The craft beer industry received some good news last month

The rebate we have been campaigning for has come to fruition.

As of next year, the Federal government has announced in its 2018 budget that any craft brewer can claim up to $100,000 in rebate from its excise payments.

This is a significant increase from $30,000 and now places the industry in a better position to grow and keep improving its employment numbers with more people.

Or use the money to make improvements in the brewery.

There will likely not be a drop in the price of craft beer because brewers generally struggle to keep their head above water. The extra cash injection may allow them to have some breathing space and provide opportunities to improve their quality and provide growth.

In any case, see it as getting closer to the WET tax winemakers pay where they receive a rebate up to $350,000.

The other announcement made by the Federal government was in the area of size of packaging and rebate.

Till now there has been an excise break for bulk volumes above 48 litres, however, that means the only container that attracts the lowest excise rate is for 50L kegs in Australia.

Although the weight of a keg full of beer is circa 60kg this contravenes worksafe regulations to the maximum weight an operator can legally lift.

With the new excise laws this will not change but provides a smaller bulk package to >8 litres or more with a substantial tax break. This will then supersede the old >8L bulk excise.

What that will mean is that brewers can now have more flexibility in the size of keg used which would suit small retail outlets that aren’t able to move 50L keg volumes on draught. The choice of available kegs could potentially be 9L, 18L and 30L sizes which are sometimes available in overseas countries like New Zealand.

This is good news from a safety perspective as it would be expected to reduce Workcover claims from lifting heavy loads such as 50L kegs. The human toll is often overlooked which has overbearing consequences on personal and economic considerations.

Unless mechanical handling of 50L and 30L kegs becomes mandatory, and cheap, then brewers will persist in manually handling these large kegs with potential personal injury.

In summary, these changes to the excise laws are well overdue and a welcome relief. It is headed in the right direct and with now over 500 independent brewers in Australia we are still at the tip of the iceberg. Growth in this industry is still to explode but has increased about 10 fold in the last 10 or so years.

I believe there is still room for improvement on the excise front and we should all continue to lobby for more fairer equalisation between brewers and winemakers.

I also think that as brewers, some of the better beers we can make and enjoy are above 5% ABV.

For instance one of my favourites is Bright Brewery’s Stubborn Russian Stout (which comes in at 12.1% ABV 9in 2018).

The excise laws...as they stand, discourage brewers making beers with substantial alcohol levels.

I don’t think discerning drinkers abuse these beers because it would be akin to drinking wine of similar alcoholic strengths.

If we are to enjoy the many varieties and flavours coming from such beers then we can rest assured Australians can produce wonderful beers much like what has been enjoyed in Belgium and other countries for a long time.

Perhaps if we included moderate drinking at the dinner table with our kids they would not seem to think it’s a big deal to slosh out when they turn 18.

In Europe wine and beer forms part of the family dinner and it works well with the youth of most of these countries.

Hopefully we can take the lead of Europe and demystify drinking and excise laws can follow suit to encourage moderate drinking.

The craft beer industry received some good news last month

The rebate we have been campaigning for has come to fruition.

As of next year, the Federal government has announced in its 2018 budget that any craft brewer can claim up to $100,000 in rebate from its excise payments. This is a significant increase from $30,000 and now places the industry in a better position to grow and keep improving its employment numbers with more people. Or use the money to make improvements in the brewery.

There will likely not be a drop in the price of craft beer because brewers generally struggle to keep their head above water. The extra cash injection may allow them to have some breathing space and provide opportunities to improve their quality and provide growth.

In any case, see it as getting closer to the WET tax winemakers pay where they receive a rebate up to $350,000. The other announcement made by the Federal government was in the area of size of packaging and rebate.

Till now there has been an excise break for bulk volumes above 48 litres, however, that means the only container that attracts the lowest excise rate is for 50L kegs in Australia.

Although the weight of a keg full of beer is circa 60kg this contravenes worksafe regulations to the maximum weight an operator can legally lift. With the new excise laws this will not change but provides a smaller bulk package to >8 litres or more with a substantial tax break. This will then supersede the old >8L bulk excise. What that will mean is that brewers can now have more flexibility in the size of keg used which would suit small retail outlets that aren’t able to move 50L keg volumes on draught. The choice of available kegs could potentially be 9L, 18L and 30L sizes which are sometimes available in overseas countries like New Zealand.

This is good news from a safety perspective as it would be expected to reduce Workcover claims from lifting heavy loads such as 50L kegs. The human toll is often overlooked which has overbearing consequences on personal and economic considerations.

Unless mechanical handling of 50L and 30L kegs becomes mandatory, and cheap, then brewers will persist in manually handling these large kegs with potential personal injury.

In summary, these changes to the excise laws are well overdue and a welcome relief. It is headed in the right direct and with now over 500 independent brewers in Australia we are still at the tip of the iceberg. Growth in this industry is still to explode but has increased about 10 fold in the last 10 or so years.

I believe there is still room for improvement on the excise front and we should all continue to lobby for more fairer equalisation between brewers and winemakers.

I also think that as brewers, some of the better beers we can make and enjoy are above 5% ABV. For instance one of my favourites is Bright Brewery’s Stubborn Russian Stout (which comes in at 12.1% ABV 9in 2018).

The excise laws...as they stand, discourage brewers making beers with substantial alcohol levels.

I don’t think discerning drinkers abuse these beers because it would be akin to drinking wine of similar alcoholic strengths.

If we are to enjoy the many varieties and flavours coming from such beers then we can rest assured Australians can produce wonderful beers much like what has been enjoyed in Belgium and other countries for a long time.

Perhaps if we included moderate drinking at the dinner table with our kids they would not seem to think it’s a big deal to slosh out when they turn 18.

In Europe wine and beer forms part of the family dinner and it works well with the youth of most of these countries.

Hopefully we can take the lead of Europe and demystify drinking and excise laws can follow suit to encourage moderate drinking.

Are you a Homebrewer wanting to start your own Microbrewery?

Well, your friends may like your homebrewed beer so much they say, “why don’t you start your own brewery?” Although that may seem daunting that is exactly what many homebrewers are doing, most of them successfully.

A recent article on the ABC talks about the Tasmanian beer industry boom which excites tourism—http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-26/tasmania-beer-boom-building-along-10161318

But what makes independent craft brewing so successful. As the article suggests its not just about brewing good beer. It’s also about telling your story, talking about it and your beers to those willing to listen.

I have seen many brewers that are good at their craft but are not so good at telling their story, if at all.

It’s like waiting for a new bus with all the modern conveniences and all the problems about the setup and the problems about the setup and...
Sour beers, the next trend?

Twenty years ago if you’d asked me what I thought about sour beers I would have immediately told you that it equates to a brewery infection and it was the worst possible outcome to have in Brewing.

Sours are not new but have been the possession, mainly, of the Belgians. In fact, when I visited the over 100 year old Cantillon Brewery in Brussels, Belgium, I could not help but be impressed by the dedication of the brewers of this small brewery which produces only one type of beer, lambics.

After seeing it first hand it was explained that the brewery cannot expand its fermentation vessels because of the unique flora present in the air and exposed beams of the brewery.

It can only brew 8 months of the year because in the other 4 months the flora is not the same.

The open fermentation tanks favour spontaneous fermentation. Then the beer is put into barrels and aged for some time, blended and bottle conditioned for about a year. I tried a couple of their beers and yes they are sour. By themselves I find it difficult to take in.

A few years ago I attended the Australian International Beer Awards and we were served a three course meal with matching beer. For our sweet desert the matching beer was a Belgium Cherry Kriek, a sour beer which I’d tasted before.

I expected it to be a flop, so I thought, but when paired with the sweet, almost fatty desert, I was pleasantly surprised. The balance of the sweetness with the acidity of the beer was just perfect.

I have tried sours since then but by themselves they tend to be too mouth puckering for me. I always remember the experience I had at the beer awards and so am careful with lambics now and always advise that the combination with a dessert is much more palatable.

But that’s not to say that less sour versions are not good. In fact I enjoy Watermelon warhead by Ferral Brewing on its own as it has a subtle sourness making for a refreshing summer ale.

But sour beers are becoming popular in Australia like its counterpart in the States and all around the world.

But if you are planning to brew lambics then beware of the contamination it can cause to your home brewery or microbrewery. Once lactic acid takes hold of your equipment it can permeate through-out the entire brewery making it difficult to remove with the risk of infection spreading to normal beers.

I’ve had microbrewers get a lactic acid infection in their brewery and had to stop brewing and clean the entire brewery. This is not only time consuming but a costly exercise.

So if you want to venture to this new style, learn how to pair with food or start with a less challenging one, remember to keep the infection at bay with extra good cleaning.

Copper vessels have been replaced by longer lasting Stainless steel vessels but brewing methods have remained almost the same in the modern era- Picture from MPRnews.org
Beer Funnies

How does a man show that he is planning for the future? He buys two cases of beer.

An Irishman is sitting at the end of a bar. He sees a lamp at the end of the table. He walks down to it and rubs it. Out pops a genie. It says: “I will give you three wishes.”

The man thinks awhile. Finally he says: “I want a beer that never is empty.”

With that, the genie makes a poof sound and on the bar is a bottle of beer. The Irishman starts drinking it and right before it is gone, it starts to refill. The genie asks about his next two wishes.

The man says: “I want two more of these.”

Well, no-one said that drinking was good for you, did they?

The Amber River Group Gears up To help Brewers

After a short 15-20 minute presentation on the 12 steps to consider when starting a microbrewery to a packed house at the CBIA (now IIBA) conference in Adelaide last year I was approached by an attendee named Marcella Merck.

Marcella went on to introduce an idea that sparked my interest.

As a business and finance strategist Marcella went on to say that she was interested in forming a group of professionals that would provide a multi-disciplinary approach to potential or existing brewers wanting to establish a microbrewery or expand a current one.

I was invited to be the pivotal supplier and consultant of microbreweries on behalf of the group.

I immediately saw the value of this and so requested more information.

We at The Amber River Group are a collective of business service professionals with a focus on providing craft brewers with the best advice and assistance possible to help their businesses grow and succeed.

Our services include financial planning, accounting, legal, business planning, plant establishment and operational advice as well as assistance in seeking finance.

Each member of the group is a licensed and independent service provider, so you know you will get the right advice from an experienced professional whatever your needs are. As small business owners ourselves we understand the demands and rigours of operating a business and want to provide our clients with the best advice to help ensure their success and the future of craft beer in Australia is the strongest it can be.

The Amber River Group is made up of six professional service providers who each specialise in an area vital to a brewery owners operation.

Over the last year we have worked to put together the first comprehensive industry report that details the size and composition of the beer industry, specifically looking to discern the size and composition of the independent craft beer production segment.

After a year in the making the report was presented at the 2018 Craft Beer Industry event (BeerCon) in June and launched in August.

The Amber River Group’s objective is to provide the best professional services to the craft beer industry possible and to further improve the amount and quality of industry information in the market to benefit not just brewery operators but also those looking to service the industry.

A current project in the works is focused on investment in the industry; The Amber River Group is looking to develop an understanding of the current craft beer investment scene in Australia and what that means for the industry.

So not only is the Amber River group providing information about the growth of the Independent Craft Brewing Industry in Australia, which has been sadly lacking, but they are providing independent expertise to help new brewers start their own brewing business.

So if you need help in establishing your brewing business perhaps you should avail yourself of the services supplied by the Amber River Group.

Do you add Fish to your beer?

It may come as a stout, but adding fish like oysters or mussels may surprise some.

Hence the name oyster stout or mussel stout.

These beers may be a little heavy on the fish and so you may or may not like them.

I once had a mussel stout and if you don’t prepare yourself for a blast then it can be a little overwhelming.

So these beers are a little like vege-mite. If you grow up with it you will always like it but if you never have tasted such flavours before then they can be a bit hard to swallow.

But did you know that in the not so distant past all the commercial beer had a fish product added to it.

No, you could not taste it because of what it was being used for and at low concentrations.

The product added was called isinglass.

Icinglass is derived from the swim bladder of sturgeon and other fish. The active component is collagen which is positively charged and used as a fining agent in beer to remove beer particles and help yeast settle.

It was not labelled on the beer container but that all changed over a decade ago when labelling laws mandated labelling of fish products.

Brewers reacted quickly to this labelling change so stopped using it so as not, one assumes, lose loyal customers.

It can be replaced by other finings agents such as gelatine or pectin.

In homebrewing it is easier to use gelatine for it is readily available and easy to use.

Some homebrewers prefer not to use any finings and just “Crash Chill” the beer in their fridge to accelerate the settling process, although the best result may not be possible if using an ale yeast.

A few will filter their beer if the style warrants it. Beers that traditionally look bright and clear favour filtration, such as lagers.

So next time you have a stout it may be wise to read the label first.
I’ve just got back from travelling to Alaska, Canada and New York.

As always I try to make it a point to visit some breweries/tap rooms while I’m away.

It’s always interesting and sometimes revealing as to the extent the craft industry has gone in various countries.

No less so the Alaskan and Canadian craft beer scene, where it is booming.

Alaska seems like a remote frontier and it likely is. I visited coastal towns one of which was Ketchikan and found a new brewery (Bawden St. Brewing) which opened up 3 weeks before.

I purchased some beer (IPA) freshly put in a can of about 1 pint in size. When I asked the person serving me if they had a smaller container, the response was the bigger, the better.

The next city was the capital city of Alaska, Juneau. We visited Mendenhall Glacier and waterfall which was spectacular. I visited a brewery in Juneau which looked relatively new and spoke to the brewer. The beers tend to be similar to others in that part of the world, mainly centering around IPA’s.

Skagway also had a brewery and I had a dark beer there also.

Back to Canada and we found breweries everywhere, a notable one on Granville Island in Vancouver. Lots to see but not enough time. Next time I may even do my research before leaving home.

Perth Brewing Course
Brew Day

In Toronto, Canada, I found the biggest taproom purported to be in Canada. It has 160 beers on tap and of course having limited time I was at a lose as to where to start.

The title of this article is really important to those that want to learn about beer and how to make it consistent.

The 2017 Australian Craft Beer Survey revealed some interesting results worth sharing.

When asked if the respondent WOULD LIKE TO INCREASE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF CRAFT BEER 86% said that they would strongly agree or agree to that statement.

Of course that could mean different things to different people but if we assume a number of those respondents are homebrewers then that would include learning how to brew better beer.

As Beer Cartel summarised, the results show that thirst for knowledge is paramount, “As the world of beer becomes more complex and nuanced, it makes sense consumers are interested in increasing their beer knowledge. Be it learning about different styles, flavour profiles, matching of beer and food, or brewing processes, there is a huge amount of knowledge that can be taught.”

Coupled with the fact that 94% are on the lookout for new and interesting beers that makes a strong case for learning.

Costanzo Brewing Academy has been teaching students now for over 10 years how to brew good beer as this becomes the foundation to making consistent and interesting beers.

In 2018, we have travelled to Sydney, Brisbane, Bright, Melbourne and Perth.

Many students have been surprised on the way and amount of knowledge delivered to them.

One student said; *If you are thinking about brewing beer and want to do it the right way, then you must do this course. I have a background in wine making and I wish they had a course about wine making as good as what Vince conveyed over 4 days. The course was packed solid with absolute gems of information and I walked away incredibly confident that I knew exactly how to make excellent beers, not once, but consistently every time. Good job Vince and I look forward to buying your book when you get around to writing it!* - Sean Glasson - wine-maker, Melbourne Masterbrew course May 2018

Another recent review was just as complimentary when he said; *Fantastic course. Vince delivers an easy approach to understanding the methods behind brewing. Great for beginners or like me have been brewing for over 10 years and did benefit immensely from the course.* - Scott McInnes, Brisbane Masterbrew Bootcamp Brewing Course, July 2018.

At Precision Brewing we pride ourselves to offering beginners courses right up to courses helping the brewer start his/her own microbrewery. Of course we believe we can offer more when the time comes to actually purchasing your brewery with help with planning, acquisition, installation and commissioning. We also offer expert help with QC protocols and lab setups.

Our point of difference is our knowledge; we have worked and run breweries for over 20 years and helped brewers start their own breweries in the last 10. We believe in value for money. Our fees are extremely reasonable but our offerings surpass what may be offered in the current marketplace.

If you would like to learn more about brewing and even take the plunge to starting your own microbrewery then these courses will definitely get you going onto the right track.

For further information about brewing courses or setting up a brewery feel free to check out our websites on http://www.costanzobrewing.com/home-brewing-courses and www.precisionbrewingsystems.com or call Vince on +61 (0)408104176.