

Alpine cowboys snowed under



Libs dragged into tug of war

The row over plans for a new contiguous Alpine Park is far from over with conservationists and mountain cattlemen still at each other's throats.

The Liberal victory in the Nunawading by-election cast doubt over the future of the park plan but the Australian Conservation Foundation has signalled its determination to keep the issue alive.

"The idea of a contiguous Alpine park is anything but dead," ACF director, Dr Geoff Mosley said this week. "Legislation for it will come before State Parliament in September and the Liberals will have to examine their consciences very carefully then. Especially since the Alpine park plan has been a bi-partisan issue up until now."

The Mountain Cattlemen's Association is just as determined to bury the plan.

The association's liaison officer, Mr Graeme Stoney said his members had swung their weight behind the Liberals in Nunawading because the party opposed the existing contiguous Alpine park plan.

"We expect them to stand by their word to oppose it," he said.

"If they don't, we'll be extremely disappointed, to say the least."

The Labor government unveiled a plan earlier this year to link five existing Alpine parks to the Kosciusko National Park in New South Wales and forge a vast 1.5 million hectare reserve.

The Liberals claimed, however, that the proposal did

not meet internationally recognised standards for a national park and threatened the existence of mountain cattlemen and the tourism and timber industries.

They also argued that insufficient government resources were already being earmarked for other national parks in Victoria.

The Liberal spokesman for Conservation, Forests and Lands, Bruce Reid said this week he had not changed his attitude.

"The existing four Alpine parks need to have more resources and more rangers. Until they are run effectively, we cannot support the idea of a contiguous Alpine park."

Veteran mountain cattleman, 'Buff' Rogers said the Libs had to ensure the contiguous park plan was defeated in the Upper House because his future — and those of many other colleagues — was in the balance.

Buff, who pays \$2,000 each year to graze his 550-strong herd in the Alpine country, said strict conditions already made it hard for him to operate.

"I'm being excluded from some of the old stock routes or else given the run-around to the point where it's not worth the effort," he said.

"Next thing you know, all the conservationists will be pressing the State government to get rid of us altogether."

"They're on record as saying the Alps are not the right place for cattle."

Dr Mosley said the mountain cattlemen were "misinformed" and over-reacting.

The rights of all users needed to be considered in any overall plan for the area, he said.

"The State government has gone to the extent of suggesting that a special advisory committee consisting of cattlemen be set up. The conservationists have not been given the same opportunity. If anybody is strongly influencing the government, I'd have to say it was not us but the cattlemen."

Mountain man 'Buff' Rogers ... access to some old stock routes.