

Revised on 27 April 2018

Article 3: Whither MIVA-MIVA? Bush Nursing Centre Chaos (1991-1995)

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Linda Bruce & John Hilvert continue their history of the struggle to establish the MIVA-MIVA Aged Care hostel through 1992 to 1995. They chronicle the continuing debates over its running costs, the pressures placed on existing tenants, the move to dispossess the group of its name and why the Centre itself was placed under an Administrator by the State Government in 1995.

In 1991, after helping raise money for an Aged Care Hostel since 1977, the Mallacoota District Bush Nurse withdrew its support and informed the Department that they did not want the \$500,000 grant that had been approved to build an Aged Care Hostel. The Department then cancelled its offer.

This astonished, dismayed and confused many people in Mallacoota. The facts in support were under attack. It contended there was a lack of demand for an Aged Care Hostel and the population of the district served was arguable.

The 1991 Census put the population served at 1332 for Mallacoota and Genoa. But local GP, Gavin Le Sueur claimed a clientele of nearly 1900 (men women and children) with 10% being >70ⁱ.

Another reason for the financial unease was the Australian economy was having a rough time. Following an international stock market crash in 1987, the Federal Government began tightening its monetary policies. By July 1990 Australia had entered a severe recession from the September quarter of 1990. It was the recession “we had to have”.ⁱⁱ This recession officially ended on 11th September 1991, the day the Mallacoota District Bush Nurse put a notice in the Mallacoota Mouth withdrawing its support. (Interestingly, 9/11 became a notorious date ten years later with the twin towers attack)

As well as the recession, the Bush Nurses decision to dump the MIVA-MIVA Aged Care project was influenced by changing government policies. According to Sue Robertsⁱⁱⁱ, a close adviser to the Bush Nurse in 1995, at the time (1990-1999), the Government was changing how Bush Nursing Centres were funded. The Victorian Bush Nursing Association was declining - the Victorian government was phasing out Bush nurses. On 1 January 1999, the Victorian Bush Nurse Association amalgamated with Aged Care Victoria to form the Victorian Association of Health & Extended Care^{iv}.

According to Roberts, “A lot of it reflects changing government policy over time”^v. But many Mallacoota people felt betrayed. “People who had been working so long and hard to get aged care residents facilities there suddenly did not have the support that they thought they had from a key organisation like the Bush Nursing Centre. That’s my recollection.”

Roberts recalls there was also talk that if money was used to run a hostel, there would be less available for the Bush Nurse. There appears to have arisen a conflict of interest within the Mallacoota District Bush Nursing Centre, which faced the prospect of losing money and closing down, or changing.

In 1986, Peter Burrows established Mallacoota’s first pharmacy^{vi}. According to Roberts, at this time the Victoria government were clamping down on Bush Nurses prescribing

medications without further training. Until the Pharmacy came, Mallacoota people had to post their prescriptions to Orbost and the mail car brought back the medications.

The Bush Nurse's financial challenge was inadvertently compounded by the first permanent Medical G.P. in Mallacoota, Dr. Gavin Le Sueur who set up practice in 1989. According to Roberts, while a boon to Mallacoota residents, the G.P. s reportedly reduced the need for Bush Nurses, and the funding they could get.

At this time in 1989, some members of the Bush Nurse reportedly did not welcome the G.P.s because they viewed them as reducing their funding and their status. This noted, Dr. Le Sueur, reported that he refused to join MIAC or the Bush Nurse or MDHSS because he thought doing so would compromise his professional independence. However, the eventual closing of the Bush Nurse in 1995, was more to do with government policy than rivalry from the Mallacoota Medical Centre.

During the early 1990s, the Mallacoota District Bush Nurse committee of management argued that because the government had not committed to ongoing funding they would not be able to meet the running costs of the Aged Care hostel. They estimated that the proposed 12 bed hostel would lose \$63,000 per annum.

Under its President, Len Stevens, the newly formed MIVA-MIVA Aged Care Inc rejected these costings. It claimed an expert from within the Department of Health and two independent outside experts, examined costings and agreed the Bush Nursing Centre's costs were overstated by \$30-40,000 pa, and revenue understated. Furthermore, the Department of Veterans' Affairs had offered ongoing funding for six beds^{vii}.

From their disbanding of the MIVA-MIVA Project team in 1991, the Mallacoota District Bush Nurse ceased support for MIVA-MIVA Stage 2, the Aged Care hostel project.

When MIVA-MIVA Stage One was officially opened in 1986, it comprised the centre hall and two independent living units. After the District Bush nurse split from MIVA in 1991, the Bush Nurse built the remaining two units.

This caused consternation. In the original plans, the Aged Care hostel was to be erected on the block of land adjoining the MIVA building. Then in 1987 the project team and the District Bush Nurse, agreed that the hostel would be better placed within the grounds on the same block as the first two units.

However, after the split, in November 1989, despite protests from MIVA-MIVA Aged Care that this would make the Aged Care hostel more expensive, the Mallacoota Bush Nurse proceeded to build the next two units on the site designated for the Aged Care hostel^{viii}

The Bush Nursing Committee also increased the rent for the existing units. In August 1992, the Bush Nurse instructed residents of the four MIVA-MIVA units (Stage 1) to sign a new lease that appeared less favourable to them^{ix}. The first residents of the Units were concerned because they said they had been offered a "special arrangement" if they sold their houses and moved into the MIVA-MIVA units. These residents were Bill Maloney (who had one unit named after him because he had donated \$11,000 to build it), Ella Dorran, Betty Warren and Walter Mills.

Concerned their rent would increase, the tenants sought advice from the Senior Citizens, and MIVA-MIVA Aged Care Inc, who petitioned the District Bush Nurse, and then obtained legal advice on the tenants' behalf.

Through its solicitor, the Committee of Management argued that the rent increase was in accordance with the *Retirement Villages Act (1986)*, and that it was unaware of such "special arrangements"^x with the tenants.

MIVA-MIVA Aged Care Inc then spoke to the Administrator of the Victorian Bush Nurse Association about the local situation. He advised that separating the Bush Nursing Centre and the MIVA-MIVA Project, "seemed sensible because the functions were quite different". And that "the final decision would rest with the Victorian Bush Nursing Association Board ." ^{xi} (1992)

MIVA-MIVA Aged Care Inc then started a legal claim that the MIVA-MIVA flats and the money raised for the Aged Care Hostel, belonged to them.

In response in May 1993, when The Bush Nurse Centre's Committee of Management demanded that MIVA-MIVA Aged Care Inc stop using the name MIVA-MIVA. They asserted that they owned the MIVA-MIVA acronym as its operating "business name and trademark" for the existing units from Stage 1 opened in 1989^{xii}.

According to a letter from Solicitors Mosely and Palmer (1993) to the Solicitor for the Mallacoota Bush Nurse, a search of corporate records found that the Mallacoota Bush Nurse had never registered the name MIVA-MIVA as a business name or trademark. The name was only registered to MIVA-MIVA Aged Care Inc., Mallacoota, the reincarnation of the MIVA-MIVA Project team.

MIAC's solicitor also noted that contrary to the Bush Nurse's promise published in the Mallacoota Mouth in 1991, to transfer money saved to any new provisional Hostel Project team, that the Bush Nurse appeared to be actively thwarting the establishment of an Aged Care Hostel.^{xiii}

Mosely and Palmer further asserted, that, "our client association (MIVA MIVA Aged Care Inc) has expended much effort to dissociate itself from the functions of your client association (the Mallacoota Bush Nurse) so that the functions of both associations would be kept quite distinct from each other" and "we do not understand why your client association (the Mallacoota District Bush Nurse) would seek to do anything else but encourage our client association in the pursuit of its aims."^{xiv}

However, because MIAC still hoped to partner with the Bush Nurse Management Committee for their longed for Aged Care hostel, on 29th June 1993, MIAC agreed to change its Business name from MIVA-MIVA Aged Care, to Mallacoota Inlet Aged Care (MIAC)^{xv}. MIAC minutes record that they agreed to do this, "for a little while and then change back."

Despite their name change, the Senior Citizens and MIAC, continued their bid and on the 14th January 1994, argued that as the government had first recommended, when the MIVA-MIVA Project was initiated, that the entire MIVA-MIVA project including the Miva hall and four independent units, should be separated from the Bush Nursing Centre, and be managed by MIVA-MIVA Aged Care. The Bush Nurse would continue to manage the Home Care packages and activities such as podiatry and physiotherapy.

They also kept pressuring the Bush Nursing Centre to transfer the remaining \$290,000 raised, and government grants allocated for the MIVA-MIVA Aged Care hostel Stage 2, to be transferred back to them. They argued that legally, government grant money must be spent for the purpose that it was raised.

On 2nd March 1994, a letter from the Victorian Department of Health to MIAC asserted that the Bush Nursing committee had convinced them that the Senior Citizens had no special rights to the MIVA building. In response Gloria Baker (Senior Citizens), and Don Finley (MIAC) met with Minister Caroline Hogg, who had previously supported the Senior Citizens and MIVA-MIVA Project team to launch the MIVA project.

Furthering their bid to keep the money, on 16th August 1995, Russell and Kennedy Solicitors for the Mallacoota District Bush Nursing Centre informed MIAC that instead of transferring money raised for the Aged Care Hostel, to the Aged Care project team as promised in 1991, they intended to use the money (\$290,000) to build more flats, “our client will be proceeding with the building of (more) retirement flats with the monies raised during the fundraising appeal.”^{xvi}

The dispute increased between the Senior Citizens and MIAC as a team, and the Bush Nurse and their backers within the community on each side. Dissent between members of the Bush Nursing Committee also escalated. Some Bush Nurse committee members still supported the Aged Care hostel proposal and sided with the Senior Citizens, MIAC and the many in the Mallacoota community who had raised money for over 20 years for an Aged Care Hostel.

These people argued that there was enough government money for both the Aged Care hostel and the Bush Nurse, and the government and Veterans Affairs had already committed to funding.

They pointed out that many small towns the size of Mallacoota, had both hostels and home care packages and were flourishing.

Other Bush Nurse committee members argued the Hostel was not viable, they needed the income from the flats to support the Bush Nurse, and that there was not enough money to support both an Aged Care Hostel and a Bush Nurse.

“There were strong personalities involved. The Bush Nursing Committee of Management became unworkable.”^{xvii}

Persistent community discontent, complaints of money mismanagement, and friction that made the District Bush Nurse Committee incapable of working aroused government concern. In August 1995, by order of council, (Australian Government gazette, No. S 88 August 1995) the Victorian government appointed an Administrator to watch over the financial matters and management of the Mallacoota District Bush Nursing Centre.

Images: Dr Gavin Le Sueur, Victorian Minister for Health, Caroline Hogg and first president of MIVA-MIVA Aged Care Inc, Len Stevens (with his wife, May). NB: The Mallacoota Bush Nursing Committee in the 1990s was a different organization to the current MDHSS.

Disclosure: Thank you to Celia Wallace (MDHSS) for her expert input. Linda Bruce & John Hilvert are compiling this history as a work in progress in homage to the late Dot Bruce.

This history is free for anyone to use without authorisation and link their web page to, as long as due acknowledgement is provided. Please email any suggestions to improve it, add to it, and clarify it, including photos of events, to Linda Bruce: ask@helpcentre.com.au

<Public Officers in the Bush Nurse and dates served.

Don Finley 16 Nov 1989, (MIVA-MIVA, Bush Nurse Split) then Patricia O'Grady 11 Sept 1991, Wendy Robinson 10 Sept 1992, and Glenys Quick 17th March 1994.>

[Public Administrators of Mallacoota District Bush Nurse and then MDHSS were the CEO of Bairnsdale hospital: John Amery 25 August 1995, Michael Ellis 23 April 1996, Peter Power 17 Dec 1986, Yvonne Bourke 16th June 1988]

ⁱ Cited in "Note of discussion per minute 24 Oct 1996 with Ellis" *Mallacoota Inlet Age Care (MIAC) Minutes* No. 489 5 October 1996

ⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_1990s_recession_in_Australia It lasted for just a year to September 1991 after which Australia experienced a record period of economic growth.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sue Roberts in phone interview with Linda Bruce, 2 Oct 2017.

^{iv} <http://nla.gov.au/nla.party-566609>

^v *ibid*

^{vi} From a phone interview with Peter Burrows, 30 Sep 2017

^{vii} Finley *op cit*, Letter to the Editor, *Snowy River Mail*, 13 March 1996

^{viii} MIVA Minute 680, 20th Dec 1989

^{ix} Walter Mills *letter* to Tony Kolb (President of Mallacoota Bush Nursing Centre Inc), 11 August 1992 (MIAC Legal Consultations folder).

^x Abbott, Tout, Russell, Kennedy Solicitors *letter* to Walter Mills 19 August 1992 (MIAC Legal Consultation folder)

^{xi} Letter from MD Senior Citizens Club Inc Don Finley Hon. Secretary, to Neil Freestone, Mosely and Palmer 9th Dec 1992.

^{xii} Don Finley, *Confidential Discussion Notes with Neil Freestone, Orbost Solicitor*, 28 May 1993.

^{xiii} Letter from Barristers Mosley and Palmer to Mallacoota Bush Nurse Solicitors Abbott, Tour, Russell and Kennedy dated 2nd June 1993. Source MIAC .

^{xiv} 4 Letter from Barristers Mosley and Palmer to Mallacoota Bush Nurse Solicitors Abbott, Tour, Russell and Kennedy dated 2nd June 1993. Source MIAC .

^{xv} According to Consumer Affairs Victoria, the name change from MIVA-MIVA to MIAC occurred on 14 July 1993

^{xvi} Letter from Solicitors Russell Kennedy to Solicitors Mosley & Palmer 10th August 1995.

^{xvii} Sue Roberts *op cit* and Minute 489 MIAC Minutes 5 October 1996, "Note of Discussion with Mick Ellis (Administrator)"

Next- insert MDHSS as an organisation established in December 1996, was not connected with earlier issues. Celia – but the discussion on money and flats was in 1999?