

Rallying for brumbies

A rally protesting the removal of brumbies from the Barmah forest has resulted in the formation of a group to carry on the campaign.

About 200 people attended the heritage festival day to protest the planned removal by Parks Victoria of the horses from Barmah.

At a meeting after the rally, Murray Willaton was elected interim president of the Barmah Brumby Preservation Group, with Daryl Onley the vice-president, Sue Lubke treasurer and Lynette Sutton secretary.

Other people in the interim committee included Michelle Maulden, elder Sandy Atkinson, Jill Pickering, Max Baker and Peter Newman.

A petition was circulated and Lynette Sutton from Hoofs2010 estimated about 1000 signatures had been collected since the recent Barmah Muster.

"We'll be continuing the campaign to keep brumbies in the forest," Ms Sutton said.

She said they would develop a management plan for maintaining their presence in the future.

Parks Victoria is working on plans to remove the horses for environmental reasons but said it would not destroy them in the forest.

Bangerang elder Sandy Atkinson spoke in support of keeping the brumbies in the forest.

Nationals candidate for the new Shepparton seat (which will encompass Barmah), Greg Barr, spoke to the crowd and



Preservation group . . . At the Barmah heritage day were (from left) Jill Pickering, Sandy Atkinson, Murray Willaton, Barmah Goose, handler Daryl Onley and Max Schier.

Picture: Laura Buckley

said State Member for Rodney Paul Weller would take the petition to the Victorian Parliament.

Mr Barr said he attended the event to gather information and had not yet had the oppor-

tunity to research all aspects of the issue.

"If I am elected I see my role as supporting the Barmah community. That means taking their view to government."

He said his own view was not important.

"It's not a matter of what I want. I did not speak to one person who wanted brumbies removed yesterday, so I need to get across the whole issue."

New dairy facility officially opened

By Geoff Adams

The first new dairy manufacturing facility in Shepparton in decades was officially opened by Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss last week.

The \$45 million UHT factory is capable of producing 100 million litres per year but the owners already have their sights set on tripling that capacity.

The Pactum Dairy Group is a joint venture between Freedom Foods and Australian Consolidated Milk, targeting the south-east Asian market.

The ACM company, which has 120 suppliers producing 200 million litres of milk, largely from the northern Victoria and southern Riverina region, played a crucial role in getting the factory established in the Goulburn Valley.

ACM managing director Michael Auld said with the scale of supply, high quality milk and flat supply curve, it was a natural selection.

"We think all those ingredients go to support a high quality UHT plant in the region," he said.

The factory has four packaging lines already with the ability to install up to nine.

Freedom Foods managing director Rory Macleod said Australia had a unique advantage in the supply and manufacture of high quality premium agriculture-based foods.

Major shareholder in the Pactum Dairy is the Perich family, which runs a large-scale dairy farm at Camden.

Tony Perich said one of his goals was to see dairy prices lifted for farmers, and exporting to China was a priority in trying to achieve that.

Mr Truss said it was crucial for businesses in regional areas to tap into global supply chains.

"Pactum Dairy Group is capitalising on new opportunities presented by new and emerging markets, creating fresh prospects for the regional and national economies," Mr Truss said.

"This facility is a great example of strategic, well-planned and well-executed infrastructure that will improve the competitiveness of the region's dairy sector and underpin new jobs and economic opportunities for the Shepparton region."

■ More on page 52.

Bank to buy Rural Finance

Victorian Government agribusiness lender Rural Finance Corporation will be bought by Bendigo and Adelaide Bank for \$1.78 billion.

Treasurer Michael O'Brien said the asset sale was being made as part of a federal incentive to states to sell assets and fund new infrastructure.

The sale, expected to net a return of about \$400 million, plus a 15 per cent Federal Government incentive payment, will feature in this week's state budget.

Funds from the sale would go towards building infrastructure in rural and regional Victoria, including the Murray Basin rail project, which will extend the rail line from Mildura to Geelong.

Under the deal, staff jobs will be guaranteed for three years.

Bendigo and Adelaide Bank said the purchase price was about \$1.78 billion.

It said it would maintain the brand and its 11 locations across Victoria.

Bendigo and Adelaide Bank managing director Mike Hurst said Rural Finance would work with the bank's existing specialist agricultural business, Rural Bank.

The Victorian Government has also said it will go ahead with a medium-term lease of the Port of Melbourne.

The offer will go to market early next year but the government would not reveal how much it expected to net from the deal.

The lease is also being made under the Federal Government's asset recycling scheme, an initiative for states to sell off assets to pay for infrastructure.

Farmers rejoice as rain falls at right time

By Cathy Walker

April was a month of records and contrasts; while in metropolitan Melbourne the news services lamented the need for umbrellas on 10 separate days, around the state farmers were high-fiving with falls around 50 per cent above average, and more.

Record temperatures in some southern areas ushered the month in. Clearer-than-normal skies and weaker-than-normal cold fronts have

allowed north-western and central Australia to become hotter than normal.

Overnight minimum temperatures were warmer than average, as were daytime temperatures during April.

Yarrowonga received 118.9 mm in eight days against the recent average of 25.8 mm.

Its previous wettest month came in 1998 when 89.1 mm was delivered — a stark contrast to the record driest 12

months on record, 1997, when just 4.3 mm was recorded.

Echuca's monthly average for April of 32.4 mm was almost trebled when the area had 91.3 mm for the month. One day alone (April 10) eclipsed the record by itself with 46.2 mm in the gauge.

But Echuca's wettest ever April record still stands: 133 mm in 1929; and the driest — no rain at all in 1902 — can't be beaten either.

Further south at Mangalore

the average rainfall for April since 1958 was almost doubled: 37.3 mm against 2014's 68.8 mm.

Parts of northern Victoria ended their wettest April in decades with a final burst of rain after a front crossed the state last Tuesday.

For croppers who have been going hard since the dumping of rain earlier in April, the weekend provided some with a little compulsory down-time.



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