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MYRTLEFORD, 3737

Ref. SMW: PW

25th July, 1983

The Mountain District Cattlemen's Association, C/- J. A. Commins, ENSAY 3895

Dear Sir,

re: Land Conservation Council, Victoria
Proposed Recommendations - Alpine Area

I enclose herewith for your information and attention, a copy of this Council's submission on the Land Conservation Council's proposed recommendations for the Alpine Area.

Yours faithfully,

SUZANNE M. WALKER SHIRE SECRETARY

SUBMISSION TO THE LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL, VICTORIA, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE SHIRE OF MYRTLEFORD WITH RESPECT TO THE "PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS - ALPINE AREA SPECIAL INVESTIGATION" PUBLISHED IN MAY, 1983.

#### (A) INTRODUCTION

In previous years, this Council has limited itself to letters of support for the submissions made by the Shire of Bright, Mt. Beauty Timbers and the Mountain District Cattleman's Association, on the various reports prepared by the Land Conservation Council.

A change in the composition of the Council and the recognition of the vital importance of the timber (both softwood and hardwood) and cattle industries to this area, has prompted this Council to make a submission to the Land Conservation Council, on the proposed recommendations for the Alpine Area.

It should however, be stated that this Council continues to fully support the submissions made by the Shire of Bright, Mountain District Cattleman's Association, Selwyn Timbers, Mt. Beauty Timbers, Victorian Sawmiller's Association and Valley Sawmills.

Further, the following recommendation of the Council of the Shire of Bright, is fully supported and this Council intends to show its support by being represented at the proposed deputation:

"That as soon as the Land Conservation Council, presents its final report and recommendations on the Alpine Areas, the Council arrange for a meeting of representatives of all Councils and other parties effected by the final report and recommendations, with the aim of presenting a joint submission to be presented to the Premier, the Minister of Forests and Lands, the Minister for Economic Development, and the Minister for Conservation and Planning, such representation to be by way of a joint deputation to be arranged through the local members of Parliament."

## (B) SHIRE OF MYRTLEFORD

The Shire of Myrtleford was constituted in 1960, by severance from the Shire of Bright. Of the total area of 712.2 square kilometres, approximately 75% is non-rateable; the majority of which falls in the (sub) alpine areas of the south of the Myrtleford Township, accessed by the Buffalo River and Dandongadale.

The population of the Shire of Myrtleford has since 1981, remained static at approximately 4300 people (Estimated Resident Population in Local Government Areas 30th June 1981 and 1982 - Australian Bureau of Statistics). Of the 4300 residents, 42% or 1769 persons, form the labour force. Of that number, 28% are employed in the farming and timber industries. A further 3.6% of the work force are involved in the transport industries.

(Note: a further 15% or 270 persons are employed in the manufacturing of softwood timber at the Australian Forest Industries mill.)

Thus, a static population combined with the possible loss of hardwood areas and reduced cattle grazing areas under the Alpine Area recommendations; and the statements by the Minister of Forests\* to reduce softwood logging areas in the Ovens Valley by 50% over the next ten (10) years, does not instil a feeling of confidence for future development in Myrtleford.

\* Preferred Options For Future Wood Production in Victoria - March 1983

# (C) HARDWOOD TIMBER PRODUCTION

Of particular concern to this Council is the recommendations contained in the Report which effectively decreases the allocated areas for hardwood logging for Selwyn Timbers and Valley Sawmills. The social and economic impact of these recommendations has not been considered in the Report. Further, if all the current hardwood logging areas are either decreased or deleted completely, then the whole of the timber industry and other related industries in the North East would suffer incalculable losses.

Council is fully aware of the economic and social significance of the timber industry to the North East and in this regard would point out the following:

- 1. The timber production and timber-related manufacturing industry in Victoria is of greater economic importance to the State than the motor vehicle industry. In 1980-81 the value added to the motor vehicle industry in Victoria, widely regarded as being of major economic importance to this State, was \$338 million less that two thirds that of the timber industry.
- 2. The capital investment in Alpine sawmilling and further processing is approximately \$62 million at current replacement value. \$3.5 million new capital investment was made by the Alpine industry in 1980-81. Annual wages exceeded \$35 million and royalties exceed \$6 million per annum.
- 3. The annual value of sawn timber production from the Alpine area is \$36 million with further sawmill-related processing increasing the total value to more than \$50 million. The Alpine Timber industry annually invests \$0.5 million in road construction and maintenance in the Alpine area. To date more than 1250 kilometres of two wheel drive access road has been constructed.
- 4. Fire protection and suppression activities in the Alpine area depend heavily on the contributions of the timber industry, including access to the forests and availability of heavy machinery with experienced local operators.
- 5. The 35 milling operations directly dependent on the Alpine study area for timber supplies provide 31 per cent of State hardwood production; 35 per cent of employment in sawmilling and timber processing; produces 88 per cent of the State's standard grade ash hardwood and 93 per cent of select grade.
- 6. Victoria has 30 per cent of its public lands, and more than 18 per cent of its productive native forests in national parks and reserves twice the national average. 425,050 hectares of the Alpine area, or more than 30 per cent of the area's total public land is in national parks, wilderness areas and other reserves.
- 7. Timber is Victoria's most decentralised industry approximately 50 per cent of employment is in country areas Over 700 establishments employ directly some 15,000 people.

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#### (D) CATTLE GRAZING

A number of farmers in the Myrtleford area will yet again be affected by the Land Conservation Council's recommendations in relation to cattle grazing. The concern of these farmers is reflected across the industry and Council fully supports the concept of cattle grazing in Alpine areas.

It would appear that the Land Conservation Council's argument against cattle grazing in alpine areas, is based on emotive statements by persons removed from the area and the industry.

This Council is concerned that the results of research into cattle grazing on the high plains is not yet finalized, yet the decisions are being made, irrespective of the investigation into the feeding habits of cattle on the high plains.

Again, it would appear that the Land Conservation Council's decision, has been made with little or no consideration of the social and economic impact on the cattle industry.

Beef production is an important rural land use in this area. The arguments over the continued support of the tobacco growing industry will in the long term, force farmers away from tobacco crops and into full time cattle management, or alternatively leave the industry, and the area.

Cattle grazing in the Alpine areas has proven to be effective in:-

- (1) retaining "open" areas, which is essential for water catchment.
- (2) assists with fire prevention by reducing the amount of plant litter on the forest floor.
- (3) maintains access to generally inaccessable areas.
- (4) cattleman assist with the controlling of noxious weeds
- (5) cattleman also assist with the control of wild dogs and dingoes

The social significance of cattle and cattleman on the high plains cannot be disputed. Cattle and cattlemen have used the high plains for 140 years, and this tradition continues with many families dependent on these leases to continue to be economic farm units.

The cattleman themselves, provide huts and shelter, which are available for use by all persons. The cattleman with their intimate knowledge of the Alpine areas are invaluable in times of search and rescue, fire fighting and general assistance to government department personnel from Crown Land & Survey (noxious weeds) and Soil Conservation Authority (erosion control)

It would appear that the Land Conservation Council offer no alternative to those cattleman, whose economic viability is based on grazing on the high plains. Further, no consideration appears to be given to the ownership and/or tenure of the huts and yards generously provided by the cattleman over the years.

# (E) GENERAL

Council is concerned over a number of matters that effect not only areas with the Shire of Myrtleford, but over the whole Alpine Area.

# (i) Link Areas

Whilst the Land Conservation Council does not make any specific recommendations for the link areas, it is very apparent that the purpose of such link areas is to form a contiguous Alpine National Park.

This Council does not oppose such a concept, but believes that multiple use of National Parks is preferable. The total exclusion of cattle grazing, timber logging, commercially operated tourist safari's etc., will have a detrimental effect on the economies of the various communities that surround the Alpine Area.

This is particularly apparent in the link area for the Barry Mountains (A28). If the link area is declared national park, then the existence of Valley Sawmills is severely threatened. This link area contains 80% of Valley Sawmills merchantable timber, including approximately 95% of merchantable ash species. The possible loss of this enterprise to Myrtleford would be a severe blow to the economy of the region.

#### (ii) Fire Prevention

This Council supports the control burning program undertaken by the Forests Commission each year to reduce the potential fire threat to adjoining areas. It is of grave concern that the Forests Commission has not been recommended as the Authority with power to act, in the fuel reduction burning of National Parks. Whilst the amendment to the Forest Act 1958 gives the Forest Commission Victoria, power to suppress fires in National Parks, it does not give the Forest Commission Victoria, the power to undertake fuel reduction burning. This is a grave omission and one that could have wide reaching effects, should a "hot" fire commence in a National Park and burn towards the settled areas on the fringes of the Alpine Area.

### (iii) National Parks

As stated above, this Council is not against the declaration of national parks, provided that the parks are available for multiple use, ie - logging, grazing etc.,

However, this Council is concerned that the National Parks Service in its present form, does not have the ability nor the management expertise to effectively control the declared national parks, without further increasing Victoria's National Parks.

This municipality relies very little on tourism, but very heavily on timber and cattle. The increase in tourism generated by the increased National Parks would be insignificant and would effectively mean a reduction in the economy of this area.

# (F) CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this Council fully supports the representations and submissions made by the Shire of Bright, Valley Sawmills, Selwyn Timbers, Mt. Beauty Timbers, Victorian Sawmillers Association and the Mountain District Cattleman's Association.

This Council would be willing to expand on any of the above matters, should this be required by the Land Conservation Council, Victoria.

FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE SHIRE OF MYRTLEFORD

SUZANNE M WALKER SHIRE SECRETARY

18TH JULY, 1983