

Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria

PO Box 5083, Burnley, 3121 Phone 03 9429 8455
www.mcav.com.au Fax 03 9427 9324
barker@vicnet.net.au ABN 2534 2519 237
Reg. No. A2117 Friday, 6 January 2006

Media Release

Mountain Cattlemen protest to reclaim heritage

Today, Friday 6 January 2006, a number of mountain cattlemen families reclaimed their heritage and their historic right of access to the high country by droving several small mobs of cattle across the Alpine National Park in protest at having their grazing licences taken by the Bracks' Government.

"Yesterday's pantomime of a handful of volunteers puddling around in an alpine mossbed pretending to repair cattle damage was puerile in the extreme. Some of the vision even included bushfire damage because they couldn't find any cattle damage. The Environment Minister should be ashamed of himself for being part of such a sham. The alpine environment is the most pristine in Victoria and cattlemen have been caring for the high country for 170 years. We say put the cattle back under sensible management regimes and the Alps will be protected forever."

"The Mountain Cattlemen's Association is supporting these families protest because they are deeply grieved at losing their licences. To make their unhappiness and point understood they are taking back access to the original stock routes carved out by our great grandparents," President of the MCAV, Mr Doug Treasure, announced this morning.

"I am told that over the next week, these cattle will be driven along these stock routes right across the massive Alpine National Park. The actual positions of some of the mobs will be identified to news media, while other mobs will remain out of sight.

"It is clear that this action, though small in scale and essentially symbolic in nature, is in defiance of and in protest over the recent eviction of mountain cattlemen from their ancestral grazing lands.

"It is quite possible that this Heritage cattle drive across the Alpine National Park could become an annual protest event and it will continue each year until an entire range of issues in Victorian National Parks in general are satisfactorily resolved, Mr Treasure said.

"An annual cattle drive would keep alive our culture and heritage. This drive starting today will enable cattlemens families to pass their skills and experience on to our young people. We will continue to do everything we can to maintain our links and special relationship with the high country far into the future. We cannot do that in a museum as suggested by the Government!"

"Since the legislation went through seven months ago, we have thought long and hard on this matter. Individual families have come to the painful conclusion that they have no option but to confront this bad law. It is an unfortunate turn of events when good men and women feel that they have no recourse other than what they are doing today," Mr Treasure said.

Mr Treasure explained that in June this year, the Bracks' Government rammed legislation through State Parliament, effectively outlawing cattle grazing in Alpine areas. This brought an abrupt end to 170 years of unbroken tradition, hard-won experience and irreplaceable knowledge of the high country.

"It was intended to kill off mountain cattlemen and mountain cattle for good, to gain green preferences at the 2006 election," he said. "This action by some cattlemen is the first step in a week-long protest that signals that the cattlemen and the MCAV is going to fight for the return of their grazing licences and the reinstatement of their heritage and culture" Mr Treasure said.

"The Government claim we can do all that is left of the State Forest licences (which is almost nothing.) This is not true, and the Government knows it" he said.

"We have always said there is room for everyone in the High Country and we will fight for our right to share it with other users. I can guarantee that this protest, like all the others over the years will be peaceful and non-confrontational. The cattlemen will not interfere with any other users of the high country. I emphasize that the drovers and the cattle are not there to graze, they are travelling through. We invite people to support our cause in any way they can" Mr Treasure concluded.

Media note, Doug Treasure is not available today but media calls will be taken by Charlie Lovick who is out on the Great Divide on horseback
0429775510

A statement from the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria

Early this morning several small mobs of cattle have entered, and will be driven across, the Alpine National Park. This is a protest by many cattlemen's families at the loss of their grazing licences, and is supported by the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, (MCAV) supporting groups and many other Victorians.

The cattle are being tended by mountain cattlemen and other riders experienced in the traditional art of droving cattle on the original, narrow and sometimes treacherous stock routes and bridle tracks across the High Country. The cattle drives are being undertaken to demonstrate to the people of Australia that the taking of the licences means that Australia's living culture and heritage has been stripped away by the Government.

Taking the grazing licences from the Alpine National Park has virtually destroyed the Mountain Cattlemen and there will be nothing left, unless we act now. If the Mountain Cattlemen cannot be allowed to its culture and heritage, it will disappear forever. Grazing was removed from all the higher sensitive areas of the Alpine National Park years ago. The area in question is less than 15% of the Park, much less sensitive and mostly below the tree line. Until last June, grazing that section provided a balanced use of the Park and protected the heritage and culture of Victorias Mountain Cattlemen.

During the forthcoming week-long protest, individual members of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association reaffirm their commitment to continue to earn the trust and respect of other Australians. To their supporters, they pledge to maintain the highest standards of personal behaviour. To those who oppose this action they pledge to use no physical force or any threatening behaviour as they move the cattle through the bush. To those charged with maintaining the law, they claim the right to democratic protest and will offer none but passive resistance, as is the right of free men and women everywhere.

The MCAV is in no doubt that the Bracks' Government's move to evict them was purely political. It was not based on any ethical or common good considerations and only a one-dimensional science that suited its political ends. The Government ignored the opinion of other scientists that are of the belief the High Country certainly has changed from European impact but is in very good condition.

Quotes from Professor and Principal Fellow Botany, University of Melbourne, Peter Attiwill demonstrate this -

"There is no evidence that cattle grazing in the High Country has eliminated rare and threatened species, nor has species composition or diversity been irrevocably altered. Indeed, 170 years of controlled cattle-grazing has left by far the greater part of the High Country in excellent condition."

"There is no doubt that the opponents of grazing use science to achieve their end of stopping grazing completely. That is, there is no point of compromise, despite the fact that both the intensity and extent of cattle grazing has reduced dramatically over the years."

The Bracks' Government clearly felt that it had more votes to gain by appeasing radical greens than in supporting Victoria's heritage by continuing a balanced use of the High Country.

The MCAV notes and appreciates that both Victorian opposition parties and the Federal Government support reinstatement of cattle grazing in the high country. This highlights and proves conclusively that the cattlemen's removal was indeed political.

In taking this action, the cattlemen acknowledge the support of almost every other bush user group in Victoria - other bush users who have also been cast out of public land and parks or who know that they are next in line.

The Association makes the point that the cattle in this protest are not in the Park to graze, except for day-to-day nourishment as they are moved across the massive area.

The week-long protest event and the cattle will culminate at the MCAV Get Together to be held at Rose River Whitfield starting on January 14th 2006. It is expected 3000 people will attend the Get Together.

Media note, Doug Treasure is not available today but media calls will be taken by Charlie Lovick who is out on the Great Divide on horseback
0429775510