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VICTORIA



POLICE

CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

POLICE HEADQUARTERS

MELBOURNE

Our Ref.....

Your Ref.....

17th January, 1972

Mr. J. Kelly,
Shire Secretary,
Shire of Bulla,
45 Macedon Street,
SUNBURY. 3429.



Dear Sir,

Enclosed for your information is a copy of the notes taken at a Conference which was held on the 14th January, 1972, to discuss the proposed Sunbury Summer Happening.

Yours faithfully,

(S.I. Miller)
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

submission to the Bulla Shire Council were briefly explained to those present. (Copy of submission attached.)

It was pointed out that the promoters had made extensive and comprehensive enquiries and efforts to comply with any requirements of the Country Fire Authority, Health Department, Police, Local Government Department, Bulla Shire Council and Chief Secretary's Office.

"SUMMER HAPPENING" CONFERENCE

held in Conference Room, Police Headquarters,
at 10 a.m. on Friday, 14th January, 1972.

PRESENT:

- Mr. S.I. Miller, Assistant Commissioner (Operations)
(Chairman).
- Mr. H. Race, Chief Secretary's Office.
- Mr. J.R. Alder, Assistant Secretary, Local Government
Department.
- Mr. A.G. Pitfield, Chief Fire Officer, Country Fire
Authority.
- Dr. B.P. McCloskey, Assistant Chief Health Officer,
Health Department.
- Mr. P.E. Olsen, Chief Engineer, Health Department.
- Mr. J. Kelly, Shire Secretary, Shire of Bulla.
- Mr. E.C. Coady, Mental Hygiene Authority.
- Superintendent R.H. Warne, "Bourke" District.
- Superintendent H.M. Duffy, Special Groups.
- Inspector A.H. Absolon, Flemington.

The Chairman opened proceedings by saying that the conference had been called at the request of the Hon. the Chief Secretary and that he intended discussion to be divided into the following main headings:-

1. The Proposal
2. The Situation
3. The Implications
4. The Ultimate Responsibility

1. The Proposal

The proposals of Odessa Promotions as contained in their submission to the Bulla Shire Council were briefly explained to those present. (Copy of submission attached.)

It was pointed out that the promoters had made extensive and comprehensive enquiries and efforts to comply with any requirements of the Country Fire Authority, Health Department, Police, Local Government Department, Bulla Shire Council and Chief Secretary's Office.

2. The Situation

Mr. Race, Chief Secretary's Office, said that the Under Secretary completely agreed with the views of the Country Fire Authority in relation to the dangers of the situation and felt that it could lead to a State Disaster. He desired, if the festival was proceeded with, that Police be certain of their powers and that highways be kept clear of traffic.

Mr. Alder stated that his Department was not effected and could not intervene. They had adopted a completely neutral attitude.

An application which had been received from Odessa Promotions had been considered by the Bulla Shire Council and although they did not support or object to the proposal some concern had been expressed. They felt that their main attention should be given to the provisions of the Health Act and their Health Inspector and an assistant would attend the festival to ensure that health requirements were complied with.

Conference was informed by Dr. McCloskey that an application had been received from Odessa Promotions which had necessitated an approval being granted under Sections 194 to 197 of the Health Act for a public building. Subject to certain requirements being complied with, the Commission of Public Health had approved of the site. He said that the local municipal authorities would be expected to maintain 24 hour responsibility for the festival area but Inspectors from the Health Department would visit the area prior to the function and at times during the duration of the festival.

Mr. Coady brought under notice that the Sunbury Mental Hospital with some 800 mentally defective patients and 500 staff was nearby and concern was felt at the dangers of fire as the hospital property was heavily grassed. He added that it was an offence for unauthorized persons to pass through the property and despite the proposed employment of men to patrol the perimeter it might be necessary to call upon Police to remove intruders.

It was mentioned by Mr. Olsen that the sanitation requirements were laid down in the Camping Regulations formulated under the Health Act but that these Regulations were not strictly applicable in this situation where a large number of people would be congregated.

The Chairman said that the St. John's Ambulance Organization intended having 9 doctors, 39 nurses, 100 men and a field hospital at the site. In addition they would have radio and other facilities which they would make available to other organizations upon request.

Superintendent Warne stated that an inspection had been made of the site and, in view of the extreme fire hazard and traffic problems which could arise, objection had been made to the granting of a permit to hold this entertainment on a Sunday. He pointed out that there were only two roads to the property and these were narrow. The promoters desired one closed to all traffic except their artists and service vehicles.

Inspector Absolon considered that Romans Road, which linked the Lancefield Road and Calder Highway, should be kept available for use by emergency vehicles. It was a two lane road except where it crossed the bridge over Jackson's Creek. However, such a move would cause chaos with traffic which would all have to use the Calder Highway to get to and from Duncan's property. He pointed out that the Calder Highway

carried very heavy traffic on a holiday weekend such as this and, in addition, there were races scheduled to be held at Hanging Rock which would add to the traffic problem.

The Country Fire Authority had no power to approve or disapprove of the holding of this festival but after inspecting the site had expressed concern as it was considered that the holding of the festival was inviting tragedy as an outbreak of fire to the North-West could cause hundreds of casualties.

A meeting had been held with the promoters where it had been pointed out that the internal security must be of the highest possible order and that it would be the responsibility of the organizers. Odessa Promotions had been advised of the state of dryness of grass in the area and of the likelihood of days of acute fire danger occurring during that weekend. In addition the problems which could be encountered if a fire did occur had been stated and extensive advice given on what measures should be taken in regard to internal fire security.

Mr. Pitfield emphasized that the threat of a fire which occurred outside the festival area was even more serious than an internal fire.

3. The Implications

Dr. McCloskey said that consideration had been given to an outbreak of an infectious disease or food poisoning but it was not felt that either of these problems would arise. The Health Department would be mainly concerned to see that no public nuisance was caused in regard to smells, etc., and they were not concerned with a crisis occurring but only with a continuing situation.

Mr. Kelly stated that he did not consider it proper that the Council should have to spend ratepayers money in protecting neighbouring properties, providing sanitation services, etc.

Mr. Coady did not feel it advisable that patients from the Sunbury Hospital should attend the festival and said that, most likely, they would be forbidden to attend.

The Country Fire Authority had a responsibility to take all necessary steps for the protection of life and property in the country areas of Victoria. Access to the site of the promotion was of primary importance as there could be up to 40 emergency vehicles attending at the one time. Also, in the opinion of the Country Fire Authority, the Public Risks policy of \$400,000 was extremely inadequate and a policy in the order of \$1,000,000 would be more appropriate.

The Chairman pointed out that overseas experience had shown one of the primary problems of this type of festival to be severe sunburn. It had been advised that the honey-comb rock terrain in the area of the proposed festival could lead to many cases of fractured bones and lacerations.

4. The Ultimate Responsibility

The Chairman said that this commercial venture had imposed on the community a problem which was the responsibility of the organizations attending the conference and there were serious implications, particularly in terms of fire hazard. He added that the various services involved were prepared to accept responsibility in their own sphere but there was no doubt that the ultimate responsibility rested with the promoters.

He therefore suggested that a meeting be convened with Odessa Productions and that the things which could arise from the holding of this function at this time of the year at this place be put directly and forcibly to them.

Consequently, it was resolved as follows:-

This meeting views with alarm the decision to conduct a musical festival, namely a "Summer Happening", at Sunbury, on the Australia Day Weekend, because of the hazardous fire risk prevailing at that location at that particular time and the consequent danger to life and property. It is the recommendation of this meeting that a further meeting should take place with the promoters of the function, or their representatives, in an effort to dissuade them from holding this function on the occasion proposed and to postpone it until the fire risk has subsided.

Additionally, the meeting recommends that in order to confer control over future similar promotions the Government should consider the implementation of specific legislation to prohibit the conduct of such functions in hazardous circumstances or conditions.

Arrangements were then made for the meeting to be reconvened at 2.30 p.m. and for representatives of Odessa Productions to attend.

Proceedings re-opened with Mr. G. Rees Jones, Solicitor, representing Odessa Productions. He said that the function was being organized by his principals, who were responsible people, who were committed to go on with the venture as they would sustain a severe financial loss if it were postponed or cancelled.

The views and recommendation of the organizations present were then pointed out to Mr. Rees Jones who, in reply, stated that the recommendation would not be taken lightly but the situation was a balance of a known heavy financial loss against an unknown and incalculable risk. He said that his principals acknowledged and accepted that the ultimate responsibility was theirs and they would take whatever steps available to minimize the risk. He mentioned that there had been no fire in this area for 30 - 40 years but it was pointed out that conditions had not been the same in the past, particularly in regard to the number of people who would be in the area.

In response to a question as to whether he felt his principals might reconsider their decision to hold this festival, Mr. Rees Jones said that as no new aspects had been brought to his attention and despite the weight which must be given to an opinion expressed by a committee of this standing, he felt it unlikely that the function would be postponed or cancelled.

Mr. Rees Jones was requested to advise his principals of the emphatic feelings of those present that there was a very real and tangible risk of a major disaster occurring on the weekend in question. He agreed to perform this task and to advise the Police Department of any decision which his clients made as a consequence. Arrangements were made for Mr. Rees Jones to be suitably advised by letter.

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The meeting closed at 3.30 p.m.

D.M. Weeks
Conference Secretary

10.30 a.m. 15th January, 1972 (Saturday)

Mr. Rees Jones advised that his principals had considered the "balance between a known financial loss and an unknown, imponderable risk", and had decided to go ahead as planned.