

Cabinet is saving alpine park plans for a rainy (polling) day

By DAVID BROADBENT

State Cabinet has agreed to introduce legislation creating an alpine national park, but is saving the announcement for a possible by-election campaign in Nunawading Province.

Senior ministers believe the Government could use its plans to create the alpine national park during a by-election campaign if a new election is ordered in Nunawading.

Labor Party research has shown strong support for conservation issues among voters in the province and some ministers believe the park plans would win approval from Democrat voters.

The Australian Conservation Foundation has said it is considering a "presence" in any new election and its position would be influenced by the Government's plans for the national park.

Cabinet has agreed to introduce the national park legislation to Parliament next month so it can be passed in September.

The legislation would create a single alpine national park linking up with the Kosciusko National Park in NSW.

The proposed park would be the largest in the state, stretching from Mount Buller in the east and the fringes of Gippsland in the south to NSW.

The park would link up the Wonnangatta-Moroka, Bogong, Cobberas-Tingaringy and Snowy River national parks.

It would increase the area under national park from 324,000 hectares to 600,000 hectares.

Plans for the park were announced last August and came under attack from timber and cattle-industry groups. The State Government said high-country cattlemen would be able to graze cattle in the park but the cattlemen claimed the park created a framework for conservationists to get rid of grazing altogether.