

To South Australian Vineyard Owners,

After seven years, my time at Vinehealth has come to an end. Your investment in and support of Vinehealth is important, so I thought it timely to share my reflections and observations.

It has been my absolute honour to serve you, and to assist in protecting your vines through an extraordinary piece of legislation, the *Phylloxera and Grape Industry Act 1995*, the powers and functions of which deserve to be celebrated and embraced by industry and government. This Act is an enduring legacy of our South Australian wine industry pioneers, and its intent must be upheld.

I am proud of the work undertaken by Vinehealth, including:

- Leading biosecurity technical programs
- Considered and comprehensive policy advice and reform
- Championing the biosecurity conversation across the wine industry
- Maintaining and safe-guarding the valuable data (Register) of 3,234 vineyard owners across South Australia
- Raising the governance of the organisation to ensure full transparency and accountability
- Developing strong strategic plans to guide Vinehealth's operations

However, biosecurity starts with you – the practical work that you do, day in day out, to look after the health of your vines and run your grape and wine businesses. And this is where Vinehealth comes in to support you, by providing tools and solutions to make the task of stopping a significant pest, such as phylloxera, entering your vineyard easier and more effective. Vinehealth also has the job of working hand in hand with state and federal governments, on your behalf, to ensure our borders are protected and that policies and systems are in place should an outbreak occur.

I have been your staunchest ally and have always prosecuted biosecurity matters based on what is best for South Australia vineyard owners. At times, Vinehealth's knowledge of technical details and industry dynamics have resulted in robust conversations, where we are calling out others on their narrative, behaviour and decision making. We have not shied away from these conversations, and I know you would expect no less. Outcomes have varied and work is still to be done. But in my experience, the path of least resistance is not one that yields good biosecurity outcomes.

It concerns me greatly that, in my opinion, the risk of a significant pest incursion, such as phylloxera, is greater now than when I commenced as CEO seven years ago. Over and above the widely recognised global and local trends that are driving a more intense, complex and risky biosecurity landscape, my observations are that:

- Whilst we continue to see year on year improvement in the adoption of farm gate hygiene practices, there remains a significant opportunity to drive the pace of improvement. This in part will come through delivery of better practical solutions, and by steadfastly addressing signs of industry complacency.
- With the significant burdens and stresses in the industry at present, all industry players must remain vigilant and comply with South Australia's Plant Quarantine Standard regarding the movement of regulated machinery, equipment and grapes into our State. Breaches should not be tolerated. Such operators who breach the rules are in effect taking a risk on behalf of all South Australian growers. Their one poor and illegal decision has the potential to have significant consequences for you. I encourage you all to call out and demand action if you become aware of such behaviour in your region.
- Accountability for the revision of the National Phylloxera Management Protocol (NPMP) has been lacking, with discussions at times circular, glacial in speed and with no incentive for

States to invest resources given that phylloxera languishes on a long list of pest threat priorities that state jurisdictions need to allocate resources to. This jeopardises our ability to stop the spread of phylloxera. The ongoing detections of phylloxera outside of the Maroondah Phylloxera Infested Zone clearly show that the system and protocols are not working. Over time Vinehealth has continued to highlight its lack of confidence in the suitability of the NPMP, including in a memorandum to South Australian State and regional associations back in 2018. Further, following review of reports relating to recent rezoning activity in Victoria, Vinehealth provided strong advice to PIRSA that there should be a moratorium on the upgrading of any Phylloxera Risk Zone (PRZ) to a Phylloxera Exclusion Zone (PEZ) until a revision of the NPMP is completed. The recent detection of phylloxera in a Victorian PRZ this year again strongly underlines the points and basis for the advice to PIRSA. The continued application of the outdated NPMP (noting that some States have already made some necessary departures) is extraordinary for an industry that contributes \$45 billion to Australia's economy. Industry should demand more, because at the end of the day, it is the health of your vines that are at increasing risk of exposure to phylloxera.

- A strategic approach must be taken to ensure we invest in the capacity and capability of researchers and technical experts in Australia. Whilst we will always look to overseas experts and prior research to guide and support activities in Australia, our industry must invest in experts in our own country who will be at the forefront of responding if an outbreak were to occur. And if we lose the battle to eradicate a particular pest following an outbreak, we need these researchers and experts to help guide growers how best to manage the pest on an ongoing basis to minimise the impact on vine health.
- We must fortify our relationship with PIRSA's biosecurity division and ensure that they are adequately resourced to protect our industry and that Vinehealth is valued as a strategic partner.
- Collaborative effort in biosecurity must continue to leverage every dollar invested by you. Biosecurity does not warrant grandstanding or claims of ownership. It is a shared responsibility and we must all play our part to drive exceptional outcomes to protect the health of the 75,485 hectares of vines across the State.
- Whilst biosecurity can be the ultimate unifier of our industry during 'peacetime' through shared goals and practices, experience tells us that it has the potential to be the ultimate divider of an industry and social networks in regions during an incursion. I implore you to include a biosecurity incursion or 'risk' in your business continuity planning, and support Vinehealth develop outbreak plans and capability.

When it comes to biosecurity, we must continue to have the mindset of prevention and preparedness, not one of inevitability.

We recently had the difficult conversation with you about our funding. Frankly, after no change to funding rates since 1996, the choice was simple. Have the conversation now, as difficult as this was given current industry conditions, or advise you in 2-3 years' time that we could no longer perform our statutory functions. The funding nexus was a result of many strong forces at work, many being out of Vinehealth's control, given that it is the Minister of the day who sets the rules for contributions payable. Together with the Board, I made the deliberate decision back in 2016 to vastly improve the relevance and focus of the organisation before talking to you about sustainable funding for Vinehealth. With a 94% satisfaction rating by growers who responded to the 2021 Vineyard Owner Survey, the small (but nonetheless important and respected) number of objectors to the proposed new rules and rates, and the support for Vinehealth through the funding review received from the South Australian Wine Industry Association, South Australian Vine Improvement Association, and from every South Australian regional wine association, I leave Vinehealth knowing it may continue for another 125 years!

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the Vinehealth team of Suzanne, Jo, Brendan and Cindie. Their efforts and drive to serve you and protect your vines has been unwavering. I thank the Board of Vinehealth for their sage counsel and belief in how I have navigated the, at times, rocky terrain.

Most importantly, to you, thank you.

And to those growers who I have been fortunate enough to have had a chat with over the last seven years, your insights and generosity of time has been greatly appreciated. It is these conversations that have helped shape the direction and productivity of Vinehealth.

Vinehealth is poised to enter a bold new era under the leadership of Suzanne McLoughlin. Here's to the continued health of your vines.

Inca Lee