

A sign of Australia's dry times

19 Sep 2008 by Jancis Robinson

It's a sign of the times that the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation's information arm, until recently more used to trumpeting export successes, announces a new information service today: a monthly report known as the *Winegrape Water Monitor*. Today's release is the first in what will be a monthly review of water and weather influences on the forthcoming winegrape crop.

Says AWBC, 'The inaugural report shows that in the five months to August 2008, rainfall has been below average in both the cooler climate and warm inland wine regions of Australia. Lower inflows to the Murray compared to last year, and low water storage levels in the Murray Darling Basin, have also resulted in low water allocations, particularly in Victoria and South Australia. The Bureau of Meteorology reports that there is a 50:50 chance of rain in South Eastern Australia exceeding average and thereby improving the water outlook. That said, more positive July and August rain outcomes, combined with snow melt in the Snowy Mountains, are yet to convert to inflows into the Murray Darling Basin - and will be watched with interest in the upcoming releases of this report.'

'This report provides a regular update on the key variables that may impact on the size of the crop - rainfall, temperature, water allocations, system inflows, water storage levels and water trading and provides insights to season prospects as well as assisting industry manage resources in the vineyard.'

The detail of the text may not pass muster with an English teacher but the gist is clear. Australian vine growers are living in a deeply scary new meteorological era. The Winegrape Water Monitor is to be released on the 16th of each month to coincide with Australia's water allocation announcements. Unlike much of the detailed statistics released by the AWBC, this report can be freely accessed via www.wineaustralia.com/winefacts (a useful resource for anyone interested in wine) under the Grapegrowing category.