

WAOC Presidents Annual Report for 2020

Many external events had significant impact on the olive industry during 2020. These include COVID 19, a fragmented national and international market, huge bushfires in the eastern states and at home and a “down” year, generally experienced across the state and across Australia. These have challenged the Board to catch up and try to provide structured entry for growers into international markets and to fill local market needs and commitments. This has resulted in a much higher profile of WAOC as we represent our members to prospective buyers.

The 2020 WA Olive Competition was a little smaller, but we saw a high-quality range of oils come from local members, non-members and national groves. We must give credit to our volunteer judges, our coordinator, Ellen Slobe, and head judge, Isabelle Okis. This team has ensured consistency and integrity in the competition. This competition has provided growers with opportunities to showcase their qualities and provides a component of growers’ quality assurance processes. The competition will continue in 2021 and we hope it will help growers identify better markets, continue to raise the quality of their products and identify future directions in marketing.

Industry partnerships are increasingly important in this time of change as we see transfer of grove ownership to an energetic, entrepreneurial, younger generation. Many of these will need assistance to grow into the industry. I urge everyone to support them. There is plenty of room for new ideas, collaboration and we need to perpetuate the quality and standards that have been established.

Alec McCarthy recently retired from DPIRD but has left a link and a legacy that will be extremely helpful as we deal with changing markets. He helped raise our industry awareness of some opportunities for the industry to expand and some of the processes we will need to establish to manage disease and pest incursions. Pest and disease management is a national focus and WAOC will continue to have a role if/when issues arise in the future. Another aspect of this link with DPIRD is a research project into the extent of the industry in WA. We simply do not know our current capacities, grower goals or the ability of the industry to adapt to changing markets

R&D remains a major focus with Professor Zora Singh, a Director on the Board, having recently taken up Head of Horticulture Studies at ECU. He has been instrumental in engaging an academic focus on WA specific initiatives. He is keen to see this aspect in R&D having a future basis and will need input from industry to make research relevant and viable. Professor Stan Kailis, a life member, is keen to develop studies into varieties. Watch this space! There are some exciting developments in the wind.

We have provided members a service that assists when shortages occur, and contracts are difficult to fulfill. Similarly, we have provided a contact point for those looking to sell their business or purchase a grove. The capacity to operate supportively and collaboratively has the potential to include small groves to operate in the league of larger producers. This is not a new model, but, to date, mostly it has been more as cooperatives. WAOC provided a “go to” service for buyers and for our members to sell within the olive industry in WA. If this is a viable model, give us the information on where shortfalls or excess to current contract situations lie. We will endeavour to offer points of contact that may help.

My thanks to the Directors and to our life members for their common sense and experience. Their input throughout this challenging year has been greatly valued and will set up many new directions for the industry in 2021.

Steve Milton

President, WAOC.