at a vineyard he was visiting in the Adelaide Hills in South Australia. The variety was not present in New Zealand, and he wanted to cultivate it at his vineyard.

"Our biosecurity is multi-layered with checks and balances that stretch from the importing country, through the border, and into the supply chain within New Zealand," said MPI's director of investigations Gary Orr.

"The vines have since been destroyed and testing showed there was no exotic pathogens found, but Mr Milton was not to know that.

"By breaking the rules in place to protect New Zealand from new pests and diseases he took an unacceptable risk. If there were pathogens present it could damage the industry and the opportunities and export dollars it brings into the country."

Mr Milton submitted false information upon arrival and failed to declare the grapevine cuttings when arriving at Auckland International Airport.

"He lied when filling out a Passenger Arrival Card during his flight home and a biosecurity declaration that that he was not bringing in any plant or plant products. He knew this was false because he had the vines wrapped in plastic in his suitcase," says Gary Orr.