

Our Anniversary Get-together marks 150 years of mountain grazing.

It is appropriate that our gathering this year is in the Omeo district for it is only a few miles from this very spot that the first cattlemen brought their stock from the Sydney side in 1835, at approximately the same time as the Henty, Btman and Fawkiners were establishing themselves from Tasmania.

It is ironic that as a result of the selfish objectives of public funded minority groups, cattlemen are at extreme risk of being eliminated from the mountains.

Trumped up and unsubstantiated charges are levelled at cattlemen and their cattle, while very little has been heard of the many positive benefits of cattle grazing.

If the powerful moves towards the creation of a huge National Park are successful, then we and the citizens of Victoria will be disadvantaged far more than most people have yet realized.

Sweeping moves have been made in restructuring public departments involved with the natural environment and equally broad brush changes are needed to the current concept of National Parks management before further large areas are committed. Don't think that cattlemen are the only ones affected by National Park proposals. In this district a situation exists where a project that would offer much needed productive employment to extract high quality marble, as well as associated transport and processing industry is denied, because it is within the bounds of a proposed National Park. Surely it is anomalous that in the same district old gold mines that failed many years ago, are to be enshrined as historical parks.

State budget estimates last year allowed more than five times as much for National Park administration and wild life management, than for soil conservation. A vastly increased National Park will very much greatly increase this apparent imbalance or misplacement of priorities at great cost to the public.

There is more to wildfire than the danger to improved property and more of the general public are becoming aware of the relationship between wild fire and erosion.

You only have to look around Junction Plain here where we are to see the value of grazing.

What better place could be found in bushland to make a stand against an advancing bushfire and just imagine what a dangerous place it would become if it was covered with old uneaten dry grass.

The trivial inconvenience to a few people by the presence of some natural fertilizer, is of no consequence compared with the inestimable value of the trimming it has had continuing to make valuable and productive effort while maintaining good relations with the public for the next 150 years. Protective burning is a most necessary precaution in bushland, but effective grazing where it can be managed is better and very much more cost effective.

Unfortunately many people are not yet aware of this and many other cattle grazing values.

What is needed is not greater restriction, but greater education of of the value of burning and grazing.

Cattlemen through our Association, have been making strenuous efforts to persuade the Government to hasten more slowly on National Park extension, but to this time we have received no signals that they indicate any deferment of National Park plans.

Official reaction has been that the public have had ample opportunity to have their say through submission to the Land Conservation Council.

In the last round of invited submissions over 70% of respondents expressed no desire for further Alpine National Park extensions, but this has been ignored.

As an Association we have been strictly non political and have wonderful support from people of all political persuasions, but as things stand we appear on this issue at odds with the Government and we now call on the Government to review its alpine management strategies and drop or shelve

all plans to extend the National Park network.

I look forward to future generations of cattlemen continuing to make valuable and productive effort while maintaining good relations with the public for the next 150 years.