

## **Wombat Community Forest Management**

### **IMPORTANT UPDATE FOR R.U.G. MEMBERS Friday evening, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2004**

#### **“ANOTHER BROKEN PROMISE BY THE INTERIM STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL & THE WOMBAT CFM JUGGERNAUT!**

#### **POSTAL BALLOT BEING STOPPED BY TIM ANDERSON!!”**

To all recreational users concerned about the future of Community Forest Management:

First, thank you all for your patience since the assembly meeting on May 1<sup>st</sup> at Daylesford, we have appreciated this as we have tried to discover what the ISC and the DSE are seeking to do. It has been difficult to discover what is going on, especially when mixed messages are being sent. Naturally, most of you will have had questions concerning the events and subsequent possibilities of the poorly organised meeting, and we regret not having been able to inform you of any new advance on proceedings. To put it bluntly, we have not been kept in the loop, and there have been various attempts to sound us out concerning alternatives to a postal ballot. All manner of games have been played.

We have remained resolute concerning our wish for a postal ballot – which we feel is the unfettered exercise of the community’s desire for a democratic process – in order to resolve matters. This was the public promise of the chair of the ISC, Mr. Pat Connor on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Connor resigned as chair on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May in abject frustration that the commitment he gave to the public was being undermined and frustrated by remaining ISC members and the DSE in Ballarat. One ISC member even attempted to maliciously sabotage the good working relationship RUG has had with Mr. Connor by making false accusation that impugned the reputations of three good men. Legal action against the perpetrator is being prepared. Fortunately, Mr. Connor saw through the deception in time and continued to work with us to find a way forward. He offered a way through what he saw as an impasse by offering to work with us to jointly assemble a series of notices of motion for a postal ballot that would create winners rather than winners and

losers. This was a creative and unified approach, which we immediately agreed with. This new parcel of notices of motion would have included the ISC's original motion number one, concerning ongoing and broad community consultations – something RUG has always supported; the removal of all their other notices of motion and the institution of the notices of motion lodged by RUG leaders, except our first motion concerning a vote of thanks. There remained only one sticking point in all of this, and it concerned our motion number three (below) which asked for 2 recreational users being represented on the new CFM group.

*Proposed new notice of motion number 3 ...*

*1. "That this meeting hereby directs that the first committee of the Wombat Forest Community Group consist of nominees from the following working groups already associated with the CFM process, and from local communities by means of the following composition ...*

- *Biodiversity - one*
- *Weeds – one member*
- *Water – one member*
- *Forest Resource (non-timber) – one member*
- *Forest Resource (timber) – one member*
- *Recreational Users – two members*
- *Education – one member*
- *Forest Heritage – one member*
- *Local areas – two members*

*... with the power to co-opt and recommend up to three such other members is it considers necessary to ensure a balanced committee from time to time."*

*Moved: David Endacott (Local area resident)*

*Seconded: Bob Richardson (President: Bush Users Group)*

This request proved to be too much, with claims that we were asking for unfair representation in the CFM process. Indeed, Mr. Ian Miles of the DSE in Melbourne, was reluctant to allow this motion originally because he felt that two representatives was one too many and suggested to the chair of the meeting, Mr. Ian Crook, that he ask us to reconsider. We modified some aspects of our motions in an effort to demonstrate our cooperative goodwill, but felt that we could not budge on less than 2 members on the new body - 2 representatives out of a possible 14 is not unfair advantage, especially considering the environmental-conservation areas representation was going to be 4 or 5 members out of 14. Balance was a key issue for us, especially after the public threats made to us at the first assembly in February, and it is something we have remained concerned about ever since. Representation of recreational users is not a high priority for the

DSE at all, in our view. Various counter arguments were put to us stating that each of these other 'green' areas were so distinct as to be deserving of separate representation on the new group. We beg to differ. We then suggested that there could be a recreational user (motor) representative, and a recreational user (non-motor) representative, and this was immediately agreed to by Mr. Connor and Mr. Tim Anderson who stated that this was "a good way forward and a fair compromise ... and a position Andrew McLean would support ...". Indeed, Mr. Andrew McLean of the Ballarat DSE, it is reported in a draft document he, himself, circulated, was supportive about such a distinction. However, we have discovered this evening that Mr. Anderson has announced a meeting at short notice for Monday afternoon, in the middle of the day when we are all working earning a living, to discuss a way forward - rather than honour the commitment given to the public meeting on May 1<sup>st</sup> for a postal ballot. In fact, Mr. Anderson states,

***"For the past 2 weeks discussions regarding the management structure for the next evolution (sic) of the Wombat CFM process have failed to resolve the situation. It is time to make it happen. The scenarios being forced from different sections of the CFM process will create 'winners and losers' - this is not a healthy way forward and will not happen."***

No mention of when the postal ballot will be held - but an unmistakable and emphatic inference that it will not be taking place! We do not know to what discussions Mr. Anderson refers here, however, we need to state emphatically that at all times we have happily worked with Mr. Connor to find a way forward - we reached agreement that Mr. Connor, Mr. Anderson and Mr. McLean were supposedly happy with. Now all bets are off! Apparently, the ISC- DSE have changed their minds - again - and Mr. Anderson further asserts that ...

***"The design of the CFM management structure is for the community to decide on (sic)"***

But Mr. McLean's paper says very differently! We thought the community was trying to decide on a structure by turning out to participate on May 1<sup>st</sup>, at the express welcome of Mr. Connor on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the public urging, on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at Balwyn, by Mr. Chris Murphy, another active ISC member. And then there were all those ads in the local papers. We can only surmise that the kind of consultation and the results being agreed upon by the most senior players in this fiasco over the last two weeks aren't the results they want after all - regardless of what the broader community wants to decide - even when we reached agreement in four short days after consultation with other local area residents! (Isn't it such an inconvenience when democracy doesn't deliver the result you planned in your stage- managed democratic CFM charade?).

The bottom line is this: we believe that the DSE is determined to prevent a postal ballot; even though one was promised by the very process it is overseeing. We would like to know why. The facts are these ...

- Mr. Andrew McLean's paper circulated by Mr. Anderson basically wants all nominees to this new management group to be 'recommended' by a 'selection committee' of four local area residents, alternatively, he suggests, the ISC could act as such a selection committee (this we could never agree to – the ISC are without credibility now, and must go) – and these recommended “nominees” will be formally appointed by the Minister (more Government stage- managing of 'what the community wants'). Mr. McLean wants to see a group of forest experts on this group as well. Hmmm! we thought forest management expertise was the task of the DSE! We also thought CFM was a 'community' process' that allowed the community access to this knowledge base and the ability to dialogue (according to Mr. Ian Miles on May 1<sup>st</sup>) with its own freely elected representatives so that the DSE might know community concerns and interests in the context of its overall work. Mr. McLean's “way forward” paper, is seriously retrograde and would put into place a stage- managed charade of a CFM model that would never really be about a genuine community dialogue process at all. His offering is about tight control and not the free dialogue claimed. Furthermore, his idea of community is dominantly local area – a fundamental philosophical component of CFM that is at odds with the democracy in which we all live. The forest belongs to all Victorians – not a select few locals who think it's theirs. We reject Mr. McLean's paper as an attempt to manipulate CFM against the broader community's wishes and concerns. His 'way forward' is derisory. Mr. McLean's paper is attached for you to read.
- The DSE- ISC have deliberately stalled the process in the last two weeks while playing for time and regrouping – all sorts of strategising has been taking place. This is because, according to Mr. Anderson, they cannot find a “workable” way forward – yet if we had the vote we were promised, we would have a way forward that was even agreed to by the ISC! Mr. Anderson appears to be taking control wanting us all to sit down and talk governance and

representation issues through again – something we have been asking to be able to directly do since February 28<sup>th</sup>, but were consistently refused.

- The reality is that agreement on a ‘win-win’ way forward was reached with RUG and the ISC – seven days ago! In the end, rather than accept the unified way forward agreed to, the ISC have been willing to sacrifice the integrity and leadership of Mr. Connor. That’s how determined they are to maintain control.

Although, Mr. Connor has, we believe been inaccurate and unfair in some of his comments to the press concerning the “stacking” of the meeting by four wheel drivers, he has remained throughout this process an honourable player in his personal dealings with the leadership of RUG – which is much more than we can say about other key players in this sorry debacle. We do not understand why Mr. Connor stated publicly in a formal Governance Working Group meeting that he would be “delighted if a thousand four wheel drivers turned up to the meeting on May 1<sup>st</sup> – it would be great to have such strong community interest in the community forest management process”, and then complain bitterly when there was a huge attendance of concerned recreational users that they had “stacked the meeting”. Since May 1<sup>st</sup>, there have been dishonest attacks on RUG leaders, harassment, ludicrous and hysterically biased electronic media reporting on the assembly meeting which has blatantly attempted to stigmatise recreational users and, in particular, four wheel drivers. It is reported that Mr. Scott Kinnear, a prominent local green who failed in his attempt to run for public office, called the Channel 7 helicopter news crew in to exploit May 1<sup>st</sup> and twist it into an attack on four wheel drivers. Now that was really helpful, wasn’t it?

Those recreational users attending the May 1<sup>st</sup> meeting were polite and well behaved – and extremely patient – Mr. Connor said so, on radio - given the difficult circumstances which were not of their making. All this, despite the constant harassment of one prominent local green, who continued to interrupt private conversations and shout abuse at visitors to Daylesford. No one retaliated and you are all to be congratulated.

RUG leaders have been the subjects of complaints by angry ISC members who were arguing that most of the RUG attendees had no idea why they were there and didn’t even understand what they were voting for. This is not quite correct – our notices of motion were only approved the day before and we were unable to circulate these in time. That is why we had organised spokespersons to inform

their networks concerning the best way for us to vote. Mr. Anderson felt this was undemocratic – but is something his green friends do all the time. We're not sure what politics he has studied, however, people respond to good leadership and to integrity, and many groups had asked us for advice on how to properly participate to ensure a genuine and properly represented community forest management process could be created. This is because most recreational user groups have not been in the loop of this CFM process and are still playing catch up. In stark contrast to our leadership, the community failed to respond to the leadership of ISC and the facilitator of this whole process. It was embarrassing – the community stayed away in droves. Now, because their leadership is not being respected, and responded to, they want to change the rules again because RUG members have been unfair. They're becoming experts at shifting the goal posts – and at revisionism!

In his invitation to Monday's meeting, Mr. Anderson writes,

*“It is time to start talking about the forest, not a perpetual merry-go-round on the management structure.”*

We agree! But if Mr. Anderson believed his own words, and his masters did, too, he'd be encouraging the postal ballot to go ahead on the agreed grounds worked out by RUG, locals and the former chair or the ISC, Mr. Connor, to get a new group in, see out the old ISC who no longer have the trust of the broad spectrum of community interests and who have lost all credibility with us. But no! We're going to be talking about governance – yet again! How stupid does he think we are? This rhetoric is laughable. We mean no disrespect to Mr. Anderson, but we believe he is floundering, is not showing the leadership we are all looking for, and is simply doing what his DSE handlers are directing him to do.

And therein lies the problem – we always seem to come back to DSE interference and duplicity. Mr. Ian Miles can get up and state publicly for all to hear that all they (the DSE at the direction of the minister) ever really wanted was a good means of community dialogue so that community concerns and interests could inform DSE management processes in forest management, and that no CFM process was ever going to take over the role of the DSE. He strongly suggested that the Wombat CFM process had gone way beyond its brief. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Mr. Connor can state that “the formation of an association is over the top”, and now along comes Mr. McLean who offers the tightest over the top structure yet that will be virtually vetted by the minister himself. The DSE itself cannot even agree on what CFM should really be! It is very difficult not to be cynical when this has

been the pattern of the process for months. On top of that, they have lost huge credibility with RUG and locals. Mr. McLean, on May 1<sup>st</sup>, challenged Mr. Michael Coldham stating that he did not believe he and Four Wheel Drive Victoria were genuinely interested in CFM, yet the notices of motion lodged by RUG state exactly the opposite. But here's the thing: Mr. McLean's own oxymoronic "way forward" paper is inherently against broad and genuine community consultation and argues for a charade of CFM. Read it for yourselves.

RUG has asked the hard questions in this initial phase of the Wombat CFM process – at times very hard questions of the ISC and the Governance Working Group who have consistently failed to communicate properly, fairly or transparently – or even reply in any accountable way. Instead, they have tried to defend the indefensible, and continue to break trust.

Where to from here?

RUG will convene a meeting soon to look at options. One of these will be to bypass Messer Miles and McLean and go to the head of the DSE, or the minister, lodging a formal complaint and asking for their personal inquiry into this mess. We will not be duped into more pretend consultation aimed at wearing us down and throwing aside democratic principles. We can no longer trust the word of the DSE or its servants.

Thank you ...

... to all those who have either personally given, spoken or written your encouraging support – the last few weeks have been tough and filled with all sorts of falsehood, baseless accusations and character assassination. It has been deeply appreciated. We remain dogged in our determination to see genuine CFM take shape – but it must be genuine, and fair for all Victorians, or it isn't CFM, it's something else masquerading as CFM.

This is where we stand – we cannot do otherwise for all our faithful members.

Some housekeeping ...

- The executive of RUG has decided to exclude Mr. Chris Murphy (a current ISC member) from this official communication loop until

such time as it can meet with him and satisfy us that he has been acting in the best interests of RUG.

- Please upload this communiqué to your website
- Use excerpts from this communiqué for your club bulletins and magazines

Particular thanks ...

The leaders of RUG wish to particularly thank the following people and organisations who have worked hard, often around the clock, to represent your interests.

- CITYWEST 4X4 Club Inc. – for giving up their president for the last three months to focus on this important issue. They have paid a heavy price and have been totally supportive of this effort.
- Dr. Ross Wines (Pajero Four Wheel Drive Club) – for hours of strategic input at RUG executive level and support at RUG meetings
- John Wilkinson (RUG e- group facilitator) – for many hours of chat site monitoring and a great deal of input into the RUG process.
- Jodi Mann (CAMS) – for outstanding organisation and executive support leading up to May 1<sup>st</sup>
- Brian Cox (FWDV) who has handled an amazing load of enquiries, emails and communication issues in addition to an already large workload.
- Rita Bentley (Prospectors and Miners Ass, President) – for hours of helpful background input and strategizing.
- Bob Richardson (President of the Bush Users Group) – of assisting in developing the broad network alliances of RUG, and for ensuring that disenfranchised local residents were encouraged back to the CFM process.

- David Endacott (local resident) – for supporting us and offering crucial background information and advice both leading up and following May 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Mr. Michael Coldham (President of Four Wheel Drive Victoria) – for hours of legal advice, consultation and support through many a tough night.
- Mr. Ian Crook (Chair of the assembly meeting on May 1<sup>st</sup>) – for courage ‘under fire’ as he tried to keep the meeting process honest, and who has resisted pressure to give up the registration forms to the DSE in the absence of independent witnesses/scrutineers.
- Cate Howell (local resident) – for the strong support of her local area networks in the whole process. Well done, Cate!
- To the members and friends of the following communities and clubs who supported us on May 1<sup>st</sup>
  - Confederation of Australian Motor Sport
  - Sporting Shooters Association of Australia
  - Four Wheel Drive Victoria and the 75 clubs
  - Bush Users Group
  - Prospectors and Miners Association
  - Ballarat Light Car Club
  - Huts Association of Victoria
  - Mountain Bike Association of Victoria
  - Motor Cycle Trail Rider’s Association
  - Russian Ethnic Council
  - AMTRA
  - Otway Trail Riders

To all of you, thank you. We will keep you more closely informed as new developments occur.

If you have any further questions, please call 9740- 9145 after hours, or 0412 368 918 (cannot return all calls), or email on the\_rev@c031.aone.net.au

Yours faithfully

Milton Oliver (Facilitator: Recreational Users Working Group)