

### VOC UPDATE – Hans Loder, VOC Chair

In opening I'd like to thank Cath Kidman for her diligent work as Chair of the Coonawarra Vignerons VOC. I'm excited to have been elected to follow on from her, to ensure continuity of the VOC's long running initiatives.

The VOC committee provides essential grower technical representation, is an enabler for research in Coonawarra and facilitates relationships between research and extension organisations (among others) and the Coonawarra Vignerons.

VOC priorities identified in Coonawarra over the last years have been in the areas of irrigation, fruit quality (shivel), use of rootstocks, ecosystem services, smoke taint and threat management. Subsequent projects which the committee currently oversees can be classified as either "long term" or as a broader "annual, ongoing or short term."

The list of long term projects includes:

- Cab. Sauv. Characterisation Project – a "backbone" to all other work.
- Irrigation Optimisation
- Berry Shivel
- Rootstock Trial
- EcoVineyards initiative

It appears to me that whether deliberately or through opportune chance, current projects are extremely complimentary and provide insights beyond initial project expectations.

As an example, findings from both the Berry Shivel and Irrigation Optimisation work indicate learnings in terms of irrigation management, which provide outcomes directly aligned with fruit quality. Specifically, the **Coonawarra Berry Shivel Project** work to date has shown that water stress is a significant contributor to late season berry shivel, while row orientation (specifically N - S orientation) can contribute to berry shivel due to fruit exposure. Leaf removal can have positive as well as deleterious effects depending on circumstance, with canopy management shown to affect shivel.

The VOC is currently working to include Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon in an existing berry respiration trial being undertaken in Barossa Shiraz and funded by Wine Australia. Understanding of berry respiration has potential to provide critical understanding as to plant conditions conducive to berry shivel in Cabernet Sauvignon specifically.

With irrigation such an important factor in managing susceptibility to late season berry shivel, findings from the **Coonawarra Irrigation Optimisation Project** are extremely complimentary. With a primary goal of the irrigation project being to establish a novel new way of measuring vine water status and thereby better understand thresholds for irrigation at significant times in the season, there is potential for improvements in yield, quality and management of Coonawarra vineyards more broadly. A further benefit of the project has been the establishment of "gateway" telemetry infrastructure which will be available for use by Coonawarra growers more broadly.

Findings from these two projects provide a strong technical basis for discussion around one of the VOCs ongoing matters, that being the regions' water allocation (plan). Both the importance of irrigation can be clearly stated and direct impacts on quality demonstrated, while continual improvement in irrigation management shown by Coonawarra growers.

The VOC remains responsive to addressing issues affecting Coonawarra. An example in recent months is in the area of smoke taint, where the VOC was able to convene a meeting at short notice of growers and broadacre farmers looking to burn stubble. General concerns associated with stubble burning were able to be conveyed (particularly the risk of smoke taint) while also gaining a better understanding of issues faced by broadacre farmers in the Wattle Range Council district. With very little smoke affecting Coonawarra during vintage, it is felt that this intervention has been successful in identifying key entities responsible in managing permitted burns, lobbying on behalf of Coonawarra growers for better representation and improving understanding of the issue by attracting high level research (in the area of stubble burning's effect on grapes) to Coonawarra this vintage.

These projects as examples satisfy the stated aims of the VOC, to provide information which enables continual improvement to the way in which fruit is grown and wines produced from Coonawarra. This ensures fruit and wines grown in Coonawarra continue to find appeal in the marketplace, along with consumer acceptance, particularly when considering additional projects being managed such as the state wide "Ecovineyards" collaboration.

As such, I strongly urge that current "long term" projects be backed to completion on current 2022~2024 timeframes. Proposed projects beyond this timeframe currently before the VOC appear on the surface a natural fit in terms of better understanding metrics around yield: quality balance in Coonawarra. These should hold appeal to potential students and researchers, particularly given extreme degrees of spatial soil variability observed in Coonawarra; in my opinion, unlike any observed in most other regions!

The VOC also closely monitors costs of projects and aims for transparency to members of the Coonawarra Vignerons. Olivia will provide a summary of current VOC costings, as part of the overall Coonawarra Vignerons quarterly and 2020\_21 budget. In short however, the longer term Rootstock Trial is of utmost importance for funding and there is a current commitment by the Coonawarra Vignerons to the Cabernet Sauvignon Characterisation PhD project, which is in the second year of this five year project.

In terms of field days and extension activities from regional projects, given current COVID lock downs and restrictions these are basically on hold. I've asked the committee to focus efforts on consideration of the VOC's long term technical focus beyond 2022 and how practical findings can be best communicated; particularly if lock downs continue and/or hosting of field days is not practical. Beyond being provided technical reports or thesis papers at the completion of trials, methods such as fact sheets need to be explored which summarise the practical aspects of research findings. It is critical that findings are widely understood amongst Coonawarra's growers and winemakers and that research findings can be easily accessed and not lost in lengthy reports, or misinterpreted due to reporting ambiguities.

Primarily I believe Coonawarra's technical focus as guided by the VOC has seen projects over delivering on their outcomes. While the current COVID restrictions have limited or delayed the opportunity for field days (among other activities), there's opportunity to review and convey practical findings of current projects in new formats. The conversation as to the next "long term" projects can also commence, so that continuity exists well beyond the current 2024 timeframe.

Hans Loder

**VOC CHAIR**

The current COVID19 pandemic has had some major implications to the finances of the Coonawarra Vignerons Association. To ensure the CVA has sufficient funds to meet its ongoing commitments the CVA Board, at its April meeting, approved a motion to be able to draw up to \$50,000 from the term deposits if necessary. It was also noted we should attempt to replace these monies in the future.

Our current finances are listed below:

- CGWI cheque account      \$1,884.70
- CGWI saver account      \$49,565.37
- CGWI term deposit 1      \$233,498.34
- CGWI term deposit 2      \$70,519.58
- Aged Receivables      \$39,988.75 (at 4<sup>th</sup> May)
- Aged Payables      \$21,933.55 (includes credit card and BAS)

We have a BAS payment of \$20,493 due soon, so to ensure we have enough funds to pay this and meet our other ongoing accounts, the Finance Committee decided it would be prudent to draw \$20,000 from the Term Deposit 2 which has just matured this is reflected in the current CGWI saver account sum reflected above.

While we currently have enough funds to cover our bills, we have to allow for contingencies that are beyond our control. Much of the Aged Receivables is made up of member payments, and we are mindful that some members may be experiencing some financial difficulties in the current climate. If this is the case please contact myself, or Olivia, to discuss how we may make it easier to pay your membership fees.

Olivia and I have drawn up three versions of the FY20/21 Budget. We are hoping we have covered all possible future scenarios with respect to coming out of this pandemic. The 2020 Roadshow is cancelled and there is some doubt as to Coonawarra Celebrations in it's traditional format, and even the Cup, going ahead, so we have drawn up drafts to cover these eventualities. This draft Budget is under constant review to make certain it is as accurate as possible.

We are continuing to monitor the situation closely and adapt as things change. We are also looking at ways to keep our costs under control and make savings where possible.

Bruce Redman

**COONAWARRA VIGNERONS TREASURER**