

Strategic Plan 2026-28



Contents



03 Executive summary

04 Our role

05 External outlook

06 The One Grape & Wine Sector Plan

07 Our foundations

08 Our strategic approach

09 Partnering with our sector

11 Leading with science and innovation

13 Turning science into solutions

15 Strengthening our organisation

17 Our people

18 Our systems

19 Monitoring and evaluating our performance

Executive summary



Kieran Kirk, Chair
Mark Krstic, Managing Director

In 2026 the Australian wine sector continues to navigate a period of sustained global disruption. Oversupply, changing consumer trends, trade instability, cost pressures and climate variability are reshaping the operating environment.

It's in this context that the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) has developed an updated strategic plan which sets our course for the next three years.

While our strategy responds directly to today's challenges and opportunities, it is firmly focused on the future. Our vision is for a thriving Australian wine sector, one that is backed by our world-class science, innovation and translation into practical, real-world solutions.

This plan will guide us to be more connected to grapegrowers and winemakers in every part of Australia, making sure their voices help shape our research and the services we deliver back to them. It also keeps us on the path to financial sustainability and organisational strength, so that we can reinvest in world-leading innovation and outstanding customer engagement.

We will continue to work closely with our valued partners including Wine Australia, Australian Grape & Wine, BioPlatforms Australia, federal and state governments, Adelaide University and industry organisations. This collaboration is key to our effectiveness and helps extend the reach, rigour and impact of our work.

By delivering this strategy, we will play an essential role in contributing to a resilient sector while securing our future as a trusted and indispensable partner.

Our role

Founded in 1955, the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) is the grape and wine sector's own not-for-profit research organisation. Working at the intersection of leading-edge research and real-world practice, we have a unique position within Australia's wine sector.

For 70 years we have provided independent, science-based advice and technical extension and adoption services to help grapegrowers and winemakers remain competitive and sustainable in local and global markets. From early work on yeast strains and oxidation to today's genomics, metabolomics and digital services, we have supported the sector through decades of change.

Our offerings span lab-based discoveries, frontline support through our help desk, and education, training and digital resources. Designing everything with practical application in mind, we are a trusted partner to all those who make Australian wine. Our expertise also extends beyond wine, with our analytical testing, sensory science and product-development services increasingly supporting adjacent industries.

As part of our role in helping the sector strengthen its sustainability practices and long-term resilience,

we administer Sustainable Winegrowing Australia, the national program that helps grapegrowers and winemakers demonstrate and improve their sustainability performance. We deliver this program in partnership with Wine Australia and Australian Grape & Wine.

As well as long-term research, we mobilise quickly when it counts. During the 2019–20 bushfires, our experts rapidly delivered testing, advice and on-the-ground support across the sector. In just eight weeks we analysed more than 4,600 samples for smoke markers, responded to over 1,600 smoke-related help desk queries and delivered 25 regional fire-and-smoke seminars. Our response demonstrates our ability to pivot rapidly and provide clear, timely technical guidance when it is needed most.

Our service to industry remains at the heart of everything we do.



External outlook



The Australian wine sector is experiencing one of the most complex times in its history. Global shifts in supply and demand, trade instability, evolving consumer behaviours and rising costs continue to create a challenging operating environment.

Our focus is on supporting the sector to weather these forces and remain resilient, resourceful and adaptive in the years ahead.

Global supply and market pressures

Worldwide, there is an oversupply of wine with production exceeding consumption in many regions. Traditional export markets are tightening and geopolitical instability has disrupted long-standing trading channels. Evidence of responsible and sustainable practices is also increasingly influencing buyer decisions.

Changing consumption trends

Consumption of wine is slowly declining globally, with younger consumers in particular drinking less often. Wine is under increased scrutiny as part of broader societal conversations about alcohol and wellbeing.

Cost pressures and profitability

Producers face mounting cost challenges including rising prices for energy, fertilisers, chemicals, transport, bottles, packaging and labour. At the same time, margins are being squeezed by oversupply and price competition.

Climate and environmental change

Climate variability is impacting vineyards, from heat stress and changing ripening patterns to water scarcity and biosecurity risks. Extreme weather events create further uncertainty.

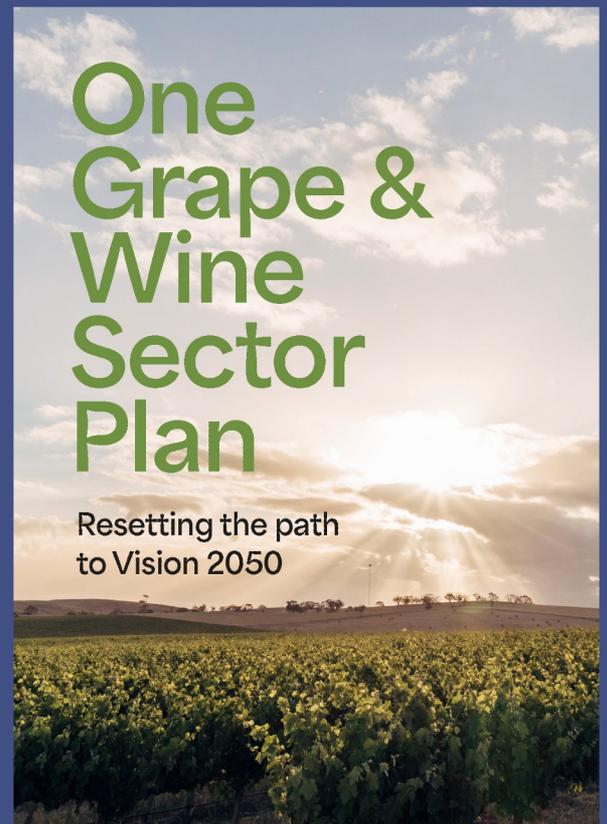
Resource efficiency and emissions reductions

With increasing global scrutiny on sustainability, the sector faces growing pressure to reduce its environmental footprint. Businesses will need to cut emissions and improve efficiency in energy use, packaging, transport and waste, while still remaining commercially viable.

Workforce and systems capability

The sector's future depends on skilled people and fit-for-purpose systems and infrastructure. Regional skills shortages and the need to invest in digital and operational capability present significant challenges for many producers.

The One Grape & Wine Sector Plan



The One Grape & Wine Sector Plan (OGWSP) is the industry's overarching strategy, developed by Australian Grape & Wine, Wine Australia and state and regional associations. The OGWSP provides a long-term roadmap which responds to the sector's challenges.

The plan lays out the industry's collective priorities and the actions needed to achieve them by 2050. These are categorised in six themes:



The AWRI's strategic plan aligns with these sector priorities while continuing to deliver the unique value that a dedicated wine research institute offers.

Our plan also aligns closely with Wine Australia's 2025–2030 strategic plan, which is grounded in the same sector-wide priorities expressed in the OGWSP.

By focusing on world-leading science, innovation and practice change, our plan will allow us to support grapegrowers and winemakers across Australia, for generations to come.

Our foundations



Our purpose

To advance Australian wine through trusted science and practical solutions.



Our vision

A thriving Australian wine sector powered by world-leading science, innovation and technical expertise.



Our mission

Working in partnership to translate scientific and technical know-how.



Our values

Excellence. Integrity.
Passion.



Our strategic approach

Our strategy begins with listening – to understand the needs, challenges and ambitions of grapegrowers and winemakers across Australia. We will be better connected to them through improved market analysis, customer insights and stronger engagement which links us to every wine region. What we hear will help shape our research priorities and sharpen how we transfer knowledge back to the sector via practical tools, advice, training and digital platforms.

This approach will be underpinned by our commitment to financial sustainability and building our organisational strength. We will develop a stable financial base with a balanced mix of funding streams, more partnerships and improved efficiency and effectiveness across our operations. These measures will allow us to invest in the activity that makes us unique - innovation and engagement that deliver practical, real-world solutions.

Partnering with our sector



Turning science into solutions



Leading with science and innovation



Strengthening our organisation





Partnering with our sector

Partnering with our sector



The vision we are working towards

We are trusted partners to grapegrowers and winemakers in every region of Australia.

We keep these voices at the heart of our work. We listen to their challenges and their aspirations, undertaking research and delivering timely and practical solutions which are based on real needs.

We work closely with Wine Australia, Australian Grape & Wine and other key partners to ensure our collective efforts deliver maximum value.

We have a national footprint and work with customers and partners both big and small. Through our traditional communications channels and our enhanced digital engagement, we are reaching more people, more often, in ways that fit with their lives and work.

The impact we will have

Australian grapegrowers and winemakers feel heard and supported. They can clearly see their operational realities reflected in our science and services and they experience us as a valuable partner - responsive and tuned in to their needs.

Priorities

Embedding an ongoing approach to market research and analysis

We will introduce an ongoing, evidence-based approach to market research and analysis. This will benchmark what the sector needs and expects from us and will help us to shape science and extension activities which are data-informed, responsive and targeted. It will also provide insights into different market segments across Australia and establish a baseline of awareness, knowledge and trust in the AWRI brand, to be strengthened over the life of the strategy.

Strengthening awareness and trust in our brand

We will build a targeted marketing and communications approach that draws on our market research insights to build awareness of what we do and raise our profile where this is needed most. Through our accessible content and thought leadership, we will lift recognition and trust in our brand with audiences ranging from growers and producers to decision-makers.

Success measures



Headline KPI

Customer Satisfaction Score of 70% or higher for core industry facing services.

Key metrics:

- 30% increase from baseline levels in positive brand perception and recognition of the AWRI's profile Australia-wide.
- 30% growth in digital reach and engagement measured through follower and subscriber growth, platform engagement rates and email campaign performance.
- Three new product or service offerings developed or improved annually, based on industry and customer feedback.



Leading with science and innovation



Leading with science and innovation



The vision we are working towards

We lead the way in grape and wine science, pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

We respond to current challenges while driving tomorrow's breakthroughs.

Through our in-house expertise and collaboration with local and international partners, we keep Australian wine globally competitive by delivering the science to solve existing problems and unlock new opportunities.

The impact we will have

The Australian wine sector is considered an innovation leader worldwide. Grapegrowers and winemakers are using cutting-edge solutions to enhance quality and sustainability and stay ahead of market trends and challenges.

Priorities

Maintaining our scientific excellence

We will secure our position at the forefront of grape and wine science by creating the conditions for our experts to do their best work. To do this we will continue to invest in attracting and retaining leading scientists, supporting their professional development and giving them the infrastructure, data systems and sustainable funding needed to keep our science relevant and world-leading.

Expanding collaborations and partnerships

We will harness domestic and global partnerships that strengthen our scientific capability and extend our reach and impact. Working with other leading research centres, universities and industry bodies, we will bring new processes and technologies to the wine sector. These partnerships will help to accelerate discovery and ensure our science keeps pace with industry's changing needs.

Building a Catalyst Fund

We will build a Catalyst Fund generated from a stable and balanced mix of funding streams, to fuel breakthrough science and technical innovation that is independent of specific funding contracts. The Fund will support projects that give our scientists the scope to pursue new ideas and develop solutions with sector-wide application.

Success measures



Headline KPI

At least one innovation translated into a new product, service or practice for the Australian wine industry on an annual basis.

Key metrics:

- A portfolio funding mix of 70:30 between discovery research and development projects.
- At least one peer-reviewed publication per annum (5-year average and 80% in a Q1 journal) per PhD trained scientist working on discovery research.
- Catalyst Fund enables at least one high potential internally-funded project annually.

Turning science into solutions



Turning science into solutions



The vision we are working towards

We know that our research only matters if the people we exist for can put it to use. Our focus on translating scientific discovery into practical support means grapegrowers and winemakers can make decisions with the latest know-how.

Whether it's rapid responses during vintage or delivering the Sustainable Winegrowing Australia program, our workshops, tailored advice, expert testing, training and digital tools help growers and makers run their businesses with confidence.

We have become the leading partner in extension services, drawing on social and behavioural science to translate new technologies into ready-to-use solutions for industry.

The impact we will have

Grapegrowers and winemakers across Australia use our products and services to help them respond to current problems or pursue new business opportunities. Our enhanced digital reach and national footprint mean all growers and makers have access to the same high-quality tools and technical support

Priorities

Building a consistent approach to customer and industry engagement

We will implement a structured engagement approach to connect the AWRI across Australia's wine regions. We will work closely with Wine Australia to deliver extension and adoption activities that respond to the breadth and variety within our sector. We will also amplify our reach through closer collaboration with peak bodies, other research organisations and strategic partners.

Connecting and scaling through digital engagement

Alongside our traditional communications channels, we will strengthen our national footprint by using digital channels to reach and engage with more people, more effectively. This will include delivering exceptional tailored online content, interactive resources and platforms that make it easy for grapegrowers and winemakers to access our knowledge and services no matter their location or size.

Success measures



Headline KPI

One significant shift in industry practice or technology adoption annually, stemming from AWRI activities.

Key metrics:

- Translation of AWRI science into at least one new product or service offering through Affinity Labs on an annual basis.
- Translation of AWRI science into at least five new extension and adoption offerings to industry on an annual basis.
- 35% or more of the Engagement and Sustainability team's funding is secured from increased grant funding or fee-for-service sources.



Strengthening our organisation

Strengthening our organisation



The vision we are working towards

We have a financially sustainable organisation built on a stable funding base, effective partnerships and efficient operations. This gives us the capacity to keep investing in innovation and better industry engagement over the long term.

The impact we will have

Our Catalyst Fund gives our scientific and extension teams the ability to innovate in ways which keep more grapegrowers and winemakers ahead of market trends. A reliable mix of funding streams and sound financial management underpin the Catalyst Fund and provide the stability to weather future funding fluctuations.

Priorities

Enhancing Affinity Labs

We will strengthen Affinity Labs' role in supporting AWRI's financial sustainability by improving efficiency, delivering exemplary customer service and sharpening our focus on new business development. This will include applying our expertise in related sectors, expanding fee-for-service offerings and building a product and service portfolio that draws on our full capability.

Building a diversified and balanced portfolio mix

We will build a balanced portfolio of revenue streams that mitigates risk and protects us against funding volatility. This will include forming more investment partnerships with funders of research and adopting a structured approach to securing grant funding. Over time, we will also recruit or upskill for the right mix of skills in partnership development, revenue generation and grant writing.

Success measures



Headline KPI

AWRI generates a net surplus equivalent to 4% of revenue on an annual basis.

Key metrics:

- Each business unit is achieving sustainable financial performance.
- Engagement with new customers and expansion within existing customers delivers > 8% year-on-year revenue growth.
- A balanced portfolio of revenue streams, with no more than one-third of total revenue from any one source.
- Customer Satisfaction Score of 70% or higher for Affinity Labs services.

Our people



Priorities

Since our inception, the AWRI has been home to scientists, researchers, technologists and industry specialists who are leaders in their fields. We know that our people are our greatest strength and we will continue to create the conditions that help them to thrive and feel inspired in their work.

This includes a commitment to a safe, healthy and supportive workplace, with a comprehensive approach to work health and safety and a strong focus on wellbeing. We will invest in professional development and leadership capability and will embed an inclusive culture where contribution is recognised and career growth is supported.

Priorities

Closing the gender pay gap

We will continue to close the gender pay gap to ensure there is equity within role classifications. We will set clear targets to achieve this and will report regularly on progress.

Investing in staff development

We will develop clear pathways for professional development, career progression and leadership growth to give our people structured opportunities to advance within the organisation.

Headline KPI

Staff engagement score of 70% or higher.



Key metrics

- Annual improvements in gender pay gap towards parity.
- At least a 90% retention rate for staff with specialised skills.

Our systems

For our people to deliver their best, we need systems and infrastructure that are smart, seamless and efficient. We will invest over time in secure data systems and digital platforms that make information easy to access, reduce the administrative load and lead to more tailored services for our customers. By making it simpler for people to do their jobs, we will free up more time for the work that delivers real impact.

Our aim is to build a strong foundation of systems that support excellence across our organisation - from financial management, risk management and governance to project delivery, data management, knowledge sharing and customer engagement.

Priorities

Modernising our systems

We will implement a technology plan that equips our people with the right systems to collaborate easily and efficiently. This will include an integrated CRM to elevate customer service, and improved data and knowledge management systems to better manage information and IP.

Integrating AI into our operations

We will scope and embed the responsible use of AI into our business systems and processes to streamline workflows and reduce the administrative burden.

Advancing ESG commitments

We will integrate environmental, social, and governance principles into our operations to support transparent reporting, accountability, and ongoing improvement. Our focus will be on reducing environmental impact, strengthening equity and inclusion and exemplary governance.

Headline KPI

Staff engagement score of 70% or higher.



Key metrics

- Reduce time spent on administrative tasks by ~20%.
- Automate routine processes by ~20%.
- Measurable annual progress in reducing our footprint, strengthening inclusion and improving governance.



Monitoring and evaluating our performance

To bring this strategy to life, we are breaking it down into annual implementation plans which set out clear activities, milestones and targets for each year. This will help us to build steadily towards the outcomes and impact we have committed to achieve by 2028.

We are monitoring progress quarterly and annually, with our performance against the strategy reported to the AWRI Board and to employees. This approach will allow us to track results over time, adjust our course if needed and hold ourselves accountable for delivery.