

CHAPTER 4: WHITHER MIVA-MIVA? THE BAIRNSDALE TAKE-OVER

Submitted by Linda Bruce & John Hilvert



Anke De Gues has raised money for Aged Residential care since 1953 and Wilma Becker since 1960. They both remain active fund raisers in 2017.

This is the penultimate chapter of the history. It chronicles the transformation of the Bush Nursing Centre to the present Mallacoota District Health & Support Service Inc (MDHSS) and the diminishing fortunes of the Mallacoota Inlet Aged Care group, MIAC during 1995-2005.

Following community discontent, complaints of money mismanagement, and friction within the District Bush Nurse, the Victorian Government appointed an Administrator to take over the financial matters and management of the Mallacoota District Bush Nursing Centre.

The entire Bush Nursing Centre Committee of Management was given a choice of resigning or being dismissed, so they resigned (August 1995). John Amery was appointed Administrator in August 1995, as the first of the four administrators of Mallacoota Bush Nursing Centre (later MDHSS), all of whom were CEO's of Bairnsdale Regional Hospital.

The initial ruling in August 1995, to disband the Mallacoota Bush Nursing Committee and appoint an administrator required Amery to develop a "comprehensive service plan" in consultation with a "reference group" comprising the State Department of Health and Community Services, the Victorian Bush Nursing Association, the Mallacoota Community Support Centre and a general practitioner practicing in the Mallacoota area¹.

The Administrator appointed a Community Reference Group, "formed to ensure community input into the development of the service plan". However instead of being comprised of Mallacoota residents most members were from the Bairnsdale Regional Health Service², with

one representative from the Mallacoota Bush Nurse, and one from the Mallacoota Community Support Centre (later to become the MDHSS Neighbourhood House).

Mallacoota Senior Citizens, MIAC, and the local GP, Dr Le Sueur were not included on the reference group. According to Dr Le Sueur it was against his policy to join any group other than the local yacht club because he did not wish to compromise his professional independence.³ Instead a former locum Dr. Ian Broome, from Lakes Entrance who visited Mallacoota once weekly before the town had a permanent G.P., was appointed.

This biased selection of the Community Reference group side-lined the main people and organisations in Mallacoota that lobbied for the Aged Care hostel or had worked on the MIVA-MIVA Project.

Nonetheless in 1995, in a letter to the Mallacoota Mouth, MIAC's President Cedric Gilbert hoped the time may be ripe for a "positive start" to review the merits of establishing its long sought for Aged Care hostel, with the funds that the Bush Nursing Committee had declined to release since it had pulled out of the "approval in principle" deal back in late 1991⁴. Two weeks later, Amery rebuked Gilbert in the Mallacoota Mouth, accusing MIAC of being misleading and "mischievous" by quoting the sums of money raised for hostel development⁵. Amery appeared to claim monies raised for the hostel, could be used for other purposes, described the Bush Nursing Centre as an "important support structure" for Mallacoota, and criticised the "negative attitude and misleading information" of the MIAC letter to the Mouth.

Sue Roberts, from Bairnsdale Regional Health, was given

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the job of creating a blueprint for the first year of the Administrator. The 15-page initial MDHSS Service Plan prepared by Sue Roberts⁶ did not mention an aged care hostel. Its only relevant goal was 3.3: "To promote and maintain mobility and independence of the elderly frail and disabled." This focused on home and community care (HACC) programs, which assisted the elderly to live in their own homes until they needed to go to a Nursing home. Funds for this came from federal grants.

In late 1995 Joy Burch was appointed the first manager of the purged Bush Nursing Centre oversighted by Administrator Amery who was replaced in March 1996 by Mick Ellis, incoming CEO of the Bairnsdale Regional Health Service⁷.

In a meeting with Joy Burch, a vote was held as to whether the Bush Nurse committee wished to support MIVA-MIVA Stage 2, the Aged Care Hostel proposal, or not. Members against the hostel dominated so Joy Burch agreed to recommend against the proposed hostel to the Administrator. Asked after the meeting if she would have agreed to back the hostel proposal if a majority of members had supported it she replied, "Of course I would have."⁸

At a meeting at the Bairnsdale hospital in late August 1996, MIAC urged the new Administrator Mr Mick Ellis that an aged hostel could still be viable. But Ellis declared he did not want to listen to "baggage of the past."⁹ Furthermore, like Amery, Ellis would not allow any members of the Senior Citizens or MIAC Committee to join his advisory group or present information on the MIVA-MIVA project to the reference group.

Ellis declared there was a "complete shift in Government focus from the earlier days". The Bush Nursing Centre would focus on new goals as the "Mallacoota District Health & Support Service" (MDHSS). The Victorian government would deal with only that one entity. Asked about likelihood of a hostel established by another local body, Ellis dismissed this possibility saying no recurrent

funding was available and the population of Mallacoota "did not warrant the building of a hostel" because "persons too ill to be in their own homes should be in hospitals or nursing homes"¹⁰.

This view became the formal view of the MDHSS cementing its opposition to a local aged care facility ever since.

Ellis argued for a more "flexible" approach implying the money raised used for the hostel be used to support some respite care.¹¹

The MIAC delegation was left with little optimism but appreciated the frank exchange. They questioned Ellis' view that no hostel with less than 20 beds was viable. They noted some 250 "small" hostels in Australia (<20 beds) average 13 beds already existed. These included the recently approved Eden hostel (Nullica Lodge) with 13 beds, which signed a Federal funding agreement in 1991, and officially opened on 3rd March 1995. None had shut for financial reasons.

Later discussions with Joy Burch in November 1996 confirmed the name change¹² of the Mallacoota District Bush Nursing Centre to MDHSS with its new emphasis on home services. MDHSS planned to reduce its aged care services at the Centre to two afternoons a week. She added there was "no intention" of touching the MIVA-MIVA money and MIAC could submit ideas on the use of the money raised, thought to be about \$290,000¹³.

Some MIAC Committee members urged legal action to recover the funds. But they decided this might alienate their relations with Ellis. So no action was taken¹⁴.

By Dec 1996, some MIAC members conceded privately that the aged care hostel seemed a "lost cause". They wondered whether they should canvass membership on their views. There was a growing fear that MDHSS might spend their funds on a swimming pool or additional cycle paths which had been supported at a public meeting.

The following August 1997, MIAC committee minutes note that they considered the proposal from MDHSS that the money could be used to build a two bedroom disabled unit to add to the four existing units¹⁵. At the same time, MIAC membership numbers had plummeted almost 50% to just 36 in 1997 as against 71 for 1996¹⁶.

This gloom provoked a call in June 1998 for a special general meeting to consider the case for MIAC closing down.

Despite the frustration, most members wanted the MIVA-MIVA project to proceed. This was carried unanimously with only one dissent. A revival of enthusiasm stirred



Above: Joy Burch

Mallacoota Bush Nursing Centre manager after BRHS takeover

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among the MIAC committee about the economic merits of their cause. MIAC Secretary Don Finley noted that the HACC program had far less effect on hostel developments than first thought. Many hostels still had waiting lists whereas there are often vacancies in units¹⁷.

Finley pointed out that from the viewpoint of the MIVA-MIVA funds, the capital cost per person housed in a single bedroom unit was about \$55K in a twin bedroom unit about \$40K. But in a hostel, if the Department of Veterans Affairs helped, the cost per resident could drop to \$10K - \$12K.

In 1999, given a forced choice between spending the remaining MIVA-MIVA Project Stage 2 money on a swimming pool or on building another unit at MDHSS, MIAC agreed with MDHSS's proposal to use the disputed funds to construct a two bedroom Disabled Unit. This unit was to be used by an aged couple who needed ramps and bars, or an aged person with their carer. MIAC rationalised this went part-way towards the purpose funds were originally raised. The unit was built at MDHSS in 1999.

However, the MIAC Committee regretted the concession. Its report to membership on 1997/98 stated that their support for the twin bed-roomed flat approach may be "a very poor decision". Our Committee will do its very best to overcome any difficulty and get the "Approval-in-Principle" for an Aged Care hostel, re-established as soon as possible.¹⁸

MIAC then hit another obstacle when it lost its leading advocate for the hostel initiative, Secretary Don Finley. In 1992, despite claims by the former Bush Nursing Centre it had registered the name MIVA-MIVA, Finley discovered that it was still available. The only group that had registered the name was in fact the MIVA-MIVA Aged Care group (MIAC), who were pressured by the Bush Nursing Centre to give up the name in 1992, and decided to oblige, "for a little while and change back".

Finley argued 1998 was a good time to change back and reclaim its MIVA-MIVA Aged Care name, which they registered in 1991, as well as registering the trademark MIVA-MIVA. This was vital for their next round of fund-raising, he argued.

However, the MIAC committee thought reclaiming the name may irritate the MDHSS administrator Mick Ellis and offend Joy Burch. Finley was very disappointed at the committee's verdict, commenting, "There would come a time when they would deeply regret the decision."¹⁹

Accordingly, on 3 March 1999, Finley resigned from his position as Secretary. The issue was one of principle, he insisted. Although he would remain a MIAC Committee member, after eight years of struggle, he would no longer act as MIAC's public advocate under the name "Mallacoota Inlet Aged Care", when they were entitled morally and legally to use the name MIVA-MIVA²⁰.

Meanwhile the newly formed MDHSS flourished under its revised remit of moving away from independent residential care, to providing numerous non-residential services to the aged, including home care packages, and organising visiting specialists, a service first started to back up Mallacoota's only GP, Dr. Gavin Le Sueur. In 1999 MDHSS absorbed the Mallacoota District Community House (MDCH), which included the Neighbourhood house, Occasional Child Care and Telecentre.

MIAC continued its fund raising for a 24-hr Aged Care Residential Nursing Home. Anke de Gues of Genoa had started fund raising for the Ambulance and Bush Nurse in 1953, was Treasurer of the original MIVA-MIVA Project started in 1983, and remained treasurer of MIAC. Wilma Becker (Maramingo), joined in the 1960s and was still a staunch supporter.

In 2000, according to Dr. Le Sueur, the need remained high. Even with the support of Home Care packages, an average of six people were forced to leave Mallacoota each year



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in order to access one of 10 Nursing Homes – the closest being in Eden, Orbest, Lakes Entrance and Bairnsdale, the others as far as Melbourne – six hours away.

The 1999-2000, Mallacoota Inlet Aged Care President Doug Sewell's report records that, MIAC, still hoping to be able to use the original MIVA-MIVA Centre, in order to reduce a Nursing Home's costs, requested permission from the DSE to build an aged care hostel on the block adjoining MDHSS. This was one of the two blocks adjoining MIVA-MIVA Stage One Independent Living Units, that the Department of Sustainability & Environment (DSE) had allocated for that purpose. The DSE reportedly replied that this was not possible because trees would have to be removed.²¹

Strangely, in 2004, the DSE granted MDHSS permission to construct a Men's shed on this same block adjoining the MIVA-MIVA centre. According to a report at the time, DSE let MDHSS build on the same crown land, and the East Gippsland Shire – approved roadside clearing and mulching of trees; waiving \$500-600 building permit and re-directing a drain." The shed opened on 21 October 2004²².

This construction effectively blocked the possibility of the MIVA-MIVA Project Stage 2, (an Aged Care hostel linked to the main Miva Building dining room by a covered walkway), being built on the second site that the Bush Nurse Committee had originally planned in 1990.

The first site was also not available, the Bush Nurse having constructed two extra units on it (despite protests from MIAC) in 1992, after they withdrew their support for the Aged Care hostel project.

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. We have joined MIAC (the former MIVA-MIVA project sub-committee), CHIRF and been rejected for membership to MDHSS (as it limits membership to permanent residents of Mallacoota). This history will be published with more references on the Historical Society, and MIAC Web Sites. It 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

References:

1. Victorian Government Gazette, No S88, Tues, 29 Aug, 1995
2. Apart from Sue Roberts & Administrator John Amery, CEO Bairnsdale Regional Health Service, it comprised Dr Ian Broom (the nominal local GP -- rather than Gavin Le Seuer), Richard Johnstone, Andrew Tsindos (Victorian Bush Nurse Assoc), Greg Blakely, Susan Davies, Joan Traill, Greta Jessup (local and 3MGB-FM broadcaster) and Rob Herni.
3. Interview with Dr Le Sueur, 9th Jan 2018
4. Mallacoota Mouth 783, 8 Sep 1995
5. Mallacoota Mouth 785, 13 Sep 1995
6. Supplied to authors by Sue Roberts, 15 Oct 2017
7. MDHSS Annual report, 2015-16 at p. 37
8. Interview Eileen Buckland 2017
9. MIAC Minute # 489 (5 Oct 1996).
10. ibid
11. ibid
12. The name change to MDHSS occurred officially on 13 May 1997, Refer to <https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/clubs-and-fundraising/incorporated-associations/search-for-an-incorporated-association?q=A0012127E&pn=0&sz=20>
13. MIAC Minutes, (4 November 1996), Minutes 502
14. Op cit MIAC Minute 504
15. MIAC Report of the Committee for 1996/1997, Fifth AGM, 13 Aug 1997
16. MIAC Minutes 1 October 1997, Number # 629.
17. MIAC MINUTES SGM Meeting 10 June 1998
18. Report of MIAC AGM 1997/98 – 10 August 1998
19. MIAC Committee Minutes c Nov 1998
20. MIAC Minute 884 – 3 March 1999.
21. MIAC Minutes 1999-2000, President Doug Sewell's report
22. <http://www.pigswillfly.com.au/2004/11/happiness-is-a-mens-shed-mallacoota-grasps-an-opportunity/>



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