



Vine lover: Phylloxera aphids are a pest for wine growers and were first spotted in Victoria in 1877.

Horticulture

Vineyard biosecurity: Call to arms to rid state of phylloxera

GUS McCUBBING, The Weekly Times
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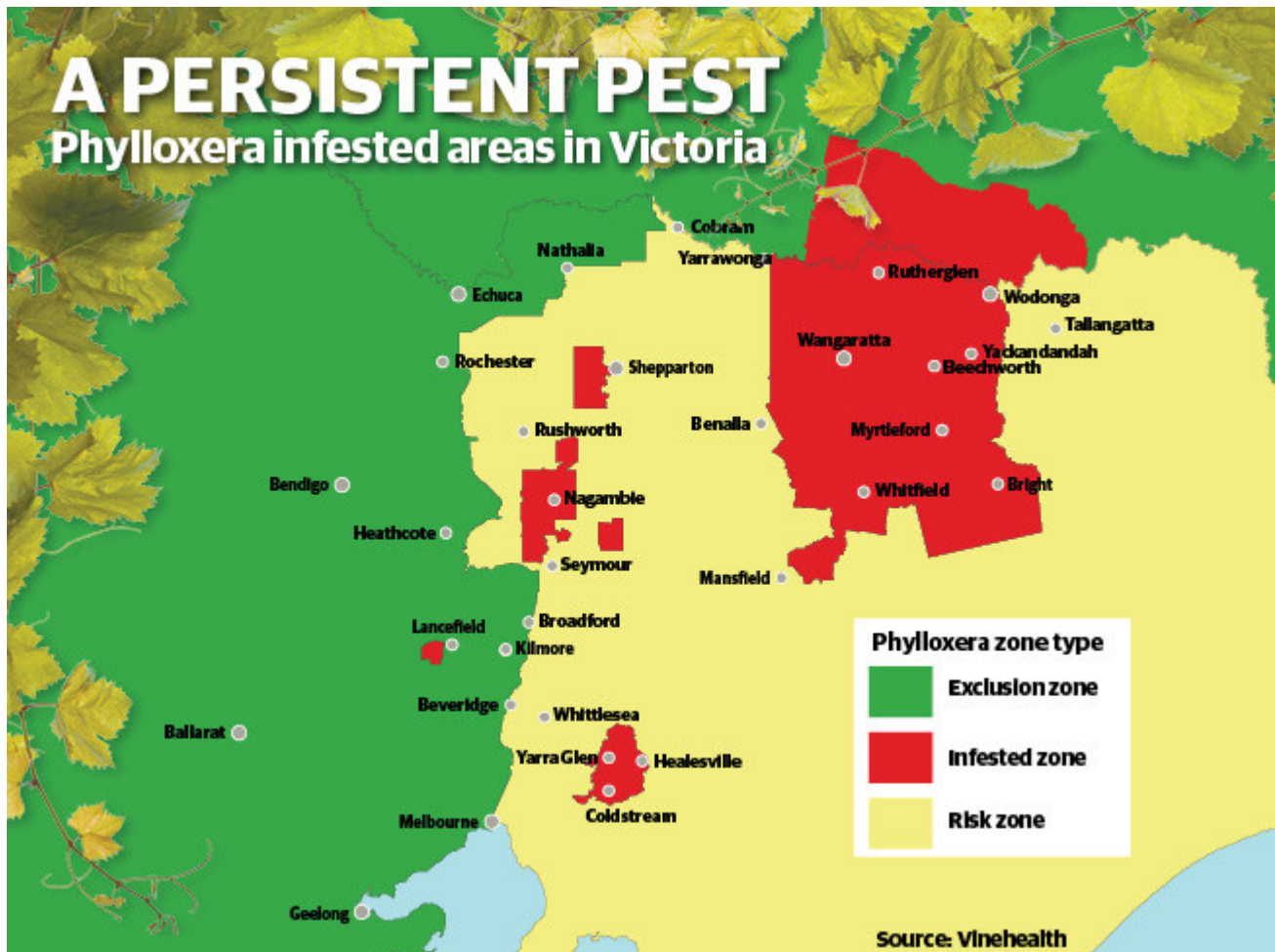
VINEYARD owners are being urged to improve their farmgate hygiene to help prevent major pest or disease incursion, following further detections of phylloxera in Victoria.

Agriculture Victoria has branded the insect the No. 1 threat to grapevines in Australia after the Maroondah phylloxera infested zone was extended.

The pest, which can easily spread, destroys grapevines by eating away at the roots and leaves until the plant dies.

The pest was first discovered in 1877 near Geelong and in 1884 near Camden, NSW.

Given there is no available chemical or biological control for phylloxera, the only possible response to infestation is to pull out the vineyard and replant with new vines that have been grafted on to phylloxera tolerant or resistant rootstock, a process that costs roughly \$60,000 an hectare.



In order to prevent further spreading of the pest and to protect the grape industry the Victorian Government uses different management zones.

These include phylloxera exclusion zones, which must be protected from the introduction of the pest, and phylloxera infested zones, which are established to prevent the insect spreading further.

While an estimate of the total financial damage phylloxera has caused the Victorian wine industry is currently unavailable, a spokeswoman from Agriculture Victoria said the use of the control zones had already paid dividends.

“In 2012, a benefit-cost analysis was completed on phylloxera exclusion zone activities for viticulture in Victoria (and) the analysis found the benefits of the phylloxera management program exceeded the costs, with an estimated return of between \$7 and \$9 for every \$1 of cost incurred,” the spokeswoman said.

Vinehealth Australia chief executive officer Inca Pearce said although phylloxera did not spread rapidly, it did spread easily.

“Phylloxera will naturally spread from root to root in a vineyard, but what assists it spreading further afield to other vineyards within a region and then between states are vectors such as machinery, equipment, (and) potentially people,” Ms Pearce said.

“If you have phylloxera in your vineyard, some of the phylloxera in the soil can get into the tread of a tire, or a shoe, and can then be transported to other parts of the vineyard ... and if the harvester isn’t cleaned and sterilised, it’s very easy for them to transport phylloxera from one vineyard to the other,” she said.

“So that’s why we have all the quarantine regulations that restrict and further controls on the movement of those vectors.”

As a result, Ms Pearce said the group was asking all growers, wineries, and suppliers to the industry to be vigilant and to strengthen their biosecurity practices. “It really is simple things, such as putting signs on the front of your gate in very clear, explicit language that people entering your property must respect biosecurity systems,” she said.

“It’s about not allowing people to walk down among vines without firstly sterilising their boots.

“And of course any equipment and machinery that comes on to your property needs to be clean of plant and soil, and you need to know where that’s come from.”