

# Doyle backs Lib MP in alpine protest

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OPPOSITION Leader Robert Doyle has endorsed Liberal MP Graeme Stoney's decision to join a protest against the State Government ban on cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.

Mr Stoney was criticised yesterday for joining mountain cattlemen on eight days of driving through the park, where grazing was banned last May.

Acting Premier John Thwaites urged Mr Doyle to pull Mr Stoney into line.

"If Mr Stoney is urging people or inciting people to break the law, that wouldn't be appropriate, and I think it's incumbent on Robert Doyle to certainly ask his member of Parliament what he is doing," Mr Thwaites said.

But an incensed Mr Doyle accused Mr Thwaites of being a hypocrite.

"He and Steve Bracks can stand on the steps of Parliament and incite over 100,000 people to break the federal IR laws, but when it comes to protesting against one of their laws, suddenly we need to have serious sanctions?" he said.

"Graham Stoney is a man's man, and I support him and what he is doing, absolutely and completely. . . he has been a mountain cattleman all his life."

The 170-year tradition of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park ended last year when the Government said it would not renew grazing licences.

The ban, based on environmental considerations, affects more than 40 operators, who muster 8000 cattle in the national park each summer. The Government has provided \$100,000 over three years to individual licence holders to shift their cattle back into nearby state forests.

Some have taken up the transitional payments, but others are vowing to defy the new rules, risking fines of up to \$1000 per head. The president of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, Doug Treasure, said protest cattle drives and heritage rides would continue until the leases were returned.

"Mountain cattlemen are self-reliant and only ask to be left alone to continue their craft, and in doing so, the skills, heritage and culture will continue," Mr Treasure said.

Parks Victoria intercepted some cattlemen two days ago, but they refused to leave the park.

Rangers warned that they were in breach of regulations, but no fines have yet been issued.

Mr Stoney said he entered Parliament on the back of his reputation as a lobbyist with the cattlemen's association and that Mr Thwaites was "just trying to intimidate us".