

17 April, 2012

Winemakers happy to help; but resist Government mandating

The wine industry's attitude to pregnancy warnings on alcohol containers needs to be clarified.

Winemakers are willing and able to help in the fight against Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), but are opposed to mandated Government measures that would impose onerous obligations without addressing the problem.

For the past three years the Winemakers' Federation of Australia has been encouraging winemakers to voluntarily include the internationally recognised "pregnant-lady" pictogram on wine labels and will continue to do so.

This is one of a number of initiatives we have undertaken that are designed to provide the information that consumers need to make informed choices. This includes supporting a common and visible "standard drinks" graphic on all wine containers, a special information panel on wine casks, and the range of successful information initiatives co-ordinated by DrinkWise.

What we are opposed to are graphic, cigarette-style warnings – with mandated placement, size and colour – that use simplistic language to deal with a very complicated issue.

The evidence shows they are not effective in changing behaviour, especially by at-risk groups, and often cause confusion. For industry they mean unnecessary costs, a significant regulatory burden and potential trade barriers.

That warning labels don't work has been acknowledged by the World Health Organisation. Even leading anti-alcohol researchers commissioned by the Food Standards Authority through Australian Governments failed to find a link to warning labels and changes in at-risk behaviour.

The Australian wine sector is continuing to constructively work with Australian Government and state and territory jurisdictions on improving the roll-out and adoption of voluntary consumer advisory information messages about pregnancy on wine labels.

We also remain committed to assisting Government with informing the consumer about the concept of a standard drink and how this links to the National Guidelines for Alcohol Consumption. Industry was promised a significant awareness raising campaign to coincide with the adoption of standard drink information on alcohol beverages but unfortunately this was never delivered.

We are keen to see greater Government investment and partnership to these voluntary initiatives to deliver a lasting change in the fight against FASD and to improve consumer's understanding of standard drinks and the healthy drinking guidelines.

Further information: Andrew Wilsmore, WFA General Manager, Policy & Government Affairs; (02) 6239 8301 or andrew@wfa.org.au