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CATTLE GRAZING DOESN'T REDUCE FIRE THREAT

Cattle **grazing** in Australia's **alpine high country** does not reduce **bushfire** fuel loads and has no impact on the intensity and spread of fire, according to new research by leading scientists. In the biggest scientific survey of its kind undertaken in Australia, a team of four scientists studied the burning patterns of the January 2003 fires at 419 large-scale survey sites across the Bogong High Plains in Victoria. "If you take the popular bumper sticker slogan "grazing reduces blazing" as a scientific hypothesis, then we've found no evidence to support it," CSIRO fire ecologist Dr Dick Williams said. The research has the potential to further fuel controversy over a Federal Government grant of \$3million to the **Bushfire** Cooperative Research Centre to research the value of **alpine grazing** in reducing fuel loads.

Headline: Cattle grazing doesn't reduce fire threat

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CATTLE GRAZING DOESN'T REDUCE HIGH COUNTRY FIRE THREAT, SAY SCIENTISTS

The grant was allocated after a House of Representatives inquiry chaired by Eden-Monaro Liberal MP Gary Nairn recommended the CRC investigate "the long-term effects and effectiveness of grazing as a fire mitigation practice." During the inquiry, members of the Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria claimed grazing played an important role in preventing "the emergence of a fire tolerant, flammable ecological community immediately following a wildfire event." But Dr Williams said extensive research conducted several weeks after the 2003 fires revealed no evidence that fire severity was lower in grazed sites compared to ungrazed sites. "This is a landmark study, and as far as we know, it's the only one of its kind in the world, with data collected over a big swag of country according to a robust scientifically designed method." The study was "funded by scrounging funds together" by Dr Williams who said his team had "just decided to grab the opportunity to go out and do some serious science" after the fires. The team, which included Australian National University visiting fellow in fire management Dr Ross Bradstock, examined patterns of burning for 211 grazed sites and 208 ungrazed areas, with each site ranging from 3km to 5km in length. Over two weeks, they recorded vegetation type, estimated pre-fire cover, slope and aspect of land and took 4050 twig measurements from burned and unburned shrubs. "The more severe the fire, the fatter the twigs, because the tips and smaller branches are burned off. It's a severity signal you can measure, like first, second or third degree burns," Dr Williams said. In a peer-reviewed paper to be published later this year, the team concludes "the use of domestic stock in Australian alpine environments as a fuel reduction tool ... is not justified."

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