ENSMY

VIC.

21st July, 1983

The Secretary, Land Conservation Council, 464 St. Kilda Road, MELBOURNE, 3004.

Dear Sir,

RE: VICTORIA'S HIGH COUNTRY (ALPINE AREAS)
CURRENT ENQUIRY

We are writing to express our strong concern at the possibility of new restrictions being imposed on the Alpine Areas which could effectively limit the value of these areas to the people of Victoria and others. The relevant points which we wish to bring to your attention are -

1. CLOSED OR CONTROLLED ACCESS

To close off all alpine areas in the same way as, say, the Baw Baw Plateau is restricted would be an extreme over-reaction to a biased conservation pressure group. True conservation is to be encouraged as it is conserving what we have inherited for the benefit of as many people as possible in this and future generations.

Major restrictions on access and usage limit the enjoyment of this beautiful area to a very small percentage of the population who are super-fit and can carry supplies etc. on their back for long distances throughout these areas. Unfortunately many of us are not that fit, nor do we all have that much free time.

2. HERITAGE AND TRADITIONS

The alpine areas, especially the Bogong High Plains, the Howitt Plains, Holmes Plains, Wonmangatta etc., have a unique place in Australian pioneering history where a particular type or breed of Australian developed, and to some extent still remains today.

The closure of these areas would mean the disappearance of this type of Australian forever along with the bush skills they have developed.

The various cattlemen's huts also have a place in history, and many such as Guys Hut on Bryce's Plain should be preserved as a reminder to all of another way of life.

3. GRAZING

Carefuly controlled grazing in the alpine areas in summer does no harm to the environment, and in fact can promote healthier vegetation, and at the same time reducing fire hazards. Some of us have spent a week in the Howitt Plains area in the summer of 82-3 (a drought period) and the vegetation was green and lush as can be seen from the enclosed photographs. One or two have also spent a few days about the same period in the high country of the Kosciusko National Park (where all grazing is banned and access is very restricted). The vegetation in these areas was much inferior in appearance to that of the Howitt and Holmes Plains.

We truly believe grazing under the control of an independent and unbiased authority should be continued in existing areas. There are already sufficiently large areas of restricted access which could be used in comparative studies.

4. POLLUTION

Controlled grazing and controlled access in these areas will not cause any more pollution than that which occurs naturally through wildlife, rotting vegetation etc. It is worth noting that water from streams in many parts of the Kosciusko National Park is unfit for human consumption because of contamination not by humans but by wombats.

5. HORSE SAFARIS, HIKING GROUPS, CROSS COUNTRY SKIING

Organised trips under the control of suitably experienced persons should be permitted in these areas. In the case of horse safaris, permits should be issued to responsible people suitably experienced to conduct such trips. Permits could be refused if evidence showed abuse of this access.

It should be noted that horse safaris enable a wide range of people to visit a large part of these areas in a relatively short period. On a recent ride there were many people who could not possibly hike through these areas with heavy packs - they included people with weak backs, elderly, and even one man with an amputated foot.

6. CONCLUSION

Yours faithfully,

Let us keep alpine areas for the benefit of as many as possible whilst conserving these areas for future generations. Strong vocal pressure groups not representative of all Victorians should be allowed their point of view, but not allowed to control.

Finally, we would liken total restriction of alpine areas to burying your money in the ground. It may be nice to know it is there, but it is of no use to anyone.

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July 17th, 1983

The Secretary
Land Conservation Council
464 St. Kilda Road
MELBOURNE, VIC. 3004

Dear Sir,

We have read your "Proposed Recommendations for the Alpine Area," and would like to make some comments on it.

We are mainly concerned for the future of the mountain cattlemen. The 140 year traditions of these fine pioneering families is something that is very highly valued by all Australians. It is something quite unique to this country, and should be conserved and fostered by those in authority. It would be a tragedy if the old custom of cattle grazing in the high country during the summer was allowed to die out. Most Australians value the mountain cattlemen and their work just as much, or more, than they do unusual flora, or fauna such as smokey mice or pygmy possums. The cattlemen are allowed to use such a small amount of the vast Alpine area - only about 1% - that they could not do any very great damage to the whole environment.

It is a matter for regret that the cattlemen lost some of their rights after the previous enquiry and recommendations by the Land Conservation Council. Incidentally, that enquiry and recommendations were supposed to last till the end of the century. It seems very unnecessary and wasteful to hold another enquiry so soon – it also puts a great strain on the resources of the mountain cattlemen to again put their case so soon after the last enquiry, when they presented an extensive survey of grazing operations on Crown Land in Eastern Victoria – the first and only survey of this kind. In the circumstances, it would be only fair for the Cattlemen's Association to receive some financial help from the Government to once more put their case and make their representations. The various Conservation organisations regularly receive many Government Grants.

We are glad to see that the L.C.C. recommends the continuation of cattle grazing in the Alps. But we also see that there are to be large increases in National Parks to 39% of all public lands, as well as 24% of Uncommitted Land, which amounts to 63% of the Area. The massive increases in National Parks will mean a much greater area will be out of the control of the Land Conservation Council. We do think that this will be beneficial to the cattlemen.

Great care should be taken in declaring new Parks and Recreation Areas, that they do not make it impossible for the cattlemen to get cattle up to their leaseholds, and there should not be any large increases in their rates and rentals, as it would be quite easy for these grazing areas to become non-viable. The expenses are already heavy in taking the cattle up and maintaining proper care for them during the summer, as well as the responsibility of control of noxious weeds and vermin.

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Moorabool Landowners Action Group Upper Yarra Valley Landholders Association Narbethong/Marysville & District Ratepayers Green Wedge Farmers Association Mountain District Cattlemens Association

INCORPORATING THE FOLLOWING ASSOCIATIONS:

Bannockburn Ratepayers Association — Barrabool Hills Preservation Society — Bellarine Ratepayers Association — Gippsland Lakes Association Mt. Dandenong Ratepayers Action Group — Peninsula Rural Landholder's Association — Phillip Island Land Rights Association Upper Yarra Citizens Rights Association

Most cattlemen do not have very large properties in the lower country, and if they lost their Alpine grazing they could be put out of business, which would be a great loss to the industry. The high quality breeding cattle that come from these areas are well known and are sought after everywhere.

Grazing cattle help keep the long mountain grasses in control, reducing the need for costly operations of slow burning, which is absolutely necessary for the control of bushfires in summer. One bushfire will do more damage to the environment than many years of grazing could possibly do.

Cattle and sheep grazing could be rotational. The Mount Hotham area has been closed since the '50s. Some rotational grazing would surely do no harm there.

If the Government provided some dams in the grazing areas, it would help keep the cattle away from marshy land, which it is claimed they may damage.

The cattlemen state that there is no serious or long term damage done by these cattle grazing, and there is no genuine proof of damage. There are certainly many benefits from reasonable, controlled grazing. Rabbits and blackberries certainly are doing very great damage indeed. Four wheel drive vehicles, ski lifts, ski slopes and lodges (many areas catering for two or three thousand people) are also very damaging to the natural environment ... but nobody seems to be very concerned about this.

The mountain cattlemen have much to contribute to the community, as well as their colourful traditions and magnificent riding and bushmanship. When skiers and hikers become lost, a quite frequent occurrence, the cattlemen can find them and bring them safely out as no one else can do. Their huts are always available in emergencies, and their more recent activities in organising and guiding riding parties of tourists give a wonderful opportunity of passing on their unsurpassed knowledge of the area, their traditional bushcraft, and knowledge of the local history.

According to the official Agricultural Census, Victorian beef cattle numbers are down by 25% since the drought. The high quality beef breeding cattle produced by the mountain cattlemen will therefor be in greater demand than ever. They should receive every encouragement. It should never be forgotten that Australia depends on its rural industry for 45% of its export income. The great majority of Australians would expect the Government to give the cattlemen all the help and encouragement possible, so that they may continue their valuable cattle production and their conservation of the traditions of the Australian bushman and cattleman.

Yours faithfully,

(LORRAINE COLE)

Hon. Secretary
UNITED LANDHOLDERS & CITIZENS
CO-OPERATIVE LTD.

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