



Big Sustainability Debate panel debate. Photo: Thomas Skovsende



UK event provides sustainability insights to industry

The second Sustainability in Drinks conference took place in London in late October. Founded by Judy Kendrick and Janet Harrison working with sustainability consultants Anne Jones and Fran Draper, the annual event brought together sustainability experts, products and services from eight different countries for around 300 attendees, as **Simone Madden-Grey** writes from London.

Organised according to Land Health, Carbon Management, Packaging, and Sustainable Society, the programme presented a range of panel discussions and smaller workshops. There were individual stands for industry bodies, packaging companies, certification organisations and sustainability resources. Key stakeholders across the sustainability spectrum included International Wineries for Climate Action, the Porto Protocol, Regenerative Viticulture Foundation and Drinks United. Wine Australia, New Zealand Winegrowers, California Wine Institute and Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme were also in attendance.

Bookending the main part of the conference were panel discussions The Value of Certification and Communicating Sustainability. The first

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Dr Edwin Massey

panel considered certification's value in purchasing decisions, particularly for younger consumers, its value as a driver for change within industry, as a means of combating greenwashing, and as a risk management and regulation compliance tool. Increased time and resources required to manage parallel certification processes were also discussed.

The final panel of the day, Communicating Sustainability, drew a packed audience. How to inform and not overwhelm the consumer was under the spotlight. Strategies to achieve this covered a focus on positivity, hope and value alignment through entertaining and educational material, and the use of images, words and stories as a means of humanising sustainable initiatives. Succinct messaging inviting the consumer to be part of something bigger than the individual was seen as

fundamental to improved engagement with industry initiatives.

The workshops took a more informal tone covering topics such as practical guidance on managing the future of decarbonising glass with specific focus on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and Deposit Recycling Scheme (DRS) in the United Kingdom, the associated costs of which will inevitably be passed back through the supply chain. Other workshops included retail experience of trialling different packaging and guidance on international labour standards. Australian, Keith Tulloch of the eponymous wine label, shared his experience in a workshop on soil health.

The day concluded with the Big Sustainability Debate and keynote address, introduced by Jancis Robinson OBE MW. Panel members representing a cross-section of food and beverage industries considered Politics and Value of Sustainability. Key points covered the importance of science, innovation, regulation, and data in unifying industry strategy and planned interventions. Balancing data driven decisions with instinctive business acumen alongside increased sustainability knowledge amongst consumers were described as integral to long-term success. The final speaker, Professor Paul Behrens, British Academy Global Professor, and author, of Oxford University, delivered a keynote

address leaving the audience in no doubt as to the urgent action demanded by climate change.

For representatives from New Zealand and Australia, the conference was an important opportunity to communicate industry strategies, progress and future plans. Highlighting the importance of sustainability for New Zealand wine, Dr Edwin Massey, GM Sustainability at New Zealand Winegrowers, said: “The story behind the provenance (of a wine) is more important than ever. It helps brands connect with consumers and gives them a deeper story to share about the wines they love. In New Zealand, we have built our reputation for distinctive, premium and sustainable wine for the last 30 years, and it is events like Sustainability in Drinks that show us we have to keep making progress – because if we don’t, we will lose that connection.”

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Laura Jewell MW

Sustainable transportation

Informal discussion amongst attendees related to exporters outside Europe and consumer understanding of sustainable wine transportation. In addressing this, Laura Jewell MW, Regional General Manager UK/EMEA for Wine Australia, noted that while industry is actively working to reduce emissions, education is crucial to communicating the nuances in sustainable wine transportation. “The carbon footprint calculated in our Emissions Reduction Roadmap (released in 2023) is whole life cycle, including everything from upstream to downstream inputs and end-of-life waste treatment. Naturally, a footprint of the whole life cycle, such as this, will be larger than a calculation that omits elements. Therefore, you can’t compare other wine producing nations without the same method being applied.”



Keith Tulloch's soil health workshop. Photo: Thomas Skovsende

As the transport sector meets its own emissions reductions, Jewell sees the subsequent reduction in shipping emissions together with advances in wine packaging as particularly relevant to the messaging of sustainable transportation. “Initiatives such as shipping wine in bulk and using lightweight glass are increasingly popular among Australian producers. Around two-thirds of Australian wine is already exported in bulk, which increases packing efficiency and reduces carbon emissions for the sector.”

Bridging the divide between industry specific knowledge of transportation emissions and broadbrush understanding outside the industry is vital in addressing the perception in Europe of sustainable wine transportation from Australia and New Zealand.

Preparation for Sustainability in Drinks 2026 is already underway creating another opportunity for industry to share, learn and collaborate, while providing insights into how an important export market understands sustainable wine production in the Southern Hemisphere.

Further information

Sustainability in Wine Conference - www.sustainabilityindrinks.com

Sustainability in Wine Knowledge Hub - www.sustainabilityindrinks.com/the-knowledge-hub



Jancis Robinson OBE. Photo: Thomas Skovsende