

# Cattlemen query park cost

**THE Mountain Cattlemen's Association has run into a brick wall in its efforts to obtain estimates of the cost of the Victorian Government's plan to extend the Alpine National Park.**

"The Government is obviously embarrassed by the information and won't release it," MCA's liason officer, Graeme Stoney, said this week.

A Government Bill to extend the alpine park from 395,000 hectares to 695,000 hectares is now before the House.

Mr Stoney said the proposal involved a serious indictment of the process of government.

"Surely a government making a decision like that would have to take into account the monetary, political and management aspects, all of which would require detailed reference material.

The MCA confirmed that little or no costing on the park existed during a Freedom of Information hearing in Melbourne last Wednesday attended by a group of cattlemen and the Department of Forests, Conservation and Lands.

"They admitted at the hearing that they didn't consider any costs before the park extension was announced.

"It's obvious it has been done since then, but the department now claims the costings are in a budget submission and can't be released.

"There is no doubt what we are asking is embarrassing to the Government. We have been

stalled and shoved around between the LCC and the Department for seven months," Mr Stoney said.

"This information is of prime importance and interest to the public. We should be told the real costs of turning such a huge area into a national park.

"At a time when the community is seeking a reduction in government expenditure, this Government has made an open-ended commitment on a project for which there is little public support."

"It now appears the Government will continue to stall and sidetrack us until the Nunawading by-election is over and the legislation is passed."

Mr Stoney said supporters of the cattlemen would campaign for middle ground conservation in the by-election.

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The Federal Government tried last year to