

Push for the Bush

A THOUSAND CUTS

BACKGROUND TO OUR OPPOSITION TO LABOR AND THE GREENS

INTRODUCTION

Huge problems with mismanagement of water and the ever increasing restriction of access to public land is the basis of our campaign. Groups including mountain cattlemen, timber workers, beekeepers, horse riders, miners and prospectors, four wheel drivers, trail bike riders and many others have had enough of the exclusionist policies of the Bracks Government.

The irrigators are in a desperate situation and a major water storage is to be closed.

Farmers have been severely disadvantaged by punitive native vegetation laws and regulations on their own land which, in many cases, they are being forced to manage as quasi national parks. In the irrigation areas the catchment and distribution of water has been used as a political stunt to infringe the legitimate rights of producers. These are key rural issues. This government has politicised the bush by protecting its political alliance with The Greens at the expense of Victorian agriculture and Public Land access.

TIMBERWORKERS

Since the Hawke Government's time, virtually no federal or state election has passed without Labor sacrificing the jobs of timberworkers to boost its environmental credentials and secure Green preferences. This happened in East Gippsland again last week. The most famous recent example was Mark Latham's bid to force even more national parks on Tasmania which is a perfect example of green insatiability. More than 40% of the state is locked up in national parks but the greens still want more. But do Tasmanians in general want it? Plainly, no! Union and grassroots opposition cost Latham two Tasmanian seats and a substantial loss of blue collar votes in mainland states.

All new national parks declared since 2001 are a breach of the Regional Forest Agreements which were intended to deliver stability to the forest industry and a park system representative of all forest types. Every state Labor government with the exception of Tasmania has broken the RFA routinely at election time. Despite the fact that it was the Keating government which designed the RFA process no Labor government (except Tasmania) has defended the process or its outcomes. Any statement that logging is unsustainable is a political lie designed to obscure blatant political deal making.

MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN

The Bracks Government evicted the Mountain Cattlemen from the Alpine National Park last year. This also made state forest runs unusable as the cattle stray into the

adjacent parks. The government attempted to justify the decision publicly by a deceitful advertising campaign which featured doctored photographs. Environment Minister, John Thwaites, propagated the lie that 10,000 cattle would continue grazing in the high country and that each cattleman would receive up to one hundred thousand dollars in order to defray the costs of agistment and other expenses for three years. With the cattlemen's eviction, a beloved part of Australia's bush heritage has been stolen and more public land has been closed off.

HORSERIDERS, BEEKEEPERS, 4WD DRIVERS & TRAILBIKES

But it's not just the cattlemen and the timberworkers who are suffering from the green inspired exclusionist policies of the Bracks Government.

Horse riders, four wheel drivers and trail bike riders are gradually being excluded as the tracks they use are inexorably closed. They too are losing important bush cultural and recreational experiences to which they are deeply attached. The tourism industry and horseback recreation are likely to be the next target. National Parks and green lobby groups are now instigating a campaign against commercial tourism operations on public land. There is a genuine danger of total loss of access to the bush for any purpose other than walking and that may only be allowed on defined tracks.

FARMING AND WATER

The Bracks Government has demonised farmers using the same tactic applied against timberworkers. Thus, hard working farmers have fallen victim to draconian native vegetation legislation which erodes their private property rights and hits at the productivity of their farms.

Bracks and the Greens are loudly insisting on more environmental flows and to do this they are taking the gamble that to de-commission Lake Mokoan won't lose them any votes. But Lake Mokoan is used by irrigators and tourism; it provides an economic base for Benalla and it deploys flood waters and provides habitat for large numbers of flora and fauna. The Brack's Government thinks that by decommissioning Lake Mokoan, the city people will believe they have achieved the promise made for environmental flows from the Snowy.

Farmers who irrigate are virtually being blamed for the lack of water caused by the current drought. The near hysterical debate about the drought (e.g. "the worst in a thousand years") is likely to lead to further impositions (higher prices for water) which will make it harder for farmers to compete against imports. Governments which have failed to implement channel lining to save irrigation water are using irrigators as scapegoats. The inevitable outcome of this will be higher food prices, more rural decline and irreparable harm to irrigation-dependent country communities.

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