

MEETING: 240 VICTORIA PARADE, EAST MELBOURNE.

PRESENT: MINISTER CONSERVATION FORESTS & LANDS - JOAN KIRNER,
PRESIDENT M.C.A.V. JIM COMMINS; EXECUTIVE OFFICER M.C.A.V.
GRAEME STONEY; & SUE SILVERS.

DATE: 12 MARCH, 1986.

The Minister opened the discussion by stating that in respect of the Alpine National Park Bill, she had received confused messages about the bottom line the Cattlemen would take. She thought that someone called Phil Macguire had spoken to Geoff Moseley, or Moseley had rung Macguire after the Nunawading By-election and said "You can have grazing, if we have the National Park". Mr. ^{Stoney} ~~Commins~~ explained to the Minister that a meeting had taken place between Jack Lovick, Geoff Burrowes and Geoff Moseley and another member of the Australian Conservation Foundation. It was in the nature of extending the hand of friendship, but ~~it did not work~~. There was no productive discussion.

The Minister stated that she believed that an Alpine National Park was inevitable. It may take 50 years to come about, but it will eventually happen. She stated that she would like to see it through now, however she was not prepared to put the Bill forward only to have it knocked out, and at the same time she did not think it to the Mountain Cattlemens benefit to stage campaign after campaign.

Jim Commins replied that the Australian Conservation Foundation had forced the M.C.A.V. to take part in the By-election, as it, (the A.C.F.) was campaigning in support of the Democrats who put conservation as No. 1 and were supporting the Government in introducing the Bill. The M.C.A.V. was on a collision course with the Government as the M.C.A.V. could not agree to the proposal. Mr. Commins said that the A.C.F. had involved the M.C.A.V. and that the Cattlemen had to go in as hard as they could. The M.C.A.V. had a lot of help, some of it coming from Government supporters.

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Mrs. Kirner said that she did not want the Bill "knocked off", and that she was unclear whether the M.C.A.V.'s opposition was to a National Park per se, or a National Park with grazing phased out, or whether it was the areas of land the Government had added to the Bill, which she pointed out that the Liberal Government had decided. Mrs. Kirner stated that she would like to hear where the M.C.A.V. was at the moment on the issue.

Mr. Stoney said that it should be stated most strongly that the M.C.A.V. stand was not only on Alpine grazing. It was concerned about bringing management under the National Parks regulations to such a large area. He said he believed it would be the wrong management for such a large area - doubling the size of the Park - someone had to say that the management was wrong.

Mr. Commins said that the M.C.A.V. was opposed to such a huge area.

Graeme Stoney told the Minister that a recent meeting of the Cattlemen reaffirmed their opposition to the large Park, and they would like the Minister to realise that the issue is a lot bigger than just self-interest.

He stated that if the Park, as indicated, was declared, the grazing licences will be under serious threat. He stated that the conservation movement wanted the Mountain Cattlemen out. Jim Commins said that they had taken a stand because they had been required to give up grazing in areas before, and mentioned Bogong, Hotham and Feathertop. He said that the M.C.A.V. had agreed to that. He said that it was not very long before the Land Conservation Council recommendations for the area were adopted that significant further areas were to go.

Mrs. Kirner reminded Mr. Commins that only some of the recommendations were adopted.

Mr. Commins said that Mr. Sam Dimmick had written to the M.C.A.V. and stated that it was not because of any alleged damage to the environment, but simply because grazing did not conform to the ideas of a National Park. Since then the L.C.C.

recommended an extra area be crossed off, and they looked at the new recommendations, and yet not one could point to damage from grazing, they had been given wrong information. It is still wrong to withdraw grazing, and they should go and have a good look.

Graeme Stoney asked Mrs. Kirner whether anyone in the Department had considered what the M.C.A.V. has been saying over the past 12 months or so - the reasons for not having a Park of such size.

Mrs. Kirner said that the bottom line is the vision of a whole lot of people, not radical conservationists, for an Alpine National Park contiguous with Kosciusko - that is the bottom line. As far as the size, and the boundaries were concerned, she said she was prepared to talk about that, because she thought that the important issue is the contiguous National Park. Decision can be achieved through a variety of means, it is not the decision of the V.N.P.A. or the A.C.F. The Department cannot manage the area without declaring it a National Park. That was a possibility David Evans thought I was doing, what did he call it - "a Claytons Park". The Federal and New South Wales Governments talk about a joint management plan for areas of the Alps, some for Parks, some not. Mrs. Kirner said that her Government, and the wider community in Victoria is committed to the realisation of that vision (of a contiguous Alpine Park). She said she would talk about the boundaries. The two areas for discussion were - 1. The management of the area, and 2. National Park boundaries.

Mr. Commins said that the M.C.A.V. would consider anything the Minister had to say, but he felt that there is a contiguous Park now with the Tingaringy (? sp.) Alpine Park. He questioned whether having more area contiguous was that important.

Mrs. Kirner said that it is as important in that heritage, as the other issues are in the M.C.A.V. heritage.

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There was then a discussion about Dick Johnston's book "Alps at the Crossroads" and Mr. Commins said that the Cattlemen were not very pleased with the way the book came out against grazing. He then said that if the Cattlemen had not come down to the election people would have been sold the line Moseley and the others were pushing.

Mrs. Kirner said that she did not want to discuss Nunawading. She said that in the grazing sense the issues were: management of the area, grazing, and the area itself.

Mr. Stoney then said that he was concerned about the line the Government has been using for promoting the area for tourism. He stated that people pressure on the Alps is terrible, and something to worry about.

Mrs. Kirner said it was something to manage.

Mr. Stoney said that the people pressure on the Alps was tremendous.

Mr. Commins said that most people who go to the Alps go on wheels and that if it was developed, there would need to be more roads, and in the long run there will be more people simply driving through. He said that in about 1977 the timber people handed out survey sheets to everyone entering the mountains at a certain point. Questions on the survey asked where people had come from etc. and that there were several questions relating to grazing, and did the presence of cattle spoil the holiday. The results were something like 78% were for cattle, 13% were against and 11% didn't know. He also thought that tourists only spent a little on their way through.

Mrs. Kirner said that Wilsons Prom. is now a public area that has returned well to that community with people going through. She said that you could have planned tourism which does not replace all other industries. However planned tourism can return more to the community. In New Zealand they operate under that situation (returns to community).

Jim Commins asked the Minister what the National Park is going

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to give people that they have not got now.

Mrs. Kirner said that it gives permanent protection to an area of land and reserves it for the people and puts the responsibility on the Department to manage the area.

Mr. Commins said that it was a mosaic of different areas; they form areas of timber, wilderness country, people look at it as a uniform area, but it is not like that.

Mrs. Kirner said that most had to be zoned for management.

Mr. Stoney agreed that some areas have to be protected. He said that there were National Parks there now, and that the management in other areas was not very satisfactory, and needed to be tightened up, but does not have to be a National Park to do that.

Mrs. Kirner said "With reduced re-negotiated boundaries"?!

Mr. Commins said "Negotiable boundaries".

Mrs. Kirner said that she could only negotiate the boundaries, it was not negotiable about the National Park. She repeated that it will be a Park one day. "I think thats the way it will move down that track. I am not in any hurry before this Parliamentary session. I want to discuss the bottom line. She stated that if the Liberals ever get back into Government they have a National Park strategy.

She said that in terms of the area not currently under National Park she did not think was managed with any general plan in mind. She said the process of managing the area now was through the five regions.

Graeme Stoney said that if that particular area was put up for another management plan with a wider range of uses, couldn't a management plan be devised which has a higher standard but not up to National Park standard.

Mrs. Kirner said she did not think the management of the area was all that bad.

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She mentioned some 4 WD areas. ~~7th~~ *problems*.

Mr. Stoney said that some should be closed in the winter. He said the M.C.A.V. feared ~~the~~ ^(National Park) regulations in the long term.

Mrs. Kirner told him that people were against the Grampians National Park, but then the management plan got almost 100% agreement, even from the Shire Council and the beekeepers. Some plans are acceptable to all users, except in respect to timber and grazing. "I don't think it would be impossible to get a grazing agreement in the National Park, a timber agreement could be more difficult" she said. "Grazing, I think could be negotiated".

Graeme Stoney said that he was concerned about the management of the whole area, and the screw would tighten and the ^(National Park) regulations will do it. If the area is managed under the National Parks Act in the future people will have the power to tighten the regulations....

Mrs. Kirner said that the management plan would be a public document which would set the regulations. She said she thought it was possible to manage the area.

Mr. Commins said that the L.C.C. lean to the Government of the day. They don't understand good land management comes from grazing, and said that people in the Minister's position will listen to them.

Mrs. Kirner said that either way the L.C.C. is a bench-mark whether you accept their view or not. She repeated that she thought it was possible to have a management plan acceptable to grazing, but not the saw-millers. She said that all the National Parks will have management plans.

Mr. Commins pointed out to the Minister that there is also worry because of leaving a corridor for the wildlife, for example, pigs, wild dogs etc. Boundaries have been contentious, as so many more people will be bordering on the National Park..

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Mrs. Kirner said that there are problems with Crown Land which is not Parks.

Mr. Commins said yes, but people learn to live with it. Newcomers would find it hard. If grazing can be accommodated in the National Park its O.K., if not it is very different, as you will be under pressure...if it can be clearly sorted out..

Mrs. Kirner - "In legislation?"

Mr. Commins - "Yes, because it is part of good land management."

Mrs. Kirner asked if there were areas the Cattlemen agreed should be free of grazing.

Mr. Commins said that he wanted to be co-operative. He then explained how the conservationists say that cattle grazing causes bare ground, and further explained how this is wrong. He said that the Cattlemen think that grazing does a good job in reducing fire. The tussocks are better eaten rather than burned. He said there is a place for grazing, and this has not been taken on by the L.C.C.

Graeme Stoney said that ^{THEY} ~~he~~ certainly did not agree with Howitt, ^{PLAINS}

Bogong and the Bluff being withdrawn. He said Buffalo was withdrawn from grazing 50 years ago. He then explained to the Minister how he had seen evidence of erosion caused since the fires in early 1985. He agreed some areas should not be grazed, but said that he was opposing any more country being taken. Mr. Stoney asked that the Minister, if she had time, should go to the areas discussed with some of the older Cattlemen who knew the area and who could explain to her what the M.C.A.V. is talking about.

Mrs. Kirner said that she would like that.

Mr. Commins related that in reference to the Snowy Park, one

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of the Department's employees out there said "When are you getting the cattle back." Because of the fire danger.

Mrs. Kirner said she would like to look at it. She said she had not discussed it with the Department if we are not ready to go ahead with the Park Bill, which is her choice, she would like to work through some issues about management of the area as it stands. Looking at a management plan for the area in an agreed fashion might get rid of some of the Cattlemens' fears about management. She said "We can also look at the boundaries.. and grazing on Howitt, I am not sure why that place should be picked out".

Mr. Commins said it was playing the man. They considered Gilder was a wealthy man...

Mrs. Kirner said to quote the Premier "I would not die in a ditch" over Howitt Plain.

Graeme Stoney said that the reasons from the L.C.C. (in regard to Howitt) were false.

Mrs. Kirner asked whether the other areas which were put in by the Liberal Government, was the M.C.A.V. happy about those.

Mr. Stoney said no.

Mrs. Kirner said so the areas removed from grazing, tops of some mountains, the big three...

Stoney ^(MT) ~~Stoney~~ Howitt, Feathertop and Buffalo. We don't accept part of the Bogongs, the part to be phased out in 1991, it is only part of the philosophy. Those members concerned are cross about that.

Mrs. Kirner asked whether there were any grazing licences on Cobberas/Tingaringy being phased out.

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Mr. Commins said no, and restated that grazing was a worthwhile management tool.

Mrs. Kirner stated that she was having meetings with the A.C.F. and the V.S.A.

Mr. Commins explained at length about the 60 Minutes programme which was filmed at Omeo, and how there was no chance of a proper debate with Geoff Moseley. He thought the media would use the programme to keep the issue going.

Mr. Stoney said that the M.C.A.V. disagreed with the A.C.F. more than with the V.N.P.A. and Mr. Commins commented that the C.C.V. have been heavy on the Cattlemen.

Mrs. Kirner asked that the M.C.A.V. spell out in a letter what the thoughts are.

Mr. Stoney asked that a letter be written by the Minister setting out her position.

Mrs. Kirner said she was going to talk to the V.S.A., she had been told she should also talk to the 4WD Association, but she was unsure of that yet, she was going to talk to conservation groups, and see what their bottom line was, and what Moseley's bottom line was. After that she would put the position in writing and talk about management of the area.

Mr. Stoney reminded the Minister that in any management plan the M.C.A.V. would need safeguards.

Then followed a discussion of a personal nature with Mr. Stoney and the Minister.

The Minister asked that the M.C.A.V. not publish any details of the discussion just completed, and was assured that the matter would be treated as confidential by the M.C.A.V.