

Coonawarra boundary - a decision at last

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Coonawarra with its supposedly distinctive *terra rossa* soil is Australia's earliest claimant to appellation status and, according to its growers, 'Australia's leading wine district'. However the comings and goings about exactly where the boundary line should be drawn suggest that local wine politics are every bit as virulent Down Under as in Europe - with the question of whether Brian Croser of Petaluma's property's falling inside or just north of the boundary being a particularly contentious one.

Coonawarra, in a desperately unpopulated area in the far south-east of South Australia, has been selling wine since the late 19th century. In today's Coonawarra, however, there is a strange mix of some of Australia's largest and some of its smallest wine producers, all operating side by side.

Fortunately, it seems as though the boundaries have not been drawn too generously (the problem with Soave and many an Italian DOC, for instance). However, it is still way beyond the limestone 'ridge' (for which read protuberance a metre or so high), which finally suggests that the *terra rossa* pitch has been an over-simplification for years.

Appeals are possible on legal matters, and those most likely to give it a go are Mildara (Beringer Blass) whose Robertson's Well vineyard is excluded and, for the same reason, Riddoch Estate. The area was extended a little to the north so Brian Croser's Sharefarmers vineyard is in, and a little to the south, below Penola, to include some recent Rymill plantings.

Reflecting the reality of plantings, good vineyard land (but not *terra rossa*) has been included east as far as the border with the state of Victoria. Almost none of the heavy black soil to the west is in, which excludes St Mary's and its little *terra rossa* 'island'.

Now that the detail has sunk in, the members of the Coonawarra Vignerons (*sic*) Association are jubilant, and mostly all friends again. They say that Mildara and Dunkeld Pastoral (owners of Riddoch Estate) can't really complain because they were never actually in Coonawarra in the first place. The joke is that they may have to welcome brewers Lion Nathan and/or Allied Domecq as a new member now anyway since they are sniffing around the Petaluma group.

The new boundary strongly reflects the 'interim boundary' of 1984, which said that whatever Coonawarra was, it wasn't anything outside the local government areas (shires) known as the Hundred of Comaum and the Hundred of Penola. All the decision has done is extend the district a little to the north and south of the longstanding cigar shape, which reflects its nature and extent, and to the east, which reflects established plantings.

The map below shows the new Coonawarra boundary in orange, and the old one in black.