

Media Release

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Bushfires draw Australian wine sector closer

Australia's wine sector is drawing together to provide support and advice to those affected by fire.

Wine Australia, Australian Grape & Wine, the Australian Wine Research Institute and viticultural experts, backed by the Federal Government, and state and regional wine agencies, are coordinating a response that will offer support and advice in the short-term and a longer-term action plan.

Wine Australia Chief Executive Officer Andreas Clark said it would be several weeks before it would be possible to get a real picture of bushfire impacts in the affected areas.

'In some areas where people have been evacuated it will be some time before it is safe to access vineyards. There is also the fact that assessment of the impact on vines is complex. It is easy to see when vines are burned but often it takes much longer to establish the damage caused by heat.'

Mr Clark said in some regions of South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland individual vineyards and wineries had suffered devastating damage which would take years to recover and local regions and the sector more broadly would step in to assist.

'Sadly, it is not the first nor the last time that Australia has dealt with bushfires. What we have seen in the past and no doubt will again in the future is an astonishing generosity where people have donated grapes and labour to assist their neighbours and friends to recover.'

Mr Clark said it was important to keep the impact of the fires in context.

'Australia is a very large country with wine regions spread across it from the eastern seaboard right across to the west. Most fires have been in heavily forested areas or National Parks. While the toll on individuals cannot be underestimated and should not be downplayed, a review of fire maps suggests a maximum of around 1500 hectares of vineyards fall within the fire affected regions to date. Even if all those vineyards were fire damaged – and they are not – it would only be about 1 per cent of Australia's total vineyard area.'

Australian Grape & Wine Chief Executive Tony Battaglione said there would be a coordinated response to both short-term relief and longer-term planning.

'Responses must include relief for those directly impacted, including those growers who might not be able to sell smoke-affected grapes. In the medium term we must look to strengthen regional tourism and bring people back to the regions' he said.

'Our message is that Australia is hurting from the fires, but we are open for business. We need donations to the relief funds, support for our emergency services, and consumers to buy our wine and visit our regions. It is important to note that the fire season is not over and our temporary relief may not last.'

Donations can be made to the Australian Red Cross (www.redcross.org.au/campaigns/disaster-relief-and-recovery-donate) or the Adelaide Hills in South Australia

(www.adelaidehillswine.com.au/fireappeal). Donations can be made to Queensland's Granite Belt Drought Assist via Facebook.

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About Wine Australia

Wine Australia supports a competitive wine sector by investing in research, development and extension (RD&E), growing domestic and international markets, protecting the reputation of Australian wine and administering the Export and Regional Wine Support Package.

Wine Australia is an Australian Commonwealth Government statutory authority, established under the *Wine Australia Act 2013*, and funded by grape growers and winemakers through levies and user-pays charges and the Australian Government, which provides matching funding for RD&E investments.

About Australian Grape and Wine Inc

Australian Grape and Wine Inc is the national association of grape and wine producers. We address issues across the supply-chain that impact on the profitability and sustainability of the sector. We lead and advocate public policy that enhances the ability to responsibly produce, promote and enjoy Australian wine in moderation.

Australian Grape & Wine is recognised as a representative organisation for winegrape and wine producers under the Wine Australia Act 2013, and is incorporated under the SA Associations Incorporation Act 1985. We work in partnership with the Australian Government to develop and implement policy that is in the best interests of winegrape growers and winemakers across Australia.