

"We're not turning a blind eye to illegal activity in national parks." Peter Jacobs, Chief Ranger of the Victorian section of the Australian Alps said, in response to the recent protest organised by a group of people supporting the re-introduction of cattle to the Alpine National Park. "We certainly don't want to have unnecessary conflict, but we also can't condone what is now an illegal activity – grazing cattle in the Alpine National Park. It requires careful management."

visiting cattle

In August last year, cattle grazing licences were not renewed, a situation that led to the protest held early this year. Prior to the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria annual get-together, held in early January at Rose River, two groups of protesters drove cattle through the Alpine National Park. "We'd heard that a protest was being planned, and rangers met the protesters as they approached Wonnangatta Valley, an old cattle station, one where there's been no grazing since the 1980s. One of the groups had travelled from Mansfield and other was from the Dargo

Ranger Adam Whitechurch from Dargo was there on the day. "It was a very challenging task as our presence became the focal point for the three commercial media organisations present as well as the MCAV who were putting together a documentary about cattle grazing. It was not easy having cameras and tape recorders recording your every move and word for the best part of seven hours, and this is while you're trying to do your job and interview people. I think that the staff present on the day performed extremely well under the circumstances and managed to

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area – they'd been out for at least six days and had pushed about 15 head of cattle 100km through the Park."

Parks staff were well briefed and prepared with a response strategy. The protesters were informed that it was illegal to bring or be in control of cattle into a national park and they were asked to leave. They chose not to immediately, but proceeded, and met to hold a media conference in the valley – three helicopters flew media in and the event was televised.

complete the task that we had set out to do".

Overall, dealings remained pretty amicable and the cattle were removed at the end of the protest. "We didn't go in to inflame the situation – just establish and enforce that the activity is now illegal. We need to maintain good relationships, to help present the cultural traditions associated with past cattle grazing in the Alps – and we'd like to work together on this to do it well."

