

## FISHY WINE

If you read the fine print on a wine bottle, you will sometimes see 'Contains traces of fish products'. Or, much more commonly, 'milk products' or 'egg products'. So what's going on - is it some sort of contamination or are fish really added to wine?

It is actually all about a concept called 'fining'.

Fining is used in winemaking for two purposes - to clarify the wine (take away any cloudiness) and to remove any harsh flavours, mainly phenolics (stalky characters) and perhaps astringency (tannins). None of the fining agent remains in the finished product, and not all wines are fined.

For example, after fermentation of the wine has finished, it is still quite cloudy with yeast particles. These gradually settle, but it can be sped up considerably by adding a fining agent to the top of the vat. As that sinks down, the particles adhere to the agent (flocculate), and are carried out of suspension, ending up as a sediment at the bottom of the vat. A type of clay called bentonite is often used for this.

Later, just before bottling, there may be final taste-driven small adjustments made to the wine. This may involve removal of proteins, haze or slight bitterness, and fining agents are generally used for this. Only very small amounts are used, and they bind with the proteins or particles and settle out.

The main fining agents allowable under Australian Food Standards are -

- Milk products (milk powder or casein)
- Egg whites (either fresh or powdered)
- Bentonite (a clay)
- Gelatin (from animal skin and bones)
- Isinglass (a substance obtained from the dried swim bladders of fish. It is a form of collagen)
- PVPP (which is a polyvinyl product, not animal-derived)

So that's where the 'Contains traces of fish products' comes from - it indicates that the wine was fined with isinglass.

But why do these have to be shown on the label? It's simply that some people have allergies to milk, egg and fish products - even the smallest traces.

In 2009 there was an update to the regulations - the food standards people identified that isinglass actually does not trigger fish allergies, so 'traces of fish products' will disappear from labels.

There is a problem with wine labelling for vegetarians though - it's about allergies, not animal products. The label does not say whether the wine has been fined with gelatin (or isinglass now), so veggo's have to ask the producer about that.

*Warwick Adams*

# belgravepark

**WINERY**  
**FREE TASTINGS**  
**MEDAL WINNING WINES**

Princes Highway, Cobargo  
3km south towards Bega  
Open Weekends, 11am - 5pm  
T 6493 6377 [www.belgravepark.com](http://www.belgravepark.com)