

2/2/85.

"The Government must completely review its alpine management strategies and until the review is completed, drop or shelve all plans to extend the national park network." The President of the Mountain Cattlemens Association, Mr. Jim Commins said this today at the festivities marking the 150th Anniversary of alpine grazing at Junction Plain, near Omeo.

Mr. Commins said, "The severity of some recent bushfires in the Alps are a direct result of poor management strategy and lack of funds to those authorities charged with the responsibility to properly manage the area".

"The lack of cool protective burning on Mt. Buffalo combined with the phasing out of grazing years ago, created a situation where most of what mountain was recently badly damaged with wildfire with devastation to our flora and fauna."

"All cattlemen and their families are practising conservationists and our survival and our interests are no different from the aspirations of the majority of Victorians. Many urban "conservationists" do not understand land management practices such as burning and grazing."

"Their philosophies which have influenced alpine managers not to protective burn forests, are an obvious disaster causing unnecessary and enormous costs. If Government management agencies continue to bow to their influence, the Alps will eventually be totally devastated by a major bushfire. If the alpine area is to be properly protected and developed for future generations of Victorians, there are several aspects of management which must be seriously and urgently addressed.

- * Increased cool protective burning at the appropriate times.
- * Controlled grazing must be recognised as the cheapest and one of the most efficient forms of fuel reduction and fire prevention.

Mr. Commins said "it is absurd to propose an extension of national parks when the existing authorities have insufficient resources of manpower to look after existing parks."

Mr. Commins further added that there are over 110 families who not only earn their livelihood by grazing in the high country, but care for the high country. Some of these families have acted as unpaid guardians of the high country for five generations. They are now threatened by the State Labor Party's policy to extend the National Park, further restrict grazing rights and even more immediately through increased State charges on their leases.

Mr. Commins said the review the cattlemen are seeking should utilise the experience and understanding of people who have lived and worked in the Alps for up to five generations. These people such as the Mountain Cattlemen are moderate and practical conservationists. They understand the Alps and live close to nature. There are none better qualified to help review alpine management which should be done immediately. If the Government will not review their Alpine management and land use, the cattlemen have no option but to request our thousands of supporters to support candidates in the forthcoming election who will not allow extensions to National Parks until the management of the Alps is completely reviewed and the value of cool protective burning and grazing recognised with Alpine management strategies.