CHANGE IN THE DOLLAR HAS NOT DRIVEN NEEDED CHANGE

The Australian dollar is at its lowest in years sitting below $0.80USD now for a number of weeks. This alone should be providing relief throughout the entire wine industry and giving a much needed increase in returns to producers but based on the current price offers it has done nothing for growers.

Unfortunately the recovery that wineries stated was needed for the industry to return to profitability has stalled as increased returns to growers have not materialised.

Exports rises have continued to occur (albeit minor) and with the dollar sitting where it is surely wineries that are export focused are reaping the benefits, if not through the sale of goods then through the costs of freight which are generally paid for in USD.

Growers desperately need to recoup an extra $0.10 per bottle back into their pocket immediately or wineries will find their supplier numbers dwindling as growers exit the industry. $0.10 per bottle equates to approximately an extra $100 per tonne at minimum and based on some of the prices that have been released in this region it should actually be an extra $0.20 per bottle.

Following the 2014 vintage the region saw a number of vineyards removed from production and if growers hold true to their word more of the same will occur following the 2015 vintage. The Board is aware of growers that have decided not to pick for some of the low price offers this Vintage.

Know Your Costs

It is important that growers know what it has cost to produce the grape crop to the stage where it is ready to harvest. Industry discussion suggests that around 70% of the costs of grape production are associated with the growing costs with the harvest and freight costs the remainder of the overall costs.

A number of growers have stated the obvious fact that this years returns in general will not even meet the growing costs no matter how lean the operations are and regardless of the yields.

For all growers it is important that you speak directly to your buyer to advise them of the predicament that you are in especially where the costs of production will not be met. The more that wineries are aware of the situation within their grower base the more chances that a review of prices may occur.

The problem is seemingly widespread across all inland regions with the pricing being reflective of a market that is not functioning well. Many within the industry are putting the blame on the WET Rebate and the distortions that it is causing within both the export and domestic the market for bulk and bottled wines.

Previously growers with wine licences were able to make viable returns from the sale of bulk and bottled wines and could benefit from the WET Rebate of up to $500,000pa. Since its proliferation however it is being reported anecdotally that the retailers (wine buyers) are gaining the benefit of the rebate in the price that they are offering to purchase the wine.

There is now ongoing lobbying of the Federal Government to fix the problems that are being caused by the WET Rebate. Some are calling for it to be completely removed while others want it restricted to only Australian based wine business, i.e. no more claims made by New Zealand producers. We could all agree that the problems in the market are causing severe financial stress to growers.

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BOARD ACTIVITIES REPORT

- **Regional Promotion:** The Board published a second video on its You Tube Channel and linked this to the Board's website and Facebook page.
- **Chinese Media Group Visit:** In mid-March 2015 a group of Chinese wine media representatives will be visiting the Riverina to gain an understanding and insight into this region. The group will be hosted by the Wine Grapes Marketing Board. For further information please contact Kristy Bartrop (IDO).
- **Australian Grape and Wine Authority Strategic Planning:** AGWA are seeking industry input into their first 5 year strategic plan. AGWA is the new authority formed from the amalgamation of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corp and Wine Australia. Industry have until 20th February 2015 to provide written input into their planning process.

  The Board will also have the opportunity to meet with AGWA representatives in March 2015 as they travel to many regional centres within the Australian wine industry to hear from growers/wineries.

- **Variable Message Boards for Harvest Safety:** The Board has hired two message boards to be placed around the region warning road users of the movement of transport vehicles carting winegrapes. The exercise is a public relations one as much a road safety warning. The Board are conscious of the interface problems that are often report when cars cut off grape trucks, often resulting in unavoidable spillage of winegrapes.
- **Future Leaders course:** The Board is investigating if it would be able to provide flight costs to a local based grower if they are successful in gaining participation in the course.
- **Board laboratory running over the vintage:** Growers are advised that the laboratory will again be available free of charge to constituted growers in the region for colour and baume.

  Growers can drop their samples into the office in the morning and generally the results will be available the same day. It is one way of monitoring the progress of maturation particularly in red winegrapes.

  If you have any queries about the testing please do not hesitate to call the office prior to bringing samples in.
- **Winegrape Index active again:** The Board's index is again operating as a service to growers. This is the second year in which the system of winery notification is reversed. Previous years the growers details have been provided to the winery and it is then left up to the winery to get in touch with the grower. It is understood that some wineries were only seeking details to get a handle on the volume of available fruit in the market and then used this to make pricing adjustments.

  The system now works by having the Board staff informing all growers when a winery shows some interest in a variety that they have listed. This then allows the grower to make a business decision on if they want to make contact with the winery that is seeking extra production.

  The Board office will not be releasing the details of individual growers to wineries nor will it advise wineries of the tonnes that it has listed.
- **Notice of Statutory Fees and Charges:** A formal notice was published in the Area News Friday 29th January 2015 advising growers of the fees and charges that will apply this season. As approved by growers at the Strategic Planning and Budget Meeting in December 2014 the rate per fresh weight tonne of winegrapes is $3.90 per tonne.

  Following receipt of the 2015 reports held by wineries the Board will prepare and post Tax Invoices to all growers for your tax records.
- **Board Executive positions unchanged:** The Board annually undertakes a voting process for the executive positions on the Board, Chair and Deputy Chair. Reconfirmed in their current positions were Bruno Brombal (Chair) and Robert Bellato (Deputy Chair).

ARE YOU LOCKED INTO ACCEPTING A PRICE?

Prices offers below the costs of production? No opportunity to take your fruit elsewhere or simply locked in to a buyer that you don't wish to supply? Lets explore what options growers may consider in the current market environment.

If you have a contract with a winery to purchase your grapes but it does not contain a price it is often called a "Supply Agreement". That is you the grower agree to supply the winery with your product and they agree to purchase this. Such a transaction is based on the understanding that you will receive a fair market price for your product.

Alternatively you may have a contract that contains a flat rate minimum price which is marginally below the cost of production and the offer price you receive for the current season does not represent a satisfactory position in the market.

This article explores what your options are in the event that you believe your agreement or arrangement with your current winery is disadvantaging you.

Trapped into a Contract?

Many within industry like the security that a contract or long term arrangement gives them. They know they have a home and they expect that the home will provide them with a return for their winegrapes that at least represents the market price.

Sometimes this arrangement can go awry and the price that the winery is prepared to pay varies from where the grower thinks the actual market is. In fact sometimes the market price for the product declines so far that it does not cover the costs of production when you account for obvious factors such as harvesting and freight.

As a grower are you then obliged through the strength of your (written or verbal) agreement to deliver? The answer is somewhat more involved than a straight yes or no and in fact would potentially require a legal determination to resolve it. In fact the issue of being forced to accept a price that does not cover the basic costs of its production by virtue of an arrangement or written contract has not been tested at law.

To seek some guidance on this the matter has been raised with relevant authorities particularly in relation to the price offers evidence this season.

This has been investigated as it has been reported to the Board that many of the known price offers are well below the cost of production this season. This is an ongoing matter of concern for the industry as growers struggle to maintain vines and service debt.

The first thing that a grower needs to do is seek a meeting with your buyer. There is no need getting worked up about a price offer until you take the opportunity to discuss this with your buyer. If your buyer is aware that the price offer will subject you to financial difficulty then it may be reviewed - this has happened in the past and the office often hears from wineries that they have not had any complaints.

Remember as a grower that relies on a winery to purchase your product the most pressing issue is to try and maintain a professional relationship at all times. Document your discussions with them, particularly what they have said to your concerns.

If you are not happy with the outcome of the meeting your next step is to speak with the Small Business Commissioners (SBC) office. They provide free mediation services for small business that are having difficulty dealing with larger business.

http://www.smallbusiness.nsw.gov.au/

Ph: 1300 795 534

If the SBC mediation services do not assist you in negotiating a better return for your product and you are able to find another buyer that will, you need to let your original purchaser know about this. Seeking a release from an agreement can be done in writing or verbally just ensure that you document what has been said and to whom in case down the track people forget.

If your existing winery does not allow the release from your contract it is hard to imagine that they could enforce delivery at a loss. In the event of this occurring the best authority to contact is the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) 1300 302 021.

WARNING ABOUT MOG LEVELS

Growers beware of grading at the winery. The office has had reports of wineries applying MOG levels that impact financially on the grower without them actually being at a level that would become a MOG penalty.

Wineries should advise the grower as soon as practicable if they detect MOG in a load so that corrective measures in the field can be taken. Growers have the right to question MOG grading.

WINE EXPORT APPROVALS REPORT - TO DECEMBER 2014

The following text has been extracted from the Wine Export Approvals Report (WEAR). Growers wishing to read the report in its entirety are encouraged to contact the Board office for a copy.

Total shipments, volume and value increased in 2014, the volume of total Australian wine exports increased by 1.9 per cent to 700 million litres and value increased by the same rate to A$1.82 billion, the first increase in total value since the global recession took hold in 2007. The average value of exports remained constant at A$2.60 per litre as an increase in the average value of bottled wine exports was offset by a combination of an increased proportion of bulk wine exports and a decline in the average value of bulk wine.

Australian wine was exported to 121 destinations by 1,329 exporters. More exporters recorded volume growth compared to those in decline (893 in growth v 8092 in decline). The opposite was true in 2013.

The increase in volume of wine exports was aided to some degree by the depreciating Australian dollar but a huge Spanish crush in 2013 put downward pressure on bulk wine prices.

The above A$10 per litre segment increased by 15 per cent to 17 million litres, while the A$7.50 to $10 segment increased by 5 per cent to 15 million litres. In value terms, the above A$10 segment, at A$356 million, is just below the record high of A$371 million set in September 2007. In the ultra-premium segment, exports above A$50 per litre segment grew 55 per cent, hitting a record A$107 million.

Another contributing factor to the increase in the average value of bottled wine was a decline in exports under A$5.00 per litre, much of which is now being shipped in bulk containers to bottle in-market.

What's in store for 2015?

A number of fundamentals indicate that 2015 should be a brighter year than 2014.

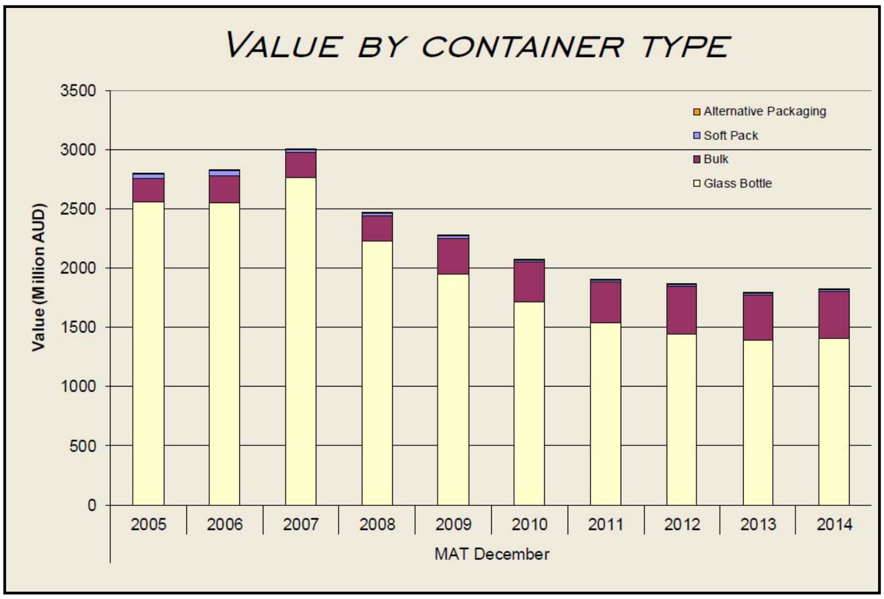
In January 2015, the AUD has been trading around the US$0.81 mark whilst in January 2014 the AUD was trading around the US$0.89 mark. *This is now below US$0.80 and should be providing some relief across the supply chain.*

Although the precise impact on wine exports is difficult to predict, the lower dollar will improve the competitiveness of Australian exporters and all else being equal should improve margins. Furthermore, due to different exchange rate hedging policies by businesses, the full effects of the lower dollar can take some time to be fully felt meaning more benefits should flow through in 2015.

Another positive is global wine production in 2014 is estimated to be down on 2013. According to Rabobank, the US crop is estimated to be 5 to 10 per cent smaller than in 2013, albeit still larger than crops before 2012. They also suggest that "European production looks set to register a significant decline in 2014" with Spain down from a huge crop along with Italy while production in France is likely to be up. Australia's harvest was also down by 7 per cent in 2014. However, even though global production is estimated to be down in 2014, wine stocks in many producing countries may still be high as a result of the large 2013 vintage.

Some significant Free Trade Agreements (FTA) came into force during 2014 and the benefits will begin to flow in 2015. The South Korean and Japanese FTAs came into effect and the China FTA should bring even greater benefit.

A potential challenge on the horizon is that European Union export subsidies for promotional activities are speculated to extend to the United Kingdom. Previously much of the EU promotional subsidies were restricted to developing markets outside of the Union, with the majority of funds spent in Asia and the Americas. The budget for promotion is also being doubled in the 2014 to 2018 period from €522 million per annum to €1.15 billion.



RESEARCH BENEFITS WINEGRAPE GROWERS

Australian Grape and Wine Authority Media Release 18 December 2014

A report showing an $11 return for every dollar invested in new and improved rootstocks for winegrape growers has been published today by the Australian Grape and Wine Authority (AGWA).

A cost–benefit analysis of 26 research projects found the major benefits of rootstock use include improved resilience against soil-borne pests, improved water-use efficiency, reduced potassium and salt uptake, and enhanced vineyard establishment and production.

Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce, said research and development (R&D) in Australia's rural sector had a long history of delivering impressive returns.

"This rootstock analysis demonstrates the valuable role R&D plays and should give levy payers confidence in the value of their levy investments," Minister Joyce said.

"It's important to measure the outcomes of R&D investment to ensure levy payers and our grape and wine sector realise tangible benefits, such as increased profitability and productivity.

"Across the country, about 31 per cent of our grapes are planted on rootstocks, with the top three varieties being Chardonnay, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. Further uptake of the research could deliver substantial benefits to many of our wine grape growers.

"Together with the Australian Government, AGWA is focused on increasing demand, capability and competiveness in Australia's $3.4 billion wine sector," Minister Joyce said.

The 26 research projects previously funded by AGWA, through sector levies and matching contributions from the Australian Government, represent an investment of $19 million in 2014 present value terms. It's estimated they'll deliver additional profitability of more than $260 million by 2040 to grape growers who use rootstocks, AGWA's Acting Chief Executive Officer Andreas Clark said.

"Previous R&D in this area has developed several new, commercially available rootstocks and has helped us compile detailed information on other rootstocks available in Australia," Mr Clark said.

Vineyard Manager at Wynns Coonawarra Estate, Ben Harris, said rootstocks play an important role in his vineyard.

"Rootstocks provide improved biosecurity from potential infestation, optimise wine quality and canopy balance, as well as manage different soil depth and type.

"With climate variation in mind, we're trialling many rootstock combinations aimed at providing not only high -quality grapes, but also drought tolerance, flexibility in growing season length and ripening diversity."

The Australian Government is expected to provide approximately $11.5 million in matching funds to AGWA for R&D in 2014–15.

WILL ENTHANOL BECOME A VIABLE MARKET FOR GRAPES?

Recent developments in the Coleambally region of two new ethanol plants has caused growers to think about alternative markets for their winegrapes. If growers could sell their winegrapes to be made into fuel then it would reduce the available fruit in the market and bolster the price offers possibly.

One company in Coleambally Eagle Energy is a consortium of local farming families which plans to initially process 15,000 tonnes of locally sourced wheat and corn only. There is no indication from them that they will look at other commodities.

The other plant is currently in operation and will process any waste organic material into ethanol and they are looking to purchase wine to extract the ethanol. It is unlikely that they will ever purchase winegrapes, preferring to use "waste" wine. At the time of contact they had not worked out a wine purchase price that was available for discussion.

REAL TIME WEATHER DATA NOW AVAILABLE

Grapegrowers in the Riverina region now have local weather information at their fingertips with online access to a new network of weather stations.

Installed by the Australian Wine Research Institute with funding from the NSW Government under the Skills Development Program for NSW grapegrowers and winemakers the stations are located in five places across the region.

http://www.awri.com.au/industry_support/weather-nsw/

Growers are encouraged to visit the site and use it for recording of weather information prior to spray applications.

RWA INTAKE POLICY

RIVERINA WINEMAKERS ASSOCIATION

The Riverina Winemakers Association (RWA) and interested wineries have again coordinated a joint policy to cover the *Winegrape consignment Chain of Responsibility Code of Conduct Vintage 2015.*

In their policy the RWA states that they are committed to working with industry, regulators and enforcement agencies to proactively engage in the practical management of Mass, Speed, Fatigue, Dimensions and Load Restraint in relation to Chain of Responsibility (CoR) laws now administered by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) from 10 February 2014, whilst recognising the difficulties faced in achieving compliance. To support this common goal and as key members of the Supply Chain, Riverina Winemakers have adopted this code of conduct.

Overloading of Heavy Vehicles

All vehicles entering sites will be monitored, and where vehicles are loaded in excess of their "Legal Mass" limit, an offence under the *Heavy Vehicle (Mass, Dimension and Loading) National Regulation NSW* has occurred. The breach of "Legal Mass" limit will be recorded on the weighbridge docket and all sites will provide an opportunity for the overloaded vehicle to safely correct the "Legal Mass" breach through normal processing procedures on site.

Minor Mass Breaches (0.01% to 2.99%)

For all minor mass breaches in the range noted above carriers will be given the "benefit of the doubt" and no financial or other site penalties will apply. Breaches of legal mass limits still constitute an offence under the legislation.

Breaches that a greater then 2.99% may be processed in different ways depending on the purchaser and their onsite policy.

Load Restraint and Dimensions

Staff at each site will carry out random checks or audits to ensure load restraint guidelines are being adhered to. It is recognised that site staff are not experts in load restraint and hence compliance monitoring will be limited to: Secure fixing of individual bins; Straps, fasteners, gates or webbing in good condition; no evidence of grape spillage over the side of bins or tipper sides. *Copies can be collected from the Board.*

BOARD ELECTIONS TO OCCUR LATE THIS YEAR

Constituted growers that are interested in joining the Board are encouraged to nominate for a position at the end of the year. The positions of the five elected members will be up for renewal and should enough nominations be received by the NSW Electoral Commission an election will be called. There has not been an election for a number of terms. Growers that are interested can contact the Board for further info.

WINE INDUSTRY FUTURE LEADERS COURSE

People with the skills to 'be next' and contribute to the future success of the Australian wine community are invited to apply for Future Leaders, the grape and wine sector's leadership development program.

Funded by the sector and coordinated by the Australian Grape and Wine Authority (AGWA), Future Leaders will be offered to 15 applicants with open, creative, inquisitive minds who are early to mid-career and already demonstrating leadership potential.

Who is this program for?

The program has been tailored to meet the aspirations of committed wine people who want to develop leadership skills, extend their knowledge of the sector and develop collaborative partnerships with their peers for long-term networking and support.

How can you apply? If you want to 'be next' - go to www.futureleaders15.com to submit your written application addressing the selection criteria. Applications opened Monday 12 January and close Friday 13 March 2015.

FUTURE LEADERS 2015

Future Leaders is a combined initiative of the Australian Grape and Wine Authority (AGWA), Wine Grape Growers Australia (WGGA) and the Winemakers' Federation of Australia (WFA).

MEDIA WATCH

South Australian Coalition backbencher Tony Pasin gathering support for dumping New Zealand wine tax rebate ABC Rural, Clint Jasper 28 Jan 2015

Political support for axing a tax rebate enjoyed by New Zealand winemakers is growing, with the Prime Minister agreeing it needs to be eliminated, according to a Coalition backbencher.

Liberal Member for Barker, in eastern South Australia, Tony Pasin, said the rebate is more like a subsidy, and scrapping it would save the Federal Government millions of dollars, as well as helping Australian winemakers.

Under the current system, some New Zealand winemakers selling wine in Australia are eligible for a rebate on the Wine Equalization Tax (WET).

Mr Pasin said that is hurting the local industry, especially in warm inland regions like the Riverland in South Australia, Sunraysia in north-west Victoria and the Riverina in NSW.

"The subsidy is inherently unfair. It's akin to playing the All Blacks or the Silver Ferns with one hand tied behind our backs.

"We wouldn't put up with it on the sporting field, and we shouldn't have to put up with it in business."

Mr Pasin's comments came after Independent Senator for South Australia, Nick Xenophon, made asimilar call for reform of the rebate, saying the reason it was still operating was because of the 'free trade fundamentalists' within the Government.

"I don't share Senator Xenophon's view that there is an unwillingness on the part of the current government to do something about this issue," Mr Pasin said.

"I've raised this issue directly with the Prime Minister and he acknowledges that this is an idiosyncrasy that ought not to be allowed to continue."

Mr Pasin said the Wine Equalisation Tax would be reviewed as part of an upcoming white paper on tax reform.

MEDIA WATCH

Radio New Zealand, Online 29-01-2015 http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/rural/264776/opposition-against-tax-rebate-nothing-new

The New Zealand wine industry body is defending exporters being able to collect a tax rebate in Australia, as politicians across the Tasman call for it to be axed.

Under the Closer Economic Relations (CER) trade agreement with the Australian government, some New Zealand wine exporters were eligible for a refund on the Wine Equalization Tax.

Some Australian politicians and wine industry figures wanted it stopped, calling it a subsidy that was disadvantaging their industry.

But New Zealand Wine Growers chief executive Philip Gregan said the CER agreement had been in place for 30 years and opposition had been around for a while.

"It's been bubbling along over the last year or so. Some people in Australia have tried to describe the wet rebate to New Zealand wineries as a loophole.

"It's not, it's simply about trade rules being in place and under CER, that which is good enough for Australian wineries is good enough for New Zealand wineries."

He said if it was axed, it was not likely to make much difference to the total sales of New Zealand wine in Australia.

"It would clearly have an affect on some individual wine makers but our success in the Australian wine market it not based on the WET rebates, the WET rebate is based on consumer demand for our products."

Mr Gregan said Australia had a greater share of the New Zealand wine market than we did over there.

MEDIA CORRECTION

On Monday 26th January 2014 the Area News Page 5 quoted the Board Chair Bruno Brombal incorrectly in relation to the Board's policy on the WET Rebate.

The article claimed: *"The Board's policy is that people who have cellar doors can claim the rebate, and people who don't should be able to claim it," Mr Brombal said.*

This statement is contrary to the Board's policy.

The Board's current policy in relation to the Wine Equalisation Tax Rebate is that it should apply only to retail sales direct to consumers, for example it should apply to all sales that are made at a cellar door as well as those made to consumers and retailers and promotional events. This would then reduce the amount of rebate claims that are being fed into wholesalers and impact on the price offers to us all.

HARVEST MANAGEMENT SCHEME DELAYED

Following approaches from the Wine Grapes Marketing Board, the Hon. Adrian Piccoli MP starting around 8 months ago the Board has finally had a response from the Minister for Roads and Freight The Hon. Duncan Gay MLC.

The Board was seeking urgent inclusion into the scheme as it allowed for most transport vehicles to carry up to 4.99% greater than their Gross Vehicle Mass under a gazette scheme that was controlled and managed by the NSW Government.

The Minister's response was:

In relation to the WGMB's request, I am advised wine grapes are moved in a slurry form. This means as a load they perform very differently to grains and therefore may have different axle load effects and impact on road infrastructure compared to grain.

Also, the GHMS, as a concessional mass scheme, is based on detailed knowledge of the supply chain processes and research relating to seasonal harvest practices, vehicle types used for the grain transport task and associated pavement wear analysis. Hence, it is not considered practical to include grapes in the GHMS. A plausible approach would be to consider a potential stand-alone transport arrangement for the movement of wine grapes.

I am aware that a number of Councils have expressed particular issues with spillage from grape movements. If loads were increased, there is potential for aggravation of the spillage issue. As such, a collaborative approach involving Local Government, Roads and Maritime and industry would be needed to consider any transport productivity scheme for the wine grapes industry. Ultimately, all road managers, both Local and State Government, will need to be involved in the development of a scheme.

Under the HVNL, which came into effect in February 2014, any new productivity schemes need to be developed in conjunction with the NHVR, particularly where industries work in a number of states and possibly cross borders. I am advised that Transport for NSW is willing to facilitate discussions between WGMB, NHVR, Roads and Maritime and Local Government to commence work on a suitable scheme for the wine grapes industry.

WARNING SIGNS FOR GRAPE TRANSPORT VEHICLES

This season the Board has instigated a number of new initiatives aimed solely at reducing the risk of winegrapes being spilled by trucks. Based on conversations with drivers the biggest concern that they have is other road users cutting them off at intersections and roundabouts. These incidents allegedly cause the brakes to be applied too rapidly and results in grapes leaving the vehicle in extreme circumstance.

Growers could protect themselves from prosecution if they all had a dashboard camera but it is obvious that this solution does not prevent the grapes from leaving the vehicle.

Throughout the harvest the Board will be moving around a number of variable message boards that will operate 24/7 advising all road users that the trucks are out and about.

Growers with suggestions as to where these could be located are encouraged to call the Board.

To compliment the variable message boards the Board is also going to trial reflective signs for the back of trucks so that when being followed the vehicle behind will know that you are carting winegrapes and hopefully take all due care if and when overtaking. If these work effectively they will be made available for all grape transport vehicles.

WINE GRAPES MARKETING BOARD - proudly serving winegrape producers since 1933
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