

The Cockfighter

March 2021



**FORTUNES
TURN AFTER
NIGHTMARE
YEAR FOR
HUNTER VALLEY
WINEMAKERS**

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HVWTA CALL TO FIGHT BROKENBACK MOUNTAIN MINE PROPOSAL



HUNTER VALLEY POSITIONED TO SURVIVE CHINA'S TRADE EMBARGO



Letters to the editor

**Kylie Minogue's
wine** and
**Tottenham
Hotspurs**

COCA-COLA AMATIL HAS MADE A "HUGE" AUSTRALIAN ANNOUNCEMENT



SINGLETON GYM AND SWIM WITH OVER A QUARTER OF A MILLION- DOLLAR INVESTMENT



THE 41 CHINESE-OWNED AUSSIE WINERIES ON BOYCOTT HIT LIST



FROM THE EDITOR

With this calamitous pandemic seemingly on the wane—but, we're warned, not the wipeout so fervently desired—it's time to reflect on the 12 months which have changed (and in some cases taken) the lives of so many Australians, brought businesses and careers to their knees and catapulted the national economy into a potential decade of unprecedented debt and limited growth.

The upside? Through Federal and State bipartisanship, with the exception of quarantine blunders that cost Australia dearly at the time, the Down Under response to Covid-19 has become a beacon of exemplary caution and control. With New Zealand, which topped an international poll judging countries with the greatest success in tackling this scourge, Australia joined its trans-Tasman democracy in registering fatalities and case numbers which most countries would regard as unworlly: the death tally for the ANZAC pair is short of one thousand—against, for example, Sweden, with a smaller population than Australia, with some 13,000 lives lost because of a tragically misdirected 'herd immunity' programme with limited lockdowns. To add some glaring perspective to this, reflect that the initial prognosis by some epidemiologists for Australia's fatality index a year ago was between 30,000 and 40,000.

My personal view is that notwithstanding the great performance by Prime Minister



Bureau of Statistics' Provisional Regional Internal Migration Estimates; they show a big shift in population shift from capital cities to regions during the pandemic.

and Premiers alike, our insularity, remoteness and comparatively small population helped us attain these astonishing figures. But it took our elected politicians and health workers, led by tireless Chief Medical Officers like the good Murphy, together with our Defence Force and Police from all over, to enforce the understandably unwelcome lockdowns. Aussies and Kiwis should stand proud on their stoicism in this time—a jobless, sport and church-free and community-beggared cataclysm that seems a distant nightmare now. Certainly, these impositions wrecked so

many business aspirations and forced tourism operators to the wall, but realistically, there was no alternative; just ask the Swedes.

It follows that if our relatively small national footprint on the world has helped us survive this holocaust, then our even tinier regions—and sub-regions—must have helped with our impressive results. On asking an anonymous health worker about the pandemic in our bailiwick, the only response was , “..no, there’s nothing around here.” I could be corrected, but I can recall only one or two reports of sub-regional infection—and definitely no deaths. I have the same reaction from family members in country Victoria—and not far from the catastrophe that enveloped Melbourne so regularly .I sense that out here, in the sticks of NSW, we became the Luckiest part of the Lucky Country (and yes, I know that the originator of that phrase 60 years ago meant no compliment whereas I unashamedly plagiarise it as a full-barrelled salute).

I believe this emergency has moulded a new identity for the Hunter and for us, its somewhat remote inhabitants. Part of this is the influx of newcomers from afar, from the need for people to rid themselves of the Big Smoke and find something kinder environmentally and possibly economically. Call it liveability, country air and water (with a caveat regarding certain mining and aviation mishaps), space, toll-free thoroughfares (Sydney now the world’s most toll-afflicted metropolis), as well as traffic-friendly-and-trouble-free highway trips via the Newcastle Expressway and the Putty Road, for example, to say nothing of our appeal to wine-drinkers .In some spots, of course, the hicktown atmosphere can deter the most ardent tree-changer.

I’ve attempted to obtain the latest data on migration to the Hunter from Sydney since Covid-19 but Google said “Don’t go past 2019”--at least it didn’t say “Go straight to Gaol.” Indications are that there is a healthy trend towards our part of NSW—as reflected in certain PRIME figures. That’s not the TV broadcaster—it’s the Bureau of Statistics’ Provisional Regional Internal Migration Estimates; they show a big shift in population shift from capital cities to regions during the pandemic. In the second half of 2020 over 22,000 fled to the regions—double the quarterly average gains. In the year to September 2020, centres outside the capitals had a net gain of 36,000. If you argue that this in part could be a result of job losses in the Covid-crushed cities, with the newly unemployed fleeing the ‘burbs, this may well be balanced by new work openings in the Bush—such as the education and health categories. And don’t feel sorry for Sydney or Melbourne regarding the loss of inhabitants—they get so much of the international migrant intake that their swollen demographics hardly vary from increase after increase.

Tom Jackson

FORTUNES TURN AFTER NIGHTMARE YEAR FOR HUNTER VALLEY WINEMAKERS

After seeing off drought, bushfires, torrential rain and a pandemic, bottling this year's vintage will be especially satisfying for Hunter Valley vigneron Linda Keeping.

ABC Upper Hunter / By Jake Lapham and Madeline Lewis

Twelve months on from the Black Summer fires, the smoke has cleared and lush green pastures envelope Ms Keeping's picturesque Two Rivers vineyard near Denman.

"After 2020 it's just such a joy to be looking over the vineyard on this glorious morning, picking some shiraz fruit that is in optimum condition," she said.

Key points:

- **2020 was a year of challenges for Hunter Valley vignerons**
- **Heavy rain in January threatened to ruin the grapes**
- **Despite the hurdles, winemakers say it will be one of the best vintages in recent memory**



A cool, crisp morning at Two Rivers in Denman made for perfect harvesting conditions. (ABC Upper Hunter: Jake Lapham)

The challenges have been felt up and down the Hunter Valley, including on Bruce Tyrell's farm near Pokolbin.

"This time last year we weren't doing very much at all,

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we were still at the end of the drought so it hadn't rained you really couldn't see outside for smoke and that smoke had written off our vintage," Mr Tyrell said.

"So we made maybe 10 per cent of a normal vintage and the rest got fed to the cattle or worked back into the vineyard."

The fires ravaging the east coast of Australia had barely stopped smouldering when COVID-19 bolted cellar doors shut.

For an industry and a region so reliant on tourism, travel restrictions came as a hammer blow for Hunter winemakers.

"Something I'll never forget, Easter last year is the first Easter since I was very small that I hadn't worked on Easter," Mr Tyrell said.



Heavy rain throughout December almost ruined this year's harvest. (ABC Upper Hunter: Jake Lapham)

"It's our busiest weekend for visitors and we were closed."

While domestic travel soon returned, international visitors remained locked out, bringing a new set of problems for Stuart Hordern of Brokenwood Wines.

"It's certainly been a challenge this year, more so than normal due to fewer backpackers and international tourists, but we've been

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quite lucky in terms of getting pickers here at Brokenwood,” he said. Drought-breaking rain throughout 2020 brought joy for many farmers, but winemakers came within a whisker of having yet another vintage ruined. “We were looking down the barrel of a very challenging year, with the whites in particular, but the weather gods shined on us and we’re in a great spot due to it,” said Mr Hordern, whose grapes were saved by a spell of January sunshine. While there are signs of a return to normality, deteriorating relations with China



Collecting the 2021 shiraz vintage. (ABC Upper Hunter: Jake Lapham)

have created a fresh headache for Mr Tyrell.

Despite China only making up 5 per cent of his business, new tariffs have prompted Mr Tyrell to explore markets in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

“It will never, of course, be the volume of China, but all of those [other markets] help,” he said.

If nothing else, 2020 has given winemakers like Mr Tyrell a renewed sense of optimism.

“Australia’s pretty resilient, we get out there and go for it,” he said.

HUNTER VALLEY WINE AND TOURISM ASSOCIATION CALL TO FIGHT BROKENBACK MOUNTAIN MINE PROPOSAL



President of the Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Association (HVWTA), Christina Tulloch, has asked residents and business owners to help fight the application by the Chinese company Yancoal to undertake coal exploration activities within “Wine Country”.

In a message to members Ms Tulloch states;

One of the core roles of HVWTA is to represent the best interests of its members by lobbying Government and others to discourage inappropriate development in Wine Country, alongside local government when appropriate. The proposed Monash (Yancoal) Exploration Leases (EL’s) are a big issue for you and our Valley, and we will be seeking your support in the future. Clearly the adjacent landholders (map below) will have the most to lose, and many of you we have contacted have already committed support. If you are in the bordering area and haven’t yet helped please call us and make a commitment to support the action now. As it will impact the remainder of Wine Country, we will be seeking support in time from all business and property owners.

Continued next page

In late 2019, the HVWTA became aware the NSW Government were considering the renewal of two mining EL's which combine to be known as the Monash Coal Exploration Leases. As per the above picture, these leases are located between the two wine growing areas of Pokolbin and Broke Fordwich and extend from the western boundary of De lullis Winery in Pokolbin to the Bees Nest Ridge southeast of Broke.

Monash is proposing to develop a coal mine under Brokenback Mountain, and we think this will involve headworks and other mining infrastructure near Hermitage and Broke Roads.

The entrance to this mine would be on Broke Road in between the Hermitage Road intersection and the town of Broke and would result in devastating negative ramifications for the scenic backdrop of Wine Country, our beautiful Brokenback Mountain range. Additionally, many properties around Broke along the road to Wollombi will potentially be impacted as the EL extends through from Pokolbin. A small group of HVWTA directors have met with NSW Government Ministers and Officials, as well as Monash representatives, and voiced our concerns based on the below:

The significant negative impacts related to the visual impact it would have on Hunter Valley Wine Country and its pristine, rural nature.

The requirement of a washing facility, a rail network to transport the coal, and general mining activity on the Broke Road, which would have a disastrous impact on Wine Tourism, which is valued at over \$630m annually to the NSW economy. Issues with dust, noise, water, and the potential for run-off into vineyards, to name a few.

Representatives of the HVWTA board will be meeting with the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, Minister Stokes, in Macquarie Street in late February where we will have the opportunity to present this report and put our case forward. Equally meetings will be held with both Cessnock & Singleton Councils as they have the right to object to the proposal. Further updates will be provided on the outcomes of this meeting as they become available. Cessnock City Council has already lodged an objection with Government.

HUNTER VALLEY POSITIONED TO SURVIVE CHINA'S DEVASTATION OF AUSTRALIA'S BILLION-DOLLAR WINE INDUSTRY

Leading Hunter Valley winemaker, Andrew Margan comments on the effects of the trade embargo placed by China on Australian wine stating in a letter to The Cockfighter:

***“The Australian wine Industry had finally returned to normal supply and demand conditions over the last few years after many years of disruption to pricing with excessive supply. China was a big part of soaking up this excess volume and to lose them as a market so suddenly is bound to create some imbalance in the future.*”**



A customer looks at a bottle of wine imported from Australia at a supermarket on November 27 in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province of China.

The Hunter Valley is not a large volume producer of wine and generally only grows and produces super premium quality wines associated with quality brands. The change in China will not massively change the industry in the Hunter Valley because of its positioning. The changes will occur in relation to the potential dumping of cheaper wine in to the domestic market having a flow on affect to the whole industry.”

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Ben Westcott of CNN Business posted this article last week:

Melbourne, Australia (CNN Business) South Australian winemaker Jarrad White spent almost a decade building his business in China. Then, in a matter of months, it all fell apart.

It had nothing to do with the quality of White's wines at his vineyard in McLaren Vale, one of South Australia's premier winegrowing regions. Instead, it was the result of months of worsening diplomatic frictions between China and Australia.

White lived in Shanghai for several years, setting up a network of distributors to sell his Jarressa Estate wine to the booming Chinese market, where demand for foreign wines among the middle class was growing fast.

By mid-2020, more than 96% of Jarressa Estate's wines were being sold to consumers in China, up to seven million bottles a year. But in November, Beijing announced crippling tariffs on Australian wine as part of an "anti-dumping investigation" into whether those wines were being sold too cheaply in China. The government said the probe was prompted by complaints from Chinese wine producers.

White says he hasn't sold a single bottle since.

Currently, hundreds of thousands of bottles of Jarressa Estate wine are piled on pallets in a warehouse in Adelaide, the capital of South Australia, waiting for the tariffs to be lifted.

"It's hurting us dramatically. We had a lot of supplies that needed to be paid for and all these orders that were planned to shift, so it's left us in an awkward situation," White said.

He isn't alone. Hundreds of Australian wine producers who invested heavily in China's wine boom are now facing an uncertain future.

The value of exports of wine to China dropped to almost zero in December, according to statistics from industry group Wine Australia. The total value of wine exported to China for all of 2020 dropped by 14% to about 1 billion Australian dollars (\$790 million).

China maintains the measures are needed to stop cheap wine imports from depressing the local market. But the Australian wine industry believes it has more to do with worsening tensions between the two countries.

It isn't just wine. As relations between Canberra and Beijing spiral, many Australian exports, including beef and timber, started encountering obstacles entering the China market, and there's little optimism things will improve any time soon.

CALLICOMA HILL

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Callail Rowley, Zach Choi (violins), David Banney (viola) and Matthew Banney (cello)

An outdoor, totally acoustic concert on our mountainside, accompanied by the sounds of the forest and sunset

Saturday 20 March, 2021 from 4pm



(in the case of unsuitable weather, the concert will be held at an indoor venue in Singleton)

The program of this very different outdoor classical concert will be influenced by nature and the weather.

Be immersed in the late afternoon hues and sounds of the forest and the sunset over our spectacular 80km view of the Hunter Valley. Follow the musicians to different forested locations for three brackets of uplifting acoustic music. BYO seats/rug, picnic and drinks to enjoy pre-concert. There will also be an interval to continue your picnic.

You can come for the concert only, or stay overnight in our camping area or 10 bed bunkhouse. If you stay overnight, you will be treated to a short extra performance on Sunday morning! You are also welcome to stay either Fri and/or Sun night - why not make a weekend of it!

For more information tickets etc: **CALLICOMA HILL**

DONT WORRY NAN - ITS ALL DONE WITH PHOTOSHOP



Letters to the editor

Reproduced in part:

RE The Cockfighter February 2021

I think it is fantastic that this newsletter keeps going. I understand editorial stuff takes a bit of time and effort however as a newsletter that is defined by the boundaries provided by the wine industry it may be perhaps more appropriate to be seen to celebrate our local wine successes. Giving a made up wine like Kylie Minogues concept wine space for winning an award in a wine show but not mentioning that wines made here were awarded best wines of its class in the recent NSW Wine Awards and Hunter Valley Wine Shows would seem a bit misdirected.

Kind Regards,

Andrew Margan

Managing Director & Winemaker

Margan

Attn: Tom Jackson (Editor),

Hi,

I love receiving “The Cockfighter”, the Broke / Fordwich wine region is one of my favourite tourist spots (I’m from Sydney).

This month’s edition was it’s usual interesting read, however I feel compelled to correct a comment you made in your editorial – “ in comparison with the un-touchable Premier League of British football, spectators packed to the rafters with no discernible hint that they could be infecting millions of their countrymen and women?” I follow the English Premier League, (in particular Tottenham Hotspurs) and in March last year all games were suspended. They finally restarted in empty stadiums in June 2020 and have played in empty stadiums ever since. The last Premier League game in a full stadium was nearly 12 months ago!!

Best regards

Richard

Apologies to Cockfighter reader, Richard regarding this fearful own goal - the authorities stopped crowd attendance last year and they are not expected to allow supporters in this season, depending on success of their (so far) remarkable vaccine inoculation rate. As well as Richard, my dear old Northumbrian Dad would be amazed at my oversight—as he joins the host of Newcastle U ghosts in the empty stands at St James Park. Ed



COCA-COLA AMATIL HAS MADE A “HUGE” AUSTRALIAN ANNOUNCEMENT.



One of the world’s best-known brands is making the switch to 100 per cent renewable electricity in Australia and New Zealand by 2025.

The company made the announcement as part of its sustainability objectives to 2040 which will focus on four priority areas – water, consumer wellbeing, packaging and carbon reduction.

But Greenpeace Australia Pacific is still calling on Coca-Cola Amatil to commit all of its global operations to 100 per cent renewable electricity and join more than 280 businesses worldwide in the RE100 initiative, which brings together some of the world’s largest and most ambitious companies on renewable energy.

Coca-Cola Amatil has committed to achieving net zero direct carbon emissions by 2040.

They have also outlined a target of 50 per cent average recycled or renewable content across all packaging by 2030.

Greenpeace’s Lindsay Soutar said renewable electricity was a big step in the right direction for the soft drink giant.

“You can’t beat the renewable thing,” she said.

“Greenpeace is the last organisation you’d expect to find cheering on an announcement from Coca-Cola Amatil. But in this instance we think they’re doing the right thing by switching to 100 per cent renewables, and committing to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040.

“Coca-Cola Amatil is one of Australia’s major energy users. Coke committing to 100 per cent renewable electricity will reduce Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions and put pressure on other major businesses to make the switch.”

Coca-Cola Amatil joins other big brands like Woolworths, *Continued next page*

Bunnings and Telstra which have committed to 100 per cent renewable electricity. Ms Soutar said companies recognised the move was a crucial part of their responsibility to tackle climate change, and increasingly, what their customers wanted to see.

“As our Federal leaders dither over an inadequate net-zero by 2050 emissions



reduction target, they’re being out-run by Australian businesses who are rapidly transitioning to renewable energy, and setting net zero goals for ten years earlier,” she said.

“When even Coca-Cola’s doing more for the environment than our government is, it shows it’s time for Australia to up its climate ambition.”

“While this is a welcome step, Coca-Cola Amatil still has a lot of work to do on its environmental impact, such as banning single use plastic drink bottles, one of the biggest contributors to harmful plastic pollution.”

Related:

Coles supermarkets in Queensland will undergo a major change in 2022, with the supermarket chain signing a major 10-year deal this week.

The shopping behemoth has committed to using renewable energy to power more than 90 per cent of its sites across the state from July 2022.

Woolworths is looking to be powered by 100 per cent green energy by 2025 in a move it help grow the renewables sector.

The ambitious pledge has been made with the intention of having net positive carbon emissions by at least 2050.

Under the retail giant’s new sustainability plan, the company has also committed to zero food waste to landfill by 2025 and its own brand packaging being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2023.

FITNESS OVERHAUL AT THE SINGLETON GYM AND SWIM WITH OVER A QUARTER OF A MILLION-DOLLAR INVESTMENT IN NEW EQUIPMENT

Singleton Council is flexing its investment muscles in 2021 with \$269,000 to keep the Gym and Swim at the top of the game.

All fitness equipment in the health club has been replaced, including the introduction of weightlifting platforms, more variety in cardio machines, and a brand-new spin cycle studio.

The gym overhaul is another example of Council's commitment to sport and recreation infrastructure in 2021, which also includes a new surface for Howe Park, sport lighting upgrades and the continued roll out of irrigation systems for sporting fields.



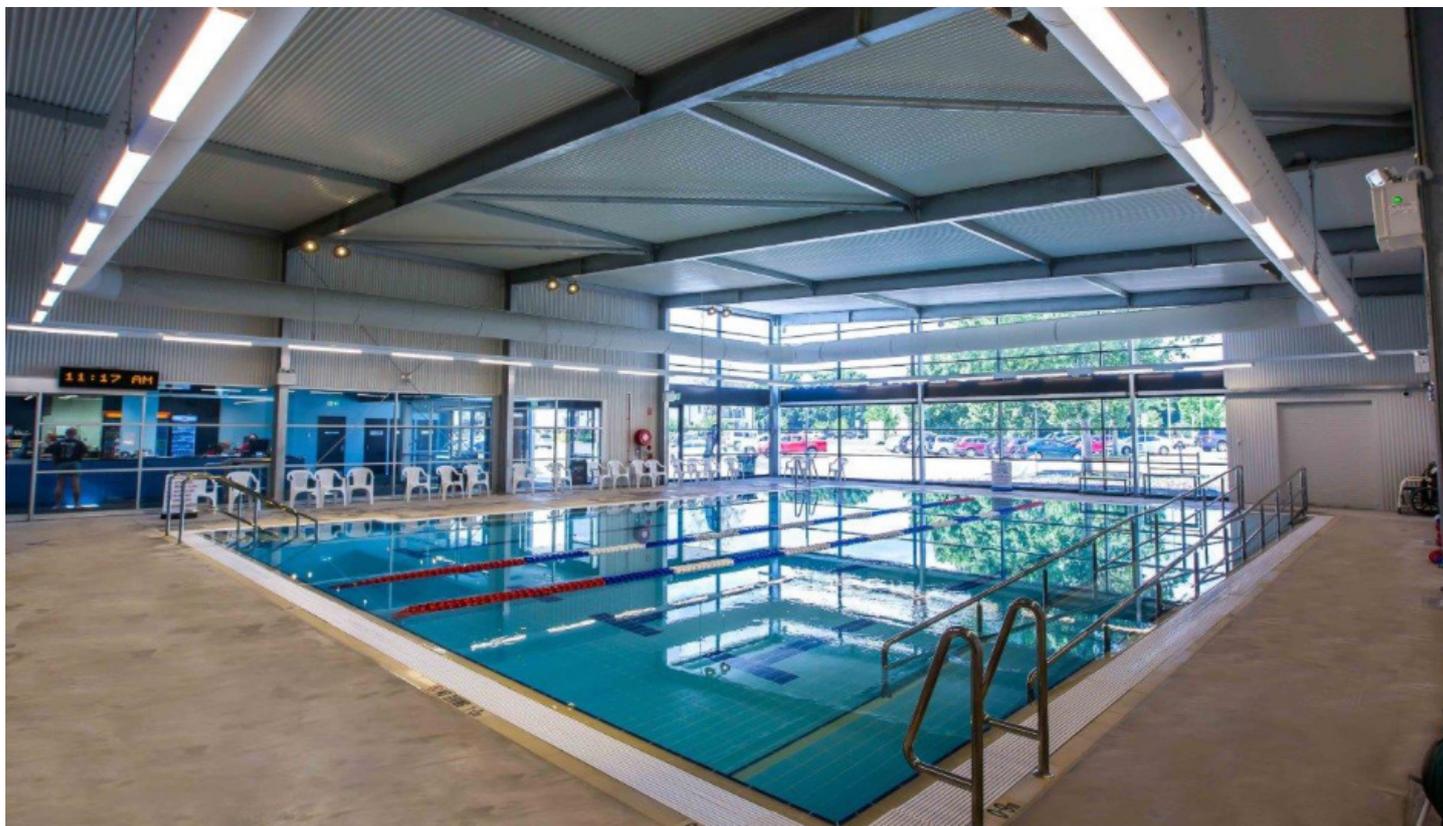
Anthony Egan, Council's Director Business and Community Services said the new equipment was an investment in the health and wellbeing of the Singleton community.

"We are starting 2021 off on the right foot – and that means the best possible facilities to get people stuck into their new year's resolutions and fitness goals," he said.

"We've seen during COVID that exercise is a really impor- *Continued next page*

tant component for one's physical and mental health and we are really proud of the facilities right across Singleton, from sports fields to cycleways.

“We have a great partnership with Belgravia Leisure to deliver programs to help you get where you want to be, and ensuring the Gym and Swim offers members state-of-the-art fitness equipment goes a long way to support this.”



Belgravia Leisure Area Manager Amanda Lenton said with a new fitness challenge launched at the gym on Monday, the arrival of the new equipment was well-timed.

“It’s a new year, a new gym, and a new challenge. Whatever your fitness goals, it’s always nice to work out on state-of-the-art, brand new equipment, and with that, we now offer an improved experience to our members,” she said.

“The cardio machines and pin-loaded cable machines have mostly been replaced like-for-like, and we are really excited to introduce some new additions to the gym like s-force machines, stair master, woodway curve, Jacobs ladder, assault bikes, SkiErgs, and new kettle bells.

“Equally as exciting, in the strength room, we’ve also introduced new weightlifting platforms and bumper plates, a hack squat machine, as well as more duplicates in our free weight rack.

“It gives people something to be excited about, and a little bit of motivation and a reason to get back into the gym after a really hard year.”

OUR WILDLIFE



SPOTTED - TAILED QUOLL (*Dasyurus maculates*)

This ferocious marsupial has a long tail for balance, sharp curved claws, ridged pads on its feet. Its coat ranges from reddish- brown to dark with a pale underbelly. There are white spots on the back and these continue down the tail.

It is active at night, moving slowly on the ground sniffing for food and climbing trees to spot prey and catch sleeping birds, it runs with a bounding gait and is an agile climber. During the day they sleep in a den in a tree hollow, log, abandoned burrows or caves and this is shared with family members after mating. Males fight for dominance in the breeding season in winter, females giving birth to 6 young 21 days after mating. The young suckle in the mothers shallow rear – opening pouch for about 7 weeks and are then left in the den while she forages, until independent at around 18 weeks old.

Spotted – tail Quolls diet is birds, reptiles, ,insects and small mammals and live in sclerophyll forests, rain forests, woodlands and coastal heaths.

We have seen quite a few Quolls at Bulga and Broke over the years but they are now on the NPWS wildlife. endangered list

Elizabeth
Joeys Retreat

THE 41 CHINESE-OWNED AUSSIE WINERIES ON BOYCOTT HIT LIST

Alexis Carey News.com

Aussies are vowing to shun dozens of Chinese-owned vineyards in an act of revenge against Beijing. But how much do we really know?

Wine lovers across the nation are reeling after a viral list revealed that dozens of Australian vineyards were actually owned by Chinese companies.



Chateau Yaldara in the Barossa Valley was sold in 2014. Picture: Kelly Barnes/The AustralianSource:News Corp

The list, shared by the *Vino e Amigos* Facebook page, has sparked boycott calls as Beijing's brutal trade war against Australia continues to escalate, and has also kicked off an uncomfortable national conversation about foreign ownership.

But how much do we really know about what's going on in vineyards across the country?

When contacted by *news.com.au*, Wine Australia – a government agency dedicated to the industry – confirmed it did not record ownership of wineries according to nationality.

In NSW's famed Hunter Valley, Chinese investors purchased Allandale Winery in 2016, while in 2011 the 16-hectare Capercaillie Wine was sold to Chinese buyers after being listed for \$1.89 million.

Continued next page

The majority of the nation's Chinese-owned vineyards are located in South Australia, with the Barossa Valley proving particularly popular with Chinese buyers. In fact, scores of lucrative deals have been struck in the region over the past decade, resulting in estimates that around 10 per cent of the area was now owned by Chinese nationals.



*Capercaillie Winery in the NSW Hunter Valley was also bought by foreign owners.
Source: News Corp Australia*

Over in WA, a Chinese company took over a majority stake in popular Ferngrove Wines in 2011, while Margaret River's Woodside Valley Estate and the Perth Hills Western Range were acquired by Palinda Wines – owned by Chinese businessman Jacky Wong – in 2012.

Nocton Vineyard, located in the Coal Valley Tasmania, was established by Chinese owners in 1999 and is one of the Tasmania's biggest vineyards.

Most of the Chinese-owned vineyards and wineries in Victoria are located in the Yarra Valley, with the Hillcrest Winery purchased for a rumoured \$4.6 million in 2018.

Wild Cattle Creek is believed to have sold for \$8.5 million while Badger's Brook also sold the same year for an unknown amount, with all three properties going to Chinese parties.



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