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## Number one plant pest under the microscope

Australia's number one unwanted plant pest – *Xylella fastidiosa* – is the focus of international scrutiny in Australia this week.

The Australian Government's Department of Agriculture and Water Resources is hosting a two-day International Symposium on the bacterium from 17–18 May in Brisbane, aimed at improving knowledge of prevention and management.

Delegates, including Suzanne McLoughlin, Vinehealth Australia Technical Manager, Dr Sharon Harvey, Wine Australia and James Hook, representing McLaren Vale Grape Wine Tourism Association, will hear from international experts, who will share their knowledge in managing *Xylella* in the field.

"This symposium has been designed to fast-track the practical knowledge of Australian biosecurity personnel so that we are effectively prepared for an incursion of this exotic pest which impacts over 350 plant species – if that time comes," said Vinehealth Australia CEO Inca Pearce, a member of the symposium organising committee.

"Preparedness to respond quickly and implement effective management processes is critical to minimising the impact of this bacterium, should it be detected in Australia."

*Xylella fastidiosa* was named the number one unwanted plant pest for Australia in 2016 and is a High Priority Pest for the wine industry. It is currently found in Europe, Asia, Middle East, North America, Central America and South America. There are no treatments currently available to cure diseased plants in the field.

The distribution and impact of *Xylella fastidiosa* is closely related to the presence of sap-sucking insect vectors that can carry and transmit the disease. In Viticulture, *Xylella fastidiosa* causes Pierce's Disease, which is spread by the most efficient vector, the Glassy-winged sharpshooter.

"This bacterium blocks the movement of water in the vine, causing dehydration and death within a couple of years," Suzanne McLoughlin said. "Early detection of the pathogen is critical, but it's complicated due to disease symptoms which are easily confused with water stress or other pathogens."

As part of their involvement in symposium, Vinehealth Australia plans to translate information from the symposium into knowledge and tools for vineyard owners, which will be shared in wine industry publications and in Vinehealth's monthly e-newsletter.

"For us, it's about understanding the gap of where we are at in terms of preparedness and where we need to be for the wine industry to minimise the impact of an incursion and how we as an organisation can influence and play a role in the closing of this gap," Inca said.

For more on *Xylella* and Pierce's Disease refer to Vinehealth Australia's website: [www.vinehealth.com.au/pests-and-diseases/exotics-viticulture/xylella-fastidiosa](http://www.vinehealth.com.au/pests-and-diseases/exotics-viticulture/xylella-fastidiosa)