

# Biosecurity being tackled on two fronts

STRONG TECHNICAL EXPERTISE, a national focus and a wealth of experience in pest and disease management in Australia is being put to good use as those in charge of the biosecurity project consultancies get to work on behalf of Wine Grape Growers Australia (WGGA).

"I am confident we have chosen two excellent organisations to help deliver these extremely important projects for the wine sector," said Lawrie Stanford, WGGA executive director.

The first project, due for delivery later this year, will be to prepare a strategic plan and business case, through consultation with industry, for longer-term national biosecurity arrangements in viticulture. Stuart Pettigrew, of Ag Dynamics, has been selected for this task and he brings 25 years' of experience in working with agricultural businesses on pest and disease management including in vineyards and other horticultural crops.

"Not only does Stuart have great depth of knowledge in pest and disease management and biosecurity across a range of crops, he has also worked as a vineyard manager and has direct experience with the issues and realities facing grape growers," said Stanford.

Pettigrew said he was tackling the task in three steps.

"The first one was to meet with opinion leaders amongst both this topic and also some of the key growing areas," he said. "I've done the first round of consultations really just to check what the industry is feeling, almost to take the temperature of the industry to see how they are feeling about the whole area of biosecurity."

"It's been a little bit of a long process, particularly for WGGA, to build momentum on this area."

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The second project has been awarded to the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI).

## AT A GLANCE

Wine Grape Growers Australia (WGGA) currently has two biosecurity projects being managed for the benefit of grapegrowers.

Stuart Pettigrew has been appointed to prepare a strategic plan and business case, through consultation with industry, for longer-term national biosecurity arrangements in viticulture.

Kerry DeGaris, through the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI), is currently delivering biosecurity operations that fulfil the grape sector's obligations to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed.

AWRI will deliver biosecurity operations that fulfil the grape sector's obligations to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed, which defines the cost sharing arrangements between the industry and the Commonwealth government for responses to exotic pest incursions, as well as dealing with national ramifications of endemic pest and disease management.

These tasks will be outsourced to AWRI for the next 12, and possibly 24 months, while longer term arrangements are being developed and implemented.

"The AWRI's expertise in matters of viticulture pest and disease, its prominence in extension activities to vineyard operators and its acknowledged capacity in executing rapid responses to weather and disease events all recommended it to the task," said Stanford.

"A key feature of AWRI's tender was its ready-to-go industry knowledge and established industry networks across Australia. All of these qualities ensure that growers will be engaged in biosecurity management activities that affect them."

AWRI's project activities will be delivered primarily by






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Kerry DeGaris, with support from the AWRI viticulture team. Kerry is a qualified viticulturist with 17 years' experience working in many grapegrowing regions of Australia.

Kerry DeGaris said it has been a bit of a "baptism of fire" because there had been a lot happening with biosecurity and her workload has been busy straight away.

"I'm picking up a lot of representation on the Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP), I sit in on those meetings and there have been a lot of those because every time there's a new incursion there's not an Emergency Plant Pest Response," said DeGaris.

"There are a lot of phone hook-ups and it's my job to take information back to the grape industry if it's relevant."

The projects are being funded by voluntary contributions from a range of organisations with viticulture interests. Moreover, the strategic planning will engage with the range of the viticulture industries including winegrapes, dried fruits, table grapes and nurseries.

WGGA has national responsibility for biosecurity arrangements in the wine sector on behalf of independent grape growers and winemaker grape growers. It is the signatory to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed for the wine sector and as such, has an obligation to the normal commitments required of industry parties under the Deed.

WGGA undertakes these biosecurity responsibilities in close association with the Winemakers' Federation of Australia, in consultation with the Australian Grape and Wine Authority and in close liaison and cooperation with the other viticulture industries namely; table grapes, dried fruit and nurseries. While the relationships with the other viticulture industries are integral to the management of the projects, WGGA's funding arrangements are independent of those applying to table grapes, dried fruit and nurseries.

Pettigrew said part of his role had been to prepare a background assessment which included dry fruits. "I've also had a discussion with Australian Table Grape Growers Association as well to try and include all viticulture".

He said the key message is that the winegrape sector can't do this without the other viticulture sectors.

"We're really trying to make sure that we talk about what we have to do, and what we must do project the industry and not what we can add into the project," said Pettigrew.

"What we decided with WGGA and 'dried fruits' who are both involved in the project, and hopefully table grapes will come on board as well, is let's come up with a really solid business case and a solid proposal before we go out and talk to growers.

"I wanted to go out and say 'this is what we're proposing'. We're still in the 'drawing it together' phase, so the next phase is to come up with the strategic plan which will be looking at: How should we be going about doing this? Who should be involved? What are the activities? What will the funding mechanism look like?"

Pettigrew said once these questions have been answered, a clear understanding about the activities will be possible.

"Around that we will develop a business case saying: if we don't do this, here is the consequence; and if we do, these are the benefits. Once we get to that point, we will go out and speak numbers to the industry.

"We're still in phase two at the moment which is still drawing all the bits together into some sort of coherent structure. Once that's written and approved by the key stakeholders, we will then go out and deliver that to a broader audience.

"At this stage, what we're really looking at from the industry is anyone who feels strongly about this should really actually take the opportunity now to have some input about it. Most growers are happy for their representative and regional groups

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to speak on their behalf but we want to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to put some input into the process."

DeGaris in the meantime has been managing the current requirements for the WGGA, on behalf of the winegrape industry, while Pettigrew works on how that role will be strategically planned and funded for the future.

But DeGaris is at the coal face – on the ground protection from pests and disease incursion. Protection from new pests and diseases has not been a part of the daily management plan of growers or representative bodies. But Pettigrew said the aim is to plan for ongoing efforts of the broader viticulture industry to work on project that increase the ability of the industry to help protect itself.

"That's awareness raising activities and having growers as regional champions that can push the topic of biosecurity at their regional levels," Pettigrew said. "Understanding who the technical experts around the industry are; and who can be relied on to help out."

While fruit fly and phylloxera are existing pests, they will also become part of the planning.

"I guess, at a technical level they don't fall under the biosecurity system from a perspective of the emergency plant pest response deed because they're already in Australia," Pettigrew said.

"But, of course nothing is ever as clear cut as that. While they don't fall under the deed, they would fall under any biosecurity activities we plan simply because there is no point in sidelining groups such as the phylloxera board when they have great skills and experience.

"What we're really trying to structure as part of the strategic planning part of the project is how we can come up with a system that engages all of those people to use their respective skills and not duplicate."

DeGaris pointed out the funding for the management of fruit fly in Australia has ceased, and the winegrape sector is expected to contribute to the ongoing control of this pest. Regardless of the funding issues, DeGaris works to identify the level of threat and communicate these to both industry and government, in order to facilitate any response.

"My job is the conduit between the Federal Government and WGGA," she said.

At the moment she is in preparation mode ahead of the National Viticulture Biosecurity Committee, which will meet for the first time this November.

DeGaris, who lives on the family farm at Bool Lagoon in the Limestone Coast region, has worked in the wine industry since 1998, she has worked for Accolade and McWilliams and also had a pest and disease monitoring role with Wynns.

"I've got good pest and disease knowledge," DeGaris said. "I majored in entomology in my final year of university. But the big part of the role is extending the information out to growers. I've had a lot to do with growers over the years.

"The AWRI already do a lot of extension work and they have a good team of viticulturist and good industry contacts. So we've got the skills to do all that is required in this role."

She said growers shouldn't be daunted by emergency response planning. ▶

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“There are very good procedures and there is a biosecurity plan, so there are emergency response plans in place. But what is lacking in our industry is the people on the ground.”

“One of my roles will be to identify the right people and build those networks and train people up. That list of people will need to be regularly maintained and the plans need to be updated every five years.”

DeGaris said the largest time commitment in her role has been taken up in phone meetings. There are often two per week which not only take a few hours to complete but require plenty of follow-up work.

“I’m just shocked at how many incursions are happening on a regular basis. And a lot of the pests come in could have some relevance to the wine industry, but that depends on where the incursion happens.”

“But there’s a lot of investigation work involved, trying to find out if a particular pest has been found in any other wine regions around the world and whether they will have any economic impact.”

Pettigrew pointed out that “basically all of the high-priority pests that we want to keep out of Australia are a major economic pest in some part of the world already”.

“That’s why we have identified them as major pests. The one that people will know about is Pierce’s disease which has devastated viticulture areas internationally and California has the vector for it. It’s one of those diseases that has an insect vector and a pathogen.”

“There’s a lot of work going on in the Californian industry to keep glassy wing sharp shooter under control.”

“There have been plenty of examples of devastating diseases come into Australia and cost significant sums to money to control. I think the reason these pests and disease are there is because they’re devastating and there’s plenty of examples of where they have caused problems.”

“In California controlling the glassy winged sharp shooter is an example of an added expense to every vineyard manager’s budget which is something we want to avoid.”

Pettigrew said the viticulture industry wasn’t alone in working through its biosecurity planning.

“The citrus industry is in the third year of an R&D levy funded project which I am managing and we went out and held a lot of information sharing sessions with a lot of activities on the ground as well as surveillance programs and trainings,” he said.

“We built a lot of momentum around the topic.”

“But we need to be aware that there are a lot of people who understand it and a lot of people who don’t. Proper awareness raising across the entire viticulture sector is critical for this to be a success in the long term.”

“The government has a big commitment already in this field, but what they quite rightly expect is that the industry gets their house in order.”

“If the government is putting its money at the table to support any future management programs then the industry really needs to get its act together as well to be an equal partner.”

“Recently when the cucumber industry went through some issues, because it had refused to sign up to the deed, the government made all the decisions and the industry had no seat at the table.”

“What we need to sell this message as is that the government are sitting there as a willing partner, but why would they put up money if the industry aren’t serious about the topic themselves.”

“It’s a shared responsibility but the leadership needs to come from the industry so we can be proactive in making important decisions.”

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