

Food Standards Australia and New Zealand Call for submissions – Application A1119

Addition of Water to Facilitate Wine Fermentation

10th August 2016

About Wine Grape Growers Australia (WGGA)

WGGA is the national advocacy body that represents the interest of growers across the nation, and assumes the responsibility for national grower advocacy, biosecurity arrangements and works for the benefit of Australian winegrowers and the Australian industry as a whole. It represents the interests of over six thousand Australian winegrowers.

Addition of Water to Grape Must

It is clear that there is a recent trend with vintage periods becoming more compressed, placing greater strain on processing capacity. There is limited ability to deal with this challenge once vintage is under way. This compressed vintage pattern has been worsened in some years by heat wave events, and in some instances limited availability of growers to access enough irrigation capacity to deal with the impact, and prevent loss. This has placed greater pressure on the logistical measure to handle intake during the vintage period, and on wine companies to spend on capital works to allow more rapid processing in the event that compressed vintages continue; as it appears they will.

Yield loss is a significant concern in some varieties (such as Shiraz), with some growers in the Riverland region of S.A. reporting reduction in yield in the order of 30% between fruit that is harvested before and after heat events. The loss to a grower, and the possibility of a “stuck” ferment means that everyone suffers loss; but the grower suffers the greatest loss to income.

This proposal is likely to meet with some concern among sections of the grower community if there is a belief that the ability to add additional water to must will result in wine companies treating intake at vintage time with less urgency than would otherwise be the case. In such an outcome the grower would still suffer loss, but the winemaker would have a simple and low cost redress. There would be significant concern among the Australian grower community if access to this international measure resulted in a “routine” method of adding water to high sugar musts, instead of working diligently and in good faith to ensure that the fruit is taken in good time, as specified in so many grape supply contracts.

WGGA believe that:

- Australian winemakers should not be left at a disadvantage in comparison with international competitors, who currently have greater altitude to prevent “stuck” ferments. WGGA believes that Australian winemakers should have available to them the full suite of measures to enable them to produce the greatest value wine possible, and therefore allow the industry to realise the greatest potential value.
- Smaller winemakers should not be disadvantaged in regard to being able to cope with “stuck” ferments, and realise that this amendment will address the current disparity and relative disadvantage that small winemakers might currently be suffering.

- The ability to add water should be treated as a last resort in to deal with problematic seasonal conditions, and should not be treated as an alternative to harvesting fruit at the optimum condition, including investment in processing capacity to allow for this timely harvest to occur, such that loss to the grower and winemaker is avoided.
- It is agreed that addition of the additional water should not be allowed at musts lower than 15 degrees baume, and that the amount of water addition should be limited.
- It is clear that there are no food safety issues with the proposal.

WGGA supports “Option 1”; namely the re-drafting of the code to accommodate the addition of water to high sugar musts, subject to the limitations suggested.

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