



Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria

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Mountain Cattlemens News

Be a part of a great campaign to keep the mountain cattlemens tradition alive.

Become part of the tradition yourself

We urge you to send a submission to the Taskforce reviewing alpine grazing, lobby your local politician and write to the key politicians including the Environment Minister and the Taskforce.

The Government's decision to review alpine grazing by a Caucus Taskforce gives every member, every associate and every supporter an opportunity to drive home your opinions and thoughts about taking cattle to the high plains of Victoria. You have until June 18 to send a submission and a strong message to the Caucus Taskforce. Soon after the deadline for submissions the Caucus Taskforce will be meeting probably in Bright and Bairnsdale, where you will have the opportunity to present your views in person. You also have the opportunity, now, and especially after June 18 to lobby your local politicians and send a strong message to the Government.

We must make an emphatic impact with this campaign. The future of the great tradition of taking cattle to the high plains depends critically on what we do now and over the next few weeks.

The Association is preparing a submission and parts of the introductory section of it are contained in this Newsletter. We urge you to use this material in preparing your own submission and in your own representations to local politicians.

We are actively developing campaign

components and strategies and have weekly conference phone hook ups to keep activities on track.

You have the opportunity to become part of the legend itself as we fight once again to maintain access to the high country leases and to continue the tradition of our forefathers and predecessors.

We must not let down the great names of the past such as Jim Treasure, Don Kneebone, Jack Lovick and Jim Commins.

As you write your submissions and letters, imagine that these giants of the legend are looking over your shoulder, guiding your hand and urging you not to let this marvellous heritage slip away into oblivion.

These great men, mountain cattlemen, bush poets and keen conservationists have done their bit to create, nurture and build the legend. The reins have fallen to our hands. The horse stands ready. The saddle is empty. It is our turn, it is our responsibility, it is our heritage.

Let no one take it away from you.

The Environment Minister's announcement

On May 11, 2004, the Minister for Environment, John Thwaites announced the formation of a Caucus Taskforce on Cattle Grazing. His statement read:

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," Mr Thwaites said.

"Issues and option raised by the taskforce will help inform my overall considerations about grazing licenses."

The Member for Narracan, Ian Maxfield, will chair the taskforce that will report to the Minister in July 2004.

Mr Maxfield said the taskforce was now calling for public submissions to its investigation, with submissions closing on Friday June 18.

"I encourage current licensees, stakeholders and the community to make submissions and respond to newspaper advertisements calling for input," Mr Maxfield.

"People making submissions may also be invited to make verbal presentations to the taskforce."

Terms of reference for the taskforce are as follows:

- 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.

The Taskforce will not be re-examining decisions relating to the return of cattle to areas affected by fires, as these decisions are handled through a different process.

Submissions addressing the criteria can be emailed to alpine.grazing@dse.vic.gov.au (preferred submission method, MS Word Format only) or posted to:

Alpine Grazing Taskforce, c/- Department of Sustainability and Environment, 8 Nicholson St. East Melbourne, Vic.
alpine.grazing@dse.vic.gov.au



Your action checklist

This is what we would like you to do:

Prepare a submission (a short letter is fine) and send this to

Alpine Grazing Taskforce,
c/- Department of Sustainability and Environment,
8 Nicholson St.
East Melbourne, Vic 3002

A page in this newsletter is like a submission and you could just tear this out, sign it and send it on. However, comments in your own words would be better.

You need to get your submission in by June 18

Send a copy to your local politician and ask him/her to lobby the Environment Minister.

Send a copy to the Environment Minister
The Hon. John Thwaites,
Minister for Environment, Water and Victorian

Communities
1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne Vic 3000

Send copies - or short messages to members of the
Caucus Taskforce

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The key issues

Please note that all the assertions in this section are substantiated in the MCAV's submission to the taskforce. These are the key issues that you could use in a submission

These points are the ones we are trying to drive home. They don't necessarily cover all the Terms of

Reference. When you write your submission, look through the Terms of Reference and provide additional comment.

Members of the MCAV intend continuing 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.

The full mosaic of policy

Any review of alpine grazing must cover the whole 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.

The cultural links to 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.

The beneficial impact of cattle grazing on fire fuel

The grazing of cattle substantially reduces the potential for wildfire, which apart from immediately devastating the area, can result in severe soil erosion and degraded water catchments.

Cattle grazing is also a more reliable and smoke free alternative to fuel-reduction burning for much of the mountain bushland.

In the full range of environmental issues, alpine grazing is just not important.

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 and wind power. In comparison, alpine grazing is infinitesimally small.

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

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 some licences.

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:

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**. The 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 still occurring in the State - 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 cattlemen's 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**.



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 170 years, as alpine grazing.

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.

Cattle grazing is acceptable in the concept of national parks

There are many national parks around the world, including Kakadu in the Northern Territory where cattle grazing has existed for decades. National parks in other countries include towns, villages, mines and quarries.

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 immediately.

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 to continue and the current families feel honour bound to continue this custom which is highly valued by many people.

Public opinion supports the cattlemen

There is strong community support for the cattlemen and alpine grazing. This is illustrated by scientific research, the government's own surveys, a *Herald-Sun* Voteline and other expressions of community support.

The community has made it abundantly clear what it wants, what it supports and what will attract voter support.

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.

The management plan

The Association's 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.

The short answers

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

You can use some of these short reasons in your submission.

As previously indicated the MCAV submission substantiates these points.

- If you view the whole policy mosaic, including community, economic, social, heritage and historic issues, the cattlemen win hands-down.
- The cattlemen have a 170 year history of caring for the high country and provide cultural links from the past to the future.
- Cattle reduce the fuel for fires.
- Cattlemen are opposed by one small lobby group, the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA)
- In the 1960s and 70s the VNPA actually supported alpine grazing.
- The land was good enough to be proclaimed as Park, with cattle grazing.
- Alpine grazing is a significant contributor to the Bracks' Government's triple bottom line.
- The cultural heritage traditions of alpine grazing could support a World Heritage nomination.
- There is cattle grazing in Kakadu National Park and this Park has World Heritage listing.
- The Government has no mandate to terminate grazing licences.
- The Cain and Kirner Labor Governments supported alpine grazing.
- Media coverage and public opinion overwhelmingly supports the cattlemen.
- There have been many public demonstrations of community support for alpine grazing
- Mountain cattlemen are enshrined in tourism.
- Cattlemen have controlled weeds.
- Cattlemen have been involved in the control of feral animals.
- The presence of the cattlemen provide a strong force to monitor pest plants and animals, adverse human behaviour and fire fuel conditions.
- The value of local knowledge in emergencies has saved lives and assisted in fire fighting.
- The cattlemen are proposing a strong alpine cattle grazing management plan.



Where did all the cattlemen go?

Alpine Grazing Taskforce,
c/- Department of Sustainability and Environment,
8 Nicholson St.
East Melbourne, Vic 3002

To the members of the Alpine Grazing Taskforce,

I think mountain cattlemen should be permitted to continue the great tradition of grazing cattle on the high plains in the Alpine National Park.

If you view the whole policy mosaic, including community, economic, social, heritage and historic issues, the mountain cattlemen win hands-down.

The cattlemen have a 170 year history of caring for the high country and provide cultural links from the past to the future.

I think the implementation of a positive alpine grazing cattle management plan is the only sensible option for the future

Signed