

# Mountain cattlemen launch campaign

Victoria's embattled mountain cattlemen will turn to the media for support in their fight against grazing bans in the Bogong National Park.

Mountain Cattlemen's Association president David Treasure said he would take journalists into the park on March 8 and 9 to show why his group thought grazing was important for the high country.

The cattlemen want to take media into the national park to capitalise on good press from a big rally at Watchbed Creek flat on the Bogong High Plains last Sunday.

More than 1000 people gathered at the remote creek flat to protest against Victorian Government plans to exclude cattle from part of the national park.

But Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands, Kay Setches, said it would be far better for cattlemen to come down off the mountain and enter into genuine negotiations with her department.

She accused the cattlemen's association of staging an emotive and selfish campaign colored with "misinformation" about grazing in ecologically sensitive mountain areas.

By **BRENDAN DELAHUNTY**

Mr Treasure said last Sunday's rally was big, especially considering the isolation of the location.

"We had to bring the attention of the public to the whole issue of management problems in the Bogong National Park," he said.

Main catalyst of last Sunday's rally was a plan to phase out 17,500 hectares of high country grazing leases by 1991.

Mr Treasure said the plan would "evict" 11 families from their high country grazing leases and threaten their livelihoods.

"If the mountain cattlemen go, then there goes the last critical voice against mismanagement in the high country," Mr Treasure said.

"The mountain cattlemen are the last group with an intimate knowledge of the area."

Mr Treasure said his group was concerned that Kosciusko National Park in NSW had been set up as a model of how Victorian alpine parks should be run.

He argued that Victoria's Conservation, Forests and Lands department budgets were too small to address serious management problems such as vermin,

noxious weeds and fire control.

Locked gates, over-grown tracks and "ridiculous regulations" were among other problems with the government's management plan, Mr Treasure said.

But Ms Setches said the cattlemen just wanted low cost grazing rights in the most sensitive parts of Bogong National Park, and there were compelling reasons why grazing should be withdrawn from parts of the park. She listed 10 species of endangered plants affected by grazing, plus several others which have been severely reduced by grazing.

"This is a unique environment which is important for nature conservation, recreation and water production," Ms Setches said.

Of the 386,000ha of high country open to grazing, the government plans to phase out 17,500ha of leases, mostly in Bogong National Park.

Ms Setches said cattlemen enjoyed cheap grazing rights of \$3 a beast for a three to four-month grazing season.

She said her government had offered to investigate alternative grazing areas for those affected, but the Mountain Cattlemen's Association had refused to discuss the issue.