

CATTLEMEN SUPPORT MULTIPLE USE OF ALPS

A gathering of more than 1,000 people at Shannon Vale last week-end, again demonstrated support for mountain cattlemen.

The Mountain District Cattlemen's Association's annual get-together was held on the property of Mr and Mrs Brendan Fitzgerald, beneath the Bogong High Plains.

The Fitzgeralds will lose their high plains lease, following adoption of Land Conservation Council recommendations for exclusion of grazing on the plains.

Their predicament is typical of numerous producers who depend on the alpine grasslands for summer grazing.

Mountain District Cattlemen's Association president, Mr Jim Commins, told the large gathering that membership of the association was being "chipped away" as many cattlemen were finding it difficult to carry on with bush grazing.

Development of new management policies had restricted some of the runs, and he cited roading development, creating problems in containment of stock, among the difficulties.

Hosts for the gathering were among those facing total exclusion.

Mr Commins called for more time to be provided, before implementation of restrictive L.C.C. recommendations.

He was confident pressure for multiple-use would widen.

He said the minority "conservation" group had been very vocal.

The Minister for Planning, Mr Lou Lieberman, was among a number of Parliamentarians, senior departmental personnel and leading figures in primary production circles to attend the cattlemen's get-together.

Director of the National Parks Service, Mr Don Saunders, and Chairman of the Rural Finance Commission, Mr I. Morton, were there.

At least as one member of the Government, Mr Lieberman, indicated he favored some concessions being made to cattlemen over implementation of the L.C.C. recommendations.

"I hope that over the next eight years, we can sit down and have a round table look at what you are doing."

"I am very optimistic of your future in that respect," he said.

Mr Lieberman regarded "team-work" as the operative term in resolving areas of contention.

He believed only good could come from working together.

Cattlemen considered they could live and work in the alpine areas, without damaging the environment.

He made it clear that there was also a responsibility to contribute to food production.

Mr Lieberman drew attention to a projection that Victoria would make up 30 per cent of total Australian food production.

If this were to be achieved, careful consideration had to be given as to how best the state could marshal its resources.

The Minister referred particularly to young members of the audience. He urged them all to become ambassadors for the mountain cattlemen.

Omeo Shire president, Cr W. Flannagan, said his municipality was largely dependent on the cattle industry.

A large proportion of cattlemen relied on leasehold runs to retain viability.

Without them, they would have to sell up their properties, he said.

He said a lot of leases had been held for over 100 years.

Cattlemen had built huts which were available to all who visited the areas and their use was welcomed.

The huts were also an important refuge for skiers, and, on many occasions, lives had been saved by them, he contended.

Pointing out that final recommendations of the L.C.C. had not been implemented, Cr Flannagan urged consideration of some of the contentious aspects before any decisions are made.

The shire president commended the M.D.C.A. for caring for the interests of cattlemen.

He pointed out that these people had become

experienced in management of the high country over a long period.

"There are too many self-professed experts who think they know better," he said.

In recent years, the high country had been managed with the assistance of advisory committees, on which cattlemen worked with the Soil Conservation Authority.

Cr Flannagan said this had worked well and he advocated a continuation of this practice in the future.

He urged cattlemen to remain "strong in spirit" to fight the "conservation lobby."

Cr Flannagan said it was stated at the National Agricultural Outlook Conference that Victoria would become the "food-bowl of a nation".

The shire president drew attention to industrial expansion in other parts of the State.

He stressed that high country was the part of Victoria where quality cattle could be produced.

MOUNTAIN BEEF

NEEDED

Prominent North-East stock and station agent, Mr Brian Unthank, reiterated the call for consideration of every aspect in implementing L.C.C. recommendations.

Mr Unthank contended that Victoria will need high plains cattle.

He said Victorians who have been accustomed to going to Northern New South Wales and southern Queensland to purchase store cattle were going to face problems in supply of their requirements.

Reason for this in the short term was the drought, but he believed stock numbers would also not be available in the long term.

While Melbourne had been the traditional beef export centre, fat cattle were bringing much the same price in Brisbane, where stock could be purchased at an advantage because of the absence of high freight costs.



CATTLEMEN MEET: This was the scene at the Mountain District Cattlemen's Association's annual get-together at Shannon Vale on Saturday evening.

MULTIPLE USE

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"Victoria is going to have to supply its own cattle for the future. That is where the high country comes in."

"Everyone must work towards keeping breeding areas open," Mr Unthank said.

Many people took part in an inspection of the Bogong High Plains on Sunday, travelling in a four-wheel drive vehicle convoy.

This provided a first hand appreciation of how cattle grazing is carried on in harmony with the alpine environment.

The weekend get-together was catered for very adequately. Patrons arrived on Saturday afternoon to set up their camps along the banks of Middle Creek, prior to enjoying a barbecue tea.

A semi-trailer served as stage for speeches and an entertainment program, which continued

to the early hours of Sunday, featuring the popular group "The Hawks" and another famed artist, Johnny Faithfull who grew up at Omeo.

Three thousand steaks were eaten during the week-end, along with chops and sausages.

Unfortunately, the week-end did not go by without an accident occurring on the Omeo Highway.

Occupants of a Northern Territory registered car escaped injury when it skidded off the highway within half a mile of the Shannonvale turn-off.

The car came to a halt 15 feet from the roadway, stopped by a tree from rolling further down the steep valley side.

Driver was Miss B. Burden, who recently travelled down from Northern Territory to her parents' home at Ensay.



Minister for Planning, Mr Lou Lieberman, pictured with Mountain District Cattlemen's Association president, Mr Jim Commins (right) and vice-president, Mr Graham Stoney.