

Lorraine Pountney (B.App.Sci) (Grad.Dip.E&T)  
February, 2015

### ***ABSTRACT***

It must be remembered that not all Victoria's supporters of the preservation of Victoria's natural assets are vocally biased or tenacious in their approach to conservation. There are many who believe preservation and protection should use as many tools as necessary to ensure the State's tangible and intangible assets remain for future generations. They also understand the environment will change over time and that those changes will be in response to a multiplicity of factors, both natural and 'man-made'.

Legislative and environmental management decisions cannot be made on poorly informed political decisions or based on knee jerk reactions to legal threats and succumbing to the wants of radical minority groups.

Sound decisions must be made on more than just the 'one-size fits all — lock it up and leave it' approach but on a *balance* of area-specific scientific studies *combined* with local knowledge and skills *in conjunction* with today's management staff who live and work in the environs to protect the State's natural assets.

The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to provide a balance to the rhetoric offered by the key stakeholders at the forefront of banning cattle grazing in Victoria's Alpine and red river gum national parks with the current scientific views that support strategic cattle grazing as a viable and sustainable adjunct to the controlled patchwork burning methods of fire fuel load reduction before land mismanagement and extreme fire events result in the loss of life, and the degradation and loss of the tangible and intangible assets that remain.

### Chapter 1

#### *The Environment and the Human Footprint*

This Report begins with the Environment because without some grasp of the geological, geographical and climatic bases that support indigenous and non-indigenous flora and, in turn fauna, it is difficult to understand why the scientific studies undertaken in one area may not have the same, or in fact, any level of relevance to another. The following is not an in-depth study but a thumbnail overview to provide an insight into these differential bases and examines how the past and present human footprint impacts on Victoria's High Country.

#### ***The Environment***

##### **1.1 The Geology and Geography**

*"The Great Dividing Range was formed during the Carboniferous Period some 300million years ago and has experienced significant erosion since."* (en.wikipedia.org, [Great Dividing Range](#): 2015) The centre of the Range is dotted with hundreds of peaks surrounded by smaller mountain ranges; major plains including Victoria's Bogong High Plains, and valleys similar to the Wonnangatta.

Mountains, plateaus and valleys were created by the faulting and folding processes of tectonic plate movement in the earth's crust and the mountains and plateaus consist mainly of limestone, sandstone, quartzite, schists and dolomite.

An article (author unknown): [The Southern Highlands of NSW](#): ([www.highlandsnsw.com.au](http://www.highlandsnsw.com.au)) and updated in August, 2000, concentrates on the geography and provides further insight into the beginnings of the southern end of the Great Dividing Range.

In the Paleogeography, the article states that originally Australia was part of the super landmass known as Gondwanaland and was formed after tectonic plates travelling north separated about 95 million years ago.

The article goes on to say that “*over hundreds of millions of years various parts of the continent were under the sea*” and this can be evidenced by the observation of seashells and marine fossils in the Buchan Caves in East Gippsland.

The article further supports the formation of the Great Dividing Range during the Carboniferous Period, identifying that glaciers covered part of the eastern shore, ice sheets existed in the south and “*the subsequent erosion caused by rivers of molten ice contributed to the current land formation*”.

There is also evidence that the southern part of the Great Dividing Range was at one time arid, and that temperature changes created the temperate climate we observe today. It has been these climatic changes that have influenced the evolution of the indigenous flora that attract the variety of indigenous fauna and bird life to the area.

### 1.2 Climatic Differences

The three key observations appear to be lacking in the botanical and zoological scientific studies undertaken in the Alpine National Park and they are those of topography, geography and meteorology and these are significant to the science as they can affect the prevailing climatic conditions between the mountains, plateaus and valleys prior to commencement or subsequent studies.

Using the Bogong High Plains and the Wonnangatta Valley as examples of these differences, the Wonnangatta Valley sits in the shelter of the surrounding mountains approximately 600m above sea level and is located to the South West of the exposed Bogong High Plains at an elevation level of approximately 1600m. The impact of climatic changes between the two locations will necessarily be quite different, even though they are only a little less than 80km apart in a direct line, because of the topography.

Wonnangatta Valley has some degree of protection from wind, rain, and varying temperature changes where there is no such protection on the exposed Bogong High Plains. Both areas can be blanketed in thick fog,

exposed to high temperatures and to hot drying Northerly winds, but the duration of fog cover and the length of exposure to the other meteorological conditions will be significantly different in both areas.

There can be significant differences in snowfall and snow melt levels. The Valley can be exposed to snowfall but Bogong High Plains experiences frequent higher intensity snowfall and snow melts because of its exposure and these in turn can affect the soil retention water levels of both areas.

### ***The Human Footprint***

The human footprint has also impacted on this environment. From the first Australians to European settlement and on to today, each have added, or taken, something from the environment.

The Gunaikurnai clans who inhabited the high country had a connection to this area that many cannot understand or relate to, and these people are far better environmental managers than many recognise or give them credit for today.

The humanistic footprints are also different. The Aboriginals gathered on the Bogong High Plains in the summer but did not reside there during the winter months preferring instead to return the lower warmer areas of the valleys. They did build permanent campsites at various places along the tracks each of the different familial groups travelled during their visits to the Bogong High Plains.

Fluvial gold mining, and to some degree forestry, dominated the area before Oliver Smith established the Wonnangatta Cattle Station and introduced cattle to the area in 1860s. It was after the gold ran that out many of the miners took up grazing or became members of the small communities that remained after the boom.

Victoria's High Country had no roads. Many of the tracks used by the Gunai people and the pack horse tracks used for the transportation of goods to the

## Discussion Paper

---

mining sites became cattle tracks and later some became today's walking, 4wheel drive and fire access tracks.

The cattlemen in the High Country today are descendants of some of the miners took up the land or those who moved into the area in search of land for beef production. They did not graze cattle on the Bogong High Plains all year round, instead taking their stock up at the end of spring in November. They visited regularly while the cattle were there for the summer and returned in March to muster their cattle for return to the home runs on the lower slopes and valleys for the winter.

There is also a long history of forestry in the area that cannot be excluded. Whilst no commercial logging is carried out in the High Country today many of the forestry coupes are adjacent to, or in close proximity to the Alpine National Park and the State Park boundaries, and this industry too, supports strategic cattle grazing in some areas. Rather than losing their coupes to bushfires if appropriate fire fuel load reductions cannot be managed with the use of controlled burns or there are areas left without fire fuel reduction methods at all because vehicular access for fire management crews is not possible.

It is known that some controlled burns have escaped in the past to become devastating bushfires that have burned out large tracts of valuable forestry stock before they were able to be brought under control.

And what of those who live in the small towns and villages, and the visitors to the area, whose lives are disrupted or put at risk because in this fire prone area the only current method of fire fuel reduction is controlled burning. Again strategic cattle grazing in the valleys and along the access tracks can play a vital role in providing natural fire breaks using the valleys and opening up tracks that are currently inaccessible to vehicular traffic, making them safe and accessible for fire management staff.

## Discussion Paper

---

The Alpine National Park is known to be visited by 4wheel drive clubs, fishermen and bush walkers and from a study prior to the 2013 Wonnangatta Strategic Cattle Grazing Trial, the damage caused by 4wheel drive vehicles was extensive and it was observed that 4wheel drivers are using the deer wallows to deliberately bog their vehicles to '*practice their 4wheel drive skills*'. The 'Widow Maker' a particularly steep rise has been closed to 4wheeler's as it has become too dangerous to use and banks on some of the river and creek crossings have been torn up badly resulting in serious erosion of the banks.

Further, it is known that there are Samba deer in the Alpine National Park and they attract game shooters and many visitors camp around the elms area near the Homestead Cemetery. There are no public amenities in the Wonnangatta Valley.

Bringing the environment and the human footprint together provides a broad overview of the diversity of not only the Wonnangatta Valley and the Alpine National Park, but the huge tract of land that is referred to as Victoria's High Country.

### Chapter 2

#### ***The Minister and the Science***

The Minister, the Hon. Lisa Neville, MP is recorded in Hansard on the 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2015 as having said in her response to Ms McLeish, MP:

*I want to address the claims made by the member, who suggests there is no scientific evidence. The first report that was ever done on cattle in Australia's high country and national parks dates back to the 1860s. That report very clearly showed that cattle do an enormous amount of damage in our national parks and in our high country areas but make little impact on the prevention of burns. That work continued from about the 1860s. In the 1950s and 1960s all across Australia—New South Wales, Kosciusko, the Snowy Mountains and all across Victoria—cattle in our national parks and high country, except for the Alpine National Park, were banned.*

And the Minister went on to add:

*The member talked about it being a scientific trial. I would like to make it really clear that there was no scientist involved in this scientific trial, because no scientist would put their name to it. I do not know if the member remembers, but a whole lot of scientists came out at the time to criticise it, and a whole lot of scientists walked away from it.*

Ms Neville concluded by saying “*that there is no place for cows in our national parks*”.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2015, Hansard again records in the Minister's response to Ms Suleyman, MP:

*(The previous government) ... decided that our Alpine National Park should not become a beef farm by reintroducing cattle to the high country under the guise of a so-called scientific trial.*

*Let us be very clear: in 2005 this Parliament passed legislation that took cattle out of the high country. In fact we paid out the licences to all those licence-holders, so a whole lot of people received a whole lot of money when this Parliament voted to take cattle out of the high country. The*

*Parliament did that because the science was absolutely clear. In fact the science has been clear for decades: cattle do enormous damage to our environment and they also have absolutely no impact on reducing fire risks. That is why back in the 1950s and 1960s all governments across Australia took cattle out of our high country and national parks, including the Snowy Mountains National Park.*

*But the former ... environment minister ... was not one to be swayed by the overwhelming scientific evidence. In fact he was not swayed by the fact that scientific evidence had been collected over decades and decades. He was not swayed by the fact that there was clear evidence showing massive environmental degradation caused by cattle grazing, and nor was he swayed by the evidence that cattle played no part in reducing fuel loads. No, instead the member for Warrandyte decided to conduct his own scientific trial.*

*Upon coming to government, I went looking for the scientific data that had been collected during the first phases of this so-called trial. I asked where that work was. Where was the meticulously detailed record of where the cattle had been, which bushes had they been eating, which were the craggy ravines they were using where there were fuel loads? Where was all that evidence? It did not exist. There was not one document, not one report—no file was anywhere to be seen.*

*This was a sham. We saw it for what it was—a loophole by which the coalition could once again treat our national parks as paddocks.*

Much of what is recorded in Hansard, and quoted here, is misleading those who are not familiar with the dynamic nature of the Alpine National Park or its vulnerability to intense wildfires. It also demonstrates that any scientific research the Minister makes reference to as demonstrating that “cattle do enormous damage to our environment and they also have absolutely no impact on reducing fire risks” is undoubtedly questionable.

## Discussion Paper

---

The Strategic Cattle Grazing Trial was never about “*reducing fire risks*”. No amount of controlled burning can do that either.

26% of fires in Victoria’s National Parks are started by lightning strikes and 2% by controlled burns escaping containment lines.

It is well known by researchers that any data collected as empirical scientific evidence that is more than five years old cannot be considered a primary reference source but may be included as base data or additional reference material in subsequent studies.

The Minister continues to quote scientific studies relating to damage caused by cattle grazing that were undertaken around the mid-19th century. And, even her reliance on some that were undertaken in the early 20th century and have continued for the first 5 years of the 21st century, is questionable.

The Minister, the Hon. Lisa Neville, MP has, on numerous occasions quoted scientific studies that were undertaken in Victoria’s National Parks in the 1860s and that these studies record the devastating damage caused by cattle grazing. In fact, the first National Park was established at Tower Hill State Game Reserve in 1892 near Portland in the State’s west some thirty years after the time she quotes the study was undertaken.

The Minister has also made reference to scientific studies with the same findings; claiming that the first report that was ever done on cattle grazing in Australia’s high country and national parks dates back to the 1860s and again this is misleading.

Ferdinand Von Mueller, the government botanist at the time, did undertake botanical studies around Mt Buffalo at about this time however in these studies Von Mueller was studying the forestry industry not cattle grazing and he makes no mention of the impact of cattle grazing in his report.

## Discussion Paper

---

There is, in fact, no scientific studies undertaken in the Alpine National Park that directly relate to cattle grazing as a supplement to controlled burning to reduce fire fuel loads.

There are, however, scientific studies that have been completed in Australia and overseas that do support the use of cattle grazing to reduce fire fuel loads.

None of the studies the Minister refers to record the prevailing weather conditions such as long wet periods or hot, dry periods or the length of those periods prior to the commencement of the studies. There is no detail of the seasonal periods where vegetation may have been dormant when studies were undertaken. No detailed damage caused by deer, existing fire fuel loads, rain and snow fall levels, soil erosion rates, soil moisture content or 4wheel drive vehicle damage, is recorded in commencement studies that could be measured and compared in subsequent studies.

Where the Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, the Hon. Ms Neville MP refers to the former Minister for the Environment the Hon. Mr Ryan Smith MP, as not being able to be swayed by the plethora of scientific evidence she consistently refers to, she adds that he “*decided to conduct his own scientific trial*”.

What should be remembered is that the 2010/2011 Trial was not withdrawn because of the lack of scientific evidence. To the contrary, it was because the necessary Federal ministerial approval procedures were not followed. What the Hon. Mr Ryan Smith MP did was, not to undertake his own trial, but follow the correct procedures in applying for Federal ministerial approval, and when that was granted, the original trial was re-established under the strict conditions and limitations that were applied to the approval.

The Minister, the Hon. Lisa Neville, MP goes on to claim that ‘when coming to government’ she went looking for the scientific data collected during the first phases of the 2013 Trial. She questions where the meticulously recorded data

## Discussion Paper

---

was and claims none existed. She also added that “*There was not one document, not one report— no file was anywhere to be seen.*”

When the Application for Approval of the Trial was made to the Federal Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Mr Greg Hunt MP, there in were in fact **twenty-seven** detailed documents prepared, including detailed site studies and maps of the site itself, and all these were drawn from to complete the Application for Approval.

Where Minister Neville makes reference to any data collected *during* the 2013 Trial it was probable because there was no scientific data available as the next report was not due until the completion of the 2014 Trial. That Trial was cancelled on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013 — just six days after the Premier, the Hon. Mr Daniel Andrews and his new cabinet were sworn in; and this would have left little time for the Minister, the Hon. Lisa Neville, MP to complete her document search.

Much of the damage of the past was not done deliberately to destroy the environment but through the use of the practices that were known and followed in the past. Today’s cattlemen are much more aware of sustainable animal husbandry practices and their inherent local knowledge and the use of their skills in managing their environment is vital to protecting the tangible and intangible of the Alpine National Park’s assets in a volatile bushfire prone area.

We are fortunate to have the observational accounts of the early explorers to the area and the recorded research of the early botanical and zoological scientists upon which we can now draw. However, it can be argued that many of these records were limited only to those areas that were easily accessed at the time, and in terms of the timeline in the evolution of the High Country, can only be referred to as ‘new’.

It is the topographical, geographical, meteorological differences and the impact of the human footprint on the Alpine National Park that requires flexible, area-

## Discussion Paper

---

specific land and fire management strategies that respond to the complex and dynamic environs to reduce fire fuel loads rather than the adoption of a 'single one fits all — lock it up and leave it' politically driven policy management plan that will not stop bushfires or reduce the intensity of wildfires in the Park, nor will it see a return of the bush to its past ecology.

Many of the botanical and zoological scientific studies carried out prior to the 2010/2011 Trial are not flawed in the purpose for which they were carried out at the time but lack the scientific evidence that identifies the differences in the diversity of the geography topography and meteorology between those study areas, and particularly to the 2013 Trial, and cannot be considered relevant to bush fire fuel reduction as no specific study had been undertaken previously.

It is also known that 2% of controlled burns do escape control lines in Victoria and many of these go on to become devastating fires that require thousands of hours of manpower and the use of expensive firefighting equipment to combat, particularly in remote areas, and protect assets and communities.

There are recent, reliable, credibly authored scientific studies and reports that support the use of strategic cattle grazing in conjunction with controlled burning strategies. Strategic cattle grazing is a viable option for fire fuel load reduction; particularly in those areas where the use of fire, and access of the vehicular support that is needed to ensure that these burns can be carried out safely by the staff charged with the burn task; and, provide the maximum protection against fire escaping the control area.

If future governments wish to continue this type of study, five continuous years of sound, reliable, valuable scientific data that should have been available in 2016 at the conclusion of the Strategic Cattle Grazing Trial in Wonnangatta Valley, will be lost.

The continuation of the Trial would also have provided sound, reliable, continuous science that should have resulted in the development of viable, flexible fire fuel

## Discussion Paper

---

reduction plans and strategies in remote locations that would have placed Victoria as the benchmark for other Australian States and Territories and upon which other countries around the world with similar ecologies could also have drawn.

Some may also argue that a Strategic Cattle Grazing Trial undertaken in what can only be described as a very small part of the Alpine National Park, and an even smaller part of Victoria's High Country, could be considered too narrow to be of any value to the development of landscape fire fuel reduction plans and strategies. But this is not the case. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

A small scale study such as this provides opportunities to identify and control any variables that may be present and that should be considered when developing land and fire management strategies in the future. The evidence gathered here would also have been much more accurate because of the natural containment of the area and therefore be more measurable against what should have been collected in subsequent studies.

### ***Summary***

Botanical surveys began in the 1850s in Mt Buffalo and Mt Bulla but area-relevant environmental studies did not begin in earnest on the Bogong High Plains until the 1930's and have continued periodically since then. However, these studies generally relate environmental cattle damage to the botany and zoology and have made no reference to the role of strategic cattle grazing in reducing fire fuel loads.

These reports could also be considered doubtful as none provide statistical data relating to the weather conditions, e.g. snowfall, rainfall, erosion rates or length of dry or wet periods, immediately prior to the commencement of the studies. An example of this is where the author/s have recorded cattle damage observed in wet, muddy soil areas that may not be present if the study was repeated after a hot, dry period.

In fact no scientific studies were undertaken to examine the connection of the strategic cattle grazing to fire fuel load reduction in the Alpine National Park until

## Discussion Paper

---

2010/2011. The results of these studies did not support the total removal of strategic cattle grazing because of 'devastating cattle damage' but confirmed that cattle grazing did reduce fire fuel loads of exotic plant species and where some species of indigenous plant species were grazed, these were not adversely affected.

It is the new science that includes topographical, geographical, meteorological differences, uses local knowledge and skills and includes the impact of the human footprint on the Alpine National Park that should drive the development of flexible, area-specific plans and strategies to reduce fire fuel loads that respond to the complex and dynamic environs that is needed.

The adoption of a 'single one fits all — lock it up and leave it' politically driven policy management plan will not stop bushfires or reduce the intensity of wildfires in Victoria's High Country, nor will it see a return of the bush to its past ecology.

That is lost and what remains will continue to be lost until the local and knowledge of those who live and work in these remote locations is put at the forefront of flexible multi-tasked fire reduction planning and flexible, area-specific methods of control are introduced to reduce the intensity of wildfires in Victoria's High Country that this vast tract of land will survive, albeit changed, and it will survive and be there for future generations to appreciate its tangible and intangible assets.

### Chapter 3

#### The Burra Charter

The Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013 (See Appendix A) was adopted by Australia on the August 19th, 1979 at Burra in South Australia. There were revisions on February 23, 1981, April 23rd, 1988, November 26th, 1999 and October 31st, 2013, after considering the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice 1964) and the resolutions of the 5th General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) (Moscow 1978).

The Burra Charter provides guidance for the conservation and management of places of cultural significance (cultural heritage places), and is based on the knowledge and experience of Australia ICOMOS members.

Conservation, as defined in The Charter, is an integral part of the management of places of cultural significance and is the ongoing responsibility of both politicians and managers to ensure the protection of the Alpine National Park.

The Burra Charter sets a standard of practice for those who provide advice, make decision about, or undertake works to places of cultural significance, including owners, managers and custodians.

It can be applied to all types of *places of cultural significance with cultural values*, including natural and Indigenous and historic places and Article 1 gives Definitions to the purpose of The Burra Charter.

The Alpine National Park is a *place* that is a geographically defined area. It does include elements, objects, spaces and views and it is a *Place* that has tangible and intangible dimensions.

It is a *place* that does enrich people's lives, provides a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape and to past and live

## Discussion Paper

---

experiences. The Alpine National Park is recorded as an expression of identity and experience and reflects the diversity of our communities and tells us about who we are, the past that has formed us and our Australian landscape. It is irreplaceable and precious not just to the Gunaikurnai and the Cattlemen of the High Country but to all who live, raise families and work in the area and who visit it.

According to the Burra Charter to ensure the *cultural significance* of Victoria's unique Alpine National Park it must be conserved for present and future generations in accordance with the principle of inter-generational equity.

The Burra Charter advocates a cautious approach to change: do as much as necessary to *care for the place and to make it useable, but otherwise change it as little as possible so that its cultural significance is retained.*

For the Park doing as much as necessary to protect the *place* and making it useable means reducing the fuel fire loads by opening up natural fire breaks in valleys and on plains, and maintaining fire access tracks to reduce the intensity of wildfires. It means reducing the amount of invasive non-indigenous plant growth, reducing the damage from sambar deer and the 4wheel drive visitors who are increasing soil erosion on tracks, river and creek crossings.

The aim of conservation is an integral part of good management and to achieve this purpose it is necessary to call upon the knowledge and skills of the Gunaikurnai people who were present in the High Country for more than 10,000 years prior to white settlement and the cattlemen who, for more than 150 years have lived, raised families and worked in the Alpine National Park alongside the Department of Environment and Parks Victoria staff who also live and work in Victoria's High Country and are responsible for its maintenance.

The head waters of the major rivers and the smaller creeks start in the Victoria's High Country and flow into the catchments that provide much of Victoria's water and the use of strategic cattle grazing provides alternatives to controlled burning

## Discussion Paper

---

in some areas. This reduces contamination from fire residue runoff and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the current large landscape burning methods and will provide better asset management strategies now and for the future.

There is social value in High Country too and this continues with the cattlemen, bushwalkers, 4wheel drivers, deer hunters and fishermen who regularly return to the Alpine National Park with family and mates to share the friendships and camaraderie experienced during their visits and pass on their experiences to future generations.

There are strong spiritual values connected to Alpine National Park and the surrounding area for the Gunai peoples and the many descendants of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> generations of cattlemen who live, own and run cattle in the High Country. There are others whose lives are inherently linked with the cattlemen who live in the small communities dotted throughout the area who have spiritual links to the Alpine National Park that are still held today.

For the Gunai peoples the spiritual value of the land and family is real and is passed on generationally through their dreamtime stories, songs and corroborees.

There were churches in the towns and villages but many continued to practice their beliefs where they lived because access to regular services was not possible.

This is also a spiritual link that may not be recognised as theological link but it does not have to be. God and Nature are both recognised and celebrated by today's Traditional Land Owners and the cattlemen and their families as the providers of country, its beauty and its power.

These spiritual values will continue because they will be passed to future generations of the Gunai peoples and the cattlemen as they have been passed before.

## Discussion Paper

---

This is the community spirit of the bush. Older than white settlement and for those who came after, it became vital to their endurance in a precarious and unforgiving environment. Today we call it mateship.

*Conservation, Preservation and Maintenance* are defined as the all the processes of looking after a place to preserve and to conserve the tangible and intangible assets of the Alpine National Park to retain cultural significance (p.2)

Knowledge, skills and techniques (p.3) states that: '*conservation should make use of all the knowledge, skills and disciplines which can contribute to the study and care of the place*'.

This Article allows for studies that are not only botanical and zoological, or directed only at the perceived damage cattle grazing does to environment, but calls upon the knowledge and skills of all those who know the Alpine National Park intimately. It calls for contributions from the Gunaikurnai peoples as the Traditional Land Owners, the Alpine Advisory Council, the local historical and heritage groups, and the Department of Environment and Parks Victoria staff who live and work there to be included.

And yes, it does include politicians, environmental scientists and conservation groups but not as *the masters of knowledge and skill*, but as *contributors* to the development of sound, viable, sustainable management plans and strategies.

And the clear example of where Article 4 is not applied relates directly to the Traditional Land Owners and the cattlemen. Both groups were signatories to a document where, in part, the Traditional Land Owners agreed to the return of the cattlemen to carry out the Strategic Cattle Grazing Trial.

In accordance with Article 4 allows for the inclusion of the cattlemen, even though they were excluded after the cattle were removed by parliamentary process and could no longer play a role in the preservation, maintenance or conservation of the Alpine National Park.

## Discussion Paper

---

The knowledge and skills of the cattlemen and the cattle grazing methods that had been handed down to them by previous generations to reduce fire fuel loads in the valleys, on the plains, or to keep access tracks open is well documented and nowhere more so than by Wallace Mortimer.

In turning to Wallace Malcolm Mortimer, well known historical author, it is imperative that his Author's Note at the beginning of his first book the **History of Wonnangatta Station (1989)**, is stated as it confirms his writings are valid as a social research reference.

*This book is not intended as a novel, but simply a document of facts. There is very little information in this book that is hearsay: all statements have been checked and verified by documents, or are quoted from firsthand knowledge. In the course of research hundreds of miles have been travelled, and no stone has been left unturned in an attempt to gain the truth.*

He records in this book, how the role of cattle grazing in the Wonnangatta Valley protected the Station, the Homestead and its surrounds in his description of the aftermath of the disastrous bushfires of 1939:

*"The fires followed a year of prolific growth of grass in the bush. The dry grass, leaves and small branches on the floor of the forest became a giant tinder box. There was no hope of extinguishing the fire, particularly in the remote areas near Wonnangatta where it was impossible to transport men and equipment. The fire had to burn itself out and it is amazing that the flats of the station itself escaped, the hut in the top flat, the stockyards and the homestead itself all remained unscathed. (p.123)*

The damage to the surrounding bush was extensive and the expanses of grasses in the valleys and on the creek flats were burnt out. According to Mortimer "nature had her own spectacular way of regenerating the lost bush and

## Discussion Paper

---

*the young scrub grew strong and quickly. Where there had been hillsides and flats of open grass surrounding the Station there was now nothing but impenetrable hop-scrub."*

The 1939 fires devastated the High Country but the cattle grazing did protect the Station as a whole and Mortimer's description of the aftermath shows that the surrounding hillsides and open grass were lost to regeneration.

The Burra Charter also defines the use of a place (the Alpine National Park) as the functions, including activities, and traditional and customary practices that may occur or are dependent on the place.

In Article 5.2 (p.4): *Relative degrees of cultural significance may lead to different conservation actions at a place* and this can clearly be applied to the Alpine National Park in relation to the use of strategic cattle grazing *and* controlled burning.

The Burra Charter must be respected and referred to in the development of land and fire management plans and strategies. It is an international Charter to which Australia is bound and Victoria's politicians as the legislative managers of the Alpine National Park must abide.

Whilst the Burra Charter is a key document for places of cultural significance it is not the only one to which Australia is committed. There are also the international agreements on the environment and whilst these are not included here, they are also applicable and vital to the development of land and fire management plans for the Alpine National Park.

### ***Conclusion***

The purpose of this Discussion Paper was to outline the rhetoric of the key stakeholders at the forefront of the cancellation of the Strategic Cattle Grazing Trial in Wonnangatta Valley; and, if the Minister, the Hon. Lisa Neville, MP and radical environmentalists are to be credible in their preferred method of a politically-driven single ‘one-size fits all — lock it up and leave it’ approach to environmental and fire management of all Victoria’s National Parks, this Discussion Paper does identify the only possible outcomes.

The single ‘one-size fits all —lock it up and leave it’ outcomes will not be protection and conservation; they will be eradication and devastation.

This is a Discussion Paper not a Report, and its purpose is to bring to the debate between the key stakeholders a level of knowledge and understanding that should be known and understood; reveal much of what is currently missing or misleading; and, highlight that legislative environmental and fire management decisions cannot be made on poorly informed political decisions; or based on knee jerk reactions to legal threats; and, succumbing to the wants of radical minority groups.

Sound environmental and fire management planning and implementation methods for the protection and conservation of the heritage; the tangible and intangible assets of Victoria’s National Parks generally; the Alpine National Park specifically; and, the surrounding High Country; then this planning and these methods must be based on more than just the ‘one-size fits all —lock it up and leave it’ approach.

Informed, reliable, viable and sound management decisions must be made on a variety of balanced, area-specific scientific studies *combined* with local industry and community knowledge and skills in *conjunction* with today’s management staff who live and work in the environs to protect all Victoria’s National Parks and the adjoining areas.

And, if this paper generates that greater level of knowledge and understanding that must be brought to the current debate; it will have achieved the purpose for which it was written.