

17 February 2020

MEDIA RELEASE

Australia's wine sector deeply disappointed by FSANZ decision on pregnancy labelling

Australian Grape & Wine is deeply disappointed by Food Standards Australia-New Zealand's (FSANZ) approval of a flawed, costly and ineffective pregnancy warning label, and urges the Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation to reject it immediately.

"This pregnancy warning label is a classic example of bureaucratic over-reach, and is not a good example of science-based decision making" said Tony Battaglene, Chief Executive of Australian Grape & Wine.

Australian Grape & Wine is a strong supporter of the existing voluntary labelling arrangements and industry initiatives¹ which work in tandem to raise awareness of the dangers of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), and have contributed to significant improvements in the rates of women abstaining, or reducing their alcohol consumption during pregnancy.²

"Our concerns extend beyond simply the costs to grape and wine businesses, though they will be significant" said Mr Battaglene.

"Evidence tells us the current initiatives are driving positive cultural change in Australia. If FSANZ was able show how this new label-design would lead to a significant change in drinking behaviour, we would take a different position. But given they can't, why are Ministers being asked to consider a design that will be costly to businesses, but achieve very little?" said Mr Battaglene.

The costs to Australian Wine businesses will be felt most keenly by small, family owned wine businesses in rural and regional Australia. Most wine businesses have multiple products in their portfolio, with some brands offering consumers almost 100 different wines. These businesses would need to redesign labels for each of these products, potentially driving up the costs in the tens of thousands of dollars per wine business.

"It's clear FSANZ had an outcome in mind before it commenced its consultation process. We participated in good faith, but FSANZ has ignored the science and the views of grape growers and winemakers, and gone with its pre-conceived ideas."

"Surely the best approach is to make the existing voluntary label mandatory, and invest further in initiatives to raise awareness about the dangers of FASD" said Mr Battaglene.

¹ Australian Grape & Wine, through the National Wine Foundation, has invested \$400,000 into the DrinkWise Australia FASD Awareness Program over the last two years (<https://drinkwise.org.au/our-work/drinkwise-fasd-awareness-program-partners-with-federal-government-for-new-education-materials-featuring-deborah-mailman-and-aaron-pedersen/#>)

² The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states that 98.8% of women either abstain or reduce their alcohol consumption when pregnant (up from 96.6% in 2004).



“While this might be a box ticking exercise for FSANZ, it’s a kick in the guts to Australia’s 6,000 grape growers and 2,500 winemakers who are battling the impacts of fires, smoke and drought. It’s now up to the Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation to reject this proposal. We urge Ministers to go back to the drawing board and consider a label that will maintain the positive trends in drinking during pregnancy in Australia, while minimising the costs and risks to wine businesses. Mandating the current voluntary pregnancy warning label would be a common sense solution and we encourage Ministers to take this approach”.

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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.