

MEDIA RELEASE

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New identity heralds new opportunities for Australian Fortified Wines

Makers of Australian Fortified Wines are entering a new period of opportunity to enhance awareness of their unique attributes and qualities by adopting new terms and standards outlined in the 'Australian Wine Industry Fortified Wine Code of Practice' released today.

Speaking at the launch of the Code at *Wine Australia International 2006* in Sydney, Winemakers' Federation of Australia (WFA) Chief Executive Stephen Strachan said the Code represented another step forward in the creation of a uniquely Australian winemaking identity.

"As a result of the 1994 agreement between Australia and the European Community on Trade in Wine, producers have known for some time of the need to cease using certain geographic indications like Port and Sherry," Mr Strachan said.

"This new code demonstrates our commitment to meeting our obligations under international agreements, while providing producers with a new framework of defined descriptors and terms to benchmark their fortified wines.

"With clear guidelines for age, quality and style classifications, the Code should ultimately increase consumer confidence and understanding of Australian fortified wines."

The Code defines styles of Australian fortified wines that can be described using terms such as Cream, Ruby, Vintage and Tawny, while also providing ageing and maturation requirements for terms such as Classic Tawny, Grand Tawny and Rare Tawny.

The Code will come into force on 31 December 2006, with full compliance expected within 12 months, although certain exemptions exist for existing stocks already in the marketplace and museum stocks. The effectiveness of the Code will be reviewed by 31 December 2008.

Mr Strachan acknowledged the cooperation of industry in the development of the Code, especially the Muscat of Rutherglen group. Muscat of Rutherglen group chairman Colin Campbell said the classifications in the new Code were introduced into the Rutherglen region in 1996.

"The acceptance of these classifications saw them trialled at the Rutherglen Show last year. They have proved to provide a successful basis for descriptions and been well accepted by producers, trade and consumers," Mr Campbell said.

Mr Strachan urged producers of Australian fortified wines to view these changes as opportunities rather than hurdles.

"Sales of Australian Sparkling wines have increased dramatically since the industry ceased using terms like champagne," Mr Strachan said. "With a stronger focus on branding and the attributes of Australian produced wines the same opportunity exists for our fortified wines."

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