

# Growing shoots of sustainability

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Since 2015, when the AWRI took on the management of what was then Entwine Australia, sustainability in the Australian grape and wine sector has come a long way. The National Sustainability Review in 2017 led to the merging of the McLaren Vale Grape Wine & Tourism Association Sustainable Australia Winegrowing program with Entwine to launch Sustainable Winegrowing Australia in July 2019 — a truly national program with ongoing leadership from Australian Grape & Wine, Wine Australia and the AWRI. Since then, the program has continued to blossom with significant membership growth, creation of a trust mark for use on wine bottles and increasing demand for certification. This article takes a look at recent developments and what's on the horizon.

## STRENGTH THROUGH COOPERATION

One of the key strengths of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia comes from the three national organisations (Australian Grape & Wine, the AWRI and Wine Australia) working closely together, drawing on each other's skills and ensuring a truly national perspective. Australian Grape & Wine provides valuable strategic industry oversight through its Sustainability Advisory Committee as well as essential engagement via its regional networks. The AWRI contributes technical rigour and expertise to the program, ensuring it is backed by a strong scientific evidence base. Wine Australia provides its extensive marketing experience, expertise and networks to support the program, drive membership and communicate with markets both domestic and overseas. None of the three organisations

can cover all of these bases, which means the program is so much stronger through working together.

## PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Sustainable Winegrowing Australia members commit to annually reporting business metrics and completing a workbook of vineyard and/or winery practices. The data reported covers the environmental, social and economic components of sustainability and the program is relevant to vineyards, wineries and wine businesses. In October each year members can access individual, customisable benchmarking reports, showing their performance in the context of other members. This allows opportunities for improvement to be easily identified and then tracked. Members who choose to be certified undergo an independent third-party audit once every three

years, in addition to maintaining Sustainable Winegrowing Australia membership.

## MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

In the first year of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia (2019-20), there were approximately 480 members, representing 23% of Australia's vineyard area and 18% of winegrapes crushed. Now, almost three years on from the launch, membership has grown to 865 members, 87% of which are vineyard members, 12% winery members and 1% in the new category of wine business members. Approximately 20% of members have taken the additional steps to become certified. This significant membership growth is testament to the efforts of the team to clearly communicate the benefits of membership and support new members in their sustainability journey. The new wine business category was developed



Photo: Ovis Creative

Launched in 2020, Sustainable Winegrowing Australia's trust mark is available for use by certified members of the program on wine labels, vineyard signs and other marketing materials — it is currently used by 83 certified members on 91 signs, 64 wine labels and by 20 members in their branding and promotions.

and launched in response to feedback from businesses that did not fit the traditional vineyard or winery categories, but still wanted to contribute to our industry's growing sustainability movement.

#### TRUST MARK AND INCREASED DEMAND FOR CERTIFICATION

One key factor in the membership growth experienced has been the development of a trust mark for the program. Launched in July 2020, the trust mark is available for use by certified members of the program on wine labels, vineyard signs and other marketing materials. Uptake of the trust mark has been strong, with it currently being used by 83 certified members on 91 signs, 64 wine labels and by 20 members in their branding and promotions. The increased visibility of the trust mark is also helping to drive demand from members to seek certification, as evidenced by significant growth in demand for certification training workshops, which are a key step in the certification process.

#### GRASSROOTS ACTIVITIES

Local community engagement, particularly at the regional level, has been another very important aspect of the program's recent growth. Assistance has been provided to a number of regions to apply for grants to support uptake of the program. In regions where these applications have been successful, such as Yarra Valley, Rutherglen, Margaret River, Barossa, Adelaide Hills, Langhorne Creek and McLaren Vale, one-on-one assistance has been made available to producers to help them either join the program for the first time or take the next steps towards certification. The enthusiasm and commitment displayed by the regional organisations and their members to drive adoption of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia right across their region has been really inspiring. We look forward to continuing to work with regions on their sustainability priorities.

#### INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Positioning Sustainable Winegrowing Australia within the international marketplace is a further key priority to ensure the program is recognised overseas and Australian producers are rewarded for their efforts. This involves a range of ongoing activities including:

- engagement with large international purchasing groups (e.g. Systembolaget, LCBO etc) to ensure they understand and value the program

- participation in international benchmarking processes to ensure the program continues to operate at best practice
- contribution to international working groups such as the Sustainable Wine Roundtable, which is currently investigating whether or not it is feasible to develop an international sustainability standard
- developing further understanding of the importance of sustainability as a market access issue through a planned review of the international marketplace to understand customer sustainability requirements and identify any gaps in the program.

#### IMPACT REPORT

Sustainable Winegrowing Australia recently released its first impact report (available from [sustainablewinegrowing.com.au](http://sustainablewinegrowing.com.au)) which summarises the progress that Sustainable Winegrowing Australia members are making across six key areas. Within the report, metrics on member actions and achievements are put in context with member stories and testimonials. Some key highlights from this report include:

- 87% of vineyard members and 79% of winery members have taken action to plan, monitor and reduce water use
- 72% of vineyard members and 82% of winery members have taken action to reduce energy consumption
- 68% of vineyard members and 62% of winery members have taken action to protect and enhance biodiversity
- 72% of vineyard members and 89% of winery members have taken action to reduce waste to landfill and identify recycling and reuse options.

The impact report has been distributed to all members.

#### WHAT'S NEW?

Qantas has recently partnered with Sustainable Winegrowing Australia as part of its new Green Tier program. Wines from certified member wineries are now being promoted to Qantas Frequent Flyer members, with purchasers gaining credit for choosing these sustainable products. This is a great example of a partnership between two organisations that value sustainability, with benefits for both consumers and producers.

A number of other agricultural and horticultural industries are taking notice of the grape and wine industry's sustainability focus. The program team has been approached by representatives from several different sectors interested in learning more about Sustainable Winegrowing Australia and how it might be adaptable to their grower and producer communities. It is pleasing that the efforts made by grape and wine producers to improve the sustainability of their practices are inspiring others to take similar action.

#### WHAT'S COMING UP?

The AWRI has recently commenced a collaboration with researchers at the University of Adelaide on a pilot project on soil carbon, which aims to provide our industry with tailored information on measuring soil carbon, practices to increase carbon sequestration and advice on the costs and benefits of participating in government emissions reduction programs. This will address a current knowledge gap which is currently making Australian growers hesitant to invest in soil carbon enhancement practices while the return on investment is unclear. The project has potential to incorporate soil carbon decision tools into Sustainable Winegrowing Australia.



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In addition, sustainability will be one of the key themes at the Australian Wine Industry Technical Conference in Adelaide in June 2022 with one of the plenary sessions focusing on a roadmap for a sustainable industry and a workshop on what sustainability means for small, medium and large producers. Sustainable Winegrowing Australia will also be part of the WineTech trade exhibition, in conjunction with Freshcare, the organisation that maintains the wine industry sustainability standards.

There is also momentum from within our industry to adopt more aggressive sustainability targets, in line with high-level strategic goals. Sustainable Winegrowing Australia will need to adapt and develop the metrics to support this, an example of continuous improvement in action both within and outside the program. The three lead organisations will be working together on this next phase of the program's development.

#### HOW TO GET INVOLVED

For grape and wine businesses interested in learning more about Sustainable Winegrowing Australia, the first point of call should be the program's website: [www.sustainablewinegrowing.com.au](http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.com.au). Detailed FAQs are available to answer the most common questions about the program and membership. There's also the option to sign up for a short series of emails with tips on program benefits and help to gather the information needed for membership. Assistance is also always available from the friendly members of the AWRI helpdesk team via [helpdesk@awri.com.au](mailto:helpdesk@awri.com.au)


#### CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS WHILE CONTINUING TO EVOLVE

Sustainable production is not a destination, it's an ongoing cycle of identification, planning, action and review. Sometimes we can get caught up in that cycle and forget to celebrate the achievements that have already been made. The Australian grape and wine community's sustainability achievements are worth celebrating and so is the growth and impact of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia over the past three years. Under the joint leadership of Australian Grape & Wine, Wine Australia and the AWRI, the program will continue to grow and evolve as our community and our markets increase their focus on sustainability.

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Launched in July 2019, Sustainable Winegrowing Australia is a relatively young program that draws on the strengths of its predecessor programs, including Entwine Australia and Sustainable Australia Winegrowing (SAW). It acknowledges the contributions of many individuals and organisations dedicated to promoting and progressing the sustainable production of Australian grapes and wine. More information about those who have contributed are included in the Sustainability Timeline and Contributions sections of [www.sustainablewinegrowing.com.au](http://www.sustainablewinegrowing.com.au).

The AWRI's communications are supported by Australia's grapegrowers and winemakers through their investment body, Wine Australia, with matching funding from the Australian Government. The AWRI is a member of the Wine Innovation Cluster in Adelaide. 

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