

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the possible introduction of volumetric taxation regime on wine. As a long term grape grower located in the Riverland, I see the introduction of such a tax as potentially the end of my family owned vineyard.

I have over twenty years dedicated to the wine industry, and have contributed at corporate, environmental and social levels. In 2006 I was awarded the DAFF Science & Innovation Award for research I undertook on improving the quality of wine made in the Riverland through the use of less water and rootstocks.

With a Bachelor of Applied Science in Viticulture and Masters Degree in Wine Technology & Marketing, I strive to use my qualifications, experience and dedication to grow the highest standard of wine grapes possible. It is important to note that all my grapes are purchased by a family wine company and are used in their 2ltrs cask wines. This is something I am proud of as the quality of cask wine where my grapes end up is of the highest quality. The problem with cask wine is its quality is judged by historical reputation. The quality of cask wines today is far superior to cask wines of the past, and in many cases far better quality and value than many bottles wine. People need to try before casting stones!!

My email is not going debate the pro & cons of alcohol abuse. Alcohol abuse is an issue that needs to be addressed, but the using cask wine as the scapegoat by supporters of the volumetric tax is unfair.

Recently two major wine companies supported the introduction of the volumetric tax on wine. Both of these wine companies are not what I would refer to as 'true' wine companies, rather the producers of alcoholic beverages as they both make, market and sell beer and spirits, hence they have substitute 'non wine' beverages to fill the void created by the potential demise of cask wines. Of even more importance, these potential 'substitute' beverages will likely be made from raw ingredients that are not grown in Australia.

The Riverland has gone through dramatic changes in recent times, driven by the drought, over supply issues and general depression. Things are changing though! There has been a focus in recent times to grow quality grapes. Wine companies have identified that the Riverland can supply quality grapes at a sustainable price that helps alleviate the problems created by the strong Australian dollar. There are wine companies moving back to the region, and the hard work of removing surplus vineyards, that has not been implemented by any cool climate region, is starting to pay dividends.

The last ten years have been very difficult for our family vineyard, especially last year with the extreme weather experienced during vintage. I do see a light at the end of the tunnel, but the introduction of a volumetric tax would be devastating and would see the potential foreclosure of our business that we have worked so hard to establish. I struggle to see how my local community would survive in the volumetric tax was introduced!

I hope that you take into account all the Riverland growers who find themselves in similar position to my family when you consider the tax reforms of wine, in particular Riverland Wine!

Regards

Ashley Ratcliff
Director – Ashmile Vineyard