MOUNTAIN DISTRICT CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

ALPINE STUDY AREA LAND USE STATEMENT

We, the Mountain District Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, anticipate that Councils, Associations and many individuals will be responding to the current Land Conservation Council's Invitation to make submissions in respect of the Alpine Study Area by 30th September, 1977.

Our Association would like to enlist the support of all interested people by making known the advantages of grazing within this area of Crown Lands. Following are some of the points in favour of continued grazing, though not necessarily in order of importance.

The L.C.C. has undertaken research which would indicate that graziers using Crown Lands to supplement their freeholding can produce cattle efficiently and at less cost than elsewhere in Victoria, yet without access to these areas would be in the vast majority of cases, quite unviable and have to leave the industry.

The cattle industry is worth 30% to 50% of the total income of small towns in and surrounding the mountain area.

- Where cattle graze effectively, which is by no means the whole area, the risk of fire damage is very greatly reduced as the pasture is trimmed and remains green for longer periods.
- Having stockmen throughout the Alpine Study Area who collectively know the whole of it intimately, provides a valuable source of knowledge in the case of guidance, lost persons and fire.
- Assertions of erosion damage have been grossly exaggerated, in fact cattle grazing causes virtually no erosion. Some of the factors that have caused erosion are as follows:

The greatest erosion hazard is when holocaust wild fires are followed by heavy rain.

The area is just recovering from the damage done by the on-slaught of rabbits.

Motorised vehicles are relatively recent but severe eroders. Frost contributes to erosion at the highest altitudes.

- Native plant life and cattle co-exist very satisfactorily while grazing stimulates improved and vigorous plant life. Forest regeneration and cattle grazing are compatible.
- The tracks made by cattle invariably follow an even gradient or level contour if possible and are helpful to fishermen and bush walkers.

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- Cattle grazing in the mountains can be aesthetically pleasing to visitors who are intrigued by the methods used to manage cattle in open range environment. Very few other animals are seen for most of them are wary of humans or are nocturnal.
- It is a disease free environment in which are bred quality cattle that are keenly sought for foundation stock and by store cattle buyers throughout Victoria and N.S.W.
- Australia is said to be the driest continent on earth and even during the present rural depression depends on primary industry (exclusive of mining products), for its greatest share of export earning. The community should not demand that fertile areas of relatively high rainfall be closed to food production.
- Grazing on the Crown Lands of Eastern Victoria forms a valuable part of the heritage of our nation.

The land has been occupied for grazing since the very earliest days of settlement with no change to overall landscape or livestock management. The only real difference between now and 140 years ago is that runholders in many cases are able to service their camp sites by motor vehicle.

In most cases runholders are members of pioneer families and are rich in their knowledge of its local history.

The runholders are skilled and traditionally involved in managing the operations of grazing. They have a sound understanding of the ecology through generations of experience.

RESERVES AND WILDERNESS AREAS

We recommend very careful consideration of any area proposed for reserves. The reduction of cattle grazing and the timber industry in this country would have serious effects on the incomes and possibilities of employment of those living in adjacent towns and areas.

Throughout the mountains there is a vast area of natural wilderness where it has scarcely changed at all during the past 140 years and more.

The environmental changes in the past or future have and will be mostly brought about by the effects of foxes, feral cats, rabbits, as well as blackberries and other noxious weeds. Cattlemen predict that the expanding population of deer, due to their habits of wallowing in springs and moss beds, will also become a problem.

These places of irregular dimensions are invariably surrounded by or adjacent to grazed land or timber areas of commercial value. The only way for people to enter them is on foot and to those people who will undertake that exercise, complete solitude and a sense of remoteness is available plus an opportunity to study the native plant, animal and bird life in the most natural surroundings.

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There are many places of this nature ranging from a few hectares to thousands of hectares where cattle virtually never graze and the limited stands of commercially attractive timber would be uneconomic to extract.

We do not believe there is a need to declare these areas by statute as National Parks or Wilderness Areas for several reasons:

- 1. Because it would be difficult to define the boundaries.
- 2. There is no conflict of interest relating to these places of natural interest. (Unforeseen mining activity may at some time affect some parts but would be unlikely to affect many or large areas).
- 3. They will remain wilderness areas without further officials to administer them thus saving the expense of public services being duplicated or adding to those in existence.
- 4. We consider it important that there be minimum disturbance of existing grazing conditions until a full and thorough up to date research is carried out on burning, moss beds, native flowers and other contentious problems which it is claimed affect the maintenance of the country under consideration.

RECREATION AND TOURISM

Our association recognises the recreational value of the Alpine Study Area and also that these pleasures should be available to the general public as they now, in fact, are.

Provision should be made to protect the privacy of cattlemen's camps and stockyards, likewise logging and mining camps etc.

Motorised vehicles should be allowed entry as provided and restricted by law.

We feel there is a strong case for restricted access to some places. As already pointed out this is taken care of by the natural topography and vegetation over a large area but many snig tracks, forest access tracks and fire trails should be excluded from general public use.

M.D.C.A.V. is gravely concerned by hunting dogs used on Crown Lands.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Rural communities dependent on the Alpine Study Area would be most seriously disadvantaged by being denied the use of its resources especially the renewable resources of pasture and timber.

Towns supporting the timber industry would disappear and grazing properties used in conjunction with Crown Land grazing would become unviable.

All this would combine to have a disastrous effect on municipalities and in particular, on the Shire of Omeo of which 80% is in the Study Area.

There would be many unemployed and an exodus of people to the cities seeking work.

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If the resources of the Alpine Study Area continue to be under the good management that has developed then country towns in and adjacent to it will be able to provide goodsservices to the local inhabitants and visitors alike.

The social structure of the local people with their community organisations which have been developing over a great many years will continue to flourish where they would seriously diminish if denied these resources.

In conclusion it must be said that cattlemen regard themselves as conservationists as a necessity to succeed in their enterprise and have been gaining knowledge over very many years of experience.

Over the study area each runholder has a specialised knowledge of his own allotted grazing area and should be allowed the greatest degree of autonomy in his grazing management which should be assisted by the advisory services of interested State Departments.

We recognise the value and co-operation of the various departmental services with whom we have contact and we strongly support the view that the Department of Crown Lands and Survey should continue to be the landlord of the areas they now administer for grazing.

Our association is in favour of a multi-use concept for the Alpine Study Area with the existing management authorities to supervise activities within their own specialized field and in turn being responsible to Ministers of the Crown and the State Government.

James A. Commins,
PRESIDENT