

Rallying support to oppose new accommodation rate

A group of accommodation providers met with Waitemata and Gulf Ward councillor Mike Lee last week to discuss the accommodation providers targeted rate (APTR) that was imposed on residential accommodation providers who let through online services such as Airbnb or Bookabach from 1 July.

"After talking to these people and talking to council staff about the situation, I'm fully convinced that there's a real problem with equity and fairness," Cr Lee says.

From early July, residential accommodation providers not only had to start paying a portion of business rates, they now also have to pay the APTR brought in on commercial accommodation providers last year to partly fund the activities of Auckland Council's tourism branch ATEED.

Led by managing director of Waiheke Unlimited Ed Couatts, the accommodation providers that met on behalf of their owners were Stay Waiheke, Visit Waiheke, Be My Guest, Waiheke Escapes and Waiheke Unlimited.

"We've got a plan on what we're going

to do to move forward. Mike is giving us support and assistance from his end, and we're in joint agreement that what we should be trying to do is get us re-rated from B to C," Mr Couatts says.

The APTR is charged at different levels, and Waiheke in zone B is only charged half of what those in zone A will pay. But the group is trying to bring the island into zone C with the likes of Franklin, Great Barrier, Papakura, Rodney and Waitakere Ranges which are completely exempt from the rate.

The targeted rate has been criticised for being overly complicated and Cr Lee says there is a suspicion it was made less clear than it should have been.

"Because when it boils down it is reasonably simple but not especially attractive."

He also argues that council's consultation process has been inadequate.

"The rush to grab revenue has been so hasty that they haven't ticked all the boxes at all. It raises serious questions about due process and natural justice," Cr Lee says.

The next step for the group of accommodation providers is to form a steering committee and look at funding for the process because it is going to be expensive, as Mr Couatts notes.

"The concept is to stop it in its tracks and get breathing space to argue our case. To do that, we need financial support to hire a lawyer that can look for an injunction," he says.

"The whole thing is deeply flawed. It's been agreed that we will work together to try and get Waiheke out of B and into C. In the meantime, it could be that the APTR falls over after the High Court action, which is on right now," Cr Lee says referring to the commercial accommodation ratepayers who commenced a judicial review in the High Court at Auckland earlier this year challenging the legality of the new targeted rate.

If you would like to see this change, Mr Couatts continues to gather names and contact details for supporters. Please send an email to kristie@waihekeunlimited.co.nz and you will be kept updated on progress. • Emma Haas

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