

RED MEAT MoU BYZANTINE REGULATIONS?

Sitting down for an afternoon of pondering on the state of the red meat in Australia I had at hand the Green Paper, the White Paper and the operational plan (“AOP”) from the MLA. To fortify myself for the afternoon I grabbed a well-chilled bottle of [Les Maillons Rosé de Saignée Extra Brut NV \(2015\)](#) from the great wine maker, Oliver Collin. Even though it’s a great aid for relaxation, concentration and incisive insight, there is some method in this madness. Why this bottle of Champagne? The Collin family had been growing grapes in this tiny, rural zone of Congy just southwest of the Côte des Blancs since 1812. They had always sold their fruit and eventually rented the entirety of their 8.7 hectares to a large Champagne house, an arrangement that continued through the late 1990’s. Oliver, a trained lawyer, wished to gain control of his family estate and set about to renegotiate the Byzantine contracts that tied up his family business. The champagne system was excessively complicated, and typically involved a great deal of administrative detail, all at the mercy of unaccountable bureaucrats. Sound familiar? Anyway, it’s a shame that Teresa May had not read this story before she started on her Brexit adventure.

So, after a mammoth battle of some seven years Oliver was free to produce and market his own wine.

And what did Oliver teach me about the White Paper, the MOU and RMAC as an accidental producer; part of the long tail of producers that pay not insubstantial levies .

It taught me that you need great tenacity, persistence and a clear understanding of a process to change a moribund bureaucrat system excessively complicated and involving a great deal of administrative and governance obfuscation to a dynamic democratic system where there is a powerful advocacy body and a clever innovative but yet very accountable RDC.

A pipe dream perhaps?

So, I poured my first glass of chilled Saignee and marvelled at the power of the effervescence, the steady stream of fine bubbles and the rose hue. Surely this fine drop will aid my understanding and create great insight into the problem.

The first taste confirmed my high expectations of the wine but what now of the Industry reform?

How did we end up at this point in the reform process where the body roundly criticised by Senate Committees puts together a reform package that puts it at the head of the industry while it is hopelessly conflicted? You could be excused for thinking that Senate Inquiries are a waste of time and a Senator in a private moment reflected on this. This is not the only Senate Inquiry that has largely been ignored so what role should the Senate now play especially if their recommendations are largely ignored.

The Australian Senate is the upper house of review. All legislation must pass both the House of Representatives and The Senate. Originally the senate was created to protect the rights of the individual states as senators were not elected on a population basis. Today both functions have largely disappeared. Both the Senate and the Commonwealth have increased their power by creeping grabs since the founding fathers created Australia's governance structures. Perhaps we should have a look at the role of the senate now we have proportional voting and the results of its inquiries are continually ignored. Our founding fathers would be aghast at the thought that they created a governance structure where a senator with a couple of hundred votes could determine the outcome of legislation passed by the people's house.

Time for another sip of the beautiful Saignee and a return to the point of my thinking.

Rather than gaining control of the expenditure of my levies, that control will now be embedded deeper in the Byzantine contracts and further away from my control, or even further from my view. Funny enough it is also those very levies which are being used to create and enhance the Byzantine structures to make my input even more remote and disenfranchise my involvement and many thousands of others who are also accidental producers.

Based on Oliver Collin's experience, I believe that there are two immediate priorities which should require an immediate rethink. As an accidental producer how do you become vested in the industry? I am sure there are many accidental producers in the long tail of levy payers who feel just like me.

First, we need to embrace the old tenets of democracy and give each sector a democratic forum for control over their levies, and, secondly, we need to find a

way to create a powerful advocacy body for the producers; one which is not saddled with inherent and crippling conflicts.

Luckily, some friends arrive, and I turn back to the Saignee and happily share this wonderful drop.

I need to reflect on the AOP and see how the levies are spent.

Sincerely

Peter Ponder

Accidental Producer