Mark Twain was right. Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody ever does anything about it. That was surely the case in Tasmania during the past year. Indeed, the growing and ripening seasons that led to vintage 2010 presented wine producers with plenty of reasons for talking about the weather – the warmest winter/spring period ever recorded in Tasmania; the State’s second wettest September and warmest ever November; and the warmest average temperature ever recorded for a 12-month period in Tasmania.

High humidity, minor outbreaks of powdery mildew and botrytis bunch rot, and the unwanted presence of European wasps during summer and early autumn all offered additional topics of conversation.

For the State’s hard-working vineyard workers, it was a year for looking as well as listening. Careful assessment of seasonal risks is required for the success of cool climate viticulture. Proper timing of spray programs and canopy management practices such as lifting foliage and vines and shoot positioning are absolutely fundamental.

In contrast to the spate of relatively dry autumn and winter periods Tasmania had experienced during the past three years, the 2009-2010 growing season commenced with high to very high reserves of soil moisture. On most sites, bud burst occurred more or less on schedule in mid-September, with the damp spring conditions encouraging rapid shoot growth and the formation of strong vine canes and healthy leaf canopies.

December opened with several weeks of mild settled weather, and finished warm and slightly drier than average in many parts of the State. Generally favourable conditions led to good flowering and fruit set across all varieties, with only a handful of producers on the East Coast reporting large and small berries as a consequence of adverse weather.

Growers statewide were able to predict crop yields would exceed those of 2009, but fall well short of the bumper harvest of 2008, due to the low to average bunch numbers and small to average berry size.

The New Year welcomed a prolonged period of warm, dry weather that saw sites in the north of the State experience their driest January for many years. In southern Tasmania, the favourable weather patterns continued well into February and March, prompting growers there to begin readying themselves for yet another early vintage. However, the welcome arrival of a relatively mild April following the warmest March in 60 years resulted in harvest dates that corresponded very closely with those that have become commonplace in the South during ‘90’s.

Meanwhile, February’s warm temperatures, higher than normal rainfall and increased European wasp activity resulted in significantly elevated disease pressure for growers in northern and north-east Tasmania. Few found relief in March’s succession of exceptionally warm days and mild to warm nights.

By early April, some growers in the Tamar Valley and Pipers Brook regions were reporting crop losses of up to 50 percent due to European wasp damage. Additional concerns were raised regarding the likely consequences of adding small amounts of blended fruit to healthy winery fermentations.

Considerable Statewide media coverage was given to producers adversely affected by European wasp activity. Subsequent community awareness may have contributed greatly to the success of a July industry forum. The forum concluded more research is needed in Tasmania to determine the economic and biodiversity impact of European wasps.

Without doubt, sparkling wine looks destined to become one of the highlights of 2010. With harvesting beginning on most sites during early March, it was a rapid-fire vintage for Tasmania. Most reported that the resulting Chardonnay and Pinot Noir base wines possess near textbook levels of grape sugar and natural acidity.

Similarly, the white wines of 2010 are characterised by excellent aroma and flavour intensity. Many high quality wines from aromatic varieties such as Riesling, Pinot Gris and Gewürztraminer appear to have been produced across the State. However, as ever, it is Chardonnay that is likely to be one of the stars of the vintage.

Despite recent decreases in grape prices across many of Australia’s key wine regions, there is strong and continuing demand nationally for premium-priced, Tasmanian-grown Chardonnay.

The red wines of 2010 will possess plenty of colour and ripe fruit characters. For growers of Pinot Noir, vintage was completed within a matter of a few weeks. Vineyards harvested around the end of March or early April (before the rain arrived) are likely to have produced the pick of the crop. The resulting table wines will be refined and well-balanced, with tannin profiles that are more supple than some of the drought-affected Pinot Noirs from, say, 2008.

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Shiraz have often been regarded as marginal propositions in Tasmania’s cool maritime climate. Where the weather gods were especially kind to producers in 2010, small volumes of premium to ultra-premium table wine are now sleeping soundly in barrel. The best of them will speak for themselves in years to come.

Mark Smith, writer and wine columnist.

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**WINE GRAPES – Area, production and yield – year ended 30 June 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wine</th>
<th>Bearing area (ha)</th>
<th>Area not yet bearing</th>
<th>Planted or grafted before 2009 harvest (ha)</th>
<th>Planted or grafted after the 2009 harvest (ha)</th>
<th>Total area of grapes (ha)</th>
<th>Production (t)</th>
<th>Yield (t/ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red Wine Grapes</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>3,547</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Wine Grapes</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>3,841</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Wine Grapes</td>
<td>1,251</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1,388</td>
<td>7,388</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Area not yet bearing* includes area of vines with no or minimal yields.
*Area referred to is area of vines at harvest.
*Production for winemaking or distillation (fresh weight).
*Yield represents the quantity of grapes produced per hectare of bearing vines.

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**Wine production by Wineries 2009-10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wine</th>
<th>2009-10 (e) 000 L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red and Rose</td>
<td>1,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,298</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Production by Wineries**

- **Fortified (f)**
- **Unfortified**

- **Bearing area (ha)**
- **Total area of grapes (ha)**
- **Production (t)**
- **Yield (t/ha)**
- **Gross total wine**
- **Net total wine (t)**

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*a* Estimate has a relative standard error of 10% to less than 25% and should be used with caution.

*b* Area refers to area of vines at harvest.

c) Production for winemaking or distillation (fresh weight).

d) Yield represents the quantity of grapes produced per hectare of bearing vines.

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Overview of Tasmanian industry

Tasmania has 160 individual licensed wine producers. Its 230 vineyards cover some 1500 hectares (3700 acres). The island’s 29 wineries process an average annual yield of 6500 tonnes. The State’s most common grape yield by variety are pinot noir (45%), chardonnay (26%), sauvignon blanc (10%) and riesling (8%).

Tasmania has a moderate maritime climate. This is characterised by a mild spring and summer temperatures and warm autumn days and cool nights which allow the grapes to ripen slowly on the vine. Maximum varietal flavour development is achieved without losing the essential natural acidity that gives wine freshness and balance.

Industry references and statistics

For further information on the Vineyard collection refer to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Wine and Grape Industry 2010 Vineyards Collection 1329.0.

Growers may also be interested in the ‘2011 Winegrape Purchases: Price Dispersion Report’ produced by Wine Australia (download available via www.wineaustralia.com). The information is useful for buyers and sellers as it highlights the price spectrum by region (including Tasmania) and variety. The Report also identifies the potential price reward available from investing in quality improvements and can assist in general business planning and margin management.

About the Tasmanian Vintage Report

The 2010 ABS Vineyards collection is a census of all in-scope vineyards and the collection of data was conducted on a wide range of wine grape varieties. The varietal data 2010 ABS Census is supported by Australia’s grape-growers and winemakers and the Australian Government through the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation.

For those that require more comprehensive and detailed information, they can contact the ABS (www.abs.gov.au or 1300 135 070).

Wine Tasmania, with assistance of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) and the Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research (TIAR), will continue to undertake an annual survey of winegrape production in Tasmania. The 2011 Survey will cover grape and wine production for the 2010 and 2011 vintage as well as including new questions that are relevant to the industry in Tasmania.


Sources of data and images:

ABS Australian Wine and Grape Industry 2010 Vineyards Collection 1329.0
Mark Smith – writer and wine columnist
Wine Tasmania (all images)

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