

# Sheep in vineyards: know the risks



Photo: Voyager Estate

Sheep are frequently agisted in vineyards to help maintain the vineyard floor, reducing vehicle movements on wet soils that can add to soil compaction. Vinehealth Australia's new 'Sheep and Vineyard Biosecurity Risk' Fact Sheet outlines essential steps to prevent the introduction of pests, diseases and weeds, enhancing both vineyard productivity and animal welfare, as **Suzanne McLoughlin** writes.

Using sheep to control midrow and undervine growth in Australian viticulture is an increasingly popular alternative to slashing and spraying and has the potential to reduce vineyard management costs.

Before welcoming sheep onto your vineyard, Vinehealth Australia recommends considering the biosecurity risks and covering these in a written agistment agreement with the sheep owner.

"Including biosecurity risks in the agreement can help prevent a plant pest, disease or weed being moved onto your vineyard," said Warren Birchmore, Vinehealth Australia Technical Assistant.

"You also become part of the chain of responsibility for animal welfare when you have the sheep on your vineyard

and when you are consigning them for transport off your vineyard, so it's important to ensure you're up to speed with the rules."

To protect both yourself as the vineyard owner (agistor), and the potential agistee, the agistment agreement should outline expectations and responsibilities, including:

- Number of sheep and pregnancy status.
- Duration of the agreement.
- Agistment fees and ability to renegotiate.
- Person responsible for caring for livestock and animal welfare.
- Type, quantity and quality of feed.
- Requirements for water sources.

- Containment (fencing).
- Animal identification (to aid in the case of escapees and/or theft).
- Access to the property by the livestock owner or person responsible for livestock welfare.
- In the unlikely event of livestock death, the responsibilities of both parties.

## Other important considerations

**The agistment history of the sheep:** if the sheep have previously been agisted in vineyards in a Phylloxera Infested Zone (PIZ) or Phylloxera Risk Zone (PRZ), do not accept them for agistment in a vineyard in a Phylloxera Exclusion Zone (PEZ). It is also recommended that sheep are not moved for agistment either between vineyards located within a PIZ

## Including biosecurity risks in the agreement can help prevent a plant pest, disease or weed being moved onto your vineyard

Warren Birchmore

or PRZ, or moved between vineyards in these Phylloxera Management Zones. Check the Vinehealth Australia website for the current phylloxera zones map.

**The disease status of the flock:** you should know the disease status of the flock you are agisting before they arrive. Gain some knowledge of sheep diseases to ensure that you can look out for anything unusual and contact the agistee if you are concerned with the health of the sheep.

**Weed transfer:** to minimise the risk of weed transfer onto your vineyard, ask if the sheep have been on a previous property with problematic weeds. Request that sheep be shorn prior to entering your vineyard to reduce the potential for fleeces to hitchhike weed seeds. Ensure you also advise the agistee of any harmful weeds on your property that could be tracked off when the agistment ends.

**Agrochemical residues:** ensure you advise the agistee of any re-entry periods for grazing that apply (these might be from chemicals already applied before the agistment period, or chemical applications planned during the sheep occupancy). Some agrochemicals have Export Slaughter Intervals (ESI) and

pesticide labels must be consulted before livestock enter the vineyard.

**Requirements for your state under the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS):** The NLIS is Australia's system for the identification and traceability of sheep, lambs and goats. The NLIS mob-based database system enables animals to be traced to their property of birth and last property of residence. It also allows Australia to contain and manage major disease or food safety incidents. Sheep must be:

- Identified with a readable NLIS device before being moved to any property or location with a different Property Identification Code (PIC). If you keep livestock on your property, you must register the property and get a PIC.
- Accompanied by movement documentation, which must be kept for 7 years. Movement documentation includes a National Vendor Declaration, a Movement Waybill and a National Sheep Health Declaration.

### Vineyard infrastructure damage

When agisting sheep in vineyards, you need to consider any off-target impacts on irrigation infrastructure as sheep cross between rows and may damage dripper lines. This may occur when rounding up sheep upon exit of the vineyard. Checking the status of the irrigation infrastructure prior to irrigating again once the sheep have exited, is recommended.

Sheep are also prone to rubbing up against posts and vine trunks. On trunks, this could reduce the viability of buds and spur positions, particularly on low cordon vines.

### Nutrient balancing

Nutrient losses from vineyard soil due to livestock agistment are expected to be very small compared to the expected improvements in soil carbon and nutrient cycling.

### Upon signing of the agistment agreement

Assuming you have determined that the sheep to be agisted do not pose a potential phylloxera risk to your vineyard and that your vineyard is in a PEZ:

- Ensure you have sighted the NLIS documentation if applicable. ▶

# Ocloc™

VINEYARD & RURAL



## Ocloc S

DESIGNED & MANUFACTURED  
IN AUSTRALIA

THE STAND ALONE, STRONG  
ANCHOR SYSTEM

- Save time when installing
- The shape locks in the soil and has maximum surface to soil exposure
- Central round central wire hole for quick and easy loading or tying off of wires
- 3mm G450 High tensile steel
- Galvanneal coated for durability
- No pre auger Drilling in soil simply ramp into place

RAMMING COMPLETED IN  
ONE PASS

- Available in 2.20m, 2.4m, 2.7m
- Ideal for new developments
- Replacement of broken wooden strainers

*"Ocloc S was the only strainers left standing after the Cudlee creek fire. Fast to install. No augers, light to carry. No chemicals. If you bump the S they don't break. Recyclable. Use Ocloc S."*

Craig Markaby - BAppSCI VITTI  
Vineyard manager, Henschke cellars

products are supplied  
100% carbon offset

Nigel Catt 0418 832 967  
nigel@ocloc.com.au

[www.ocloc.com.au](http://www.ocloc.com.au)



- Discuss farm-gate hygiene requirements of the sheep truck with the agistee: query if the truck has been near vine rows in a PIZ or PRZ within the last 29 days. If yes, communicate with the agistee that this poses a heightened phylloxera risk to your vineyard unless the truck has been heat treated at 45° C for 1.5 hours or at 40° C for three hours, prior to leaving the PRZ or PIZ. If this disinfestation has not occurred, request that an alternative truck is required to transport these sheep to your vineyard. Also communicate to the agistee that the sheep truck must be clean of all soil and plant material upon arrival at your vineyard.

**Upon arrival of the sheep truck at your vineyard:**

- Verify that the truck is clean of soil and plant material upon entry to your vineyard.
- As you would for other visitors to your site, require the truck driver to sign in via your visitor record book and answer questions as to where the truck has been (in terms of phylloxera management zones) in the last 29 days and where the driver has been within the same timeframe.
- Avoid loading/unloading the sheep directly down vine rows.
- Limit unnecessary movement of the driver down your vine rows.

- Retain agistment records for the entry and exit of sheep to your vineyard.

**Upon exit of the sheep truck from your vineyard:**

- Ensure the truck is clean of all soil and plant material.
- Remember that when you are in charge of an animal, you are responsible for maintaining its welfare. This also extends to the transport of your agisted stock. The chain of responsibility for livestock welfare in the transport process includes the receiver after unloading. Meat & Livestock Australia has a free pictorial guide “Is the animal fit to



Photo: Voyager Estate

load?” to help assess if your agisted livestock are fit for the intended journey and your responsibilities.

For more detail and links to other documents, read Vinehealth Australia’s

Sheep and Vineyard Biosecurity Risk Fact Sheet, which is available online: [www.vinehealth.com.au/2024/04/sheep-and-vine-biosecurity-risk-2](http://www.vinehealth.com.au/2024/04/sheep-and-vine-biosecurity-risk-2)

## Know the health status

Agisting livestock in vineyards will reduce the reliance on tractor passes for vineyard floor management and weed control, with an associated reduction in fuel and herbicide use. This has sustainability benefits for programs including Sustainable Winegrowing Australia. Having sheep free of pests, diseases and weeds before arrival and knowing where they have come from, including any vehicles used in transport, will enable you to manage associated biosecurity risks. This is similar to knowing the health status of planting material, vehicles and visitors as part of your normal vineyard activities.



**Ocloc™**  
VINEYARD & RURAL



**Ocloc™ V**

MANUFACTURED IN AUSTRALIA

**LONG TERM REPAIR FOR  
BROKEN WOODEN POSTS**

### ADVANTAGES

- Quick inexpensive repair for broken wooden posts
- Single pass no tractor required
- No removal of wires and cutting staples
- No laying out heavy toxic post
- Stops wooden post going to the graveyard or landfill
- Environmental responsible
- Lower carbon footprint and carbon offset
- Available in Galfan or Galvaspan for durability
- High tensile steel
- Ideal for all under vine management
- Shark tooth screws supplied

*“We’ve been using Ocloc V for a number of years 1/4 the cost of traditional post replacement, a complete ‘game changer’ & no brainer”*  
Darren Sheer - Burge Of Barossa

### AUSTRALIA

Nigel Catt 0418 832 967  
[nigel@ocloc.com.au](mailto:nigel@ocloc.com.au)

[www.ocloc.com.au](http://www.ocloc.com.au)

### NEW ZEALAND

Philip Gleeson 0272 759 057  
[www.oclocnz.co.nz](http://www.oclocnz.co.nz)