

A life split between the vineyard and boardroom

RETIRED Barossa grapegrower Leo Pech has been awarded Honorary Life Membership of the Wine Grape Growers Australia (WGGA). Lawrie Stanford, WGGA executive director, said it seemed an inadequate instrument of recognition, but the organisation was pleased to offer it in humble appreciation for everything Pech has given to, and done for, Australian winegrape growing.

Pech has not been shy to share his opinion, so it probably won't surprise many to read his involvement in industry politics stretches way back to the 1960s with a Royal Commission, no less. He also played a key role in negotiating the vine pull scheme of 1986 and will be remembered as a lone voice opposing the introduction of the accelerated depreciation provisions in the tax legislation in 1993 that allowed the introduction of Managed Investment Schemes for horticulture in 1998.

He has always been a passionate advocate for the independent grapegrower and a thorn in the side of any government that dared act against the interest of growers.

As an active participant on many committees, boards and industry groups across more than 50 years, Pech's passion for the industry has not gone unnoticed or unappreciated.

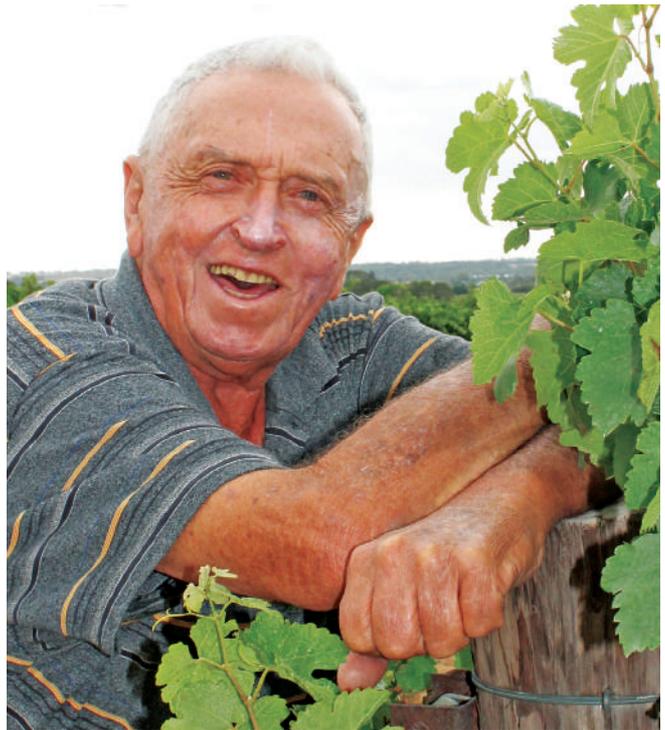
His dedication to his local Barossa community has been extensive with involvement in multiple regional committees, serving as Barossa Wine Grape Advisory Council chairman, Barossa Winegrape Committee chairman and his work with the Barossa Grapegrowers Vine Selection Society has already been recognised with life membership of that organisation.

Pech has also been an active member of the Barossa Valley Vine Selection Committee, Barossa Grape Growers Co-Operative, Barossa Grape Producers Association and the Barons of Barossa. He received the very first Grape Barossa Grower service award in recognition of his volunteer services to various grape growing bodies.

At a state level, Pech has contributed as a member of the Wine Grape Council of SA, the Phylloxera and Grape Industry Board of SA, the United Farmers & Stockowners of SA, the Agricultural Bureau and the South Australian Premier's Winegrape Committee. He was also the vice chairman of the South Australian Vine Improvement Committee, as well as vice chairman and life member of the South Australian Farmers Federation.

In the national arena, Pech has served as chairman of various bodies including the Australian Grape Producers Association, the Winegrape Industry Liaison Committee and the Winegrape Growers Council of Australia. He has also been a devoted member of the Australian Society for Viticulture and Oenology, the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation, the National Wine Grape Advisory Council, the National Vine Health Steering Committee, the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation's Geographical Indication Committee and of course, Wine Grape Growers Australia.

Pech was part of the fourth generation of his family to grow grapes, his family history in Australia can be traced back to 1850 when Johann Pech set up a vineyard in the Barossa. **CW**



PECH'S OPINION ON...

Vine Pull

"The vine pull allowed growers who wished to leave the industry to do so. Only around 2500 hectares of vines were removed – or 4.5 per cent of the 60,000ha planted in Australia at the time. Growers were paid \$3250 per hectare to remove their vines, so the scheme cost the state and Commonwealth governments around \$7.5 million. In 1987, immediately after the vine pull, grape prices in the Barossa almost doubled compared with the previous year."

Managed Investment Schemes

"Although many of these schemes have now gone bankrupt, the vines have not been removed. As a result, vines can now be purchased at rock bottom prices, making it easier for new owners to make a return but further exacerbating the oversupply and driving down prices."

Oversupply

"The oversupply situation we are in now would be worse if it wasn't for the lack of water, which since 2007 has slowed plantings almost to a halt, and reduced the crush size in years 2007-2009. Growers need to understand that booms don't automatically follow busts. Some seem to think that if enough vines are pulled out then supply will tighten up and the problems will disappear, but the problem with that is that the wineries don't have any room to pay higher prices. Believe me, the only thing worse for a grower than being in financial difficulties is if the winery they supply goes broke."

Succession Planning

"Growers must consider their options and look long and hard at what they are doing, and why. Don't encourage the younger generation to continue if your property is not viable in the current market."