



Distilled Spirits Aotearoa – Frequently Asked Questions **New Zealand Spirit Definitions – as at Feb 2023**

Background

Currently the legal definition for New Zealand spirits is covered under:

[Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code Standard 2.7.5](#) (05 Dec 2019):

“Spirit means an alcoholic beverage consisting of a potable alcoholic distillate, including whisky, brandy, rum, gin, vodka and tequila, **produced by distillation of fermented liquor** derived from food sources, **so as to have the taste, aroma and other characteristics generally attributable to that particular spirit.**

... In the case of tequila 35% alcohol by volume; or otherwise 37% alcohol by volume.”

[Geographical Indications \(Wine and Spirits\) Registration Act 2006](#) (Reprint as at 7 August 2020)

" spirit means a potable alcoholic distillate, including whisky, brandy, rum, gin, and vodka, produced by distillation of fermented liquor derived from food sources, so as to have the taste, aroma, and other characteristics generally attributable to that particular spirit "...

[Fair Trading Act](#) – (*it is what it says it is*). Product claims and advertising claims must not be misleading or deceptive:

“Misleading conduct in relation to goods: No person shall, in trade, engage in conduct that is liable to mislead the public as to the nature, manufacturing process, characteristics, suitability for a purpose, or quantity of goods.”

Definitions for Base Spirits

1. New Zealand Whisky:

In 2020/21, a DSA working group developed, by consensus, the definition for The NZ Single Malt and NZ Whisky. This was adopted by the DSA as a standard for producers of NZ Whisky on Feb 18th 2021.

It is defined as:

A spirit obtained from a mash of cereal grain or cereal grain products, then aged in wood barrels (see <https://distilledspiritsaotearoa.org.nz/nz-whisky-definition/>)

2. Rum is defined as:

In 2022, a DSA working group developed, by consensus, the definition for New Zealand Rum. This was adopted by the DSA as a standard for producers of NZ Rum on Oct 6th 2022.

It is defined as:

A spirit obtained exclusively by alcoholic fermentation and distillation of sugar cane molasses, sugar cane syrups, sugar cane juices or cane sugar produced during the processing of sugar cane (see <https://distilledspiritsaotearoa.org.nz/nz-rum-definition/>)

DSA will work through the definitions for other NZ spirits using the same process as for NZ Whisky and Rum, consulting with the DSA community. In the meantime, the following definitions are in use in other countries and commonly recognised in NZ:

3. Brandy is defined as:

A spirit obtained from the distillation of wine, or fermented preparations of grapes or grape product, then aged in wood barrels.



Distilled Spirits Aotearoa (NZ) Incorporated

New Zealand Business Number (NZBN): 9429047031708

Certificate of Incorporation: 2716891

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Telephone: +64(0)21 222 9881 email: chair@distilledspiritsaotearoa.org.nz

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4. Gin is defined as:

A spirit obtained by the redistillation of alcohol from food sources with or over juniper berries, and may contain other aromatic botanical substances, sweeteners or flavours. Aged gin must have been held in suitable containers for the time on the label declaration (if declared).

5. Vodka is defined as:

A spirit obtained by the repeated distillation of neutral spirits, treated after distillation with charcoal or other materials so as to be without distinctive character, aroma, taste, or colour.

Other spirits may be added to this list in future.

Notes

1. The DSA interprets the wording “**produced by distillation of fermented liquor** derived from food sources, **so as to have the taste, aroma and other characteristics generally attributable to that particular spirit**” to mean that the simple addition of flavouring substances to ethanol would not meet the definitions of Spirits in either the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code or the Geographical Indications (Wine and Spirits) Registration Act 2006.
2. Spirits labelled as such must contain the minimum alcohol levels stipulated by the legislation.
3. The name of many spirits is strictly guarded by governments / Spirits Regulatory Councils and is recognised and protected by designation of origin Geographical Indicators through law and various free trade agreements. This means certain names eg Tequila, Mezcal, Scotch Whisky, Grappa, Genever, Ouzo etc, etc (or any variations, e.g. New Zealand Tequila) cannot be used outside these jurisdictions.

References:

Australian Distillers Association Guidance:

<http://australiandistillers.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ADA-Guidance-Summary.pdf>

Spirits NZ Spirits Definition:

[About Spirits | Spirits NZ](#)

US Spirit Definition

[TTB Webinar: Domestic Distilled Spirits Formulas](#) Dec 2017

Canadian Regulations:

[Food and Drug Regulations \(justice.gc.ca\)](http://www.justice.gc.ca/food-drug-regulations)



Definitions for Categories of Spirits used by the NZ Spirits Awards

The categories are based upon the commonly held spirit groupings which define the style and process of spirit production.

All New Zealand made spirits entered into the NZ Spirits Awards must adhere to any DSA regulations (above) for the identity of the entry category, pending introduction of FSANZ (Food Standards Australia New Zealand) standards for Australia/NZ spirits.

WHISKY

Traditional (Scotch/ Irish)

All whisk(e)y following the Scotch or Irish definitions regarding ingredients, production methodology and maturation requirements.

- Single malt
- Single grain
- Single pot still
- Blended

North American (American/Canadian)

All whisk(e)y following the traditional North American definitions regarding ingredients, production methodology and maturation requirements.

Note: US Single Malt should be entered in the World Whisky category

- Bourbon
- Rye/Canadian
- Other

World Whisky

Note: Whiskies entered must conform to the regulations in the country of production.

All New Zealand Whisky entered must adhere to DSA rules and specifications (here), pending introduction of FSANZ (Food Standards Australia New Zealand) standards for Australia/NZ spirits. Note any New Zealand entry that doesn't meet these definitions may still be entered labelled for example "Malt Spirit", "Moonshine" or "New Make" but will be disqualified if labelled Whisky.

- Single Malt
- Blended
- Other whisky
- New make / moonshine

GIN

London Dry Gin

Juniper-forward, traditional-style gins made using the London Gin production technique: all flavours distilled, with only water and neutral spirit to be added after distillation. Must be bottled at a minimum of 37.5% ABV.

Contemporary & Navy Strength Gin

Contemporary Gins - with flavour profiles where juniper is still discernible, but other flavours such as citrus, spice and floral notes are more prominent than in a traditional gin. Contemporary Gin is a catch-all term for gins described as "New-Wave", "New Western", "New American Dry", etc. Must be bottled at a minimum of 37.5% ABV.

Navy Strength - Includes Higher strength Gin >50% and Navy Gin (Any gin bottled between 57% and 58% ABV).



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Flavoured and Aged Gin

Flavoured - Gin that has been flavoured with fruit or another botanicals, typically via infusion or maceration, and may be sweetened. Must be bottled at a minimum of 37.5% ABV

Aged - Gins that have been aged in wood after distillation

RUM

Rum

Must be bottled at a minimum of 37.5% ABV

Botanical and Spiced Rum

Rum that is flavored with botanicals like fresh or dried herbs, spices and edible flowers.

BRANDY

Brandy

Apple Brandy - This category includes all apple and cider brandies.

Fruit Brandy - This can be a brandy/schnapps/ Eau-de-vie of any age that has been distilled from fruits other than grapes and apples, such as peaches, apricots, plums, berries; or a combination of fruits, which can include a portion of apples or grapes.

Wine Brandy, Pomace or Marc Brandy - This category applies to all brandies made from wine or grapes including Pisco, Grappa.

Cognac

Cognac must originate from white grapes from the Cognac region in Southwest France. Cognac is distilled at least twice in copper stills, then aged for a minimum of two years in French oak.

VODKA

Varietal Vodka Vodka intended to be consumed neat or in cocktails whereby a little character determined by the base ingredient is acceptable, desirable even. A pure, clear and clean vodka, but not necessarily totally neutral

Flavoured and Aged Vodka

Flavoured - Minimum of 30% ABV. If more than one flavour is included in the vodka.

Aged - Vodkas that have been aged in wood after distillation.

OTHER

Botanical and other Spirits

Botanical Spirits – this may include unsweetened Absinthe, Akavit, Amaro and Vermouth.

Liqueurs

Sweetened and flavoured spirits with a minimum alcohol content of 15% alcohol by volume

Fruit - non-cream variants

Cream - This can be any spirit which includes cream.

Other – eg: Honey, Coffee, Chocolate, Nut

Spirit - Gin, whiskey, rum etc where the base spirit must be recognisable as the flavour

Anise / herbal – This includes sweetened Pastis, Sambuca, Ouzo, Arak, Raki, Mastika, Absinthe, Amaro

Tequila / Agave spirits

Tequila Tequila can only be produced in the state of Jalisco and limited municipalities in the states of Guanajuato, Michoacán, Nayarit, and Tamaulipas in Mexico. Aside from its geographical distinction, tequila is differentiated from mezcal in that it is made only from blue agave and the beverages are prepared in different ways.



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Agave based spirits Non-Tequila agave based spirits