

## **Fire threat and strategic business decisions**

### **Background**

It is widely accepted by the wine industry that smoke taint in grapes is a serious threat to the viability of many vineyards. It is also accepted that this threat will not ease as a result of global warming.

Meadowbank has been producing grapes since 1976. It now has 50ha under grapes representing a significant investment. Since the first wine was produced in 1980 not a single vintage has been compromised through smoke taint until 2012. The Meadowbank Fire resulted in the complete rejection of the 2012 vintage. Although Meadowbank was largely unaffected in 2013 many wine businesses were affected. This year, 2019, approximately one third of the fruit has been rejected to date.

In 2016 the Central Highlands fire caused considerable damage to World Heritage assets and vineyards. Part of the reason was the lag time between when the fire was detected and the effective response. Despite this a similar situation occurred in 2019 with the Gell River and Rivaux River fires.

Following 2016 an extensive internal TFS report was made referencing the 2016 experience and outlining protocols for minimising the impact of fire in remote areas. This report was initially ignored then in late 2017 its recommendations were adopted by senior administration but not by middle management. If the report had been supported unilaterally by TFS the damage to businesses and the environment would have been substantially reduced in 2019.

### **Business strategic decision making in the event of wildfires**

It is not possible to insure vineyards against smoke taint. Viticulturalists really have only one option and that is to "self insure". Given the forecasts of a 4 to 5 fold increase in the likelihood of wild fires and the impact that has on the income from vineyards the viability of viticulture in Tasmania is in doubt.

This issue is exacerbated by the complete lack of confidence I have in the Government's ability to maintain an effective bushfire and remote area fire fighting capability. This has been demonstrated by the fact that nothing was learnt in 2016.

Further, recent reports highlighting the lack of leadership in the TFS and incidents demonstrating the lack of cohesion, between levels of management and decision making abilities of top management, erode any confidence I have in the agency to adequately respond to fires in remote areas.

Multi agency response to remote fires has often brought confusion to those on the ground, resulting in ineffectual fire control. It would seem logical to have all fire control under one agency to avoid conflicts and confusion.

Tourism, Forestry and the Wine industries are 3 of the top contributors to the Tasmanian economy. All these would have to question their viability given the forecasts of increasing fire risk and the inability of Government to provide an effective fire mitigation response.