



# Feasibility Study into the Establishment of a NSW Vine Health Committee



*FINAL REPORT to*  
GRAPE AND WINE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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### ***Abstract***

In 2002 the NSW Wine Industry Association received funding to examine the feasibility of establishing a Vine Health Committee which would have, as its objective the development and management of strategies in regard to vine health disease outbreaks, including (but not exclusively) phylloxera. The funding was to enable the preparation of a discussion paper and for a program of presentations to the NSW wine regions to discuss the feasibility of establishing such a committee. The discussion paper canvassed funding issues and two alternative proposals were canvassed – establishment of a Committee under NSW legislation with funding provided by that means, or a non-statutory approach with voluntary regional funding.

The discussion paper canvassed a number of issues including

- Role and functions of a Vine Health Committee
- Committee structure
- Phylloxera status maintenance programs
- Funding

In regard to the latter the recommendation of the R&D Sub-committee was that the proposed body would be formed under the auspices of the NSWIA and be made up of representatives of the NSW wine regions. It was proposed funding would be by way of a per tonne levy on grapes grown, collected by the regional winegrower associations on behalf of grape growers.

The regional presentations took place over a period of 12 months and have just recently been completed. A meeting of stakeholders was held in Sydney recently and the following motion was passed:

*“The Meeting recommends that the NSW Wine Industry Association negotiate with the NSW Government for the creation of a vineyard identification scheme as the platform for the development of plans and policy with regard to vine health and disease issues in New South Wales.”*

This matter is now to be referred to the NSW Wine Industry Association for its endorsement of the proposed course of action.

### ***Executive Summary***

In the late 1990s the NSW Wine Industry Association’s Research and Development Sub-Committee recommended the formation of a NSW Vine Health Committee for the purpose of developing strategies and programs in response to vine disease outbreaks, including phylloxera.

In regard to the latter the recommendation of the R&D Sub-committee was that the proposed body would be formed under the auspices of the NSWIA and be made up of representatives of the NSW wine regions.

Tasks that would need to be undertaken in order to achieve these objectives of a VHC would include:

- a) Development of a data base on vineyards in New South Wales for the purposes of knowing what the targets are in the event of a major disease outbreak. This would include knowledge of rootstocks planted.
- b) Implementation and monitoring of PEZ area freedom maintenance tasks,
- c) Provide training in disease recognition/awareness.
- d) Check accreditation of nurseries selling vitis material
- e) Develop/Assess risks, provide technical advice to AQIS
- f) Represent the State on the National Vine Health Steering Committee’s Technical Reference Group.

It was proposed funding would be by way of a per tonne levy on grapes grown, collected by the regional winegrower associations on behalf of grape growers. The regional presentations took place over a period of 12 months and have just recently been completed. As a result of the consultation there were doubts that a voluntary levy could succeed, and that any activities would need some statutory underpinning.

Since the late 1990s there have been some significant developments that impacted on the way a Vine Health Committee might operate, in particular, the strengthening of the role of the National Vine Health Steering Committee and the phylloxera protocols, and the establishment of Plant Health Australia.

#### *NVHSC and the Phylloxera Protocols*

NSW is currently finalising a program of inspections of PRZs to ascertain disease status. Results to date indicate the PRZs in NSW are phylloxera free and if this is confirmed for the remaining inspections in 2006, the PRZs may be upgraded to PEZ status. Once this is achieved phylloxera status management procedures will need to be introduced for all PEZs, including the known PEZs in NSW and other States so that all states can be confident that there is no risk of re-introduction of the disease.

To that end a maintenance protocol is being developed based on aerial imaging with ground truthing of vineyard weak spots. This would be cheaper than current vineyard inspections but would require funding in order to be implemented. Aerial imaging can have a number of additional benefits. As well as providing evidence of diseased vines it can identify areas of vines not on record and enable a register of vineyards to be developed. It can be used by growers and winemakers for precision viticulture.

#### *Plant Health Australia*

PHA is now working with representatives from the wine and grape industry, government agencies and other relevant experts to develop a national biosecurity plan for the viticulture industry. This aims to deliver a coordinated and effective national plant health framework for preventing and responding to exotic and other emergency pests in the vineyard. There is capacity under the cost sharing deed for a levy to be raised to meet the cost of eradication of an outbreak of phylloxera and to raise funds for compensation. The existence of this arrangement means that the need for a separate State-based statutory funding mechanism for vine health is diminished.

#### *Recent Meeting of NSW R&D Committee*

There is general agreement among the NSW regions of the need for a Vine Health Committee as a partnership between industry and government. There is a need for the introduction of PEZ maintenance programs otherwise in the longer term freedom of trade between the states might be compromised.

The VHC's role is wider than just phylloxera- its role is one of risk management and providing a framework for this management. The VHC needs to develop a series of protocols for dealing with disease outbreaks. It would also provide a link to the national bio-security plan – a link between growers and NSW DPI.

As a result of the meeting of stakeholders it was agreed that fundamental to the formation of a VHC was the establishment of some form of vineyard identification scheme backed with some legal powers, similar to the arrangements that exist in South Australia. Accordingly the meeting passed the resolution that the NSW Wine Industry Association approach the NSW Government seeking the establishment of a vineyard identification scheme as the starting point for the establishment of a NSW Vine Health Committee.

It was also noted that a VHC would be needed to work with NSW DPI in an advisory role. This would require some funds for the appointment of a project officer to drive the establishment of the register and maintain it, plus administer the maintenance programs. The issue of funding will need to be resolved during negotiations for the establishment of the legislated register.

#### *NSW Wine Industry Association Inc*