

MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC.

LIASON & PUBLIC RELATIONS REPORT

ANNUAL MEETING 1985

After our success with the September 1984 demonstration the Cattlemen voted to engage a Consultant to advise on political matters and to organise future publicity and public relations.

After some months of searching for a suitable person we engaged a small consultant company to assist with our Moomba publicity and as a trial to perhaps go on to bigger things when the time was right.

After Moomba finished, our efforts analized and the Consultant's considerable account paid, a few facts became painfully obvious to us.

1. Collectively the Cattlemen had more expertise and knowledge of our cause plus the ability to sell our message better than outside consultants.
2. Within our organization we have a number of people with special talents which should be utilized first.

With that in mind the Executive at the April Omeo meeting gave me an inspiring vote of confidence and the go-ahead to organize and co-ordinate the publicity and political strategies in the lead up to the debate on the Alpine Park Bill.

Before I get on to all that I will deal with other issues in brief.

Barmah Forest.

Barmah Cattlemen are faced with a State Park. I addressed their annual meeting on July 26th 1985, and a group of those Cattlemen joined us for the ride into Ringwood.

Marketing.

I believe we have to take a long hard look at our marketing strategies. Our marketing has been a resounding financial success, however a few problems have developed and need to be ironed out.

The potential in this area is enormous. I would suggest a sub-committee of three Cattlemen be appointed with power to act in consultation with our marketing officers.

Book Launching.

Several Cattlemen attended the launching in Albury of Tor Holth's latest book - "Challenge of the High Country".

Tor and I very kindly asked me to launch the book on behalf of the and the launch evidently received its fair share of publicity. offered the Cattlemen his full support and help.

Freedom of Information re Cost of Park.

407
11/10/85
About 17 Cattlemen attended the Preliminary Conference in July where the Department of Conservation Forests and Lands admitted that little or no costing had been done on the National Park prior to the initial announcement. After some discussion and a refusal on our part to drop our request a full hearing was set for September 24th. We had been advised that it would be quite in order for me to appear for the Cattlemen at this initial hearing (and of course a lot cheaper.)

This proved to be the case and we received every assistance from the Tribunal in putting our case. Since that date we have reached a mutual agreement for the Department of Conservation Forests and Lands to release most of the information originally asked for by Sue Silvers last December. The September hearing was adjourned subject to a satisfactory reply, however to date we have not received the expected letter from the Department of Conservation Forests and Lands. Dept. agreed to give what originally asked for. The Press haven't covered the issue.

Enquiries.

I have been inundated with requests, during the past twelve months, for written information from students, groups, and interested people. This requires compiling and photocopying the relevant information, and posting out. I know that Sue Silvers has been hit with the same problem to the extent she has sometimes one or two requests a day. I think the situation (problem that it is) reflects the interest the Cattlemen have generated in the community.

Grazing Rates.

one Kirner
not if can
attend to put
level to put
in time because
can might have
to put up
After a protracted battle and two meetings with the Department of Conservation Forests and Lands, Tim Barker, Jim and I came to an unhappy compromise with them on fees for the coming year. I believe we still wait for the official version in writing, however, they did agree to review the position in twelve months time. Members will be circulated with the agreement when it becomes available, and should not pay anything until they ensure that it tallies with their account for next year. More information may be available at our meeting re a recent letter from the Minister.

I am most concerned at the statement of Mrs. Kirner as reported in The Herald on the Friday before Nunawading to the effect that if the Cattlemen can afford to distribute a colour brochure she will look at increasing their grazing fees. This is the type of attitude we have been facing with the Government and it reinforces our worst fears for our future and confirms our desire to go political.

Video.

The management and staff of Channel 10 (who include several Associate Members) have produced a 15 minute Video, outlining who the Mountain Cattlemen are, their history and their current fight.

The Video includes statements from the Conservation movement and extracts from news stories that Channel 10 had on file, plus Liam Bradley's song. We asked to have included as many different Cattlemen's faces as possible but this was limited by the footage available at Channel 10.

The Video was originally made because the National Gallery requested it for use overseas to explain a little about Victoria's people, and is available to the Cattlemen for their purposes. It has been shown to many people including the Liberal Parliamentary Party last week.

We are deeply in debt to the producers for their generosity, because the finished product is of high technical standard and would have been beyond our means if we had commissioned it commercially.

Farmer Rally.

Many of our members travelled to support the magnificent farmers' rally held in Melbourne.

Before that rally the V.F.G.A. asked me to attend a strategy meeting to assist with arrangements and logistics. I willingly passed on the experience we gained at our September 1984 demonstration, and our input to the farmers' rally was considerable with advice and encouragement behind the scenes.

After the consultation with Jim, we refused an offer from the V.F.G.A. for the Cattlemen to take a high profile in the rally and perhaps lead it with our horses.

For the same reasons I personally refused an offer to go to the historic Canberra rally and speak on behalf of the Victorian grass roots farmers. Both Jim and I and other Cattlemen consulted, believe that it is important that our Cattlemen spokesmen aren't seen as general stirrers, and that we concentrate on our own issue as far as taking a high public profile.

I did think, however, that it was a great compliment to the Cattlemen to have one of their number asked to speak at the Canberra rally.

There is no doubt that we gave the Victorian farming community a lead and confidence with our September demonstration and a whole new era has dawned for the farming community.

The "National Farmer" newspaper has credited the Cattlemen with swinging the November election and setting a new rural political trend. (National Farmer

Land Protection Council.

I was invited to join the Interim Land Protection Council at the start of this year as the Alpine representative.

The Interim Council has now been reconstructed into the Land Protection Council, and the Alpine representative position will disappear.

After some intense lobbying by many people to have on the Council someone with special knowledge of Public Land there is a chance, a position for a representative of Agricultural use of Public Land may be created along with a V.F.G.A. , Union and Conservation representative.

As I told the Minister at the last meeting after the Nunawading campaign, I did not expect to be nominated for that position!

Backlash.

This brings me to the next point. From the start of the Nunawading campaign, the Conservation movement (and to a lesser extent the Minister) began "playing the man" and the more up front members of the Association have been personally singled out.

This was to be expected, however throughout this year the Cattlemen's spokesmen have been at pains to keep personalities out of the debate where at all possible.

"It takes Faith to move Mountains".

Liam Bradley will have a tape available at the end of this month with the popular song, plus another catchy one which could even become as popular. Leave your name with Sue Silvers if you are interested.

Moomba.

Approximately 125 horses and 2 waggons plus all the atmosphere surrounded the Cattlemens' entry in the Moomba Parade which was their contribution to Victoria's 150th Celebrations in March 1985.

Thanks to all who made the effort and especially to the Australian Eagle Insurance Company Limited for their generous donation through the Victorian Farmers Insurance Agency which made it possible.

Royal Show & Elders Ltd. 150th Pastoral Parade.

Thanks to the fifteen Cattlemen and Associates who provided a representative group in the Parade last month.

The Alpine Park Bill.

the issue is future park management - not just cattle grazing

Almost immediately after the Omeo meeting it became obvious that a showdown was imminent on an issue that had been building up for thirty years.

On May and June of 1985 I spent 17 days in Melbourne consolidating our

position and keeping communications open with many sources.

During this time it became crystal clear that there was still mounting opposition to the contiguous National Park concept from the general community. However the Minister and the Government failed to recognise this fact and early in July appeared to anticipate some Nunawading election mileage by performing a grand announcement for the media at Bennison Lookout regarding the introduction of the Bill to Parliament.

It was about then I became convinced that our phone was tapped because that was the week Helen and I had arranged to be in Alice Springs! However we did obtain a certain satisfaction by sitting up in our motel and watching on television Jim Commins, Clive Hodge plus forty other Cattlemen and Associates carry out an exercise that "Norm" could have been justly proud of. After giggling for two days and ringing Jim and Sue constantly, a Nunawading strategy plan began to develop.

Nunawading.

We held our breath for the first three weeks of July because the Government could have pushed the Bill through during the special sittings, while they had a majority.

When it became obvious they were going to let the Bill take its course in the Spring session of Parliament, and that the fate of the Bill could well be determined by the Nunawading result we called an urgent Cattlemens' Executive meeting at V.F.G.A. headquarters on July 24th. The context of that historic meeting is well documented in the minutes.

What we did in Nunawading is now history.

It is sufficient to comment that the Cattlemens' political campaign is now widely seen by the Business community, the Government, Opposition and the beavocracy as a "stunning and copy-book example of successful political action by a small group who believed in their cause".

There were many people who responded to our call for help and it is not possible to name them all. I must however pay tribute to Assistant Secretary of the Cattlemen and Nunawading campaign Secretary, Sue Silvers. I am sure you all realise that without her professional expertise, complete dedication and unfailing good humour this lady provided nonstop for a solid month, we could not have run the campaign in the way we did. All thanks to Sue, Ken and the family for the use of their home as a base for the campaign - it was a major disruption to their life for a month.

The latest expectation is that the Liberal Party and Nationals will combine and reject the Bill when it comes into the Upper House next week. However as we all know, nothing in politics is certain, and we are monitoring the situation daily. At

There is one fact that has emerged very strongly through this campaign and in fact over the past fourteen months.

We have received a lot of helpful advice from many experts in their fields and for this we are grateful.

HOWEVER WE HAVE LEARNED TO TRUST OUR OWN JUDGMENT AND SENSE OF TIMING, OVER AT TIMES, THE MOST EMINENT AND LEARNED OF ADVICE.

This is why I believe the Cattlemen are in the unique position they are in today.

There are several subjects that the Cattlemen themselves must address today in private after this General meeting is over.

I trust that the visitors and Associates will understand why we must go into Committee later, to discuss the delicate political situation we find ourselves in. We have invited a couple of close advisors and our two Secretaries to join us.

In Conclusion.

I must make the strong point that the Mountain Cattlemen now have the highest profile in history. We are being closely watched and analysed by the community at large.

We must ensure that every statement we make is responsible and thoughtful and our conduct in the Mountains is above reproach.

We must go out of our way (even more than we normally do) to ensure that we are friendly and helpful to the public and that we continue to do "the right thing" with our cattle.

Our opponents are waiting to sieze on any incident, however trifling, to denigrate the esteem in which we are held.

Already some groups and indeed, the Minister, are showing signs of attempting to drive a wedge between the Cattlemen on the subject of Tourism and other matters.

Please be on your guard against this type of strategy.

Keep documentation or record of any slurs against members or Assoc.

I wish to thank the Associates, Jim, our President, and each member of the Mountain Cattlemens' Association for the wholehearted support given to my position at this demanding time as it has not been easy for our family or our business over the past three months.

Bryan Jameson, our writer, observes that the Mountain Cattlemen and their supporters are "almost tribal" in their loyalty.

I believe that loyalty and support for the Executive has been the secret of our success.

at
tony