

Friday, 11 January 2008

GRAPE PEST DETECTED IN VICTORIA

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) today advised that grape phylloxera, an aphid that lives on the roots of grapevines, has been detected at a vineyard near the Macedon Ranges, north-west of Melbourne.

DPI Plant Standards Manager, Patrick Sharkey, said grape phylloxera (*Dakulosphaira vitifoliae*) does not affect grape juice or fruit and is not a public health issue.

“Grape phylloxera is an insect that affects many wine-growing regions around the world, including some in Victoria,” said Dr Sharkey.

“It is a problem for the viticulture industry because it causes a gradual decline in vine health and there is no effective treatment for the pest on ungrafted vines.

“It is also a market access issue for both the viticulture and nursery industries, and requires restrictions on the movement of vine products from affected areas.”

In this case, the property owner noticed poor vigour in a number of vines and notified the Department.

“Samples were taken from the affected vines and DPI’s reference entomologist has confirmed the presence of the pest on the property,” Dr Sharkey said.

There is a well-established process to respond to detections of phylloxera, under the National Phylloxera Management Protocol.

“A control zone will be formally established and surveys conducted to determine if the pest is also present in any surrounding vineyards, or in other vineyards with links to the affected property,” said Dr Sharkey.

“Senior DPI Plant Standards officers will meet with local growers, winery managers and industry groups to proactively control this outbreak and prevent further spread of the pest.”

Nationally-agreed protocols regulate the movement of filtered juice, whole grapes, crushed grapes (must) and used agricultural machinery and bins from phylloxera-affected areas to wineries in other parts of Victoria and interstate.

“DPI took swift action to have the property placed under quarantine and the property owner is implementing appropriate biosecurity measures,” Dr Sharkey said.

“Early detection is the best defence against this pest and through a cooperative approach it can be effectively managed,” he said.

The most recent previous detection of grape phylloxera was in the Yarra Valley in December 2006; other detections have been made at a number of sites in north-east Victoria.