

# THE PARKS ROW: ANGER OVER NEW 'BUFFER ZONE'

The national parklands row has erupted again with N.S.W. government approval for 'buffer zones' to be established around the parks. JULIAN CRIBB reports on the plan which will immediately affect 200 properties in the Snowy River shire.

Graziers neighbouring national parklands in southern N.S.W. are angry and alarmed over a plan to enforce a 'buffer zone' which they believe could ruin land values and seriously interfere with their grazing management. While the rumpus is at present confined to a single shire, Snowy River, in southern N.S.W. there are strong indications that the N.S.W. Government intends to use the buffer zone concept around all major parks in that state — and if successful the plan could well spread to other states, particularly those with A.L.P. Governments.

The uproar started over a development plan commissioned by the Snowy River Shire which contained provision for a 'buffer zone' involving almost a third of the available land area of the shire to be created. The buffer zone was ostensibly to prevent 'undesirable commercial development' but the plan specified it would "remain in private ownership for controlled agricultural use". Alarmed farmers and landholders have been unable to elicit any further clarification from either the Council, or the State Government, who they suspect is behind the plan.

The buffer zone in Snowy River shire affects more than 200 properties and graziers fear that its structures will convert them into the unpaid caretakers of land adjoining the park, obliged to manage it in conformity with park policy, unable to sell because buyers have been scared off and ultimately forced to yield it up as future park land at values which have been artificially depressed by the buffer zone. They claim already buyers are turning away from the land because of uncertainty over what the buffer zone means, and values are dropping, reducing graziers viability and ability to manoeuvre to recover from the livestock recession.

N.S.W. Planning and Environment Minister Paul Landa in an interview with the A.B.C. said the buffer zone was "not a Government proposal" but added that the Government supported it. "I'd certainly regard any departure from this principle seriously because I'd see it as being motivated by reasons other than the best use of the land," he added. "The genuine grazier or farmer has nothing to fear whatsoever," the Minister asserted. He indicated the aim of the proposal was to control 'undesirable commercial development' on land near national parks and to prevent land being broken up into small lots by commercial speculators or hobby farmers.

But it is clear that some controls will also be imposed on the genuine farmers by the Shire, and possibly other authorities. These could include fire control restrictions, clearing bans, stock management, pollution, and pest control limitations. To the graziers it is the thin end of the wedge. Ultimately the land will be taken for a National Park, after it has been controlled, restricted and devalued to discourage commercial agriculture, they say.

The N.S.W. Parks and Wildlife Service has not surfaced in the controversy as yet, but its plan of management clearly calls for the setting up of buffer zones around the parks with "Management being as closely allied as possible to park management principles", and the inference is strong that either the N.P.W.S. or the State Planning Authority, or both, have had a finger in the Snowy River Shire's development plan. Tom Barry, chairman of the local Land Owners Action Committee, says landowners are becoming frightened and desperate at the wall of silence they meet whenever they seek clarification of the buffer zone plan and its implications. Maps of the buffer zone are deliberately vague so no-one knows whose land is affected, he says — but prospective buyers have already taken fright and values are tumbling. No-one will give any clear idea what controls will be imposed on graziers in the buffer zone, or who will impose them.

Deputy Shire president Clem Mackay said the buffer zone concept was developed "because the Park did not want 'undesirable development' close to its boundaries". The tourist boom in the snowfields had brought about a lot of pressure for this development he said. He claimed there were "no regulations" involved in the buffer zone plan "just a broad concept" and that the zone would be restricted for rural use with "minimal controls" probably only over fire and pollution hazards. He said the Parks and Wildlife Service would have no authority over the buffer zone unless "wanton destruction" was taking place. "Under the plan no control can or will be given to the N.P.W.S.," he said. "We are certainly not trying to sell out the landholders as has been claimed."

An independent journalist who has been following the course of the dispute told **National Farmer** that in his view the evidence was strong that the idea for the buffer zone had emanated from the N.S.W. Government, and probably the N.P.W.S., as was shown by the Minister's complete familiarity with what might otherwise be a small issue. The Snowy River shire had just become the guinea pig for the experiment, he claimed, and it was possible that similar buffer zones would soon surround parks throughout the state, and possibly other states too if the tactic was successful, affecting thousands of farmers and landholders.—From "National Farmer", by Julian Cribb.