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New Zealand has a golden opportunity to step into the future of responsible business practices, especially in sectors like horticulture and viticulture. As a country with a relatively small geographic and export footprint, we have the agility to implement change swiftly. Ignorance might be the only thing holding us back.

The Tea Sector has already paved the way with their Model Clauses (TMCs), designed to promote responsible business conduct. These clauses, created in partnership with the Ethical Tea Partnership, offer guiding principles that ensure contracts don't just shift the burden of mitigating human rights and environmental impacts onto producers. Instead, they provide a balanced framework where buyers and suppliers share responsibility.

So why aren't we adopting a similar approach in our own fruit and wine industries? The TMCs show that responsible contracting can be a key tool in meeting human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD) requirements. It's not just about adding clauses to contracts—it's about creating a foundation for sustainable, ethical, and fair business practices.



Traditional contracting relies on static "checkbox" promises and guarantees of perfection to meet standards outlined in the buyer's policies and codes of conduct.

Responsible contracting is about shifting the way we think about business agreements, especially when it comes to human rights and environmental impacts. Instead of forcing suppliers to promise perfect compliance, both parties work together on human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD).

- Buyers need to adopt practices that actually support HREDD, rather than making it harder for suppliers to comply.
- If something goes wrong, the priority should be to fix the harm and make sure it doesn't happen again before jumping to cancelling contracts or withholding payments.
- Exiting the relationship should be a last resort, only after taking steps to reduce any further damage.

It's about working together, staying flexible, and involving everyone affected to manage risks and find solutions. Incorporating these principles is key to moving away from traditional contracts that dump all the risk on suppliers. It's time for buyers and suppliers to share responsibility, especially when managing complex risks in today's dynamic supply chains.

New Zealand can and should take inspiration from this. It's time to lead by example, align with global standards, and ensure that our industries reflect the values we aspire to—responsibility, fairness, and sustainability. If the tea sector can do it, what's stopping us?