

Western Australian Vine Improvement Association

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Chairman's Report: Jan 2023 to Jan 2024

Jim Campbell-Clause

Twenty twenty-three was a nice vintage, with strong yields and great fruit being produced for winemaking. The higher tonnage and continued low international demand for wine resulted in high volumes of stored wine and low demand for fruit. Grape sales have been difficult recently, impacting demand for propagation material except for alternative varieties.

WAVIA continues to rely on a team of dedicated volunteers and assistance from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. I want to thank those on the committee from industry and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. Particular thanks to Chris Harding, who has done a lot of work for WAVIA this year, including updating the order form, revising the source block register, setting up new bank accounts and helping the Department of Agriculture with records of material distribution as well as the day to day running of the Association. Colleen Gillespie has again done most of the work, collecting propagation material and keeping the WAVIA books. Steve Partridge has WAVIA informed of many national projects and vine propagation association work. Thanks to Jock Riddel, Clint Robertson and Matt Trent for contributing to the management committee. We welcomed Rob Johnson to the committee this year representing the Perth Hills.

We thank Richard Fennessy from the DPIRD and the staff for their support and assistance. Richard continues to assist on the committee and has continued research and development in vine improvement. Many thanks to Ian Guthridge, Manager of the Horticulture Research Institute, for his team's work with the Germplasm collection.

Unfortunately, another detection of an exotic disease impacted the ability of WAVIA to collect and distribute propagation material. *Diaporthe Ampelina*, a fungal trunk/cane disease, was picked up by Andrew Taylor (DPIRD) in the Germplasm Block and resulted in WAVIA being unable to access both the Germplasm and Trial Variety Block at Manjimup for the 2023 cutting season, or to be able to store material at MHRI in their coolrooms. It has not been found in the Trial block at this stage but is widespread in the Germplasm block. Fortunately some material was able to be sourced from Source Blocks.

Only a few orders could be filled from source blocks. This year, we could only source and supply the alternative varieties, including Barbera, Carmenere, Graciano, Pignoletto, and Tannat. Steve Partridge and Patrick Bertola did a great job of collecting and packing the cuttings, with Colleen Gillespie dispatching all the material for the orders.

The long-term importance of the WA Germplasm continues to be discussed by the NGC Project as an important National Genetic Repository. The level of virus testing that has been and is continuing to be conducted presents validation of the overall high-status quality of the collection. Following the removal of the vines identified as infected with GRBV, further extensive broad-spectrum testing has resulted in a handful of individual vines of other varieties being identified for removal. These were vine of Early Madeleine WA, Chardonnay I10V3, Touriga E6V12, Grüner Veltliner, Sauvignon Blanc F4V6. WAVIA has agreed to fund fifty per cent of the costs required to conduct the additional broad-spectrum virus retesting of some 100+ vines in the Germplasm Collection for the NGC Project to confirm indeterminate previous results. *Diaporthe Ampelina* delayed the collection and virus testing.

Grapevine varieties and clones DNA were collected for the "Protecting Australia's wine-grape germplasm through the genomic testing project" from MHRI and Wokalup. The project aims to develop a database for DNA identification of specific variety/clones for the industry. All WAVIA samples were identified as expected, with three samples needing to be resampled or reviewed, including (Pinot 18 GM, Sauvignon Blanc 14V9 and Chardonnay I10V3). Unfortunately, a funding cut has delayed the project, but we hope the work will still be done in time.

In August industry was able to see and assess wines from the Howard Park Cabernet Clonal trial at the DPIRD workshop run by Richard Fennessy. These wines will also be presented at the Feb 2024 Coonawarra Cabernet Tasting Forum.

WAVIA continues to keep in touch with state and national issues. WAVIA continues to be a member of VINA and, through Steve Partridge, keeps in touch with issues that affect WA and WAVIA. WAVIA has also been involved with developing a national grape-industry strategy for implementing a national standard for grapevine certification. WAVIA sits on the Industry Advisory Committee, helping the industry form a position to preserve grapevine varieties and clones. WAVIA continues to be supportive of re-establishing a national vine improvement peak body.

WAVIA continue to seek new people interested in vine improvement to join the committee. The WAVIA committee wishes everyone all the best for the vintage and the coming year.