

MT STIRLING 1994 AGE.

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# Lib MP opposes party on ski-resort plan

By Geoff Strong

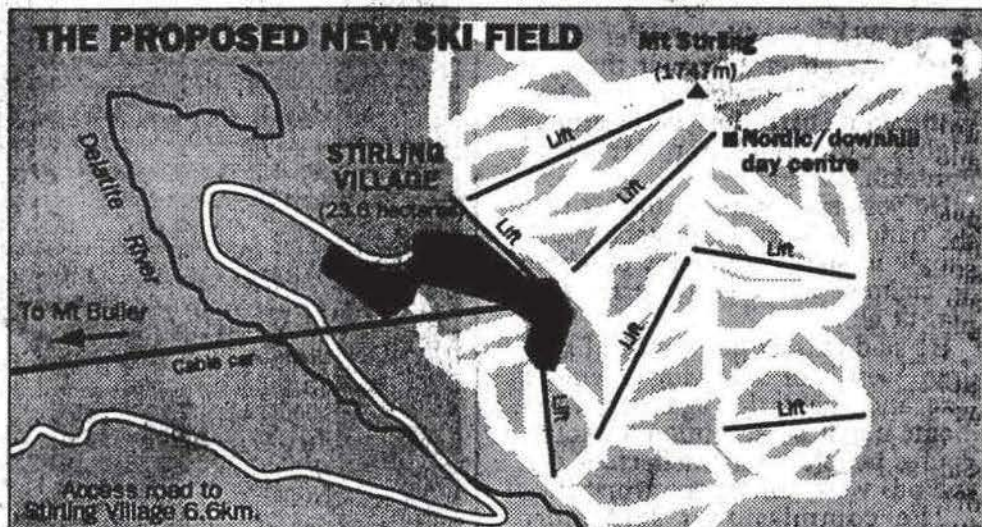
**A** STATE Liberal MP has distanced himself from his own government by opposing the Coalition's decision to allow a downhill ski resort on Mount Stirling, near Mansfield.

Mr Graeme Stoney, the Legislative Council member for Central Highlands who, in the 1980s, led the fight to defend the livelihood of mountain cattlemen against the then Labor State Government, again feels betrayed — this time by his own party.

At a meeting on Thursday night at which the Alpine Resorts Commission chief executive, Mr Phillip Bentley, announced the resort development, Mr Stoney said he was opposed to the statement that had just been read on behalf the Minister for Conservation and Natural Resources, Mr Geoff Coleman.

"My personal view, and it has been for 20 years, is that I am implacably opposed to downhill skiing on Mount Stirling," he said. "That ministerial statement maybe puts me at odds with Government policy, but I have a clear conscience because that is the first really that I have heard of the decision."

Mr Stoney was forced into declaring his position by local tourist operator Mr Steve Curnow, who runs camel safaris on Mount Stirling. After the minister's statement, Mr Curnow announced plans to take a camel



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protest to the streets of Melbourne similar to the protests organised by Mr Stoney in which mountain horse riders galloped through city streets.

After the meeting, Mr Stoney declined to elaborate, saying it was better that he confined his campaign to working behind the scenes.

To make things worse for Mr Stoney and his fellow Central Highlands Liberal MLC, Mr Geoff Craige, other Government sources say the developer of the Mount Stirling resort, Mr Rino Grollo, is likely to be given freehold tenure rather than the long-term leases that apply to every other major Victorian ski field.

The new terms for the Grollo-owned Mount Buller Ski Lifts Ltd are likely to mean significant changes.

They are almost certain to include giving the lift company control over the Ski Patrol, a largely volunteer organisation now run by the Alpine Resorts Commission as a mountain equivalent of surf lifesavers.

Mr Bentley also revealed that the company was likely to take over responsibility for collecting admission fees to the resort, car parking and services to lodges such as water, electricity, gas and garbage removal. It is also likely to be given responsibility for clearing snow from roads.

One of the main problems facing the commission is believed to be a three-year, no-retrenchment deal with the Australian Workers Union in return for its members accepting a reduction in weekend penalty rates.