

# Back to the future as local harvest comes in



Phillip O'Neill

THERE'S something about a harvest. Grain harvests in the Hunter start in November. Grapes come next. Then come stone fruit and berries and melons, then figs, and we all wish the Hunter had more of these and that we could buy them at our corner store still, like when we moved to the Hunter a quarter of a century ago.

The last harvest is olives, the new fruit on the block. A fortnight ago we drove to Mudgee to help friends pick their humble grove.

Olive trees stand out from other farm colours, their dusty grey-green is the colour of leaves on outback wattle, the colour that health authorities want for all cigarette packaging, as if it were a turn-off.

When I was a lad, olive oil was Popeye's girlfriend. Now, I was offering my day's labour for the promise of a bottle or two of the stuff; and, sure, to have a day out with friends but, as well, to use my hands to pick something that had been grown and to see it sent off for local processing by a skilled hand using little more than a hammer mill and a centrifuge, and get something delicious and unbranded back.

We who earn a quid hunched over a computer screen or tied to a phone are a pathetic lot, we in the services economy.

Why at the end of the day did we look with pride at two tonnes of produce stacked in crates on a truck, and feel tired and happy? Is it that we had done something productive for once?

Friends gathered at the appointed hour, you can picture us, \$2 cotton gloves that were to fall apart within the hour, straw hats, sensibly sleeved and buttoned check shirts, and swirling peasant skirts or oldest jeans.

The division of labour at muster went smoothly. The women gathered at the lowest branches where they could be most productive, but also because this gave them the best vantage to do the other thing they had gathered for: to talk.

The few children that were there, lured by parents' lies that picking



GOOD OIL: Recent events show people may become increasingly concerned with the origin of their food.

olives would be fun, were quickly bored and, appropriately, turned the paddocks into imaginary places and were soon elsewhere.

The dogs regarded it as a bit strange, a waste of good Sunday morning sunshine, except for one (ours) who ate every second olive that fell to the ground, and then vomited enough pigment to colour a truckload of cigarette packets, before retiring sensibly for a doze in the sun.

The work proceeded with diligence, farm-house-baked teas and barbecue lunch notwithstanding, the gang determined in its task, buckets and crates filling, productivity accelerating into the afternoon and the long shadows and horizontal light, and then the 100 trees done.

Industry experts tell me that Australia now supplies about 25 per cent of the nation's olive oil. But the unassailable majority supplier is Spain. Spanish oil is much cheaper, so Australian producers emphasise

the quality of their oil. As ever, excellent growing conditions mean Australian oil is invariably "extra virgin" – a nice way of saying that fatty acids make up less than 0.8 per cent of the oil by volume.

Australian producers can also emphasise freshness. Olive oil, their reps say, deteriorates with exposure to light, high temperature and oxygen. Best to watch the harvest date on the bottle or can, they say, and don't leave the opened oil for yonks in the back of the cupboard. Like any fruit juice, the delight of olive oil comes from its fresh smell and taste.

So I can't wait to taste the rich nutty oil from the fruit of my labour, a rare moment in modern eating where I will know where my food was grown and how it was processed.

Public disgust at the treatment of Australian cattle in Indonesian abattoirs is a good sign that people want ethical practices in the food industry, while 24 deaths in

Germany from E. coli infections heighten our watch for food supply contamination. Consumers want to know where their food comes from and under what conditions it is made.

In pre-industrial worlds, food was grown and processed locally, just like our friends' olive oil. Now food sourcing and processing involve supply networks and production sites that lap the globe. The link between harvest and table is rarely clear.

But the link can be made, if you look hard enough, especially in a region like ours. And when enough demand builds, be sure that once again we will all be able to buy local produce at our corner stores, and maybe serve it with a drizzle of local olive oil as an extra treat.

Professor Phillip O'Neill is director of the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.

# More sympathy for cattle than humanity

We have lost our heart, writes Colin Haggar.

JUST recently the federal government took decisive action to ban the export of live cattle to Indonesia because of the manner in which some of those poor animals are treated once in that country.

The government reacted because it was obvious that the public were appalled by the reports of abuse and mistreatment as presented by ABC TV's *Four Corners* program.

While this action by the government is welcome – no animal should have to suffer the cruelty that was being inflicted upon these beasts – other actions raise questions as to whether this government, and indeed this nation, has a human heart.

At the same time as we are

banning the export of live animals because of our fears for their welfare, the government has embarked upon (and does not appear to be willing to brook any opposition to) a policy of exporting live vulnerable human beings to another country that does not have the same values or commitment to human rights that we say we have.

And what is worse, the Immigration Minister, Chris Bowen, has indicated that this live human export includes unaccompanied children!

Malaysia has not signed the Refugee Convention and has a long record of abuse and mistreatment of people seeking protection.

Such mistreatment includes arbitrary arrest, detention and caning of asylum seekers.

I say to all Australians, where is our heart?

Why are we so quick to jump to protect cattle from mistreatment but

so slow to afford the same protection to human beings?

Illegal immigrants by the thousands are entering through the front door and are afforded all the comforts and protection we have to offer.

On the other hand, a small number of asylum seekers, people in fear of their lives, put their lives at risk to try and reach our back door – because that is the only door within their reach – and we turn them away because they have the temerity to use the wrong door!

If I found myself in the circumstances where I had to take such drastic action just to have a chance for my family and I to live, I would hope that I would find some sympathy and support from those who observed my plight. Unfortunately, on current record, Australia is probably the last place this could be expected.

If you are Australian, and you have a heart, I strongly urge you to not just complain about this shift in our values: why not actually do something?

Let the Prime Minister know that the mistreatment of human beings (and especially vulnerable children) matters much, much more than the unfortunate cattle being exported to Indonesia.

You can write to the Prime Minister online at: [pm.gov.au/contact-your-pm](http://pm.gov.au/contact-your-pm).

Let's restore some heart and soul to our great nation once again.

Major Colin Haggar is the secretary for business administration for The Salvation Army Newcastle and Central NSW Division. Article submitted by the Hunter Churches Media Association.



## King of the parks

DEVELOPER Keith Stronach's amended development application for a function centre at King Edward Park has received mixed reviews from online readers.

Sounds suspiciously like Surf House to me, just have a look at that monstrosity & how they fitted it on the "existing footprint".

– On Fire

Nice job! I think the kiosk will activate King Edward Park – be nice to sit up there and have a coffee – the function centre looks brilliant, well done.

– Westie

As with Surf House, this looks great. Get on with it.

– Duggo

Not exactly an inspirational design, unless it was inspired by a cardboard box. It's sad to see all these proposals coming along that look like strip-mall shopping centres.

– Ozzie

This state government-owned land should have been handed over to the council and incorporated into King Edward Park as exactly that – parkland.

– grub

Great stuff – Newcastle finally moving forward and another step in the right direction to sprucing things up and getting rid of dilapidated old buildings.

– Ross

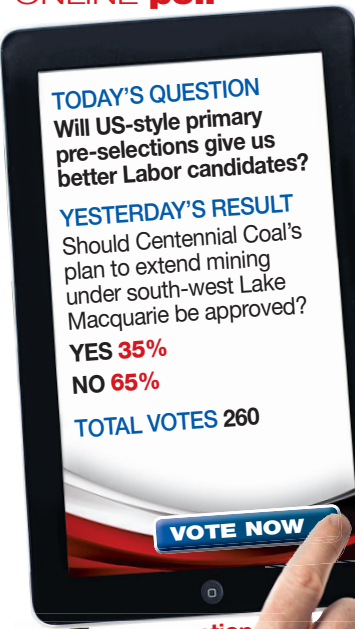
The proposal still misses the point that it will be an exclusive area, only to be used by relatively few patrons of the expensive function centre. The only part accessible by the average person will be the token cafe.

– council watcher

At the moment, NOBODY uses it, and ANYBODY can use the proposed facility. Should we ban new Holds and Fords because not everyone can afford them? And why do we need another small piece of parkland in what is already a massive park?

– bring it on

## ONLINE poll



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