

Special points of interest:

- Re-registration has started
- We've been busy on the media front
- We discuss THAT proposal by VEAC
- Fiona's inspirational speech
- The real value of membership

Re-registration has started

As mentioned in our last edition, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) requires all registered political parties to re-register.

By now, you should have received a letter from the VEC asking you to confirm that you are a member of the Country Alliance.

It is important that you tick **all three "yes" boxes** (where applicable) confirming you are:

- enrolled to vote;
- a member of the party; and
- not a member of another political party.

- and return the form to the VEC **straight away**.

Don't forget to tick all three boxes!

If you haven't received your letter—or have misplaced it - please let us know and we'll ask the VEC to send you another form (we'll need your name and address for that).

By returning your form, you will help us pass the legal test to contest the next state election in 2010— it is that important!

Please don't delay—the VEC has given us only a few days to have the responses sent back.

As you know, we are standing up to fight to keep what we love to do and how we live.

We are fighting to keep access to public land for fishing, four wheel driving and hunting, a sustainable timber industry and small business in regional Victoria.

We are fighting to stop the Greens who have policies that oppose or restrict those activities just mentioned. Guess what? They now have political power with 3 MPs in parliament!

Helping us pass the registration process is a simple but very effective way to help us go into bat for you and your family.

Just look at what is happening around you.

The current River Red Gum Inquiry which will lock families out of even more public land is a prime example of the need for Country Alliance to put pressure on the government not to cave in to the 'green agenda'.

If the VEAC recommendations are accepted, your kids will be shut out from areas where they might otherwise go fishing, camping, hunting, prospecting or find work—out of ignorance.

Other issues such as the closure of the First Murray Irrigation Trust are examples of other fights we will go into bat on in the lead up to the 2010 Victorian State Election.

Confirming your membership with Country Alliance, is confirming your support to help us go into bat for you on important issues that affect you directly.

If you have any enquiries regarding this process, call Neil on (03) 9017 6119, or on mobile 0425 746 066. Or email him at: admin@countryalliance.org

Support is growing

The level of support we have been receiving has been really impressive.

Various peak bodies have been promoting us and some of the individual stories have been just outstanding.

They include a widower of one month who had just come out of hospital but still wanted to donate a three figure sum ... and a 92 year old who just joined us volunteering to help us handing out How-To-Vote cards at the next state election. It can be pretty touching stuff.

Standing as a candidate

Getting someone elected is not easy. It requires significant commitments and those of you involved in our campaign at the last state election will know precisely what I mean.

It involves long hours, long miles and great personal expense. It requires building support and raising money to support the campaign.

However the 'prize' is a seat in parliament. That's where you can make a REAL difference to what you see happening around Victoria.

Imagine being in a position where you can have an impact on land management, VEAC, and supporting four wheel driving, shooting and fishing. Imagine being able to talk directly to the media about the Greens!!

As many of you will know, we have already started our search for candidates.

If you—or someone you know— is thinking about putting their hand up, then lets talk. Call Neil on 0425 746 066.

Inside

Re-registration starts	1
Our AGM	2
Our media releases	2
Fiona's speech in Mildura	3
Chairman's report	4

How your business can help

A significant amount of our membership has been recruited “over the counter” by small businesses who believe in what we stand for.

These include four wheel drive shops, gun shops, fishing stores, timber mills and general stores in small towns.

You’d be well aware of the number of customers who will stop for a yarn, often about track closures, marine parks and so on.

So, if you run a small business and want to do something about the pressure being placed on government by green extremists, why not grab a few of our flyers to give to your customers? That way they will be able to do their own bit to protect what we like to do.

If you would like us to send you some flyers (there is no charge), then call Neil on 0425 746 066.

Our AGM

Our AGM for 2008 was held in Bendigo.

Three of the nine executive positions were declared vacant, and saw the re-election of Russell Bate and Russell Pearson.

The third position, which had been vacated during the year, was filled by Keith Lyon. Welcome Keith!

Priorities for the forthcoming year include strengthening of our branches, ongoing recruitment of members and the start of our search for candidates for the 2010 Victorian State election.

All members will now move to a common expiry date of 1 July each year.

The next AGM will be held in Healesville on Saturday 25 July 2009.

Our media releases

We have been very busy on the media front this year.

Even though the next election is two years away, we have issued quite a number of media releases during the year.

Among those media releases issued were those:

- Calling for a ban on the imported Savannah cat—something the government did a few days later;
- Challenging the State Government’s ‘no dam’ policy;
- Challenging the Liberals to state their position on VEAC’s proposal to ban fishing, hunting, camping and other activities near the Murray River;
- Supporting the call by the Rivers and Red Gum Environment Alliance to ensure proper community consultation by VEAC;

- Called for a review on indigenous representation on the VEAC inquiry;
- Relating to our submission to a parliamentary inquiry into political donations, calling for a major revamp;
- Calling for the government to bring Parks Victoria under control after proposing to restrict fishing and beach access in the Otways;
- Released our anti-extremist protester policy;
- called for the State Government to comply with world conservation union recommendations;
- Challenged a Liberal MP over his claims of lawlessness within the Yarra Ranges community;
- Promoting our new policy supporting junior trail bike riders .

So, what is the VEAC proposal?

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council—or VEAC - is a government body tasked with an investigation into the future management of the red gum forests along the Murray River.

VEAC’s final report to Environment Minister, Gavin Jennings, recommends the massive expansion of national parks along the Murray River.

This would exclude timber harvesting, grazing, hunting, camping—and have no impact on the red gum forests!

Minister Jennings has now appointed a Community Engagement Panel, to assess the recommendations.

It remains to be seen what this comes up with but the fact it has been set up hopefully signals recognition that the recommendations should not be taken on face value.

CA supports the views of the *Rivers and Red Gum Environment Alliance*, which has represented community concerns over the unworkable recommendations.

In fact VEAC went outside its original terms of reference!

The Alliance has presented the Government with an alternative plan for biodiversity conservation under the internationally accepted Ramsar Convention on wetlands, which we believe the Government should accept.

One of Country Alliance’s policies provides a more permanent solution to the problem.

The policy is to abolish VEAC because of its incompetency!

Fiona's speech

Country Alliance's own Fiona Hilton-Wood did the party proud today when they featured on Nine News speaking out against the Victorian Government's decision to wind up the First Mildura Irrigation Trust ("FMIT").

The FMIT is a 112 year old entity, the only one of its kind in Australia. This unique Trust is run by a grower elected board of irrigators and has been operated, in simple terms, for the growers by the growers.

The demise of this unique Trust will see all of the FMIT's assets and customers placed under the control of the rival Government run water authority, Lower Murray Water.

Here is Fiona's speech to the 1,000 strong crowd.

Good morning passionate supporters of the FMIT and Sunraysia.

My name is Fiona Hilton-Wood. I am a local. I was born here and I grew up here on fruit blocks. My father was an irrigator and grower so I understand the connection of water to land. I'm a 38yo wife, mother and a small business owner.

I have seen this area go from once a lush green vibrant oasis, into now just dirt, dust and desert. You don't have to drive far from here to see dead vines and citrus.

As a child I recall the lush properties and hard working families that once made a decent living in this district, and now we like many other Australians are suffering from hardships that face this country all over.....

We face the likes of:

- *Cheap imports – where we have Californian citrus sitting in our own local supermarkets*
- *High petrol prices, and*
- *Low market prices for our produce*

And of course an ongoing drought.

But in Sunraysia we seemed to have recently been kicked while we are down!

MIS Schemes have long been looming and are now a reality. Our Governments and their representatives sit back and watch our family farms and generational careers and knowledge diminish before our very eyes.

A Toxic Waste Dump fight was forced upon us by this Government which cost our community extensively - both financially and in fighting spirit. But we won that one!

The recent announcement of the closure of the CSIRO Plant Laboratory at Merbein will have detrimental consequences to agricultural growth and sustainability to this area and many others.

We also face the appalling current state of our freight railways. Our region suffers from the lack of ability to effectively transport our fine quality grain and produce which we, as a food bowl, depend upon immensely.

The closures of the Walpeup Research Station and the Qantas Maintenance Base are further examples of cost cutting within our region.

They have even talked about fencing off parts of our Murray River and not allowing us to have a camp fire, let alone take the family dog camping on holidays.

And now this....the take over of the FMIT – 112 years of history gone in one fell swoop, what a dark day this is!

I ask myself are these all decisions for the greater good? For our benefit? Or are they just a question of change? I say a change alright – where once our Governments, politicians and their representatives listened to our communities now they don't even ask them. They tell us what is happening! This is a Democracy? – not in my book!

What I believe is, that this is a direct attempt of centralising services, the cutting of vital programs that have to date ensured our regions survival. Government reps from the likes of the DSE or DPI are merely agenda driven employees who are being paid big dollars to run to cost effective programs and to advise Ministers how to fit within their downsizing schedules or agendas.

Fiona's speech (continued)

It is my understanding that with a Democracy we have the right to be listened to by our Government and their representatives. This rally is more than just about the closure of the FMIT – this is about the fact that our Government, our elected representatives are not listening to those who know. YOU GUYS standing here today.

Those who have invested their lives in this area, those who have a stake to lose. Instead they hear what they want to hear from mindless bureaucrats who make final decisions for all of us behind closed doors – just like they are doing again here today.

Our history shows that the Chaffey Bros had a vision for this area – why? Because they lived here and saw what was needed. Now we have you – the people, the growers, the farmers, the families and you all know what is needed and what is best for our community – why- because you live here and are proud of where you live. Only growers know what's best for growers, that's why the FMIT was created with an elected board of growers.

And now some penny pinching bureaucrats sitting in their ivory tower in Spring Street wants to tell you what's best for you! How does that work?

Well, that's why we are here today!

It's vital that we have people like you here today, to be seen, to be heard and to let the Government know that we deserve to be listened to. I saw the other Sunday at the FMIT rally people with real passion about this area, I saw it again last week at the Grand Hotel – people who are passionate but people who are also frustrated.

And so I say to the State Government and to the so called politicians who are far from being our representative voice, you may take our services, and you may take our FMIT, you may even try to take our water. BUT JUST LET THEM TRY because you wont take our passion, you wont take our frustration, nor our uncompromising resolve to see that justice is done.

Thank you

Onya' Fi !!! By the way, where is the opposition on this matter? Nowhere, apparently.

The value of your membership

Contact Us

Country Alliance
PO Box 253
Mitcham Vic 3132
Ph: (03) 9017 6119 or
0425 746 066
E: admin@countryalliance.org

Email list

If you are not on CA's email list, then you can sign up online by going to www.countryalliance.org/signup.htm

Renewals

Thank you for your prompt renewal! It is a valuable contribution to our ability to contest the next election.

Contact us if you aren't sure if you have renewed your membership

Funding

Country Alliance is funded through membership fees.

Much of this is consumed through publications (such as this one!), particularly for postage and electoral registration fees.

Donations are important to any political party, and we are no different. If you can help, please feel free to do so using the form below.

Donations to political parties are tax deductible—see our website for more information.

~~X~~ **I wish to donate!**

Name:

Ph number:.....

I enclose a donation to Country Alliance of \$.....

Do you need a receipt?
 Yes No

We'll send the receipt to your last recorded address

Send this to:
 Country Alliance
 Reply Paid 253
 Mitcham Vic 3132

Thank you for your support!

There must be times when all of us wonder why we do this. Why do we bother to become a member of a small political party?

What can a party with just over 1000 members achieve in a political landscape dominated by the major political parties and by well funded minor parties like the Greens?

What is the value of my membership?

Each of us will have our own reasons for joining but I believe that there is one reason that we all have in common - a desire to speak up for what we believe is right and to speak out against what we know is wrong.

Our membership is an investment in our way of life is - whether that is a job in the timber industry, running a small family business, farming, fishing, hunting, rodeos or four wheel driving.

It has real value.

When Country Alliance was formed a little over four years ago we were well aware of the struggle ahead.

There was no handbook for starting a political party and it was certainly a case of learn as we go.

Despite the challenges we faced we were able to field three very credible candidates in the 2006 Victorian Legislative Council elections.

Our results demonstrated that a small, under-funded party can have an impact. The preference deals that we did with the major parties clearly showed that they took us seriously and it is now a matter of record that we came within a few hundred votes of securing seats in the Northern and Western regions.

What is perhaps most important is that our preferences determined the outcome in those two regions and ensured that the Greens did not gain the balance of power in the Victorian upper house.

So what does the future hold? Those of us who sat around a kitchen table in 2004 and decided that Victoria needed Country Alliance are as committed today as we were then.

Nothing has changed our belief that there is a growing and dangerous divide between the majority of urban Australians and those of us who live or pursue our pastimes in the bush.

If anyone doubts that this is the case you need only read the recent River Red Gum Forests Investigation report by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council.

The Report's statement that:

"large centres including Melbourne and regional cities inside and outside the investigation area (will) receive major environmental benefits (but that) the costs would be largely borne within the investigation area (Executive Summary - xiv)"

- typifies the willingness of some members of the environmental movement to sacrifice lives and livelihoods of country Victorians.

Duncan Malcolm, the VEAC Chair, openly stated that the need for biodiversity is more important than the communities of the red gum forests.

While thinking like this exists and while parties like the Greens are able to take advantage of the fears and ignorance of urban communities there will be a need for Country Alliance.

In recent months the Greens have taken to referring to Country Alliance as the "loggers and shooters" party; well they are partly correct and the last time I looked both of these activities were legal. But if they want to be really precise they should give us our full title - the "timber workers, irrigators, small rural communities, fishermen, 4 wheel drivers, shooters and those who love the bush" party.

I do prefer that to the "legalise drugs, bring back inheritance tax, and amalgamate farms and rural unemployment party".

We are in this for the long haul; stay with us and enjoy the fight.

*By Russell Bate,
Chair of Country Alliance*