



## Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria

PO Box 5083, Burnley, 3121  
www.mcav.com.au  
barker@vicnet.net.au

Phone 03 9429 8455  
Fax 03 9427 9324  
ABN 2534 2519 237  
26 June, 2004

Reg. No. A2117

# Submission to the caucus taskforce investigation into cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park

## Contents

---

1	Recommendation .....	Page 1
2	Introduction .....	Page 2
3	Short answers .....	Page 3
4	Short questions and answers .....	Page 4
5	Governments that have supported alpine grazing .....	Page 7
6	Terms of Reference .....	Page 9
7	Terms of Reference 1 - benefits and impacts of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park .....	Page 10
7.1	The current and potential benefits of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park .....	Page 10
7.1.1	Beneficial economic impact of cattle grazing .....	Page 10
7.1.2	Beneficial impact of cattle grazing on tourism and associated industries .....	Page 10
7.1.3	The cultural links from the past that signpost the future .....	Page 10
7.1.4	Monitoring .....	Page 11
7.1.5	Pest plant and animal control .....	Page 11
7.1.6	The value of local knowledge in emergencies .....	Page 11
7.1.7	Community .....	Page 11
7.1.8	The beneficial impact of cattle grazing on fuel for fires .....	Page 12
7.1.9	Supporting the cattlemen would be a win-win-win-win-win decision	Page 17
7.2	The current and potential impacts of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park .....	Page 19
7.2.1	The area of the Alpine National Park that is grazed by cattle .....	Page 19
7.2.2	What about the scientific "evidence"? .....	Page 19
7.2.3	The damage myth .....	Page 19
7.2.4	Cattle grazing and mossbeds .....	Page 20
7.2.5	Cattle grazing has not resulted in any significant degree of change in species composition .....	Page 21

8	Terms of Reference 2 - Economic, social and environmental implications . . . . .	Page 22
8.1	Implications for local communities and their economic and social viability .	Page 22
8.2	Implications for the cost of management services for the Alpine National Park . . . . .	Page 22
8.2.1	The cost of alpine leases . . . . .	Page 23
8.3	Implications for the security of natural resource values . . . . .	Page 23
9	Terms of Reference 3 - Options . . . . .	Page 25
9.1	Don't let's kid ourselves about "compromises" . . . . .	Page 25
9.2	Option 1 - buy-out of licences . . . . .	Page 25
9.3	Option 2 - establishment of a management plan . . . . .	Page 26
10	The draft management plan . . . . .	Page 27
10.1	Comprehension in communication . . . . .	Page 27
10.2	General Principles . . . . .	Page 27
10.3	Land Management . . . . .	Page 28
10.4	Cattle management - principles . . . . .	Page 28
10.5	Joint Management Committee . . . . .	Page 29
10.6	Scientific research . . . . .	Page 29
10.7	Cooperative ventures . . . . .	Page 29
10.8	Conclusion . . . . .	Page 30
11	Terms of Reference 4 - Natural, economic, social and cultural values of options . . . .	Page 31
11.1	Continued grazing . . . . .	Page 31
11.2	Implications of the removal of cattle grazing . . . . .	Page 31
11.3	Grazing is acceptable for World Heritage . . . . .	Page 31
11.4	Conclusion . . . . .	Page 32
12	Terms of Reference 5 - Other evidence . . . . .	Page 33
12.1	Who really is genuinely concerned about this issue? . . . . .	Page 33
12.2	The issue of alpine grazing is generated by the VNPA . . . . .	Page 33
12.3	The Government will not get any thanks or peace from the ecological lobby groups for removing cattle . . . . .	Page 33
12.4	The decades of the VNPA's support for alpine grazing . . . . .	Page 34
12.5	The ecological lobby groups are expecting politicians to break their promises . . . . .	Page 37
12.6	There are dozens of reports on alpine grazing because our opponents refuse to acknowledge that the issue is about more than just environment . . . . .	Page 38
12.7	Most minds are already committed . . . . .	Page 38
12.8	The issue is not about science and the impacts of cattle - it is about what is acceptable in a national park. . . . .	Page 39
12.9	Community support for alpine grazing . . . . .	Page 39
12.9.1	Scientific research quantifies community support for alpine grazing	Page 39
12.9.2	Demonstrations of community support for alpine grazing . . . . .	Page 40
12.9.3	Government surveys show strong support for alpine grazing . . . . .	Page 41
12.10	The Cain and Kirner Labor Governments supported alpine grazing . . . . .	Page 42
12.11	Mountain cattlemen are enshrined in tourism . . . . .	Page 42
13	The Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria Inc . . . . .	Page 43

## ***1 Recommendation***

The Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria recommends the continuation of alpine grazing in conjunction with a positive cattle and environment management plan which assures the conservation of natural values and biodiversity and enhances the cultural traditions associated with alpine grazing.

The MCAV recommends that the draft management plan outlined in this submission be finalised, with the following inclusions:

- The plan needs to reflect the environment in which the cattle are to be managed.
- Where appropriate and necessary, full time drovers will accompany the cattle.
- Where appropriate and necessary, solar electric fencing will be utilised.
- Licences will be reviewed and, where practical, areas never grazed removed from them to give a clear indication of the proportion of the Alpine National Park that is actually grazed. This should result in a fall from a perception of about 50% to less than 20%.
- The offer of the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) to be involved in joint policy development should be accepted and a representative of the VNPA invited to join the management plan implementation committee.

The finalised management plan should be implemented to support and direct the continuation of alpine grazing in the Alpine National Park.

## 2 *Introduction*

This is the Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria's submission to the May/June 2004 Caucus taskforce investigation into cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.

The mountain cattlemen and families are pleased to have this opportunity to present some facts about alpine grazing.

Members of the MCAV want to continue to graze cattle on licensed areas in the Alpine National Park and feel honour bound to continue the great tradition of responsible cattle grazing started by their families and predecessors about 170 years ago.

The MCAV, rural groups, and supporters are fired up on this issue which they see as a litmus test of the Government's concern and interest in rural Victoria. Any decision against the cattlemen, will be seen as the high water mark in recent decisions that have been adverse to rural interests.

Importantly, this issue also has strong relevance to urban residents and voters who have shown strong empathy for the cattlemen and want to see this tradition continue.

Alpine grazing is a core legislated promise and supporters will be extremely disappointed to see it raised again. The Environment Minister, the Hon. John Thwaites has said: "*Alpine grazing is a licensed activity and will continue as a licensed activity.*" (Hansard, 6.11.2003 Page 1616) A decision against the mountain cattlemen will resound throughout rural Victoria and disturb many of the thousands of supporters. The process embarked upon by the Government is too quick to accurately gauge public opinion but in earlier campaigns on this issue the MCAV found a vast, strong but essentially silent majority of the community supporting the mountain cattlemen. These supporters - urban and rural - generally do not write letters or submissions but they do vote.

This review gives the cattlemen the opportunity to present a positive alpine cattle grazing management plan. This plan, which is included in the Association's submission, includes initiatives to ensure that the cattle are managed in the best interests of conservation issues and the broader community's interest of culture and heritage preservation.

This submission contains a management plan that was initially partly developed with Parks Victoria.

The management plan acknowledges the scientific framework surrounding alpine grazing, utilises the cattleman's knowledge of animal husbandry, accepts the need to protect the conservation values of the area and presents the cattlemens' activities in a positive manner that adds to the so-called triple bottom line of the government.

The implementation of this plan is the only sensible option for the future.

---

Some material in this submission was prepared for the Association by Peter Attiwill. Peter Attiwill is Principal Fellow in the School of Botany at the University of Melbourne, Senior Fellow at The Australian Centre and retired Professor of Botany at the University of Melbourne. The sections prepared by Peter Attiwill are "Burning and grazing in the high country" and "Cattle grazing and mossbeds"

---

### **3      *Short answers***

This section lists the reasons why cattle grazing should continue in the Alpine National Park.

- 3.1      The cattlemen have a 170 year history of caring for the high country.
- 3.2      Alpine grazing is a core legislated promise.
- 3.3      Alpine grazing is a significant contributor to the Bracks' Government's triple bottom line.
- 3.4      If you view the whole policy mosaic, including community, economic, social, heritage and historic issues, the cattlemen win hands-down.
- 3.5      The cattlemen provide critically important cultural links from the past to the future.
- 3.6      Cattlemen provide essential local knowledge and experience. The presence of cattlemen provides a strong force to monitor pest plants and animals, adverse human behaviour and fire fuel conditions
- 3.7      Alpine grazing would support a nomination for World Heritage listing.
- 3.8      The beating up of the alpine grazing issues takes attention and money away from the real environmental issues.
- 3.9      The land was good enough, with alpine grazing, to be proclaimed as a national park.
- 3.10     Most mossbeds, on public and private land, both grazed and ungrazed, are flourishing. Some mossbed are in natural decline just as some are expanding.
- 3.11     Alpine grazing reduces the fuel for fires.
- 3.12     The cost of managing alpine grazing should not be significant and the MCAV is proposing some self-regulation.
- 3.13     The main opponent of the cattlemen, the VNPA, consistently supported alpine grazing through the 50s, 60s and 70s.
- 3.14     The community accepts cattle grazing in the context of a national park.
- 3.15     Government has no mandate to terminate licences.
- 3.16     Mountain cattlemen are enshrined in tourism.
- 3.17     The cattlemen are proposing a strong alpine cattle grazing management plan.

## **4 Short questions and answers**

This section lists the catch-phrases of opposition that have been used to argue against alpine grazing. These are followed by a short response from the MCAV.

### **4.1 Opponents of alpine grazing: Cattle spread weeds in the Alpine National Park.**

MCAV: Cattleman are on a constant look out for fresh outbreaks of weeds which can be spread by all types of agents especially the movement of four wheel drives vehicles. Cattlemen are “on the spot” and able to immediately control new outbreaks and prevent them from becoming major infestations. In the absence of cattle grazing, St Johns Wort is rife throughout Wonnangatta station.

Cattlemen have controlled weeds on their licensed runs. In some cases this has been with weedicides supplied by the management agencies. In other cases, the cattlemen have used their own weedicides..

### **4.2 Opponents: The cattle grazing does not reduce blazing**

MCAV: This is a complex issue and it is covered in some detail in the Association’s submission. However, suffice to say here that respected bush fire experts consider that the Esplin report was incorrect in relation to the impact of cattle grazing on fire fuel. The simplicity of this issue is that cattle reduce the amount of fuel available for fire and therefore must have an impact in the reduction in the intensity of fire. Some say that there are too few cattle to have any impact. Cattlemen would be pleased to increase the number of cattle grazing in the Park.

### **4.3 Opponents: Grazing damages mossbeds**

MCAV: The opponents of alpine grazing have sought to elevate the status of mossbeds to be like the old growth forests which have struck such a chord in the community during the anti-logging debate. After mythologising the mossbeds the opponents then seek to portray the cattle as trampling and trashing the newly established temple. This is spin. This is hype. It is not environmental science. In fact the mossbeds form an extremely small part of the Alpine area. In any event they are flourishing after 170 years of alpine grazing.

There are many mossbeds on private land, below the snowline, which are also flourishing and they are in paddocks grazed by cattle, for the whole year.

Mossbeds are protected from fire by cattle grazing which trims the adjacent grass. This lessens the likelihood a fire entering the mossbeds.

### **4.4 Opponents: The economics do not stack up.**

MCAV: Generally agistment is much more expensive than alpine grazing because agistment usually includes adequate water, fencing, security, monitoring of livestock and improved pastures. For alpine grazing, the land owner (the Crown) is under no obligation to supply anything other than the right to graze.

### **4.5 Opponents: The state is collecting an income of \$30,000 from the licenses, but it is costing at least \$500,000 a year to manage.**

MCAV: The cattlemen have never asked Parks Victoria to spend this sort of money managing alpine grazing. In any event, some cattlemen state that their only contact with Parks Victoria about alpine grazing is two letters a year stating an entry and exit date. The MCAV cannot imagine how Parks

Victoria has managed to spend \$500,000 in one year. In the past year management costs may have been exceptionally high but this was brought about by the 2003 fires

In another angle to this question, several cattlemen have complained about excessive monitoring of cattle herds, to the point of harassment, by Parks Victoria. In some of these cases cattle had been so disturbed that they have left runs and returned to the home properties. There is a concern that Parks Victoria has over-serviced this work to be able to present an exaggerated cost of management, as part of a bid by some of its staff to have cattle grazing terminated. The MCAV has raised the prospect of self-regulation which would substantially reduce the costs.

#### **4.6 Opponents: Cattle damage alpine streams and rivers.**

MCAV: There is no serious impact because stocking rates on alpine pastures is extremely low and stock are grazed for very short periods of time.

#### **4.7 Opponents: The culture of the cattlemen is wearing thin**

MCAV: There are many examples of how this culture is embraced and adopted throughout the community and probably reached a new high point with the Sydney Olympic Games.

The continuing interest in, and utilisation of, the high country imagery was recently highlighted by the opening of the Cattleman's Café at Mount Buller by the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. John Thwaites and the Drover's Dream Chairlift, by the Minister for Planning, the Hon. Mary Delahunty on 12 June 2004. The Planning Minister arrived on horseback resplendent in a Driza-bone coat and put on a cattleman's hat after dismounting!

#### **4.8 Opponents: Grazing threatens many plants and animals with extinction.**

MCAV: There is no evidence that cattle-grazing has eliminated rare and threatened species, nor is species composition and diversity irrevocably altered. Indeed, controlled cattle grazing has left the high country in excellent condition. The fenced plots clearly demonstrate the resilience of the alpine flora, even after decades of grazing

#### **4.9 Opponents: 60 years of scientific research which has consistently and comprehensively shown that cattle grazing on the high plains is having an environmentally degrading impact**

MCAV: If there has been 60 years of scientific research in incriminating cattle grazing, this research has been around since the mid 1940s. Quotes from the VNPA in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, contained in this submission, consistently show that the VNPA supported the continuation of cattle grazing in what is now the Alpine National Park. It is only in the last 25 years that the VNPA has turned against alpine grazing. This means that for 35 years the VNPA supported alpine grazing while it was fully aware of this scientific research.

#### **4.10 Opponents: Some of the licences are now held by businessmen who are not farmers.**

MCAV: We are also aware of criticism that cattle grazing licences are based upon "hereditary privilege" and that it is almost "impossible for an outsider to get a licence". On the one hand, cattlemen are criticised because some licences are held by businessmen but on the other hand are criticised because it is impossible for other people to obtain a licence. The fact is that new entrants are able to obtain licences and with the high cost of freehold land, it is probably only people with

other businesses who have sufficient money to buy these properties. The cattlemen welcome new entrants to alpine grazing - especially if they seek to open up old and vacated grazing runs located in State Forest. The cross-fertilisation of farming and financing ideas that flows from new neighbours is always viewed as a positive.

**4.11 Opponents: Some cattle are trucked to licence areas rather than walked in the traditional manner**

MCAV: Whether cattle are trucked or driven to licence areas, seems to be immaterial to the question of whether alpine grazing has any adverse impacts on the environment and whether it is an appropriate continuing activity. In any event, we estimate that just 5% of cattle grazed in the Alpine National Park are trucked to the runs. Additionally, in some cases Council by-laws have made it difficult to walk cattle to the licensed areas.

**4.12 Opponents: Cattle foul campsites and make them smelly, disgusting and a health risk. Cattle create damage to walking tracks and often excrete when disturbed, leaving disgusting fresh smelly excreta on the track and surrounding shrubs.**

MCAV: We think the way this objection obsesses about disgusting excreta says more about the complainant than the cattle. Sure cattle excrete but it is just recycled grass!

## 5 *Governments that have supported alpine grazing*

This is the list of Premiers of Governments of the State of Victoria which have supported alpine grazing

William Clark Haines	1855-57
John O'Shanassy	1857
William Clark Haines	1857-58
John O'Shanassy	1858-59
William Nicholson	1859-60
Richard Heales	1860-61
John O'Shanassy	1861-63
James McCulloch	1863-68
Charles Sladen	1868
James McCulloch	1868-69
John Alexander MacPherson	1869-70
Sir James McCulloch	1870-71
Charles Gavan Duffy	1871-72
James Goodall Francis	1872-74
George Briscoe Kerferd	1874-75
Graham Beny	1875
Sir James McCulloch	1875-77
Graham Berry	1877-80
James Service	1880
Graham Berry	1880-81
Sir Bryan O'Loughlen	1881-83
James Service	1883-86
Duncan Gillies	1886-90
James Munro	1890-92
William Shiels	1892-93
James Brown Patterson	1893-94
George Turner	1894-99
Allan McLean	1899-1900
Sir George Turner	1900-01
Alexander James Peacock	1901-02
William Hill Irvine	1902-04
Thomas Bent	1904-09
John Murray	1909-12
William Alexander Watt	1912-13
George Alexander Elmslie	1913
William Alexander Watt	1913-14
Sir Alexander James Peacock	1914-17
John Bowser	1917-18
Harry Sutherland Lawson	1918-24
Sir Alexander James Peacock	1924
George Michael Prendergast	1924
John Allen	1924-27
Edmond John Hogan	1927-28
Sir William Murray McPherson	1928-29
Edmond John Hogan	1929-32
Sir Stanley Seymour Argyle	1932-35
Albert Arthur Dunstan	1935-43

John Cain	1943
Albert Arthur Dunstan	1943-45
Ian Macfarlan	1945
John Cain	1945-47
Thomas Tuke Hollway	1947-48
Thomas Tuke Hollway	1948-50
John Gladstone McDonald	1950-52
Thomas Tuke Hollway	1952
John Gladstone McDonald	1952
John Cain	1952-55
Henry Edward Bolte	1955-72
Rupert James Hamer	1972-81
Lindsay Hamilton Thompson	1981-82
John Cain	1982-90
Joan Elizabeth Kirner	1990-92
Jeffrey Gibb Kennett	1992-99
Stephen Phillip Bracks	1999-

Below is the name of any Premier who has not supported alpine grazing:

.....

## 6 *Terms of Reference*

In his statement announcing this Caucus taskforce investigation into cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park, Mr Thwaites said, “*graziers were due to receive an indication about future licensing arrangements in August this year, given that most of the seven-year grazing licences expired in August 2005. ... We need to investigate the current and potential benefits and impacts of cattle grazing in the Park. ,*”.

- Investigate the current and potential benefits and impacts of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.
- Consider the implications of renewal or non-renewal of cattle grazing licences for local communities and their economic and social viability; for the cost of management services for the Alpine National Park; for the security of natural resource values; and for the viability of the park.
- Based on these considerations, examine possible options for the future of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.
- Within each viable option, identify opportunities for maximising natural, economic, social and cultural values.
- Identify any further available evidence that will be useful to the Minister in making his decision on whether to renew licences that expire in August 2005, and in determining what conditions may be required in relation to any renewed licences.

## **7 Terms of Reference 1 - benefits and impacts of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park**

*Terms of Reference 1 - Investigate the current and potential benefits and impacts of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.*

### **7.1 The current and potential benefits of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park**

#### **7.1.1 Beneficial economic impact of cattle grazing**

The MCAV is aware of the work being undertaken by URS Consultants on an Alpine Grazing Socio-economic Assessment. This work should provide an objective measurement of the economic impact of alpine grazing on local families and local communities. There would be little point in the MCAV seeking to replicate this work. Indeed the work being undertaken by URS will be based on economic data provided by individual cattlemen.

It might now be shown that the economic impact of alpine grazing is, however beneficial, relatively small. This is not the doing, or the preference of the mountain cattlemen. Over the past 50 years the number of cattle taken to the high plains has been gradually reduced as licences have been progressively terminated. This means that the economic impact will now be lower than it has been in previous years. Any reduction in economic impact has been caused by government action in terminating the licences. The cattlemen would be pleased to be given the opportunity to substantially increase the economic impact by increasing the number of cattle taken to the high plains.

Nevertheless, the URS work will show that the importance of alpine grazing varies between individual families. The MCAV stresses that the alpine grazing issue is not just about economic impacts. Because of this the value of alpine grazing can not be measured solely in terms of its current economic impact that arises from the production of beef and beef cattle.

#### **7.1.2 Beneficial impact of cattle grazing on tourism and associated industries**

Over recent years, alpine grazing has spawned a wave of economic opportunities. This has ranged from tourism ventures based on cattle grazing, to the film industry and through to the clothing industry which has developed a range associated with the mountain cattlemen. In the time available for the preparation of submissions it has been impossible to quantify the economic impact of the renewed interest in the alpine grazing industry since the 1980s. The renewal manifests itself in many ways, not the least being the strong support for alpine grazing in the towns surrounding the alpine areas.

The continuing interest in the high country imagery has recently been highlighted by the opening of the Cattleman's Café at Mount Buller by the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. John Thwaites and the Drover's Dream Chairlift, by the Minister for Planning, the Hon. Mary Delahunty on 12 June 2004. The Planning Minister arrived on horseback resplendent in a Driza-bone coat and cattleman's akubra after dismounting!

#### **7.1.3 The cultural links from the past that signpost the future**

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the community places high value on its cultural links to the past. If we don't have a connection to the past, we think the page we are on is the whole story and fail to comprehend that the current page is but one of many in the book - past and future. These links to

the past are critical because they provide navigation points to the future. It is time to recognise the past, embrace its iconic images and give our community breadth of vision. When we find that one of the icons of past is still alive and flourishing, like the traditional practices of the mountain cattlemen, we should support them as we would a national treasure.

#### **7.1.4 Monitoring**

Cattlemen form an important monitoring force within the Alpine National Park as they move to and from the licence areas and while they attend to their herds. The cattlemen will continue to report inappropriate activities to the management agencies.

#### **7.1.5 Pest plant and animal control.**

Cattlemen have always been involved in the control of pest plants and animals in the Alpine area.

In the control of pest plants, cattlemen have been provided with weedicides supplied by DSE and Parks Victoria. The cattlemen can continue to monitor weeds and provide advice to the management agencies. They are prepared to assist in control measures at the request of the authorities.

Wild horses, dogs, pigs and cats do considerable damage in many areas of the high country. Severe damage can be caused by horses which graze the area for a longer period than cattle and graze closer to the ground. Over the years, the cattlemen have assisted the management agencies in the control of pest animals. In more recent times, three colonies of wild pigs and numbers of wild cats have been killed in areas immediately surrounding the Bogong High Plains. Cattlemen will actively assisted in controlling the pest animals that are causing damage to flora and fauna.

There is a considerable economic gain to Parks Victoria and the Government in having cattlemen controlling pest plants and animals. A small outbreak of a new weed removed by a cattleman could eventually save Parks Victoria considerable money and work in later control of a major infestation.

#### **7.1.6 The value of local knowledge in emergencies**

The experience of cattlemen has been drawn upon many times in rescues and fire fighting. During the 2003 bushfires the cattlemen's knowledge of the bush and fire behaviour was constantly used and appreciated by the control bodies. In the aftermath of the fires it was acknowledged that the fire fighting agencies should have taken even more notice of local information and knowledge. Few people would have better knowledge of fire behaviour in the Alpine National Park and the cattlemen are always pleased to pass this on to the management agencies.

The value of the local knowledge of mountain cattlemen in resolving emergencies is irreplaceable and has assisted in saving many lives. Two recent examples include a deer hunter who had become disoriented and would otherwise have perished and the rescue of a local person who had broken his leg. The Police, CFA. and SES rely heavily on the cattlemens' knowledge of tracks to gain access to little known areas. The local knowledge of weather patterns is also invaluable. In this inhospitable country and climate any delay is potentially lethal. As indicated earlier, cattlemen are available to assist the management agencies in fire and other emergencies.

#### **7.1.7 Community**

High country cattle grazing is part of the total community livelihood in the alpine and surrounding areas. It is a vital part of the economy which sustains communities and puts players on football fields, contributors in CWA meetings and volunteers on fire trucks.

This is an extremely important aspect of alpine grazing and the MCAV stresses this importance to local communities. For the smaller communities such as Omeo the richness of the culture relies heavily on the cattlemen and the removal of it would be devastating for the soul of the town.

### 7.1.8 The beneficial impact of cattle grazing on fuel for fires

#### Burning and grazing in the high country

The Esplin<sup>1</sup> Inquiry discussed the topic of burning and grazing in the high country under the slogan, said to be a 'claim', that 'grazing prevents blazing'. We do not know who has claimed that 'grazing prevents blazing'; it is not the claim of the mountain cattlemen. As we shall show in this section, there is abundant evidence for the claim of the mountain cattlemen and of many others that 'ALPINE GRAZING REDUCES BLAZING'.

The Esplin Inquiry concluded that '*there is currently no scientific support for the view that "grazing prevents blazing" in the High Country*'. Whether or not there is scientific support is irrelevant in view of the abundant field evidence following the 2003 fire that fire intensities in grazed areas were lower than in ungrazed areas. The Esplin report includes the curious comment (p. 85) that 'today, the high country in Victoria is largely grazed by cattle', when in fact grazing of the high country has been progressively reduced from a peak in the 1940s to less than about 16% of the alpine area today. At the time of the 2003 fire, there were therefore large tracts of the high country from which cattle had been excluded for years, and smaller tracts where cattle grazing continued. It is quite apparent from simple field observation that the fire burned with a more patchy distribution and at lower intensities in areas where cattle had grazed (for example, Pretty Valley) than in areas where cattle had been excluded (for example, Mt Nelse).

A particularly good example of this difference in patchiness and intensity is the comparison inside and outside a fenced plot established in 1986 to exclude cattle grazing, adjacent to the Falls Creek – Omeo Road at Middle Creek, near the Mt Cope turnoff. The vegetation within this exclusion plot burned with very much greater intensity over a much greater proportion of the area, compared with vegetation outside the plot. If this were not so, it would be rather curious. Everyone acknowledges the obvious – that grazing by cattle reduces the amount of vegetation per unit area! In this respect, the Esplin Report (p. 86) includes a statement of the absolutely obvious: 'grazing animals will affect grassy biomass according to their stocking density'. The fuel load per unit area (or the amount of vegetation per unit area) is the principal determinant of fire intensity for a given set of conditions. The Esplin Report is very weak in its assessment of fuel management in the high country. The assessment (p. 86) is sprinkled with uncertainties: 'shrubs are most likely to burn'; 'grazing would have a negative impact if'; 'grazing animals are more likely to remove the green material'; 'free-range cattle grazing appears to have'.

Wherever there is fuel, there is the propensity for fire. We can have the best systems of fire suppression, but even the super-best systems – including fire-bombing helicopters and planes – are puny at the top end of bushfire intensity. At this intensity, heat is released at the rate of 100,000 kiloWatts per metre of fire edge, equivalent to 100,000 large household radiators. Under favourable conditions, we can put out a fire at an intensity of only 2% of this maximum rate – which is still pretty incredible if you think of the combined heat of 2,000 household radiators concentrated within a metre (from Cheney 2004)<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup>Esplin B (2003) Fuel management in the 'High Country' Chapter 8 in *Report of the Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian Bushfires*. pp 84-86. (McLaren Press: Abbotsford, Victoria)

<sup>2</sup>Cheney P (2004) 'Canberra: The Bush Capital or the Bushfire Capital'. Canberra Day Oration 2004

When it comes down to it, the only thing that we can control is the load of fuel available to be burned. 'ALPINE GRAZING REDUCES BLAZING' is a correct slogan, conveying an exact message. Like all slogans, it is basically simple. The controlled management of the fuel load, whether by grazing or by controlled fire will not stop bushfires, but it will provide a mosaic of fuel loads – a patchwork that will limit the spread of fire under severe weather, and so aid the suppression of unplanned bushfire.

In concluding that '*there is currently no scientific support for the view that "grazing prevents blazing" in the High Country*', the Esplin Report is literally factual insofar as all fuels will burn. However, this conclusion entirely misses the point that the reduction of fuel loads throughout the alpine region is essential to fire management.

Controlled grazing can be readily accommodated within the high country as part of this planned fire management, together with controlled, ecologically-based burning in the sub-alpine and lower forests. So in its greater complexity, the slogan of the mountain cattlemen that 'ALPINE GRAZING REDUCES BLAZING' means: 'grazing, together with the planned use of fire, reduces the devastating and ecologically disastrous blazing of unplanned fires'.

### **Managing fuel loads in the high country: grazing and fire**

Melissa Fyfe<sup>3</sup> writes of the 'prolific' evidence, laid bare by the devastation of the 2003 fire, of at least 5,000 years of occupation of the high country by Aborigines:

*'It is thought the alps were a meeting place – to trade, to find marriage partners, for ceremonies and initiations – for Aborigines all around the skirts of the alpine country, from the lowlands of Gippsland to Omeo to Mansfield and from as far as NSW. Many of the artefacts were found along Aboriginal "Highways", well-worn paths to the high country used for thousands of years'.*

Fyfe quotes an Aboriginal elder: 'We know now it was an area that supported big populations of people in the summer months'. In view of the apparent numbers and extent of Aboriginal occupation, it seems safe to assume that fire was used over most of the alpine country over thousands of years, and we cannot ignore the major impact that Aboriginal burning had on Australia's flora and fauna.

David Bowman<sup>4</sup>, one of Australia's foremost fire ecologists, describes this impact:

*'Aboriginal people played an important part in the making of flammable Australia as we now know it, but they did not trigger the relentless fire cycle; rather, over some 40-70 000 years they learnt to harness the naturally-occurring fires to their economic advantage. This has been described as 'fire-stick farming', but given the central importance of fires for hunting perhaps a more apt description may be "fire-stick ranching"'*.

Bowman provides a valuable conceptual theory of the changing fire regimes in Australia. The transition is one from large-scale, lightning-caused fires to fine-scale mosaic burning by Aborigines

---

<sup>3</sup>Fyfe, M (2004) 'High on the mountain ridges, an ancient society emerges'. *The Age* June 5, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Bowman DMJS (2003) Australian landscape burning: a continental and evolutionary perspective. In *Fire in Ecosystems of South-west Western Australia: Impacts and Management*. Eds I Abbott and N Burrows, pages 107-118. ( Backhuys Publishers: Lieden)

to larger and more intense fires ('feral fires', because of increased fuel loads and shifts in seasonal timing and frequency) under European settlement. Bowman writes:

*In the pre-human period, lightning started fires infrequently and burnt large areas, creating a broad-scale habitat mosaic to which various species of birds and mammals had become adapted. Aboriginal fire management was characterised by a high frequency of fires that burnt much smaller areas, producing a fine-scale habitat mosaic that supported most of the pre-human wildlife assemblage, with the notable exception of the Pleistocene megafauna. Under European fire management, fires ... burnt large areas thereby obliterating the pre-existing habitat mosaic created by Aboriginal landscape burning."*

The Esplin Inquiry<sup>5</sup> concluded that 'we do not know enough about traditional burning strategies and objectives in southern Australia to be able to implement an Aboriginal burning regime'. This conclusion certainly appears to be valid for much of the high country, and there is no reason why we should try to define and implement such a regime. Burning in the high country was banned both in New South Wales and Victoria in the 1940s and 1950s. It is now essential, as outlined in the Esplin Report<sup>6</sup> that appropriate burning regimes are now established and implemented with clear goals identified, on the best ecological principles, on the most appropriate scales for fire management, and on the most appropriate scales to ensure that catchments are not destabilized.

Again, as we have concluded above, controlled grazing can be readily accommodated within defined regions of the high country as part of this planned fire management, together with controlled, ecologically-based burning in the sub-alpine and lower forests. The knowledge, experience and participation of local communities, and particularly of the mountain cattlemen whose families have worked in the high country for generations, will be essential to the timing and safe conduct of prescribed burning.

This conclusion is really nothing new! Twenty years ago, Hodgkinson and Harrington<sup>7</sup> stated that 'It is now apparent that fire can be used to control shrubs and that there is sound ecological basis for doing so. We call upon the State Government departments concerned, and the graziers, to collaborate in regional planning, so that prescribed burns are safely carried out at the optimal time and in a useful pattern across the countryside' (the underlining is ours; and we note that the reference is to high country woodlands, rather than to grasslands and shrublands).

### **Fire, grazing and biodiversity**

There has been considerable monitoring and debate on the effects of cattle grazing on shrub establishment. Some studies (see Figure 3.4 for the Rocky Valley plot in Williams<sup>8</sup>) show little

---

<sup>5</sup>Esplin B (2003) Traditional burning practices of Aboriginal people and the prescribed burning debate in Victoria, Chapter 12 in *Report of the Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian Bushfires*. pp 117-122. (McLaren Press: Abbotsford, Victoria)

<sup>6</sup>Esplin B (2003) Chapters 9 - 11 *Report of the Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian Bushfires*. pp 84-86. (McLaren Press: Abbotsford, Victoria)

<sup>7</sup>Hodgkinson KC, Harrington GN (1985) The case for prescribed burning to control shrubs in eastern semi-arid woodlands. *Australian Rangeland Journal* 7, 64-74

<sup>8</sup>Williams RJ (2003) Fire and grazing interactions in the alpine and subalpine ecosystems: assessing the impacts of natural values of alpine landscapes posed by a return of cattle to areas of the Alpine National Park burnt by the 2003 fires. In *Report of the Scientific Advisory Panel on Fire-affected Grazing*. Report prepared for Parks Victoria, pp 17-44.

difference between grazed and ungrazed plots in the rate of recovery of shrub cover in closed heath and heathland in the years since the 1939 fire. However, it has been hypothesized that in the long-term absence of cattle, the shrubs will become senescent and gaps created by this senescence will be filled by grasses and herbs, eventually leading to the reversion of heathland to grassland<sup>9</sup>. It has also been suggested that cattle grazing creates patches of bare ground which provide the competitive edge for shrubs. However, simple observation shows that bare-ground patches do not always correspond with the establishment of shrubs.

As with most ecological problems, there is no simple equation or outcome. Factors other than gap dynamics are in force which complicate the simple extrapolation of theories on a broad scale. For example, Wahren et al.<sup>10</sup> support the hypothesis that the exclusion of cattle grazing leads to an increase in grasses and herbs using the example of *Phebalium* and *Grevillea*, but other shrubs do not comply so well. For example, in the absence of cattle, *Asterolasia* species appear to be senescing but are replaced by other shrubs, as well as by grasses and forbs.

By far the greater monitoring of vegetation change in the high country has involved the comparison of grazed areas with ungrazed areas; the ungrazed area becomes the reference. This raises the question: what should be the right reference? Given the fact that fire has been a major factor in the evolution of all Australian ecosystems, and given the recent evidence of far more intensive and extensive Aboriginal occupation of the high country than we had previously thought, and over thousands of years, should disturbance by grazing be compared with frequent disturbance by light fire?

In fact, the effects of fire on vegetation structure and composition in the high country of Australia have not attracted much research until recently. There have been a few studies after major fires (e.g. Caledonia), and the effects of these fires are summarized in general terms by Kirkpatrick:<sup>11</sup>

*'an intense fire stimulates the germination of soil-stored seed that would not have broken dormancy at lower temperatures. It also provides a relatively short period of freedom from competition, by weakening the ground stratum plants, such as tussock grasses, that normally prevent the establishment of seedlings of many species . . . The fire may be followed by the development of thickets of regenerating trees and shrubs, which can eliminate much of the ground stratum through shading and root competition. Such thickets can be important for shelter for threatened animal species, but the majority of such species also require more open vegetation, and threatened plant species of relatively small mature stature can be eliminated. Fire also stimulates grass growth.'*

The comparison of the effects of grazing with ungrazed plots protected from fire implies that fire is not a part of the landscape. It is our strong view that the most significant need is to understand the effects of grazing on vegetation composition and structure relative to the effects of frequent fires of

---

<sup>9</sup> Williams RJ (1990) Cattle grazing with subalpine heathland and grassland communities on the Bogong High Plains: disturbances, regeneration and the shrub-grass balance. *Proceedings of the Ecological Society of Australia* **16**, 255-265

<sup>10</sup> Wahren C-HA, Papst WA, Williams RJ (1994) Long-term vegetation change in relation to cattle grazing in subalpine grassland and heathland on the Bogong High Plains: an analysis of vegetation records from 1945-1994. *Australian Journal of Botany* **42**, 607-639

<sup>11</sup> Kirkpatrick JB (2003) Nature conservation values in montane and lowland areas, fire-stock grazing interactions and options for their management in areas licensed for stock grazing. In *Report of the Scientific Advisory Panel on Fire-affected Grazing*. Report prepared for Parks Victoria, pp 8-16

low intensity. We have known for 50 years (and before that, by simple observation) that frequent fires of low intensity in the high country of New South Wales maintain grasslands and control the expansion of shrubs<sup>12 13</sup>. In fact, Newman<sup>14</sup>, a member of the New South Wales Soil Conservation Service, stated that:

*‘Grazing has not led to any marked change except where (frequent, light) fire has initiated erosion or vegetative depletion’.*

Kirkpatrick<sup>15</sup> also commented on the significant effects of periodic fire: ‘without grazing and/or frequent fire . . . tussocks can close, eliminating the inter-tussock spaces relied upon by several threatened herbs and small grasses.’ We know furthermore that the build-up of closed tussocks results in the accumulation of large quantities of dead plant material (sometimes called ‘thatch’) that immobilizes plant nutrients, resulting in a decrease in productivity and an increase in flammability. Grazing and fire are both disturbances that rejuvenate grasslands and restore nutrient cycling and productivity. Again, this is something that managers of grasslands the world over have known for centuries.

How, then, should we manage diversity in the high country? Simply leaving the high country to its own devices is no solution; such a scenario will inevitably lead to a repeat in due course of the ecologically disastrous fires of 2003. As we have argued above, frequent, mild burning is essential both for ecological management and for fire management. Can cattle grazing be ecologically sustained under such a regime? Our answer is an unqualified ‘YES’.

Despite decades of cattle grazing, the grazed areas retain high levels of diversity, and diversity on previously grazed areas has not been compromised. Furthermore, Kirkpatrick<sup>16</sup> noted that none of the grazed leases in the montane or lowland zones that were burned in the 2003 fire lacked recorded significant species. We therefore argue that cattle grazing can be readily controlled and accommodated within the management framework we have outlined.

Cattle grazing can be readily accommodated within the ecological framework provided by Kirkpatrick:<sup>17</sup>

- How do we define the goals of management for nature conservation management?
- Should we aim to ‘replicate the structure and biotic composition of pre-European times? Except in a very general sense, this is not possible, as our knowledge of these attributes is very restricted’.
- *‘Most ecological communities have a variety of potential expressions, relating to disturbance history, and particular permutations within communities have been shown to be important in maintaining populations of many threatened vertebrate species’.*

---

<sup>12</sup> Newman JC (1955) Tumut catchment area – survey of vegetation and erosion. III Vegetation. *Journal of the Soil Conservation Service of New south Wales* **11**, 95-111.

<sup>13</sup> Hodgkinson KC, Harrington GN (1985) previously cited

<sup>14</sup> Newman JC (1955) previously cited

<sup>15</sup> Kirkpatrick JB (2003) previously cited

<sup>16</sup> Kirkpatrick JB (2003) previously cited

<sup>17</sup> Kirkpatrick JB (2003) previously cited

- *‘It seems logical to aim for a variety of states for any one community, while ensuring that the combination of states within and between communities that is required by rare or threatened species is preferentially maintained’* (the underlining is ours).

There is no logical or *a priori* reason why controlled grazing of cattle cannot be accommodated as part of ecologically sustainable management aimed within this goal of maintaining a variety of states, given especially that grazing is restricted to about 16% of the total area of the high country

Finally, disturbance is important in other aspects of the management of diversity, as noted by Kirkpatrick:<sup>18</sup>

- *‘the main risk of not grazing with domestic animals is the development of dense thickets, or dense tussock grass cover, that may lead to a loss of poorly-dispersed species that depend on open ground for their survival and have no mechanism for long-term storage of eggs or seeds’*
- *‘a second risk attached to the absence of grazing is that palatable weeds may become a problem’.*

#### **7.1.8.1 A further note on fire fuel and cattle**

Cattlemen often note that, at the alpine and sub-alpine levels, there is often a margin of grassland between the creeks and adjacent forest. These open grasslands are preferred by grazing cattle because the pasture has the benefit of more sun and may be more palatable. The result is that these areas are regularly trimmed each year and are ready to act as fire breaks in the hazardous late Summer fire season. The continuation of grazing will mean that many of the valleys in the high country, and much of the land between them, will be maintained in a fire safe condition.

In the 1980s the Government's Pricing Panel (established to review Crown land rentals) noted that:

*“There are benefits which accrue to the Cattlemen in having alpine and bush runs. Similarly, there are benefits which accrue to the Crown in licensing these areas”.*

Fuel reduction burning in conjunction with well-managed grazing should be used as a primary management tool in reducing the possibility of wild fire. More than twenty years ago the former Government agency, the Land Conservation Council's report on the Alpine area acknowledged that: *“In some areas, grazing can assist in management by reducing the build up of dry plant residues particularly when exotic pastures have been introduced, thus lessening fuel available for fires”.* In this context grazing referred to public land generally and not the Alpine National Park specifically. In its 1988 report *“Statewide Assessment of Public Land Use”*, the Land Conservation Council stated that *“well managed forest grazing can also provide community benefits through weed control and fire-fuel reduction”.*

#### **7.1.9 Supporting the cattlemen would be a win-win-win-win-win decision**

In today's politics we hear all about “win-win decisions.” A decision to support the cattlemen would, uniquely, be a win-win-win-win-win decision. The wins would be:

---

<sup>18</sup> Kirkpatrick JB (2003) previously cited

The Government will **win**. The Association, its members and many supporters of the mountain cattlemen will applaud this decision. Many people will think more highly of the Government if, for just once, it stands up to the unacceptable demands of the now strident ecological lobby groups

Rural people will **win**. Many rural groups will see this as recognition that the Government is concerned about their issues.

Melbourne communities will **win**. There will be satisfaction in simply knowing that a tradition and history are still alive - the mountain cattlemen are still taking cattle up to the high plains. Just as conservationists have argued that you don't have to go to wilderness areas to derive some satisfaction from knowing they exist, so too do people like to know the mountain cattlemens' tradition continues.

Whole country communities would **win**. The cattlemen have a critically important role in their local communities. They are part of the fabric of the local community and give substance to the romance of taking cattle onto high plains during summer.

Economic activity, such as tourism, latched onto the cattlemen branding would **win**.

Future generations will **win**. The link to the past will provide part of the signposts to the future.

The cattlemen will **win**.

## 7.2 The current and potential impacts of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park

Mountain cattlemen are aware of the conservation issues surrounding alpine cattle grazing and how the land needs to be managed to ensure that protection is maximised and that the activity results in net positive benefits.

### 7.2.1 The area of the Alpine National Park that is grazed by cattle

	Hectares	Percent
Total size of Alpine National Park	660,500*	100%
Area available for grazing	310,000*	47%
MCAV estimate of area actually grazed	about 100,000	15%

\* Source; Parks Victoria and Taskforce

The table above shows that 47% of the Alpine National Park is available for cattle grazing. In terms of the area of the Alpine National Park that is actually grazed, the MCAV estimates this to be about 15%

### 7.2.2 What about the scientific “evidence”?

The cattlemen have been aware of the narrowly focussed scientific evidence on cattle grazing for years. It would be hard to avoid! The point is however, that any human endeavour, leaves some impact. The scientific aspect of campaigns by ecological lobby groups has become tediously similar. The ecological lobby groups can get a set against any activity and find and encourage scientific evidence to show some impact. It does not matter whether the activity is alpine grazing, a new freeway, deepening shipping channels or siting a toxic dump. Scientists can always come up with the evidence. And rightly so, there will always be an impact. It does not take much to interpret impact as damage. Lo and behold, the campaign is off and running.

A more interesting challenge would be to come up with an activity that shows as little impact after controlled cattle grazing.

### 7.2.3 The damage myth

The high plains have been grazed, at various times by sheep, horses and cattle for 170 years. Only cattle are grazed now and at record low stocking rates. After all this grazing, the area has been regarded as being in sufficiently good condition to be proclaimed as a national park.

The mossbeds upon which the ecological lobby groups have bestowed some mystical significance exist now, just as they have for centuries. The ecological lobby groups have tried to make the mossbeds the “old growth forests” of the high plains. The mossbeds are alive and well. Indeed the MCAV can show anyone healthy mossbeds on private land that have been grazed all year round for decades.

The cattlemen know there are scientific issues and they do address them, but this is only part of the policy mosaic that needs to be considered.

#### 7.2.4 Cattle grazing and mossbeds

There can be no doubt as to the biological, ecological and hydrological importance of Sphagnum mossbeds, or bogs. They are relatively limited in extent; on the Bogong High Plains, for example, they might cover up to 10% of the area, although we maintain this is an overestimate (more likely, less than 5%). Graziers of the high country agree that if cattle enter a bog, they have an impact.

However, we submit that the damage to bogs caused by cattle has not been great, and that the bogs have been used as icons of the high country, in just the same way that ‘old-growth’ has been used in the fights over forests. Both mossbeds and old-growth forests come with the usual suite of adjectives – fragile, pristine, endangered and so forth. In the current, city-based conservation debates, one only has to use keywords like ‘mossbeds’, ‘old-growth forests’, ‘pristine’, ‘fragile’, ‘biodiversity’ and so forth to proclaim oneself an ecological expert and to set oneself upon a pedestal of great knowledge and virtuousness.

We readily acknowledge the importance of all ecosystems in the high country. However, we are concerned that the issue of mossbeds has been hugely overemphasized, and has been used anecdotally rather than scientifically and factually. Mossbeds are living ecosystems; they change, like all ecosystems, with time and with the history of disturbances (fire, grazing, alteration of water courses, alteration of drainage patterns, and so forth). Thus we can find, throughout the range of public and private lands, some deteriorating mossbeds on both ungrazed and grazed areas, and a majority of mossbeds within both ungrazed and grazed areas that are in fine condition. We can also see that many mossbeds were burnt throughout the high country, some severely and some less so, in the 2003 fire.

Cattle avoid areas like mossbeds where the ground is unstable. Furthermore, research by van Rees clearly demonstrated that the vegetation of the bogs is not preferred feed for cattle. Cattle prefer the open, grassy communities, and spend only 5% of their time in and around the bogs, mainly to drink water. We repeat again that most of the bogs remain in excellent condition; they have existed along with the grazing of domestic livestock for 170 years and yet their value is still (and rightly) proclaimed.

There is no comprehensive assessment of the condition of the mossbeds of the high country, as far as we know (apart from some work on the Benison and Wellington Plains area). Given the iconic status of the mossbeds, it is therefore inevitable that evidence for or against damage is selective and often anecdotal. Given this situation, we make only some summary points:

- As we have previously stated, most of the mossbeds on both grazed and ungrazed lands, both public and private, are in excellent condition. The Caucus Taskforce was shown one such mossbed in a long-grazed area – a large mossbed in Pretty Valley, below the Hicks’ yards;
- The mossbeds that burnt in the 2003 fire, and that we have inspected, are recovering rapidly;
- Much of the damage to the mossbeds during the 2003 fires could have been avoided if there had been a properly executed program of prescribed burning;
- Mossbeds are an important, but relatively small component of the overall hydrological balance of the catchments. The importance of the filtering capacity of mossbeds is frequently stressed; on the other hand, where whole catchments (of which mossbeds are only a small part) are destroyed as happened in the 2003 fires, erosion has been on such a vast scale that whole creek beds have filled with the eroded topsoil;
- Snapshots of mossbeds at one point in time can be quite misleading. Like all ecological systems, mossbeds change with time. For example, much was made of a mossbed on the Faithful Brothers run, off the Bogong High Plains Road. Immediately after the 2003 fire,

cattle and wild horses trampled the mossbed quite extensively. One year later, the mossbed has substantially recovered.

- In summary, we submit that in many areas grazing has resulted in little or no damage to mossbeds. We acknowledge that remedial actions such as the provision of watering places away from natural drainage lines, the judicious placing of salt-licks and the use of small, portable fencing, may be required in some areas.

#### **7.2.5 Cattle grazing has not resulted in any significant degree of change in species composition**

There is no evidence that cattle-grazing has eliminated rare and threatened species, nor is species composition and diversity irrevocably altered. Indeed, 170 years of controlled cattle grazing has left by far the greater part of the high country in excellent condition. The fenced plots clearly demonstrate the resilience of the alpine flora, even after decades of grazing

A paper prepared by A.D. Wilson, Centre for Farm Planning and Land Management, University of Melbourne, titled, “*An Overview of the Impact of Grazing on the Alpine and Subalpine Lands of Victoria: with Emphasis on Future Research Needs*”, discussed the impact of alpine grazing on the environment and concluded:

*“The general writings on the alpine and subalpine country, especially relating to the Bogong High Plains, conclude that cattle grazing has a very large impact on the ecology of this region. There are observable changes, with a diminution of perennial forbs, but in the total perspective of possible changes, the impact is small. The vegetation is still largely natural and its diversity is intact. The composition has been somewhat changed, but not degraded. Erosion and trampling effects are present, but quite localised. Land degradation is not a big problem.”*

## **8 Terms of Reference 2 - Economic, social and environmental implications**

*Terms of Reference 2 - Consider the implications of renewal or non-renewal of cattle grazing licences for local communities and their economic and social viability; for the cost of management services for the Alpine National Park; for the security of natural resource values; and for the viability of the park.*

### **8.1 Implications for local communities and their economic and social viability**

Many local communities depend on surrounding farmers and grazing activities for their livelihood and existence. The mountain cattlemen are integral parts of these communities and the loss of access to Park licences would have a depressing impact. The annual calf sales are renowned across Australia as presenting excellent livestock which are used to replenish herds on properties throughout southeastern Australia.

High plains cattle and calves are particularly important in periods following droughts when farmers across Australia are seeking to rebuild their herds. In many respects, it is the important role that the high plains cattle have in post drought herd replenishments that is their most important contribution to economic activity. It is a contribution that goes well beyond the confines of the high country as it materially assists in the rebuilding of rural economies.

The cattlemen have a critically important role in their local communities. They are part of the fabric of the local community and give substance to the romance of taking cattle onto high plains during summer. It is the cattlemen and their families, the families of employees and people from whom they purchase services that provide the glue which holds the community together, puts firemen on CFA fire trucks, footballers on fields and people in their various important groups within the community.

To not renew the few remaining alpine grazing licences in the Alpine National Park would cut the heart out of many local communities. Local country people would feel like city based theocrats would have forced a totally unjustifiable and adverse impact on the local economy and community.

### **8.2 Implications for the cost of management services for the Alpine National Park**

The ecological lobby groups have made much of the alleged cost of managing alpine grazing in the Alpine National Park. The cattlemen do not have any figures on the cost to Parks Victoria of managing alpine grazing. It should also be noted that the cattlemen have never asked for significant sums of money to be spent on this task.

In the management plan below we note that the cattlemen would be prepared to take on many of the management tasks and reduce the cost to Parks Victoria.

Over recent months the level of monitoring being undertaken by Parks Victoria has been excessive and to the point of harassment. In fact several cattlemen have brought their cattle home early because of their concerns about the way Parks Victoria monitoring has disturbed their herds. The result of this monitoring may appear as a significant cost to Parks Victoria but the point is stressed that much of it is totally unnecessary. Indeed, there is a suspicion that it has carried out to an excessive level so that cost of it can be used as an argument for the removal alpine grazing.

How Parks Victoria has managed to spend the alleged \$500,000 on managing alpine grazing is totally beyond the MCAV. Some licence holders advise that all they hear from Parks Victoria from year to year is two letters - one about entry and the other about exit.

The non-renewal of licences would obviously reduce the amount of money Parks Victoria currently spends on the management of alpine grazing. As previously noted though, much of this expenditure is unnecessary anyway.

The non-renewal of licences would of course reduce the cost of management services in relation to alpine grazing. The net saving to Parks Victoria is however, quite debatable. Cattlemen would argue that in the absence of cattle grazing more would need to be spent on monitoring, pest plant and animal control, fuel reduction, maintenance of huts, rubbish removal and general maintenance.

The main point in this issue is that, if Parks Victoria has spent \$500,000 it has been extremely wasteful. The cattle management plan proposes that the cattlemen introduce some self regulation which would substantially reduce the Government's alpine grazing management costs.

### **8.2.1 The cost of alpine leases**

It is sometimes argued that the annual charge for alpine licences is too low.

The dollar rate for commercial freehold agistment is structured differently to that of Crown land leases. The two are fundamentally different in structure and purpose.

A Crown land lease provides a right to graze the land and nothing else. The land owner (the Crown) is under no obligation to supply anything other than the right to graze.

Freehold agistment on the other hand is different in many respects. The land has been developed with improved pasture species that are artificially fertilized to enhance animal production and performance. Stocking rates are substantially higher enabling easier management and observation in a confined area. Water supply is guaranteed and placed at convenient locations. Secure fencing is supplied and enables different animal types to be managed separately at the one location. The landowner is often involved in day to day management and monitoring, lessening the commitment and involvement by the livestock owner. The landowner supplies stock handling facilities. Freehold land is usually open and clear and affords good access to the stock at all times. Bulls can be accommodated creating a more flexible management program. The general purpose for freehold agistment is for short term relief of the home property due to drought or other effect that prevents the land owner from keeping these stock at home. If the weekly rate for freehold agistment was economically viable for long term use, then surely stock owners would be less inclined to involve large amounts of capital to own land outright, and be more inclined to agist their stock

### **8.3 Implications for the security of natural resource values**

As indicated earlier, cattlemen consider that the security of natural resource values is not at risk due to the continuation of grazing.

The removal of alpine grazing could adversely affect the security of natural resource values. The removal of cattle would allow fire fuel to increase and this, together with the loss of firefighting expertise and experience could increase in the level of risk. Also the absence of any work on pest plants and animals would adversely affect natural resource values.

### **8.4 Implications for the viability of the park**

The existence or removal of alpine grazing would probably have little implication for the viability of the park.

The cattle tracks are used by other visitors and this helps to spread the visitor impacts. If these tracks became overgrown and lost, the visitor impacts could become more concentrated and result in the need to install boardwalks such as has been necessary in the Kosciusko National Park.

The park has been viable for its entire existence with the inclusion of alpine grazing. Many visitors expect to see and are fond of seeing cattle in the park. It may well be that the removal of grazing would please a relatively small number of people but it is not expected that this would have any implication for the park's viability.

## **9 Terms of Reference 3 - Options**

*Terms of Reference 3 - Based on these considerations, examine possible options for the future of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.*

### **9.1 Don't let's kid ourselves about "compromises"**

The MCAV rejects the notion of "compromise". "Compromise" involves give and take. The previous "compromises" have been all take and no give. The "compromises" have always been one way as the opponents of alpine grazing seek one prohibition after another. If a "compromise" is announced in 2004, it is just the starting point for the opponents' next campaign that will start the day after any "compromise" is announced. The following is the morbid list of earlier "compromises".

- 1923 Grazing terminated on Mt. Buffalo.
- 1940 Stricter controls on the number of cattle grazed.
- 1944 Grazing terminated above the timberline in the Snowy Mountains.
- 1956 Grazing terminated on Mts. Feathertop, Loch, and the summit of Mt. Bogong.
- 1957 Grazing terminated on the remainder of Snowy Mountains
- 1960 Premier's directive gave control of the number of cattle to be taken above the snowline to the then Soil Conservation Authority. Numbers that could be grazed were gradually reduced. Grazing terminated on Mt. Buller.
- 1964 Three families evicted from Mt Bogong.
- 1979 Land Conservation Council recommends that grazing be withdrawn from: parts of Wonnangatta-Moroka National Park, parts of Bogong National Park, Snowy River National Park, Wabonga Plateau State Park, Avon Wilderness, the Bluff-Mount Clear Natural Features and Scenic Reserve.
- 1980 Government endorses the LCC recommendations and decides to terminate licences after phase-out period.
- 1982 Grazing terminated in Avon Wilderness
- 1983 Government directs LCC to recommend extensions to National Parks. This results in more licence terminations. 1984 Grazing terminated on Mt. Howitt and Mt. Magdala.
- 1988 Government purchases Wonnangatta Station and closes leases. Snowy River National Park - one licence terminated 1988 Wabonga Plateau - one licence terminated 1988
- 1991 Significant parts of the Bogong National Park. There are 21 separate licences on the Bogong High Plains. Northern end runholders have been relocated to the southern end. The Bluff-Mount Clear National Features Scenic Reserve - one licence partly terminated. Howitt Plains - one licence terminated. Mt. Stirling - one licence terminated.

This means there is only a token but representative area left for grazing within the Alpine National Park.

The cattlemen have had enough of one-way compromises. This issue now is not about some small additional cut to the numbers of cattle on the high plains. The issue now is the final decision. The MCAV knows that the community want the tradition of taking cattle to the high plains, which is highly valued by many people, to continue.

### **9.2 Option 1 - buy-out of licences**

Mountain cattlemen have, from time to time discussed whether they should vacate the Park and ask the Government to buy out the licences. This occurred in a minor and temporary way following the

Caledonia fires. On each occasion the cattlemen have resolutely dismissed this option on several grounds.

- They feel they are the custodians of an immense and important tradition and are honour bound to work to ensure that it continues.
- The continuation of alpine grazing is important to their local communities.
- Alpine grazing and access to licensed runs is important to their economic viability

### **9.3 Option 2 - establishment of a management plan**

The cattleman had been concerned for sometime about the absence of a positive and proactive management plan upon which grazing in the alpine area can be based. The MCAV did commence work with Parks Victoria on a Memorandum of Cooperation and a draft document was prepared. However the 2003 fires intervened and that no further work has been done on this Memorandum. The Association had hoped that this Memorandum would provide the basis for a sensible management plan.

Other people involved in this debate have also expressed concern about the absence of a management plan. For example A.D. Wilson, Centre for Farm Planning and Land Management, University of Melbourne, in his titled, *“An Overview of the Impact of Grazing on the Alpine and Subalpine Lands of Victoria: with Emphasis on Future Research Needs”*, stated: *“... the public interest in the region is high, so that a high standard of management is required. Different standards apply than to other parts of Australia. It is therefore important that cattlemen take a knowledgeable and positive approach to management of the area. At the same time it is unfortunate that the Government agencies in charge of the land have not taken a more positive approach to management that might alleviate the small problems that remain. The approach has been to ask for the removal of cattle whenever a problem has been identified, rather than to seek alternative solutions. There is room for some experimental work on grazing management that has the objective of decreasing or eliminating any undesirable consequences of grazing and trampling.”*

Spurred on by this and other similar comments, including similar sentiments expressed by Professor David Kemp in the Scientific Advisory Panel (2003) report the Association has developed the following draft management plan.

The proposed management plan acknowledges the scientific framework surrounding alpine grazing, utilises the cattleman’s knowledge of animal husbandry, accepts the need to protect the conservation values of the area and presents the cattlemens’ activities in a positive manner that adds to the so-called triple bottom line of the government. The initial work on the Memorandum sought to establish a partnership in public land stewardship between Parks Victoria and the MCAV.

***It needs to be acknowledged that this management plan is in a draft format.  
Parts of it that require further consideration include:***

#### **Environment and cattle management**

It is generally recognised that the plan involves management of the environment and the manner in which cattle can be part of this arrangement. The plan needs to be reviewed in terms that promote conservation of the environment and the utilisation of cattle grazing as a component of that management. It is not just a plan in how to manage cattle - it should be a plan on how to manage cattle grazing in the context of managing the environment.

## **Full time drovers**

The Association is seeking to establish a regime under which drovers can accompany cattle for the full 16 week period in any area where it is considered that conservation values including mossbeds are at any risk from cattle. (The cattlemen do not acknowledge that mossbeds are being damaged, but if the existence of drovers allays any well founded fears about the mossbeds, the MCAV is prepared to establish this arrangement with drovers.) It would be impractical and uneconomical for licence holders to employ full-time drovers but it may well be possible to arrange for volunteer drovers to accompany the cattle. Further work needs to be done on this proposition but the Association is confident that it could become an option accompanying the continuation of alpine grazing.

## **Fencing**

It may be possible to involve the use of lightweight and mobile solar powered electric fencing. This would need to be further considered in conjunction with Parks Victoria and a review of any particularly vulnerable sites.

## **The area of the Alpine National Park that is grazed**

As previously noted about 47% of the Alpine National Park is available for alpine grazing. The MCAV estimates about the area of the Alpine National Park that is actually grazed is about 15%. As part of the new and continuing arrangement for alpine grazing, licences could be reviewed, and where feasible, have removed from them, the areas of land that are not grazed. This would mean that the Taskforce review could result in a fall in the percentage of Alpine National Park that is actually grazed from the current perception of 50% down to less than 20%. The movement towards this more accurate estimation could be incorporated into the management plan.

## **Include the VNPA in management**

In 1972 a high profile and respected member of the VNPA, Mr. Ros Garnet suggested that the MCAV should join the VNPA as a corporate member because the "*cattlemen could then, through their formally appointed delegate, play a significant role in shaping VNPA policy on the alpine areas.*" (V.N.P.A. Newsletter-87, April 1972 ) Now, 34 years later the MCAV is pleased to respond positively to this invitation with the suggestion that a representative of the VNPA be invited to join the group that manages and implements the cattle management plan.

---

# **10 The draft management plan**

## **10.1 Comprehension in communication**

The MCAV will encourage the appointment of properly-qualified people within government who can work on equal terms with the cattlemen to ensure that the proper management of grazing, as outlined in this plan, is pursued in an open, transparent and accountable manner.

## **10.2 General Principles**

10.2.1 It is recognised that Parks Victoria operates under a mandate of protection of environmental values, and is required to implement Government decisions in this regard. Published management plans for the relevant areas, which are

produced following consultation with the community, prescribe how this direction will translate to on-ground management activities.

- 10.2.2 The Association considers that management agencies should respect the fact that the licensed cattlemen are the custodians of a heritage that the community supports and embraces.
- 10.2.3 It is recognised that management agencies and the MCAV both seek to improve the environment and to enhance the value of the area to the Victorian community.

### **10.3 Land Management**

- 10.3.1 The Association will seek to have the considerable land management skills of the cattlemen acknowledged in negotiations.
- 10.3.2 Through the MCAV, licensed cattlemen will propose practical initiatives that will lessen the administrative burden on PV, protect and enhance conservation values and generally assist in the management of the land. This could involve a considerable focus on pest plant and animal control.
- 10.3.3 In the past, cattlemen have been involved in weed control and have used weedicides supplied by DSE and Parks Victoria. Cattlemen will continue to monitor weeds and provide advice to the management agencies. They stand prepared to assist in control measures at the request of the authorities.
- 10.3.4 Cattlemen will actively assist in controlling the feral animals that are causing damage to flora and fauna.
- 10.3.5 The MCAV will promote a movement towards self-regulation. It would be hoped that this would free up the funds currently devoted to the administration of licences to be available for use in the practical management of land.
- 10.3.6 The MCAV is prepared to develop and assist in the execution of plans for controlled burning so that fuel loads are managed, and so that fires such as the 2003 fire do not happen again.
- 10.3.7 Cattlemen will continue to be readily available to assist the management agencies in fire and other emergencies
- 10.3.8 Cattlemen form an important monitoring force within the Alpine National Park as they move to and from the licence areas and while they attend to their herds. The cattlemen will continue to report inappropriate activities to the management agencies.

### **10.4 Cattle management - principles**

- 10.4.1 The cattlemens' skill in cattle management, animal husbandry and animal behaviour should be utilised in resolving alpine grazing issues. The cattlemen will use these skills to develop innovative cattle management strategies which assist with the conservation of natural values.
- 10.4.2 The MCAV will assist in the development of quantitative assessments of herbage mass, and criteria based on these assessments that define starting and finishing times for grazing (that is, use quantitative assessments, together with stocking rates, to ensure that licences are not over-grazed)
- 10.4.3 Cattle will be taken to licence areas in advance of any seed set to ensure that cattle do not transport any unwanted species.
- 10.4.4 The cattlemens knowledge of pasture management will be utilised to maximise the various values associated with alpine grazing. For example, rotational, targeted and strategic grazing which best suits the run will be

used. For example, north sides are the first to lose their snow and therefore the first to grow. This means the north-sides of licence can be utilised first. The cattle can then be physically moved to the south side. Doing this can leave the north-side at a target Basal level of 1,200kg DM/Ha. Then, towards the end of January/February, the cattle can be moved to the south side which by then has had more sunlight and at will be at the stage that will benefit from grazing, as they should, by then, be at 2,500 to 3,000kg DM/Ha. Overall, this is a sustainable grazing system, in line with the latest holistic grazing management practices, promoted by the Department of Primary Industry through their Prograze and BeefCheque courses.

## **10.5 Joint Management Committee**

The Association proposes that Parks Victoria and the Association form a joint management committee (JMC) which will meet and liaise on management issues. This will be the joint PV/MCAV management committee

- 10.5.1 The JMC would consist of 3 persons from PV and the MCAV and one from the VNPA.
- 10.5.2 The MCAV will review transgressions and incidents reported by PV, positive management initiatives, conservation and protection initiatives and present recommendations to PV through the JMC.
- 10.5.3 The terms of reference for the JMC will be:
  - The annual review of arrangements.
  - To establish any new arrangements for the coming year.
  - To meet as required by either party.
  - To develop ideas on joint ventures. (See below)
- 10.5.4 The chair of the JMC will alternate between the parties.
- 10.5.5 It will be the responsibility of the MCAV to advise PV on any timelines that need to be imposed because of the land and animal husbandry issues.

## **10.6 Scientific research**

The Association will

- share relevant scientific information
- seek to ensure that scientific views are openly reviewed to ensure agreement

Where disagreement exists on scientific views, both parties will seek to establish a process through which these views can be reconciled. This may involve respective scientists meeting to discuss their approaches.

## **10.7 Cooperative ventures**

The JMC will consider options for cooperative input/activity relating to

- 10.7.1 area inspections and maintenance,
- 10.7.2 positive signage and information regarding history including early settlement, cattlemens' activities and huts.
- 10.7.3 removal of rubbish and debris from licensed areas,
- 10.7.4 participation in events eg Clean Up Australia Day, Environment Day etc,
- 10.7.5 Aboriginal site maintenance,
- 10.7.6 helping with flora and fauna surveys,
- 10.7.7 bird counts,

- 10.7.8 educational and community tours,
- 10.7.9 assistance with disadvantaged group access to protected areas,
- 10.7.10 cooperative training programs. This could include training on the highly respected “Prograze” programs along the lines suggested by David Kemp in the Scientific Advisory Panel report.

## **10.8 Conclusion**

The Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria recommends the continuation of alpine grazing in conjunction with a positive cattle and environment management plan which assures the conservation of natural values and biodiversity and enhances the cultural traditions associated with alpine grazing.

The MCAV recommends that the draft management plan outlined in this submission be finalised, with the following inclusions:

- The plan needs to reflect the environment in which the cattle are to be managed.
- Where appropriate and necessary, full time drovers will accompany the cattle.
- Where appropriate and necessary, solar electric fencing will be utilised.
- Licences will be reviewed and, where practical, areas never grazed removed from them to give a clear indication of the proportion of the Alpine National Park that is actually grazed. This should result in a fall from a perception of 50% to less than 20%.
- The offer of the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) to be involved in joint policy development should be accepted and a representative of the VNPA invited to join the management plan implementation committee.

The finalised management plan should be implemented to support and direct the continuation of alpine grazing in the Alpine National Park.

## **11 Terms of Reference 4 - Natural, economic, social and cultural values of options**

*Terms of Reference 4 - Within each viable option, identify opportunities for maximising natural, economic, social and cultural values.*

### **11.1 Continued grazing**

The cattlemen consider that there is only one viable option in relation to alpine grazing in the Alpine National Park and this is in the continuation of this practice supported by the management plan.

Maximising the economic, social and cultural values is obviously only possible with the continuation of grazing in the Alpine National Park. Almost by definition, no other option could possibly maximise the economic, and particularly the social and cultural values.

### **11.2 Implications of the removal of cattle grazing**

The removal of cattle grazing from the Alpine National Park would clearly diminish economic values through the loss to individual cattleman, the cattle industry and the local communities. These diminished economic values would adversely impact upon the social values as the communities were adversely affected by the loss in economic activity. Naturally all this would adversely affect cultural values. The loss of the iconic alpine grazing tradition would cut the heart out of local cultural values.

With regard to the maximisation of natural values, the MCAV argues that removal of cattle from the Alpine National Park would not elevate the status of the Park and would not result in an increase in the number of visitors.

### **11.3 Grazing is acceptable for World Heritage**

Some may argue that to maximise natural, economic, social and cultural values the Alpine National Park needs to have World Heritage listing. The same people will suggest that alpine grazing needs to be removed from the Alpine National Park to allow the area to have this World Heritage listing. This seems to be a nonsense.

The Federal Department of Environment and Heritage, National Heritage Database shows that the Alpine National Park is listed as an Indicative Place on the Register of the National Estate. An Indicative Place is where a formal nomination has not been made and the Council has not received the data for assessment. In the nominator's "Statement of Significance", there is no mention of cattle grazing.

Importantly, under the section "Condition and Integrity" it is simply noted that "*Parks Victoria advised that approximately 48% of park burnt in fires of January 2003.*" There is no mention of cattle grazing.

The Federal Department of Environment and Heritage website notes that Kakadu National Park was inscribed on the World Heritage List in three stages over eleven years. It is one of the few sites included on the List for both outstanding cultural and natural universal values. In its listing, it is noted that the Park is "*directly associated with living traditions of outstanding universal significance.*" This could equally well apply to alpine grazing. We need also recall that there is a uranium mine and a vast tourism infrastructure in the Park.

UNESCO's World Heritage website notes that its mission includes the following key points.

- encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage;
- encourage international co-operation in conservation of cultural and natural heritage.

The importance given to encouraging the participation of the local populations in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage should be noted.

Rather than cattle grazing inhibiting World Heritage listing, it would appear that the traditions of the mountain cattlemen and alpine grazing could support nomination.

Cattle in national parks is not new or unique to the Alpine National Park. Domesticated buffalo are grazed in Kakadu National Park. The management plan states: "*A small herd of domesticated buffalo will be maintained by the Gagudju Association within the park.*"

If grazing of domestic livestock is permitted in Kakadu National Park which has World Heritage listing, why would cattle grazing need to be removed from the Alpine National Park for if it to achieve World Heritage listing?

#### **11.4 Conclusion**

With regard to the maximisation of economic values, one could examine the possibilities of being faced with the choice of World Heritage listing with cattle grazing and without cattle grazing. It is clear that listing with grazing maximises economic values because it captures the benefits of grazing and listing.

The maximisation of natural values have not been adversely affected by cattle grazing to have any significant impact on either the status of the Park or the number of visitors. A few people might not visit the Park because of the presence of cattle, just as some people only go to the Park to be part of the cattle grazing experience. As previously noted the iconic and traditional notion of the mountain cattlemen taking cattle onto the high plains has added to the mystique of the Park. This in itself would have increased the numbers of visitors as many of them expect to see and are pleased to see cattle grazing on the licenced runs.

It needs to be recognised that the popularity of horse rides and tours through the Alpine National Park is due in part to the mountain cattlemen. Indeed many of these tours had been run by the mountain cattlemen families. This has been a clear illustration of how the beneficial impact of alpine grazing on economic value has gone well beyond just the impact of cattle values and sales.

Finally, it needs to be simply stated that only with cattle grazing can social and cultural values be maximised.

## **12 Terms of Reference 5 - Other evidence**

*Terms of Reference 5 - Identify any further available evidence that will be useful to the Minister in making his decision on whether to renew licences that expire in August 2005, and in determining what conditions may be required in relation to any renewed licences.*

There is a range of additional evidence that supports the continuation of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park. These are itemised below:

### **12.1 Who really is genuinely concerned about this issue?**

Searches of websites of ecological lobby groups like the Victorian National Parks Association, Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth and The Wilderness Society, show that it is only the VNPA that appears to be opposed to alpine grazing.

It needs to be born in mind that when the VNPA asked its members to assemble in Birrarung Marr for a photograph, a paltry 200 turned up. Is this the extent of the opposition?

Contrast this with the 3000 people who spent the weekend supporting the cattlemen at the annual Get-Together at Dargo on January, 2004, and every preceding year for 20 years.

Alpine grazing has existed for more than 170 years and has worked under all political parties and all governments. One small group of lobbyists should not be able to dictate the removal of part of the history and heritage of Australia. Indeed the challenge for the green lobbyists is to recognise this history and heritage and support well managed and properly controlled grazing, as a means retaining this important part of our past.

### **12.2 The issue of alpine grazing is generated by the VNPA**

The major environmental issues facing Victoria are salinity, pollution, greenhouse gasses, water, genetic modification of crops, and the brown issues of the city. Then there are the social issues like toxic dumps, wind power and whether grass will ever grow in Telstra Dome. In comparison, alpine grazing is infinitesimally small. The only reason alpine grazing is an issue is because the hierarchy of the VNPA has decided that it should be an issue. They could just as easily have chosen another issue totally unrelated to the Alpine National Park, just as a couple of years ago, it was Box Ironbark Forests. The VNPA has already chosen the Barmah Forest as its next target. Having chosen these issues the VNPA routinely winds up its membership to sign protest cards.

We should never lose sight of the real environmental issues and the votes available to whichever political party tackles them with sound and creative policies.

### **12.3 The Government will not get any thanks or peace from the ecological lobby groups for removing cattle**

It is usually suggested that the Government is going to terminate some licences to “placate the greens”, “strengthen its green credentials” or “appeal to the voters in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs”. However, past experience shows that governments do not get any thanks or peace as they give in to increasingly strident demands.

The reality is that ecological lobby groups use any win as the starting point for their next campaign. Governments have never got much kudos for progressively removing commercial and recreational activities from public land or for proclaiming national parks that have resulted in the prohibition of activities. The ink is hardly dry on agreements before the ecological lobby groups are off on the next campaign. For the ecological lobby groups, a win today is the starting point for tomorrow's campaign.

The incremental nature of ecological lobby groups' policies is highlighted in these statements from the VNPA's own publication, Parkwatch. These are further elaborated upon later in this submission.

In June 1978, the VNPA stated, "*The VNPA is not opposed to cattle grazing within the Alpine National Park save in a relatively few locations including wilderness zones.*" (VNPA, Parkwatch, June 1978)

However, by the 1990s, the incremental nature of policy meant it was expedient to cast alpine grazing in a different light. In 1990, the VNPA stated - "*Degrading activities such as grazing... are totally incompatible with Park philosophy.*" (VNPA, Parkwatch, December 1990)

What changed in the meantime? The cattle grazed the same areas. The same cattlemen families were involved. The only thing to change was the attitude of a small number of people at the helm of the VNPA.

The other thing that has changed is that governments have progressively caved into increasingly strident demands of conservationists. This is the policy creep, death by a thousand cuts, or the salami theory - stick it in and cut off some more - call it what you will. It is a fact. It does exist. It will not stop until someone sees that public policy is best served by saying "*No!*"

On the issue of terminating some alpine licences, this time the Government will get more kudos from saying "*No, the cattlemen stay*" rather than saying "*Yes, we cave in yet again to the demands of the strident greenies.*"

The MCAV considers that in light of the disappointment about the State Government in rural areas and the strength of support for the mountain cattlemen in the city, the Government has more to gain by supporting alpine grazing than terminating licences.

#### **12.4 The decades of the VNPA's support for alpine grazing**

The VNPA strongly supported alpine grazing and the mountain cattlemen for decades. The extracts below, highlight this support.

**1954** - Extract from National Parks Association Newsletter, July 1954

*With the exception of one or two main arterial roads, as for example the Omeo Highway, the Alpine Road across Mt Hotham, and the Mt Gibbo Road from Omeo to Corryong, the only means of access is by way of cattlemen's tracks.*

*Much of the area is unknown, save to the cattlemen and a few of our more venturesome hikers, and many thousands of square miles are above the snowline and are leased to graziers under what are termed "snow licences." The leaseholders drive their cattle on to the "high plains" in November and return them to the lowlands in April, this short season being the only period during which the high plains are free from their winter mantle of deep snow.*

---

---

**1967** - Extract from V.N.P.A.-61, June 1967. Page 12

*The V.N.P.A plan envisages a degree of multiple use in which certain acceptable and specified activities such as forestry, apiculture and even cattle grazing will continue within an overall concept of conservation of the special natural resources for which the area is renowned -namely, water and scenery. Properly managed, there is good reason to believe that in an area of the size contemplated by the Association, these several forms of land use will be not only compatible but advantageous to the State and the nation.*

---

---

**1969** - Extract from V.N.P.A.- 74 November 1969. Page 5

*After consideration of all the factors involved your Council recognises that a Park of the area envisaged must, of necessity, be a multi-purpose park in which a variety of interests and activities would be recognised in much the same way as they are in multi-purpose parks elsewhere. Such activities would include logging, grazing and mining under controlled conditions. It is believed that the proposed reservation is large enough from a conservation point of view to support a range of such complimentary activities without detriment to the long-term preservation of the environment*

---

---

**1969** - Extract from V.N.P.A.- 74 November 1969, page 7.

*In recommending an area of this size our Council recognises two significant facts: Firstly, the area at present supports some economic activity including logging, grazing and beekeeping. We do not seek to debar or even seriously restrict the activities of these industries. Secondly, from a conservation viewpoint, the area is large enough to support a range of complimentary activities without detriment to the long term preservation of the environment.*

#### *Multiple Use*

*We are not opposed to continued logging within the area or to limited cattle grazing on the alpine pastures.*

---

---

**1969** - Extract from V.N.P.A.- 74 November 1969, page 13.

*Thus reservation of this region as a Park would lead to central planning and cooperation between those responsible for fire protection, hydro-electric power, forestry, water supply, soil conservation, pest extermination, grazing and tourism, and each must be regulated with an eye to the future and the natural balance of such a highland area.*

---

---

**1970** - Extract from V.N.P.A -76, June, 1970.

*One of the key features of the proposed Alpine National Park is Victoria's highest mountain, Mt Bogong. It was agreed that it should be included in the proposed reserve because it represented not only the ceiling of the Victorian Alps but the one area in our north eastern highlands that has suffered least at the hands of man. Bogong is a truly primitive area.*

...

*After the mantle of snow has disappeared from these places it is difficult to find in any of them evidence of the primeaeval beauty that once characterised them. Tourist roads, ski runs, tows, workshops, and lodges plus litter and pollution quickly transform scenery from superb to scruffy.*

MCAV: We note there is no mention of any adverse impacts of cattle grazing.

---

---

**1972** - Extract from V.N.P.A.-87, April 1972

*Despite what the VNPA had fondly believed was wide publicity about its plan for a multi-purpose alpine park, the cattleman who used the alpine pastures for summer grazing were still apprehensive about the effect of such a park on their traditional practices. Speakers from the National Parks Association made it clear from the outset that their proposal envisaged continuance of the existing leases. The Association could see no reason for apprehension among a group of people so deeply committed, in the way indicated by their President, to conserving the environment which they themselves believed to be essential to the welfare of their industry and their own livelihood. Controls had been already accepted as a necessary conservatory measure and both parties present at the conference appeared to be satisfied that, if further control was to be exercised, it would be effected on the advice of the Soil Conservation Authority.*

.....

*A regular interchange of information would be of benefit to both organisations. Mr. Ros Garnet made the further suggestion that such an objective might be achieved in a manner more convenient to both Associations by the MDCA joining the VNPA as a Corporate Member. The cattleman could then, through their formally appointed delegate, play a significant role in shaping VNPA policy on the alpine areas.*

---

---

**1975** VNPA Newsletter March 1975, page 26

Comment by Dick Johnson

*This Association (the VNPA) is concerned that the mountain cattleman do not obtain a false impression of our aims and goals. Certainly we want a large alpine national park, and ultimately, one that is free of commercial exploitation. However, as pointed out in the book, (Alps at the Crossroads) we recognise the great conservation value engendered by the presence of the cattleman, with their long experience, in the mountain region. Specifically the book recommends that control be established over grazing in all of the high country has currently exists on the Bogong High Plains (this is accepted by all parties and control is being extended to other regions now); that cattle be banned from specified wilderness zones, mainly the tops of the very highest mountains (this principle also seems to be accepted by the mountain cattlemen); and lastly that grazing be phased out of the high country in the long term (this is where disagreement occurs, but no time limit has been set). It is my personal belief that this will be a natural process dictated by economics and changing social circumstances, and I personally have no wish to hasten it. Indeed the current rapid inflation and poor cattle prices are accelerating the process far beyond the level which I believe desirable - the rate of phase-out is now too fast!*

*The major problems of today are unrestricted logging, further roading into wilderness regions, uncontrolled "fun" and tourist vehicle movements in the mountains and the unco-ordinated ski village development.*

*It is now increasingly apparent that the viewpoints of cattlemen and conservationists are converging - differences are blurring and the major threats that we see also appear to be the same influences that most disturb the mountain folk. It is almost certain that within the next five years*

*cattlemen and conservationists will stand firmly together in fighting those influences, now only in their infancy that threatened to destroying everything which makes the Alpine area desirable to both of them.*

---

---

**1976** - Extract from the VNPA Journal No 106, September 1976. Page 27

*Grazing should be allowed to continue within the limits specified in the policy. The omission of a specified period for the phasing out of grazing is quite deliberate, as this may well occur over many decades.*

*The general principles adopted by the Soil Conservation Authority should continue to apply, i.e., grazing leases are transferable only to the lease-holder's immediate family and are revoked on the sale of the lessees property; new leases are granted only to compensate cattlemen required to surrender leases in sensitive or damaged areas.*

---

---

**1977** - Extract from "The Victorian Alps - A Resources Base?" By Dick Johnson The VNPA Journal No. 111, November 1977. Page 12

*The problem of the Alps.*

*One can identify three principal problem areas in the management of the resources of the Alps.*

*The first is the problem of grazing. This is the problem of the past. No one who has made any study of the history of the Alps would nominate this as a problem of overriding magnitude. Quite strict controls exist in certain areas and other regions are being quickly drawn into the widening net of control. The management is sensitive to local situations and the effect of the SCA policies is very slow but at the same time very positive. Very importantly scientific monitoring shows a gradual and continuous improvement in ground cover and species variation with the passage of time. The VNPA fully supports the present SCA policies and asks in addition only that wilderness areas be freed from grazing.*

---

---

**1978** - Extract from Parkwatch, June 1978.

*The VNPA is not opposed to cattle grazing within the Alpine National Park save in a relatively few locations including wilderness zones. Cattlemen themselves agree that some areas should not be grazed. While we do favour eventual phase-out, we believe that this may be a very slow process. We see this phase-out as occurring naturally under the existing policies of the Soil Conservation Authority and expected economic and social conditions. We have examined the LCC recommendations in respect of grazing and are in broad agreement, save for Mt Bogong and part of the Cobberas region, which in our view should be completely free of all cattle grazing. The recommendations say that cattle are to be restricted only from a small area around Cleve Cole Hut. How cattle are to be controlled without fencing is not explained.*

These earlier views of the VNPA provide adequate reason for the continuation of alpine grazing.

## **12.5 The ecological lobby groups are expecting politicians to break their promises**

As the ecological lobby groups decide to go for another notch on the ratchet, they expect the politicians to break promises about alpine grazing, without a blink. These are the promises that the ecological lobby groups are expecting politicians to break.

*"The government has offered seven year licences to the mountain cattlemen. Security of tenure ... will be improved. The government does not intend to issue licences for seven years and then indicate that that is the end of them. ... licences are legally binding between the government and the cattlemen."* (Mrs. Setches, Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands, Assembly, 4.5.89)

*"Victorians should also know that the State Government recognises the traditions associated with the mountain cattlemen as part of our heritage and that these will be respected in the park" ... "The Government has decided to ... offer long term licences to all cattlemen in the high country, instead of the present one year licences" "Victoria Needs an Alpine National Park".* September 1988, Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands brochure.

*"The government has said time and again, and I have explained it many times, that it will not be changing leases without consultation, without agreement and without the alpine cattlemen volunteering.* Ms Sherryl Garbutt, Minister for Environment and Conservation, Hansard, 18.11.2001

*"I said in this house a few weeks ago that there would be no changes to those licences and that we would not be taking them back or changing them without the agreement of the alpine cattle graziers."* Ms Garbutt, Minister for Conservation and Environment, Hansard 30.10.2001, Page 1260

It is worth repeating the promise: *"Alpine grazing is a licensed activity and will continue as a licensed activity."* Mr Thwaites Minister for Environment, Hansard, 6.11.2003 Page 1616

## **12.6 There are dozens of reports on alpine grazing because our opponents refuse to acknowledge that the issue is about more than just environment**

What can be drawn from the fact that there are dozens of scientific reports on alpine grazing? It's simple. Whether or not alpine grazing continues is not just a matter of environment. This government has a strong triple bottom line policy that requires decisions to be balanced with environmental, social and economic considerations. This government articulates this policy as triple bottom line but most previous governments have had a similar view. This means that alpine grazing continues today because of its social and economic considerations. It would be a simple matter to obtain a series of scientific paper damning the city of Melbourne for its adverse impact on the environment. However, this would not result in the removal of the city!! The cattlemen know the scientific discussion, but that is just one part of the policy mosaic .

## **12.7 Most minds are already committed**

Each side to this debate can produce voluminous material to support its stance. The fact is however, that anyone who has some previous involvement in this issue will have already made up their mind. How is it that the two sides remain so steadfastly opposed in the face of reams of scientific reports, discussion papers and submissions? Simple. It is the weight that is given to each piece of the policy mosaic. The policy mosaic includes community attitudes, economic activity, environmental issues, scientific data, social outcomes, heritage and historic issues.

On the environment issue alone the score might be MCAV: 2, VNPA: 1, but at full time, when we add in the community, economic, social, heritage and historic issues, the final score will be MCAV:7, VNPA:1. When the full mosaic of the policy is considered, the cattlemen come out way in front.

## **12.8 The issue is not about science and the impacts of cattle - it is about what is acceptable in a national park.**

Cattle were first removed from the high country because they were regarded as being inconsistent with the concept of national parks. This was clearly stated by Sam Dimmick of the Land Conservation Council (LCC). It was not an issue of damage, it was an issue of perception. It is only very recently that those few obsessed with this issue have raised the issue of damage. Cattlemen readily acknowledge an impact but reject the notion that damage has occurred. If the land had been damaged it would not have been considered good enough for proclamation as a national park. It is also important to acknowledge that the area was declared a national park with cattle in it. ***If it was good enough to declare the area a national park with cattle in it, why should the cattle now be removed?***

In 1988, the LCC stated in its "Statewide Assessment of Public Land Use", "The Council recommended that grazing be phased out from...Bogong National Parks, The Bluff-Mount Clear park addition, and the Howitt Plains area, because grazing conflicts with other values and uses in these areas".

With regard to allegations about damage, the LCC stated, "*Concerns recently expressed about the high plains grazing in particular are that cattle preferentially eat certain alpine herbs thus reducing their distribution, that they cause increases in shrub cover, that they foul springs and waterholes with excreta carrying intestinal worms and liver fluke. The Council has taken the view that these concerns, although real, do not justify the removal of grazing from areas other than the most sensitive or important for conservation or walking, as previously mentioned.*"

Furthermore, several Government surveys indicate that the general public do not consider that cattle grazing conflicts with other uses in the Alpine National Park. See below for more information on these surveys.

On the ABC Stateline program (12.03.04), Henrik Wahren, said, "*Given our current values for this land, (the Alpine National Park) being conservation and catchment protection, the direct threat to that is cattle grazing.*" Clearly the threat posed by cattle is based on Wahren's assumption that the primary values of the Alpine National Park are "conservation and catchment protection". Both of these values should be of equal and high importance across the State. One might ask Wahren, "Where is it in Victoria that conservation and catchment protection do not matter?" Virtually every activity in Victoria has an impact on these two values but this does not mean we ban motor vehicles, cities, buildings, towns, cities and food production. The issue should be management, not prohibition.

## **12.9 Community support for alpine grazing**

### **12.9.1 Scientific research quantifies community support for alpine grazing**

A survey conducted in 1996 found strong support within the community for retaining managed grazing within the Alpine National Park. A research project titled "*Analysing conflict between cultural heritage and nature conservation in the Australian Alps: a CVM approach*" by M. Lockwood, P. Tracey and N. Klomp of the Johnstone Centre of Parks, Recreation and Heritage, Charles Sturt University Albury states in its Abstract:

*"Previous studies have employed a variety of techniques for analysing dichotomous choice CVM (contingent valuation method) data to produce estimates of economic welfare changes. This paper summarizes these analytical options, and illustrates their application in a case study concerning cattle grazing on the Bogong High Plains in the Australian Alps. This case study assesses the nonmarket economic value of cultural heritage conservation using contingent valuation, and is unusual in that the competing values are both nonmarket in character. Nature conservation and heritage values were separately measured using two independent surveys of 555 respondents each selected from telephone directory listings across Victoria. Mean willingness to pay (WTP) for nature conservation and cultural heritage were estimated ...The positive WTP for the continue grazing scenario and the significance of variables such as 'preserving heritage' and 'history of grazing' that were obtained suggest that heritage values comprise a significant proportion of WTP. **These results provide support for the Victorian Government's current management policies for grazing on the Bogong High Plains.**" (Our emphasis)*

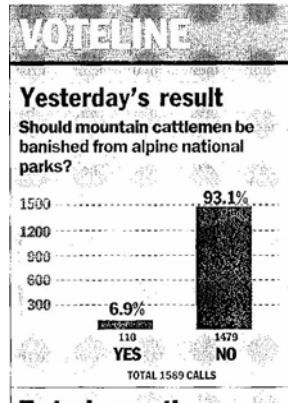
Results from this survey showed that over 90% of respondents had heard of the mountain cattlemen, and 71% were willing to contribute financially in order to retain the presence of mountain cattlemen on the Bogong High Plains.

### **12.9.2 Demonstrations of community support for alpine grazing**

When the anti-grazing Victorian National Parks Association called on all its members to muster for a photograph in Melbourne last year, a paltry 200 turned up. About 3000 people travelled all the way to Dargo for the MCAV's 2004 Get-Together. The community supports the continuation of one of the few remaining great traditions of our pioneering past.

The strength for retaining the mountain cattlemen's pioneering heritage has increased. Heritage values are recognised and appreciated within the Victorian and Australian community.

- ▶ The Sydney Olympic Games opening ceremony featured the music from the film "The Man from Snowy River", and featured horsemen, and whip-cracking. Most of the whip-crackers were either mountain cattlemen or family members of mountain cattlemen.
- ▶ "The Man from Snowy River" was one of the most widely seen and most popular Australian films of all time.
- ▶ The Centenary of Federation Parade through the streets of Melbourne in May 2001 was a great success for MCAV. The Association was asked to provide 205 mounted stockmen in a re-enactment of the original parade in 1901. The Parade in 2001 was lengthy and featured floats and entries from all sections of the community. The loudest cheers and the most enthusiastic support from the 300,000 crowd was for the mountain cattlemen.
- ▶ The recent "arena spectacular", "The Man from Snowy River" attests to the continued popularity of high country magic.
- ▶ The poll from the voteline in the Herald Sun in 2003 says it all:



### 12.9.3 Government surveys show strong support for alpine grazing

Several surveys indicate that the general public do not share the views about grazing conflicting with other uses.

a) 77% of respondents recommended that the level of grazing activity should remain the same. An increase was recommended by 11% and the remaining 11% recommended the complete banning of cattle. 73% considered that grazing did not affect their enjoyment of the area. 13% considered cattle grazing improved their enjoyment and 13% considered their enjoyment spoilt by cattle grazing. Source: Survey of 25,000 tourists in the Alpine Area conducted by the Victorian Sawmillers Association 1977.

(b) Respondents who believed public land to be not very well, or very badly managed, were asked "Why did you say that?" The fourth most common response was that the potential for bushfires had been further increased since grazing had ceased. No-one (or a statistically insignificant number) criticised public land management for the continuation of grazing. Source: Survey by Yann Campbell Hoare Wheeler, 1990 conducted for the Department of Conservation and Environment, titled "Market analysis of Victoria's public land".

©) A moderate number of people made "pro" comments about cattle grazing. A few made "anti" comments. Source: Alpine Areas Visitor Survey, Easter 1989, Department of Conservation Forests and Lands.

(d) No-one (or a statistically insignificant number) complained about cattle grazing when asked what needed to be provided or changed to attract them to the high country in non-winter. Respondents were asked about the most discouraging aspects of a high country holiday. None (or a statistically insignificant number) complained about cattle grazing. Source: Survey by Pannell Kerr Forster for the Alpine Resorts Commission, Department of Conservation Forests and Lands and the Victorian Tourism Commission, 1989.

(e) Tourist attractions in the high country include "Mountain Cattlemen's Get Togethers" and cattle drives from the high plains. Promotional strengths include "Mountain Cattlemen heritage and mustering of cattle on the High Plains".

Source: Gippsland Hinterland Region Consumer Perceptions, an assessment prepared by Destination Australia Marketing and Consultancy Pty. Ltd for the Department of Conservation Forests and Lands, 1989.

#### **12.10 The Cain and Kirner Labor Governments supported alpine grazing**

The former Cain and Kirner Labor governments supported grazing in the Alpine National Park so long as it was properly controlled and managed. Legislation brought in to Parliament by that Labor government created 7 year grazing licences within the Park, and deliberately made these licences renewable. In order to give protection to the conservation values of the Alpine National Park licence conditions took into account the need for strong management practices. When the licence document was reviewed and renewed for a second 7 year term in 1998 it was found that the document was strong enough to continue to protect conservation values, and only minor changes were required to the original licences.

#### **12.11 Mountain cattlemen are enshrined in tourism**

Tourism operators, Shire Councils and Tourism associations in the eastern highlands draw on the history and images of mountain cattlemen in attracting tourists.

#### **12.12 The Government has no mandate to abandon alpine grazing**

In the lead up to the 1996 State Election, the ALP had a policy which stated, *"Labor will improve and extend the Alpine National Park by ... Enforcing environmental conditions on grazing licences, and examining ways to remove all grazing from the Park."*

However, for the 2002 policy the ALP policy on alpine grazing was silent. Therefore it must be that, for the 2002 election, the now Government supported the status quo as outlined in the National Parks Act. The Government has no mandate to abandon the mountain cattlemen.

### ***13 The Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria Inc.***

As stated in the logo of the MCAV, mountain cattlemen have been caring for the high country since 1835. For well over 100 years, the cattlemen's organisation did not need to extend beyond informal meetings, usually around campfires on the high plains, where they discussed their problems and shared solutions.

From the late 1800's many of the cattlemen would have become members of the fledgling State-wide farmer organisations but there was still no need for a formal organisation to represent the specific interest of alpine grazing and the mountain cattlemen.

By the 1960's however, the cattlemen were recognising that proposals for National Parks could threaten their cultural heritage and way of life and agreed that there was now a need for a formal organisation. In 1969 they met around a campfire in the Dargo High Plains and formed the Mountain District Cattlemens Association. One of those who called the meeting, Jack Treasure of Dargo, became the Association's first President.

In 1984, the name was changed to the Mountain Cattlemens Association and the Association was incorporated.

Today, the Association consists of four Branches. It has a Central Council which consists of the Association's President, Vice Presidents, Secretary and Special Projects Officers together with three delegates from each Branch. The Central Council is responsible for operating the Association.

The aims of the Association are:

- To promote and protect the interests of cattlemen who graze cattle on Crown Land.
- To promote better understanding by the public of the value of grazing cattle on Crown Land.
- To encourage good relations and working relationships with all other persons and/or organisations interested in grazing cattle on Crown lands.

There are two membership categories:

- Full members, cattlemen who hold licences to graze cattle in the Victorian Alpine and sub-Alpine area, and
- Associate members, people who support the principles and activities of the mountain cattlemen.

The Association is affiliated with the Victorian Farmers Federation.