

"Minto Park"
Mansfield. 3722.

28th June, 1983.

Mr. P.G. Sheehan,
Acting Chief, Forest Management,
Forests Commission,
MELBOURNE. 3000.

Dear Sir,

I am writing on behalf of the **M.C.A.V.** in response to your letter regarding huts situated on Victorian Crown Land.

We wish to request that huts belonging to Mountain Cattlemen situated on Alpine and Bush grazing runs be assessed separately to other huts on crown land.

The reason for this is the unique circumstances surrounding these huts which we believe merits separate consideration to the ordinary hut on crown land. Our comments therefore only relate to Mountain Cattlemen's huts.

Grazing on Crown Lands in Victoria commenced in 1835 and is probably the oldest form of land use still existing in Australia. Huts situated on Alpine grazing runs are an extension of the traditional use of this land. For well over 140 years, Mountain Cattlemen's huts have been an ongoing feature of the land in question. They have been built and maintained by Mountain Cattlemen and with few exceptions have been left open as a refuge for all to use in times of emergency. These Cattlemen are proud of the tradition and service their huts have provided; and the many lives the huts have saved. They are proud of the goodwill and warmth that thousands of people feel towards the cattlemen's huts and their origins.

This fact is substantiated by the immediate success of the two books written on the subject recently. The authors were Mr Harry Stephenson and Mr Tom Holth, who can testify to the great interest expressed by the public on the subject.

With the dramatic upsurge in visitors use throughout the Alpine area, use of these huts is increasing and the need is arising to establish with the public and the managing authorities, the fact that these huts are privately owned and used primarily in the course of the cattlemen's business. Because of the growing number of people using these areas, we believe that the public should only regard the huts as a back up refuge to their recreational activities, not rely on their facilities or claim use of the huts as their given right and used as a cheap source of accommodation. Unfortunately, this

attitude is becoming an emerging trend and we are concerned that the traditional spirit and co-operation of the use of the huts by everyone may be in danger. To this end, we suggest some form of legal tenure, title or ownership be created for Mountain Cattlemen who have built, and maintain these huts on Crown Land in return for the services the huts provide the public.

In our opinion, this move would create guide lines for legal tenure by cattlemen, and establish with the public the fact that a spirit of co-operation and goodwill is required by people needing refuge in a remote area. With this concept in mind, we wish to reply to the points raised in your terms of reference: -

1. Availability to the Public

Huts or adjacent huts owned by cattlemen are always available to people in times of emergency. Almost all huts owned by Mountain Cattlemen are left unlocked for all people to use in emergencies. In some more remote areas a small shed adjacent to the hut is kept locked and supplies, chaff and oats are stored. These sheds are generally respected because the hut is available and the system appears to work well. We wish to emphasise that, despite the fact that the hut may be fully occupied by a cattleman, and his party, a person in an emergency and needing refuge would never be turned away. This is a Cattleman's tradition.

2. Appropriate forms of tenure.

Cattlemen believe that as the undisputed owners of their huts and yards on their runs, a legal priority should be created to establish Cattlemen's Bona fides with increasing numbers of visitors. Many of these visitors do not know the background of the area and the huts. They tend to regard their use of the hut as their right. This tends to create friction with cattlemen who for several generations have gladly allowed people to use the huts when not required in a spirit of goodwill to all people using remote areas. This was always on the unwritten understanding that the cattlemen had first priority over their hut when they needed it. We believe this question should be discussed further with representatives of our organisation as it is a question we have been pursuing for many years.

3. Legitimate Uses.

Primarily for the use of the Cattlemen in pursuit of their business and for public refuge in times of emergency. This primary use is expanding with the advent of some cattlemen hosting trips into their grazing areas in summer and winter, camping at the huts and tending stock. This trend has

emerged as more and more people express the wish to be taken into these remote areas expertly and safely. Our Association believes that Mountain Cattlemen are probably the highest qualified to conduct these tours because of their knowledge and experience gained over many years of family involvement in the Mountains. Camping at their hut forms a most necessary part of these trips and the people on the trips benefit greatly from the experience they generally otherwise could not enjoy safely.

We believe that the huts should not be used by the public as a cheap form of accommodation which is happening more and more. One of the main reasons for this is the overuse that a lot of the huts and surrounds are suffering from too many people congregating around the focal point of the huts. This overuse extends to firewood, water and toilet problems. People should be encouraged to spread out and camp over wider areas and this could be done by the legal title idea, plus the stipulation that the huts be used as an emergency only. The problem of overuse has emerged because of the huge upsurge in interest of the Alpine areas.

4. Erection Replacement and Maintenance.

Cattlemen owners of the huts should maintain their huts in good average condition.

5. Role of Land Managing Authority.

The land managing authority should oversee the legal priority of the owner and resolve any conflict of interest between owners and the general public. The management authority should be responsible for the erection of a notice in each hut stating the name of the owner, the status of the owner, and listing conditions that apply to people wishing to use the hut.

6. Historical and Cultural Significance.

Mountain Cattlemen's huts have immense Historical and cultural significance. It would be a tragedy for the Nation if the traditional role of the cattlemen as owners and guardians of the huts was usurped or undermined by Government policy. If this occurred over 140 years of tradition and culture would be lost and a major blow would be struck at the spirit of goodwill and involvement that exists between people using these remote areas. We believe this spirit is to be fostered and encouraged as an example of the true Australian way of life in the bush.

Using the suggestions we have listed, we believe this spirit can be maintained and people can go on enjoying the special feeling one has entering a Mountain Cattlemen's hut on the high plains.

It's not just a hut, it's a Mountain Cattlemens' hut.

Yours faithfully
Ernest Strey