

Vegetable Growers' Association of Victoria - Annual General Meeting

ISSUE 58



The Vegetable Growers' Association of Victoria held its 2014 AGM on Friday 10 October at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Congratulations are extended to David Wallace, who was re-elected as President for a further term.

Paul Gazzola was elected as Vice-President, while Frank and Rocky Lamattina, Craig Arnott, Bill Bulmer, Joe Kelly, Peter Cochrane, Anthony Mason and new member Emma Germano were nominated to the Executive Committee.

Luis Gazzola, who had been a long-serving member of the Committee, did not renominate. The meeting expressed its gratitude

to Luis and his wife Gloria for their many years of service to the industry and wished them well in their retirement.

Following the AGM, a presentation was made by the Project Harvest team of Jenny Witham and Fiona McKernan which outlined many of their findings on consumer vegetable purchases. Project Harvest is funded through HAL using the National Vegetable Levy and matched funds from the Australian Government.

The AGM and subsequent dinner were well attended by growers and industry associates, with guest speaker Michael Worthington, CEO of PMA A-NZ and Chair of the Food Safety Centre, presenting during the dinner.

More photos pages 4 & 5...

PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Hello Everyone,

Wow, another year has come and gone! They seem to be going faster each year – or we're getting slower.

The VGA held its 2014 Annual General Meeting in mid-October at the Crowne Plaza. It was well attended by members, and I have been re-elected as your President for a further 12 months. I would like to welcome Emma Germano to the Executive Committee, where she will work alongside the existing committee of Peter Cochrane, Rocky Lamattina, Frank Lamattina, Paul Gazzola, Craig Arnott, Joe Kelly, Anthony Mason and Bill Bulmer.

Over the next 12 months, the VGA will strive to represent Grower Members in meetings with government departments on topics that affect our way of farming and directly impact us, unnecessarily adding costs to our viability. Committee members put in a lot of time and effort to attend meetings with State and Federal Governments, the VFF, AUSVEG and the Melbourne Market Authority, as well as meeting with the APVMA

on chemical issues.

Spring was warm and dry, with very little rain but plenty of sunshine to make each crop grow well. Quality in most crops has been excellent and there have been no shortages of any veggies. That all adds up to an oversupply of nearly all varieties of veggies, and along with weak demand, this means prices haven't been what we would be hoping for.

Things are tough out there, whether it's planting, growing or harvesting - the costs involved in all those processes just seem to be going up and up, while returns for whichever vegetable you sell remain stable or below cost of production. This is a major concern for all veggie growers' futures.

So what do we do?

Should we diversify into other crops, grow more (or less), or spend more time and effort on marketing our great product? Do we make it more attractive and convenient for the consumer? Do we know what the consumer really wants? I think it's very important for our future to know what the consumer wants and react accordingly.

Most second- to fourth-generation veggie growers have, in the past, kept evolving and rejuvenating new ideas to stay viable, so being at the front of new technology is critical. Vegetable growers have never been afraid of change but in today's world, change is expensive, and that's why growers need to do more extensive research into any form of change. Let's hope the trade agreement with China opens opportunities for veggie exports.

I know we are all individuals and run very efficient and successful businesses. That's great. We are all competitive about marketing our crops. The biggest winner out of this

competition is the consumer – and they know this, because they get the cheap vegetables they're after. But how long can the vegetable industry survive on returns that are, a lot of the time, under the cost of production?

That's why growers need to attend the local, state and federal meetings that are organized by VGA, VFF and AUSVEG on topics that can help growers, providing up-to-date information on running a successful business. More importantly, these meetings give you the opportunity to have your say on where this great industry is going and how we can do things better – especially on informing the consumer about how beneficial your veggies are to their health and enjoyment in their busy lifestyle, as well as the benefits to their children's development into fit, active and healthy Australians.

Congratulations to Bill Bulmer on his appointment to the AUSVEG Board. Bill replaces Luis Gazzola who has retired from the position. Our gratitude to Luis for his many years as our representative.

Thanks to Helena Whitman for all her hard work in making the VGA an outstanding organisation representing the vegetable industry.

I wish all fellow growers and suppliers to this great industry a very Merry Christmas and a safe and healthy 2015.

Sincerely,

David Wallace

President

For Executive Manager's corner

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Vegetable Growers'
Association of Victoria Inc.



Executive Manager Helena Whitman
Ph: 03 9687 4707 Fax: 03 9687 4723
M: 0407 772 299 E: helena.w@vgavic.org.au
Mail Box 111, Melbourne Markets
542 Footscray Road, West Melbourne, Vic, 3003
Website: www.VegetablesVictoria.com.au

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Ph: (03) 9882 0277
Website: www.ausveg.com.au



LUIS GAZZOLA RETIRES

VGA would like to acknowledge Luis Gazzola's many years of representation of the VGA at all levels and thank him for his work. Luis was President of the Association for seven years, has been a Director on the Board of AUSVEG for nearly as long, and has sat on more committees than he cares to remember.

Luis is still involved in some committees; however, he has retired as a Director of AUSVEG and also from the VGA Executive. We wish Luis and Gloria all the best and thank them for their support of and dedication to VGA Vic.



RECIPIENT OF LIFE MEMBERSHIP - ALEC BERIAS

Sincere congratulations are extended to Alec Berias, who was granted a Life Membership of the VGA at the recent Annual General Meeting. Alec is a past President of VGA Vic, and the Life Membership recognises his contribution to the industry over his many years on both the Executive and other committees.

Alec is a past President of the Association, serving from 2002-2004, as well as being an Executive Committee member for many years.

Reading through Alec's CV, one can appreciate the time he has spent representing growers. Here are just some of the committees he has been involved in:

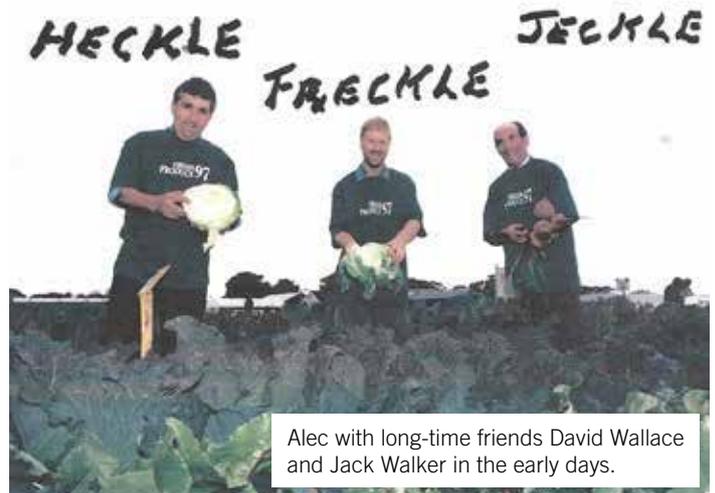
- VGA Executive
- MMA Growers Advisory Committee
- AUF Committee
- Southern Rural Water Board
- Werribee Ratepayers Association
- Drag-Racing Committee

Alec always gives 110% to any commitment, but especially to the MMA Growers Advisory Committee, as shown by the Message from the President in the 2004 edition of the VGA magazine: "David Wallace and I have been attending the market re-location consultative meetings and joined the market design sub-committee for discussion with Major Projects Victoria ..." Alec and David are still fighting the same battle, 10 years on.

Alec is also a second-generation vegetable grower who works the farm and markets its produce alongside his wife Cathy and sons Mick, Andrew, Chris and their partners. Acknowledgement is also given to their son James, who died tragically earlier this year.

D Berias & Sons have been supplying Safeway (now Woolworths) continuously for about 45 years, as well as sending produce through the Melbourne Market.

Alec's off-farm passion is drag-racing, a sport he has been involved in for very many years. He is an ardent Collingwood supporter, and supports Melbourne Victory and Melbourne Storm.



Alec with long-time friends David Wallace and Jack Walker in the early days.

Photos from the VGA Annual General Meeting



The Berias family: (L-R standing) Mick, Leanne, Brenda, Andrew, Chris and (L-R seated) Cathy, Alec and Wendy.



David Wallace gives his President's Report.



Panel discussion – Bill Bulmer, Peter Cochrane, Paul Gazzola and Anthony Mason.



AGM Dinner.



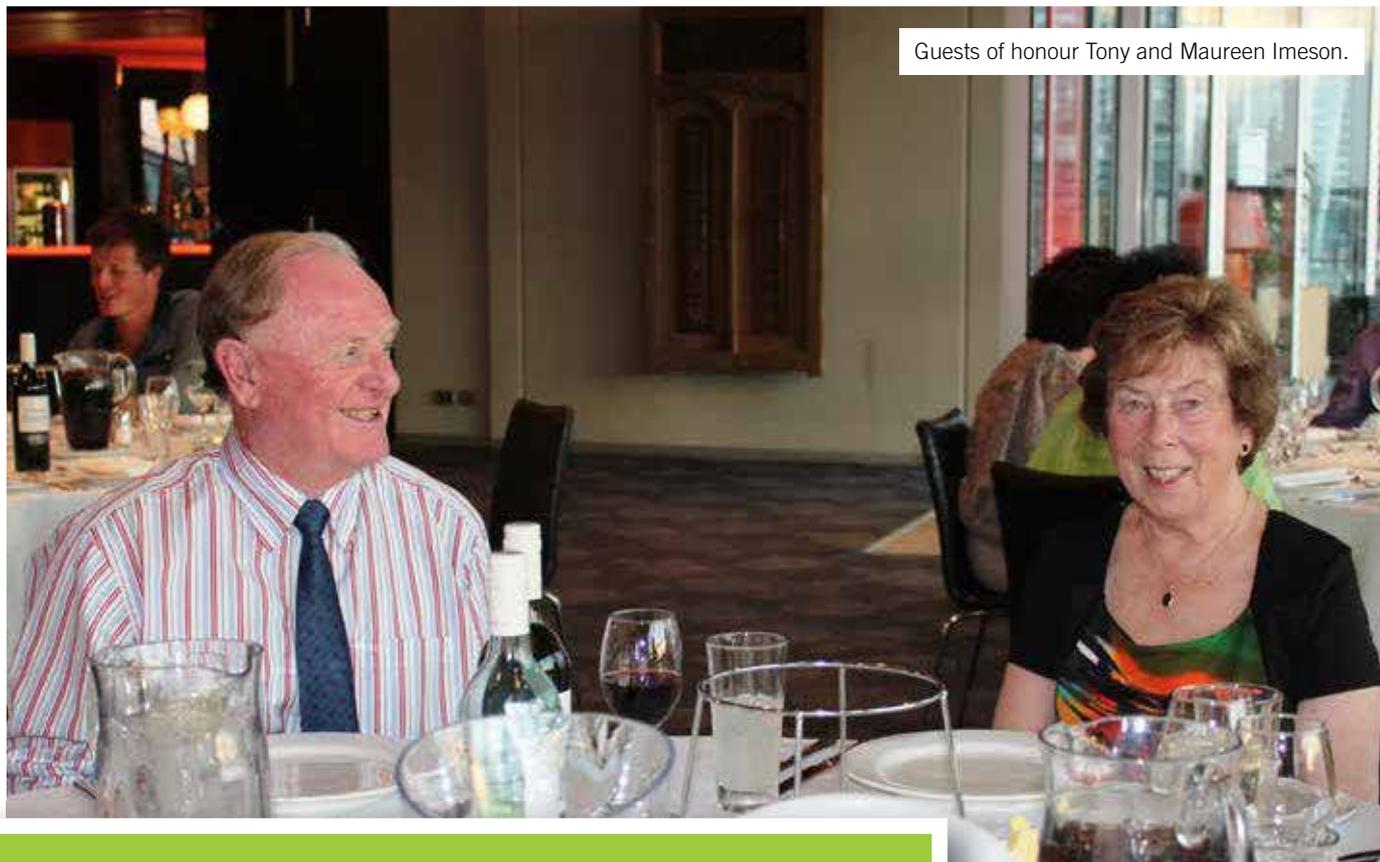
Testimonial Dinner – Carolyn Creed, Gloria Gazzola and Teisha Dower.



Tony Imeson with President David Wallace and past Presidents Luis Gazzola and Alec Berias.



Peter Cochrane, Joe and Lyn Kelly, David Kelly and Craig Arnott.



Guests of honour Tony and Maureen Imeson.

Testimonial Dinner - Tony Imeson responds

Speaking of his arrival in Australia with his wife Maureen, Tony says, “Little did we envisage, as two young Ten Pound Poms landing in Brisbane Airport in 1964, that 40 of the next 50 years would take us on a journey throughout rural and urban Australia together with people who produce the best fruit and vegetables in the world.”

For the first 10 years in Brisbane, Tony worked as a mechanical engineer and design draughtsman within the water treatment industry. It wasn't until early 1974 that, by chance, he entered the world of fruit and vegetables through what might be described as ‘the side door’, when his work entailed the development of a returnable plastic crate to be used in the fruit and vegetable industry.

Tony was instrumental in the design of the early plastic moulded crate with metal handles which was used with reasonable success by the apple and orange industry in Victoria and South Australia, and then in the introduction of polystyrene packaging to the industry.

In 1979, the CEO of C.O.D. in Brisbane (now Growcom), together with the late Brian Newman, set up an organisation known as Australian United Fresh Association (AUF). They established the organisation with the intention of creating greater understanding and building closer working relationships within all sectors of the fruit and vegetable industry.

Tony served on the Packaging and Handling Committee, then as CEO of AUF for a short time, as well as serving one year as AUF President. With the formation of AUF State branches, he held the role of the

Victorian Branch Secretary, with Jack Walker as President.

Joining the Victorian Chamber of Fresh Produce Wholesalers (now known as Fresh State) as Special Projects Officer in 1989 led to Tony's involvement as Secretary with the Australian Banana Wholesalers and Australian Potato Growers' Council.

“It was 13 years ago when, while doing my usual early morning walk around the Footscray Market, I was stopped by one of Jack Walker's sons,” he recalled. “He enquired whether I might be interested in the vacant part-time position as Executive Officer for VGA VIC.”

This resulted in his being offered the part-time position in February 2002. What followed was a combination of working between Fresh State and VGA Vic, lasting until 2007, when he resigned from Fresh State and continued the part-time position with VGA Vic.

“I have had the pleasure of working with four Presidents,” Tony said. Those Presidents were Peter Cochrane (up to the 2002 Annual General Meeting), Alec Berias (from 2002-2004), Luis Gazzola (from 2004-2011), and the current President, David Wallace.

“The past 40 years have provided me with an appreciation of the many challenges that face the horticultural industry in Australia and the resilience of those who work within it,” Tony said. “I have been fortunate to have lived and worked with so many people across Australia who have moved from being working colleagues to becoming valued friends for life.”

Port Phillip & Westernport CMA



The PPWCMA has appointed a Landcare Facilitator, Karen Thomas, to work with industry groups within the region. Karen has worked with six of the seven industry groups in the region so far to manage several small outcome-based projects which have been identified, funded and in some cases completed under the program:

- Renewal of the strawberry industry nutrient & soils environmental best practice manual
- Establishing demonstration sites for the use of compost under vines
- Improving land management decision-making by increasing knowledge of farm soil constraints matched to soil health best practice
- Assisting the fruit industry to manage the impacts of fruit bats in orchards

- Improving nutrient use efficiency in broadacre cropping and horticulture, and
- Whole farm planning with the Wurundjeri people to restore their Coranderk property as a farming enterprise.

Karen is now looking to work with the vegetable industry on a project that is based in Watson Creek. The project currently involves Water Stewardship Australia, Western Port Biosphere and Inghams Enterprises, and the PPWCMA will also be looking for involvement from growers along the creek as part of the project. Meetings will be held to inform stakeholders of the objectives of the project and to elicit participation.

WFI, proud alliance partner of VGA Victoria.

WFI is a proud alliance partner of the Vegetable Growers Association Victoria (VGA). Like the VGA, we have a very broad reach across the state with over 35 Area Managers located throughout Victoria. Unlike a number of our competitors, we prefer to deal direct with our clients face to face. When you deal with WFI, you deal with a person, not just a voice on the other end of the telephone.

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EXECUTIVE MANAGER'S CORNER



Well – what a year! This year has been especially busy for the VGA, with many issues requiring the attention of the Executive Committee, Tony Imeson and myself.

The relocation of the market to Epping has probably consumed the majority of President David Wallace's time and efforts, as well as that of the members of the Advisory Committee – Luis Gazzola, Alec Berias, David Kelly and Vince Doria. This effort has now been on-going for 10 years.

Restructure has been the theme for horticulture this year, and the review and subsequent restructure of HAL could have the most significant impact of any of this year's developments on the industry's R&D programs into the future.

There have also been numerous reviews, including regarding the harmonisation of chemical regulations across Australia – a battle that Peter Cochrane has fought on behalf of Victorian growers. Some of the other major reviews impacting on growers include:

- Various chemicals have been reviewed and deregistered
- First-principles review of APVMA cost recovery arrangements
- Independent review into the 457 visa program
- Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper
- Senate Inquiry into the imposition and disbursement of agricultural levies

Tony and I have attended numerous field days and meetings representing our members and any relevant information has been passed on to growers through the 30 *In-the-Field* fliers prepared during the year, as well as through this magazine.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank President David and the Executive Committee for all their support during the year, and to thank Tony for his advice.

I wish all our Members, fellow growers and everyone associated with our wonderful industry a very joyous and blessed Christmas and a very prosperous and healthy 2015.

Remember VGA Vic is YOUR voice of the Victorian vegetable industry and needs your support.

Should you require more information about vegetable industry services available to you, please contact Executive Manager, Helena Whitman.

Helena Whitman, Executive Manager
Mobile: 0407 772 299
Email: helena.w@vgavic.org.au

Tony Imeson, Secretary
Mobile: 0414 458 561
Email: tony.i@vgavic.org.au

The President and Executive of the Vegetable Growers Association wish all members and supporters a joyous Christmas and a very prosperous 2015.

VGA Vic. proudly recognises our industry supporters:

