

California General Winery Wastewater Discharge Order (Winery Order) Update

Many vintners in Sonoma County have expressed concerns about the expense and operational challenges associated with complying with the State of California's General Winery Wastewater Discharge Order No. R1-2024-0056 (Winery Order). As wineries began evaluating the new requirements, it became clear that compliance would impose significant financial burdens, particularly on small and medium-sized operations.

In a recent and productive meeting with local legislators, State Water Resources Control Board staff and North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board staff, representatives of Sonoma County Vintners emphasized that the projected compliance costs were not sustainable for many wineries. It was also pointed out that the current "one-size-fits-all" approach fails to recognize the operational differences between wineries in the Central Valley and those here in the North Coast area.

As a result, we identified an existing North Coast waiver program that could provide an alternative path to compliance for qualifying wineries. Eligibility for the waiver is based primarily on the volume of process wastewater generated during peak wine production periods. Wineries that exceed the standard threshold may still qualify by demonstrating a process water-to-wine production ratio of 5:1 or less.

Using anonymous operational data provided by five Sonoma County wineries, Sonoma County Vintners worked with the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board staff to evaluate how the waiver could work locally. The response from the Regional Board staff was encouraging. However, although the waiver program was renewed by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board at its February meeting, any enrollment for new facilities remained on hold pending approval by the State Water Board.

We are pleased to report that on August 4, 2026, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board notified us that the State Water Board has approved the program and that the waiver is now open to new enrollments!

To help wineries better understand the eligibility requirements and application process, we are scheduling an informational Zoom meeting on Wednesday, August 26 at 12 Noon. We will also record the meeting and share it with those interested but unable to attend. These sessions will also gauge interest in a future hands-on workshop designed to assist wineries with preparing and submitting waiver applications.

If interested, RSVP to mikem@taftstreetwinery.com and the Zoom link will be forwarded to you.

