



Vintage 2024 in the Riverina: Worst on Record

As I sit here pondering what to write in this year's vintage report it's hard not to reflect on last year which at the time was considered by most, to be the worst on record. Last year we were hard pressed to see how things could get worse but they have. This is due to prices of both reds and whites continuing to plummet. Last vintage we had La Nina and the increased cost of extra chemical application due to extreme disease pressure that saw a 40% drop in intake. This year we had a good start as El Nino led the way into the growing season however in November the rains came which compromised some varieties coming into vintage with split berries and perfect conditions for other pests like mealy bug. Vintage saw several challenges with some of the early whites rejected for disease including botrytis and sour rot. Late season downey mildew was evident in some blocks however this was nothing compared to the devastation it caused in vintage 2023. Some blocks were rejected as mealy bug populations escalated.

Prices were as low as \$150 per tonne for some red varieties causing great angst for growers that delivered to those wineries. Several growers decided not to deliver their grapes at that price. Many growers not-



ed that the reds they delivered went across the weighbridge at Baume's well above what was required by the winery and were dismayed to see water then being added to get the desiccated fruit through the crushers. Our modeling has shown that most growers made a negative return this year with some showing negative returns of up to \$2000 per hectare. We have heard of growers being told by banks to sell water to pay the bills as finance for winegrapes is not available. We are extremely worried about the mental health of our growers.

As it stands about 255,000 tonnes of grapes were crushed in vintage 2024 up from 212,000 tonnes in 2023. There have been reports of good quality in the white varieties with mixed results in the reds. 2024 crush for Chardonnay 58,500 tonnes up 20,000 tonnes on last year. Pinot Gris 19,600 tonnes being the same as last year and both Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon at 18,500 tonnes each. Shiraz 32,600 tonnes similar to last vintage, but about half of what the crop potential is for this variety. Merlot 20,600 tonnes up from 13,000 tonnes last vintage. Cabernet Sauvignon 12,900 tonnes up from 8,300 tonnes last vintage but still a long way from the regional yield potential of this variety of around 25,000 tonnes. We are hopeful that we have finally seen the worst and look forward to better years to come especially now that China has dropped the tariffs and some growers are removing vines. We are mindful that Chinese consumption has dropped markedly and that there is still an ocean of red wine in tanks suppressing the bulk market. We are hopeful for intervention after the task force report is reviewed by government, above and beyond the \$3,500,000 announced by government. Many growers have deemed this a slap in the face and an insult especially after the snub to Australia Grape and Wines pre budget submission that had the potential to make a real difference.

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WINE GRAPES MARKETING BOARD

BOARD ACTIVITIES REPORT



**Riverina
WINEGRAPE
GROWERS**

Wine Industry Taskforce

3 April 2024 saw RWG host the Wine Industry Taskforce (WIT). The working group was set up in response to the worsening conditions faced by growers. The Taskforce met with the Board in the morning and then visited a vineyard in Yenda before meeting with Winemakers.



Wine Industry Taskforce meeting with Growers

Riverina Winegrape Growers CEO Appointed to The ACCC Agricultural Consultative Committee

Jeremy Cass has been appointed to the ACCC Agricultural consultative committee for a period of 2 years. This committee meets twice a year to hear what the ACCC has been doing in the agriculture space and report anything they feel falls within the ACCC mandate. Please feel free to contact Jeremy on 0427 759 094 if you have an issue that needs to be flagged with the ACCC.

Mental Health First Aid Course

A second mental health First Aid course was sponsored by RWG. This one focused on youth mental health. Both Jeremy Cass and Tony Baggio have completed the courses and available to talk with anyone in need of help. Please contact Jeremy 0427 759 094 or Tony 0428 696 861 all conversations will be held in the strictest of confidence.

Riverina Winegrape Growers Board Elections

Have you considered becoming a board member. The Board Elections are coming up later in the year. If you are interested please contact Jeremy Cass 0427 759 094.

HACCP for Vintage 2025

Brian Bortolin will begin doing HACCP audits for growers from September onwards this year due to SWA training in July and August. If you need to complete your HACCP audit sooner please contact Brian on 0401 567 449 or 6962 3944. If you are a Casella grower SWA will supersede HACCP. If you deliver to other wineries you may need to check if your SWA accreditation will suffice or if you need HACCP also.

Rebates for third party HACCP Audit and Chemical Accreditation

A reminder that a \$150 rebate is available for Third Party Audit upon receipt of certification. With a \$100 rebate for completion of Chemical Accreditation.

Grower BBQ

Riverina Winegrape Growers held its post vintage BBQ on Wednesday 23 April 2024. It was great to see some new faces. We are now averaging 30 growers to these events and its great to catch up for a bit of a chat and a feed as we have a great BBQ chef.



Calendar of Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Time	Venue
Grower BBQ	14/08/2024	11:30am-2:30pm	Riverina Winegrape Growers Carpark
RWG Budget Meeting	16/10/2024	7:00pm-10:00pm	Yoogali Club
Grower BBQ	4/12/2024	11:30am-2:30pm	Riverina Winegrape Growers Carpark
SWA Support Workshops will be held during July and August			

Murray Valley Winegrowers Outlook Forum

On 12 June 2024 a contingent of 11 growers, board members and staff made their way to Mildura for the 2024 Murray Valley Winegrowers Outlook Forum. Paul Derrico MVG CEO arranged a cast of speakers that included Adam Fennessy PSM Secretary Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Martin Cole CEO Wine Australia, Lee McLean CEO Australian Grape and Wine, Simone George Ciatti Global Wine & Grape Brokers, David Salisbury Small Business and Agriculture ACCC, and Joe Banks Senior Manager Retail Water Entitlements and Markets Department of Energy Environment and Climate Action. The event started at 12:30 pm with registrations and speakers starting at 1:00pm. All the speakers were good and gave the latest information on their organisations input into the wine industry. At the end of the event attendees had the opportunity to speak with some of the speakers that made themselves available for a chat and a drink before heading off.

After camping the night in Mildura we were met at breakfast by Steve from Murray Valley Winegrowers who escorted us to Brent Farnsworth's property at Coomealla. Brent runs two high density plantings on the NSW side of the river. Brent is a grower that is happy to share what he does. The visit was informative with the group listening intently and asking questions on the operation that runs dual cordons at 2.7m or 9 foot spacings. Even extraverted farm cat Norm with his entertaining antics couldn't take attention away from Brent for long. Finally the tour ended with a visit to the Leda Grape harvester factory. Unfortunately the state of the industry has meant little demand for harvesters so the factory was concentrating on Olive harvesters and producing parts. This trip was sponsored by Riverina Winegrape Growers and when questioned on the trip home all of the attendees agreed that the trip was worthwhile and they would recommend it to any interested growers.



Participants listening to the speakers at the Murray Valley Winegrowers Outlook Forum

VERT Training

On Monday 15 April 2024 NSW DPI ran a VERT training workshop in Griffith. VERT stands for Viticultural Emergency Response Training and was developed after the Varroa Mite incursion in bees. The aim of the training is to upskill growers and industry participants to be available to help the DPI in the case of an incursion of an exotic pest like Xylella. Participants were trained for a scenario of an outbreak and have been targeted by the NSW DPI due to their experience in working in vineyards. This type of experience is invaluable when trying to rapidly respond to an outbreak. It's a skill we hope we never have to use.



Participants at the VERT Training Course

Sustainable Winegrowing Australia—SWA



Casella Family Brands Growers undertaking a SWA training Day

Sustainable Winegrapes Australia (SWA) as its commonly known has now found its way to the Riverina. Casella Family Brands notified growers as soon as vintage 2024 was complete that they would now have to be SWA certified by vintage 2025. This is a mammoth undertaking by CFB as they strive to get all their own sites accredited as well as all the growers that supply them. The reasoning behind this is market access.

We have just been made aware that DeBortoli Wines will also begin this process with its local growers with training to start on the 15 July 2024. After meeting with the other wineries it is apparent that most will be asking growers to become certified within the next year or so.

Being able to put the trustmark on your bottle is all about competing for market share. Most wineries have stated that they have lost sales to product bearing the trustmark or were unable to tender for a sale due to the trustmark being a requirement.

Riverina Winegrape Growers believes that SWA needs modifications regarding the way that it works and we have been fighting to get some changes to the program. We believe it will make a positive difference not just for growers but to the SWA accreditation. The problems began with no consultation with our region in the development process and we believe that for independent growers we could manage the system and audit growers on an annual basis just as we have done with HACCP for more than 20 years.

The burning question is why do growers need a third

party accreditation. I asked this question of Mark Krstic Managing Director of AWRI and his reply was “so they can use the SWA trustmark.” I expressed to Mark that none of our growers wants the trustmark. The wineries are the ones who need the trustmark and we have a system already in place to support growers with HACCP, that would work just as well with SWA in this instance. It would keep cost down for growers that

were already receiving returns less than the cost of production and be better for the program overall.

Riverina Winegrape Growers also has a problem with the fact that the trustmark could be used on grapes and wine purchased below the cost of production. Our legal advice suggests that this could be misleading and deceptive and lead to claims of green washing and damage to the SWA brand. We have

been told that the system is undergoing a change from environmental sustainability to a full ESG system. We welcome this as it would mean that under the social responsibility wineries would need to be signatories to the code of conduct to utilise the trustmark. Please see the letter on the following page that we have sent to the SWA joint steering committee to address these issues.

Grower Support

Riverina Winegrape Growers are working on a support package for growers to help with their journey to gain accreditation. We will be conducting grower support workshops in July and August as well as helping with resources needed by growers and financial rebates for first time joining fees.





**Riverina
WINEGRAPE
GROWERS**

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24/6/2024

Open letter to the SWA Joint Steering Committee.

SWA has now come to the Riverina with Casella Family Brands getting their growers accredited by next vintage, and we have just been made aware that DeBortoli wines is trying to do the same. This is causing a great deal of angst amongst our growers as they come to terms with the extra work and cost involved with achieving certification when they are making a loss by growing wine grapes, our CEO Jeremy Cass has sent several communications on our concerns surrounding SWA but is yet to receive any reply.

Our main concerns as have been noted previously are

1. The ability to use the SWA Trust Mark when growers are losing money, this isn't sustainable by any stretch of the imagination, how can a grower put anything into the environment when they need to get a second job to put food on the table. In fact, our legal advice is that if this occurs it is misleading and deceptive, or in simple terms fraudulent Green Washing. We have heard that Sweden is already asking for proof that the whole value chain is profitable, much in line with the fair-trade logo used on coffee and chocolate. What is being done to stop the SWA trust mark from being used in these instances, so that all the investment in Brand SWA is not wasted or tarnished due to greenwashing claims?
2. Lack of consultation with the warm irrigated areas has led to a system that is not fit for purpose, why do independent growers need a third-party audit? We have been doing second party HACCP auditing of growers for over 20 years and this has allowed our local wineries to become compliant in their third-party HACCP audits, why can't we do the same for SWA? Growers don't need trust marks and we are open to having a third-party auditor audit our process for full transparency. This would be a major cost saving to our growers and would be done annually which would remove the need for an internal audit from growers and give greater support and continuity to the program and the growers.
3. When will the ability to use the SWA Logo only be available to wineries that are signatories to the code of conduct? If you don't want to be a signatory to the code that's a choice you can make as the code is voluntary, to have the ability to utilise the trust mark in these circumstances makes a mockery of the system that is supposedly in the process of becoming a full ESG system. By not being a signatory to your industry's voluntary code of conduct you are thumbing your nose at your social responsibilities, and as such should not be permitted to use the trust mark, this needs to be enacted now.

The Board of Riverina Winegrape Growers would like to seek a meeting urgently with the SWA joint steering committee to address the above issues and proposed time frames of when these will be enacted, unfortunately a lot of talking takes place for no real actions to happen. Our growers have been very vocal about the extra cost and time to achieve SWA certification in the current climate, with many of the older growers worried that they will have to employ someone to manage this program for them thus adding another cost. We will be publishing this letter in our newsletter due out at the end of June so that they know that do have their best interests at heart.

Kind Regards

Bruno Brombal
Chairman

Ag Industry Services Regulation 2024

The Agricultural Industry Services Regulation 2015 (the AIS Regulation) that provides for the establishment of agricultural industry services committees, including the Riverina Winegrape Growers (the RWG), is currently being reviewed in accordance with Schedule 2 of the *Subordination Legislation Act 1989* and the NSW Government Guide to Better Regulation.

As part of this review, the RWG proposed that:

- The corporate name of the Wine Grapes Marketing Board is changed to the Riverina Winegrape Growers to better reflect current operations.
- The quorum for a committee meeting is 5% of the total number of registered constituents at the end of the last calendar year in order to remain flexible to membership changes over time.
- An outdated reference to the former Greater Sunraysia Pest Free Area Industry Development Committee is removed.

These changes have been incorporated in a draft Agricultural Industry Services Regulation 2024 (the draft Regulation). Some other minor amendments have been made in the draft Regulation to adhere to current plain English drafting guidelines and to make the regulation clearer.

The NSW Government has now commenced public consultation on the draft Regulation and its associated Regulatory Impact Statement. You can access these documents and find out more information about providing feedback as part of the public consultation process via these links:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/legislation/list/agricultural-industry-services/draft-agricultural-industry-services-regulation-2024>
<https://www.nsw.gov.au/have-your-say/ag-industry-services-regulation-2024>.

Written submissions can be submitted via email at dpi.cabinet@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Closing date for submissions 11:59pm 3 July 2024.

Natural Resources Access Regulator

The NSW water regulator dropped into Riverina Winegrape Growers office to better understand industry challenges and explore opportunities for building water resilience.

Engagement officers from the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) discussed the loss of the Chinese market, current oversupply and low demand, low profitability and high costs of transitioning to new income streams, as well as the biosecurity risk presented by abandoned farms.

NRAR engaged with more than 15 stakeholders across the winegrape, citrus, almond, cotton and grain industries to support growers with water educational resources as part of their resilience planning.


Understanding the complexities of water laws can bring efficiencies for water management and help plan for challenging periods. NRAR's new e-tool can help make sense of metering, landholder rights, and waterfront works. It's free to register.



Jeremy Cass, Merran Davis (NRAR), Bruno Brombal, Bob Bellato



Scan the code to register and start learning today.



Engagement

NRAR is the independent regulator responsible for the compliance and enforcement of NSW water laws.

Learn more at nrar.nsw.gov.au

Natural Resources Access Regulator

Learn the water rules online





About the course

Our free online course is designed to make it easier for you to comply with NSW water laws.

You'll learn about how water is managed and regulated in NSW, what rules apply to you and how to follow them.

The learning is self-directed and self-paced, which means you choose the topics you want to learn about, and you do it at your own pace.

You can also revisit the course as many times as you want.

The Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) developed the course in collaboration with TAFE NSW.

What you'll learn

We'll start you off with the basics.

The first three compulsory modules will help you understand key terms and the basics of water law.

You'll then choose topics that suit you best from the list below.

- Basic landholder rights
- Floodplain harvesting
- Non-urban water metering
- Working on waterfront land
- Works approval and licenced water take

Who the course is for

The information is targeted at primary producers, rural landholders and those working in the agricultural sectors.

However, it's freely available to anyone interested in learning more about NSW water law.

When everyone follows the water rules, environments, communities and industries thrive.

Not sure what topics to pick?

Once you've registered, you'll have access to a decision tree that will help you decide which module/s are best suited to you and your water practices.



How to register

Scan the QR code on the back or visit

qrco.de/etool_engagement

WINE GRAPES MARKETING BOARD

Prize Winners Drawn in Mealybug Survey Competition



At the recent Riverina Winegrape Growers AGM two \$250 visa gift cards were drawn for completing the mealybug survey. The survey was put together by Dr Meena Thakur. Meena is a Research Horticulturist, Entomologist based at Yanco Agriculture Institute. Meena has taken on the mealybug project and after talking with growers that were having problems decided to put out a survey to try and get a picture on how bad the problem actually is. Unfortunately the majority of chemicals to control the pest cannot be used in wine grapes at the recommended time for best control due to MRL's. Meena was unable to join us on the night so guest speaker Liz Riely drew the prizes. The first winner was Peter Valeri, who was not in attendance and the second winner was **Glen Bavaresco, pictured receiving his prize** from RWG Chairman Bruno Brombal.

China Drops Tariffs

On 29 March 2024 China dropped its tariffs on Australian wine imports. This was expected due to an announcement five months earlier by the Chinese that they were undertaking a review into the tariffs. At this stage there are no figures on what has been sent to China over the past three months. Actual figures are expected 30 June 2024 when Wine Australia releases its quarterly export report. Prior to this the export report showed a 60% increase in exports to Hong Kong which we believe was a staging point for movement into China. Speaking with local wineries most were suggesting that they had received positive enquiries for China but also observed that the same enquiries were being targeted at all wineries. The real evidence will come once initial orders have been sent and the time taken before reorders take place.



“I wasn't sure if the wine was breathing, so I've been giving it mouth-to-mouth.”

abbottsons

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