

Water Buybacks Both Sides Of The Coin

When I think of the history of Griffith the words of the explorer John Oxley who passed through here in 1817 come to mind, Oxley described the region as being **'uninhabitable and useless to civilized man.'** Just over 200 years later not only do we have a vibrant multicultural regional city, a place where it doesn't matter what day of the week it is you will have difficulty finding a park in the main street after 6:00pm in the evening. I

lose the water that flows down those man made tributaries would have a huge impact on the region. I recall when I first came to Griffith for a job interview in 1995 going past Binya, realising that I had only about 20km to drive, I started to wonder what the hell I was getting into. Five minutes later I drove past the orchards and vineyards surrounding the oasis of Yenda. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The environment was green,

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Stop the Buybacks Rally held in Griffith Memorial Park on 21/11/23

would challenge any rural city in NSW to be as active as ours. Why is this so? **The answer is Water.**

Less than 100 years after Oxley made his grim prediction about the area, in 1912 the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area was formally established. Work on the MIA began in 1903 with the construction on canals heading west from Narrandera and the construction of Burrinjuck Dam. The towns of both Griffith and Leeton were purpose built as part of the project, Both have thrived as have the people who came here over the years and yes, **the reason for this is water.**

The MIA differs from other irrigation towns that are dotted along the river systems of the MDB as it is not on the river, the water comes to us through channels that were originally dug manually all those years ago. So to

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BOARD ACTIVITIES REPORT



RWG Christmas Office Closure

Riverina Winegrape Growers Office will close for Christmas 4pm Friday the 22nd of December 2023 and will reopen on Monday the 8th January 2024. The board and staff would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year

Advanced Viticulture Course

The advanced Viticulture course run by the AWRI was held again in October this year. Jared Bianchini represented the Riverina and was sponsored by

Riverina Winegrape growers as part of our ongoing promotion of young people in the industry.

As part of the sponsorship Jared was asked to report back on his experience at a RWG board Meeting, Jared reports that overall it was a very positive



Jared Bianchini

experience, that he would recommend to anyone wishing to attend, in future. To this end Riverina Winegrape Growers will continue to sponsor up to two people to attend this event annually. Any one wishing to attend the 2024 course is asked to contact Jeremy Cass on 0427 759 094.

Grower BBQ's

This year RWG have had four BBQ's in the carpark behind our office. The last one for the year was held on Wednesday 6 December. The shelter that we built with help from a grant from the NSW Government provided much needed shade on this very warm day. Over 30 growers made an appearance to enjoy a chat, cold drink and something to eat. It was great to see some new faces and catch up in a casual atmosphere.



Growers enjoying a chat at the BBQ

BUDGET AND STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING REPORT

On Wednesday 11 October 2023 64 growers, partners and guests attended the Budget and Strategic Planning dinner meeting held by Riverina Winegrape Growers.

The meeting which was open to all constituted growers in the area was held to discuss and approve the five year Strategic Plan of the Board and to set the statutory fees and charges for funding of the Board.

The rate for 2024 will be \$3.90 per tonne fresh weight.

Growers approved a comprehensive expenditure budget for 2024. Growers were comfortable that the Board will maintain a solid financial approach and return excess funds in the future if and as required.

Jim Caddy the Chairman of the Inland Wine Regions

Alliance gave the growers a brief overview on the state of the industry before handing over to Sandy Hathaway and Angelica Crabb from Wine Australia, who demonstrated the new Supply and Demand Dashboard that had been developed by Wine Australia.

Anna Hooper from Australian Grape and Wine finalised the formal part of the evening by giving an update on the activities that Australian Grape and Wine have been involved in in the past 12 months. These included working on having the Chinese tariffs removed and lobbying the Federal and State Governments to stop both the implementation of container deposit scheme and demands from the European union for Australia to stop using the name Prosecco on wine products.

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Water Buybacks... Both Sides Of The Coin

and inviting, so much so that 28 years later, I'm still here. **Again, the reason is water.**

The MIA runs on water and the amounts that the government wants to acquire on behalf of the environment, if concentrated into the MIA, would take all we have and still not meet their requirements. Whilst we all know that this won't be the case, any water taken from the area will result in negative impacts on the region. The more water we lose the greater these impacts will be. From increased costs of getting your water supplied, to the flow on effect of job and service losses in the greater community.

The wine industry in the region would be non-existent without water. This is an industry that I am passionate about and one that has supported me for 30 years. Unfortunately, the current oversupply has caused returns, especially in the red varieties, to drop well below the cost of production. The average age of growers is rising and many have no one waiting in the wings to take over the vineyard. I believe that we will see grapes left on the vine this year due to storage issues and these grapes will have been watered.

Anyone looking over the fence would be well within their rights to suggest that this water was being wasted growing a crop, that won't be delivered. An unfortunate fact is that we need to shrink our industry in order to bring it back into balance. This would cause many growers to look at the water buybacks as a way out and under the circumstances, who could blame them. These are the willing sellers that Tanya Plibersek MP keeps telling us about. I have talked with many of these growers and not one would sell their water if they were making money growing their crops. These willing sellers are really selling under duress caused by the downturn in the industry. Other commodities that require water and are under stress are also targets. All of this is being done to put extra water through the

HACCP & 3rd Party Rebates

With Vintage fast approaching a quick reminder that you may need to have your HACCP audit completed, Brian has completed most of them but there are still a few outstanding. Don't leave it until the last minute give Brian a call on 0401 567449. If you have to have a third part Audit like Freshcare don't forget about the \$150 rebate, just call into the office with a copy of your paid invoice to receive the rebate. Anyone who has paid for a **chemical users course** is eligible for a \$100 rebate.

Murray Darling river system in the name of the environment.

This is the part that I struggle to get my head around. When I look at the environment we have here in Australia the words of Dorothea Mackellar's poem, My Country, comes to mind specifically "of droughts and flooding rains". Last

year we had floods and countless gigalitres flowed down the rivers just as it should have. So, why in drought years do we still have to run the river at a "banka" for the environment? In drought years, before we built weirs and dams, rivers would run dry. When the rains came the rivers would again run and the fish would return. I believe that rivers running a "banka" is actually harming the environment. The whole thing makes no sense. What does make sense to growers is the ability to exit the industry in a dignified manner by selling their water. This is a simple business decision that has been made possible by politicians. Whilst it may have a negative impact on the region the only ones to blame are the politicians that changed the laws to ignore this, not the growers who take up the offer .



Member for Murray Helen Dalton MP & Griffith Mayor Doug Curran addressing the water rally

USE OUR LAB

The Board operates a laboratory service during the vintage that allows growers to test the maturity and colour of winegrapes. The PH and Titratable Acid (TA) of the grapes are recorded and reported along with the variety and Baume. Results are generally the same day and can be sent directly to your phone. Growers could look to develop a yearly portfolio of their winegrapes in terms of the vineyard performance and qualities that may assist with buyer negotiations.

Upcoming Training for 2024

AgSkilled courses will once again be offered free to winegrape growers in 2024. There is a large selection of courses to choose from. Operation and Maintenance of Machinery, Pest and Disease Management to Business.

Some courses that are coming up in the near future are the Drones in Agriculture course to be held in Griffith on the 28 February 2024 (see below flyer). The Farm Mapping and Data Collection Course on the 29 February 2024. Both of these courses complement each other with the Drones in Ag course focusing on the operation of drones and the rules around their use while touching on collecting and processing data for the benefit of your farming operation. The farm mapping and data collection

course will delve deeper into the data collection possible with the use of drones and look at surveying and creating maps and models.

A couple of courses that are planned for mid April specifically for viticulture, are the VERT Course (Viticulture Emergency Response Training) on the 17 April and Weed Management in Vineyards on 18 & 19 of April. The Weed Management in Vineyards is a brand new course that has just been added to the Tocal curriculum.

The **Viticulture Emergency Response Training** was an initiative of NSW Wine, NSW DPI, LLS and Tocal as a way of preparing the wine industry in the case of a biosecurity incursion. The development of this course came from the varroa Mite incursion with

the need of DPI and LLS to co-opt bee keepers to help in the response to the varroa incursion and provide extra boots on the ground. The pilot VERT training program was delivered in January and attended by industry members from NSW and representatives from NSW DPI, LLS, and Tocal as a way of testing and fine tuning the training. The training takes one day with the aim of training personal to be available as first responders in the case of an incursion. It will introduce participants to the biosecurity protocols that are required. VERT trainees can be if available, paid by NSW DPI to respond in the event of an incursion.



AgSkilled™ and Tocal College: The training you want, where you want it, for
VITICULTURE - GRAINS - COTTON - RICE - PRODUCTION HORTICULTURE
LIVESTOCK - HONEY BEES

Drones in Agriculture

Operating a drone is like any other precision control system — with proper planning, set up and confidence to operate safely, it can provide real on-farm benefits.

Designed by farmers for farmers, in partnership with NSW Farmers, this upgraded course is delivered by experienced drone operators. This training provides information around the use of drones to collect farm data to help make informed decisions such as refined fertiliser, sowing, crop and weed management plans, as well as monitoring and maximising the efficiency of farm water systems.

In January 2021, new regulations were introduced around the use of remote aircraft on farms — this course addresses these requirements and provides base knowledge to follow the new excluded category operations class and to understand CASA (Civil Aviation Safety Authority) regulations to safely use drones in agricultural settings.

Scan to visit course webpage



The course aims to develop knowledge and skills in:

- safe and efficient operation of drones in an agricultural context
- Australian laws relating to excluded category operation of drones and Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) regulations in agricultural settings
- collecting and processing data to improve planning, productivity, water-use efficiency and safety on your farm.

The course consists of:

1 day face-to-face + pre-course online work.



www.tocal.nsw.edu.au/courses/short-courses/agskilled

Funded training delivered by Tocal College through AgSkilled™, supported by the NSW Department of Education



Drones in Ag course to be held in Griffith on the 28 Feb 2024

NSW DPI Viticulture Projects Update

Prepared by Dr Katie Dunne NSW DPI

Resting vineyard trial update

As the season has been rapidly progressing, the resting vineyard trial continues. All treatments have been applied using either double pruning (using a hedger), application of ethephon and or calcium nitrate. The chemical treatments were applied by hand due to the scale of the trial. In comparison to last year, this year has provided the conditions to apply the irrigation treatments more effectively. The irrigation scheduling is currently being managed by Robert Hoogers (DPI NSW). As part of this trial, we have also been using AgTech to monitor and record irrigation, rainfall and testing equipment that monitors sap flow and trunk expansion and contraction. Half of the trial has been put back into production to assess whether there is a carry over effect from the treatments applied last year. Results are looking promising, and time will tell as to the long-term effects. Yield data will be collected at harvest while vine vigour (leaf area index), canopy health and water stress will continue to be measured throughout the season.

Preliminary results from this trial have already been published in NSW DPI's Grapevine management guide. Further results will be made available at the end of the project.



Robert Hoogers spraying of Ethephon on treatment plots.

Fungicide Resistance Testing

As we near the Christmas period, now is the time to continue to monitor your vineyard for diseases. There have been reports of Powdery Mildew in the region. Even though the season has been relatively hot and dry, there has been periods of higher humidity which dramatically increases the disease risk in a vineyard. Coverage, timing and chemical selection are key aspects in managing disease. If you think you have a fungicide resistance issue, please do not hesitate to seek guidance. Fungicide resistance can become a problem within a season quite quickly even when all the guidelines are followed, and good technique is used. The team based at the South Australian Research Institute are continuing with their project testing for fungicide resistance in downy mildew, powdery mildew and botrytis bunch. The SARDI team are always happy to take samples and will share the results where possible. If you are interested in getting samples testing, please call 0429 361 563.

Following label rates, ensuring maximum coverage, alternating chemical groups and maximising airflow in the canopy will aid in minimising your risk of disease. There is fungicide resistance in the region with information being shared with all local agronomists. Keep inspecting your vineyard regularly for pests and diseases so that you can act accordingly before it becomes a bigger problem.

Next Crop Graduation

On 24 November the region held the Next Crop Graduation at the Gem Hotel. This program is key project that Wine Australia continues to roll out across Australia's wine regions with a purpose to develop local leaders that become champions of their region. The program was structured to suit the local industry and administered by the Riverina Winemakers Association with the project proposal initially submitted in partnership with NSW DPI. Participants came from all sections of the wine industry including viticulturists, winemakers, agronomists, marketing and compliance. The program kicked off in May earlier this year. All graduates had the opportunity to meet both virtually and in person, leaders in the Australian Wine Industry and local organisations. Special mentions go out to those that gave up their time to provide leadership insights include Dr Mark Krstic (AWRI), Kristy Bartrop (Southern Premium Vineyards),

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Chinese Review of Wine Tariffs



Wine Australia hosted a China Market Webinar on the 22 November to give some insight and advice on re-entry to this Market. The Australian and Chinese Governments came to an agreement on the 22 October 2023 that if Australia withdrew the World Trade Organisation dispute on the matter, China would start a five month review of the tariffs. The review should be complete by 21 March 2024. Failure by the Chinese, to lift the tariffs, at this point would be the catalyst for Australia to resume its case with the WTO.

Exports into China peaked in Oct 2020. At that point, \$1.3 Billion worth of wine was being exported to China from Australia. China's wine consumption is dropping in favour of spirits and it was interesting to note that all other countries currently exporting to China have experienced a drop in exports. This says a lot when you consider that this included taking up the market share left behind from our exit from the industry. It really emphasises just how much the wine consumption in China has dropped in recent times.

The tariffs were levied on bottled product of less than two litres in capacity, meaning that bulk wine was still allowed into the country. One of the panel, who works in China helping to clear imported Australian product through docks, stated that it was still very hard for Australian agriculture to do business in China, especially with border issues. Products can be left on

the docks for considerable amounts of time causing issues with shelf life, especially with fresh product. It was also explained that there was still a lot of Australian wine available in China and that exporters should make sure that they don't already have unsold stocks of wine in the country.

Lee McLean stated that it was imperative that wine companies gearing up to start exporting wine, once the review was finished, did so in a manner that would not see the whole process repeated. As the Chinese

thought that we were dumping the wine and companies may be excluded on an individual basis rather than the complete



Local Wine for sale in China Pre Tariffs

industry, as has been seen with meat exports.

The panelist from Austrade also warned business about the perils of dumping but also warned wineries not to be tempted to send poor quality wine as this would be viewed in a very bad light and could cause issues for both the industry or the individual.

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NSW DPI Viticulture Projects Update

Lee McLean (Australian Grape & Wine), Dr Martin Cole (Wine Australia), Andrew Calabria (Riverina Winemakers), Liz Riley and many more.

Jill Briggs from Affecus facilitated the sessions, guiding the group on their journey. Each in their own way, has inspired a new generation of leaders for the industry with a focus on the Riverina.

The group have started their various projects with the goal of promoting the Riverina Region and more details will follow as we see the projects come to fruition. The report from this project is underway and took several years to bring it to the region. The national program is rolled out regularly with different regions each year across Australia. It is hoped that Riverina may be lucky

in obtaining a similar grant in the future to build upon the foundation that we have created this year.



2023 Riverina Next Crop Graduates (photo credit Carrah Lymer, Riverina Winemakers Association).

Mental Health First Aid Course

Nine people took up the offer to attend a mental health first aid course. The course was run by Jennie O'Hara of JMO Training services. This was run over two days, 16 and 17 November in the Riverina Winegrape Growers boardroom.

The two days gave insightful training in the best ways to approach someone who may be having some form of mental health issues. Some of the information was very confronting when delving into some of the more severe forms of mental illness, like Psychosis and substance abuse related mental health issues.

APPROACH THE PERSON, ASSESS AND ASSIST WITH ANY CRISIS

If the person is not in crisis, apply the rest of the MHFA Action Plan.

- A**pproach the person, assess and assist with any crisis
- L**isten and communicate non-judgementally
- G**ive support and information
- E**ncourage the person to get appropriate professional help
- E**ncourage other supports

ALGEE the Acronym used to list the steps used to help in a crisis



Participants taking part in the Mental Health First Aid Course

Helpful Resources
If you or someone you know has a mental health issue

Mental Health Line
1800 011 511

Lifeline
13 11 14

Beyond Blue
1300 22 4636

SANE Helpline
1800 18 7263

WINE GRAPES MARKETING BOARD

MIA Vine Improvement Celebrates 40 years of Service to the Wine Industry



Past and Present MIA Vine Improvement Board Members and staff at the celebratory Dinner

MIAVIS celebrated 40 years of service to the wine industry with a dinner at Romeo & Giulietta. MIAVIS was formed in 1983 with the help of the NSW DPI as a not for profit organisation to supply industry with grapevine propagation material. MIAVIS now has two

farms that produce rootstock propagation material and they source scion material from local grower farms. This material is then supplied to growers and the nursery industry, predominantly in NSW, Vic, and SA, however some has even been exported to India.



Wine Grapes Marketing Board 182 Yambil Street Griffith NSW 2680 Phone: (02) 6962 3944 Fax: (02) 6962 6103
Email: board@wgmb.net.au Web: www.riverinawinegrapes.com.au Office Hours: 8:30am - 5:00pm Mon - Fri

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