



## MOUNTAIN CATTLEMENS NEWS

Newsletter of the Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria  
13 Tuxen Street, North Balwyn, Vic 3103

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### THE BATTLE IS ON

"I confirm the previous decision of my Government to implement this (the phase-out of grazing from the LCC-recommended areas) in 1991."

Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands, Kay Setches letter to MCAV President David Treasure (2-2-89)

"Ten of our cattlemen families have been given their marching orders. I am proud to be able to say that our members have unanimously decided to stand with these threatened families and resist, by any means necessary, their eviction from the high country. Put simply, we are not going."

President of the Mountain Cattlemens Association, Mr. David Treasure speaking to 3000 people at the Benambra Get-Together. (5-2-89)



### THE CAMPAIGN TO REVERSE THE EVICTIIONS

The campaign to reverse the Government's decision to evict our members from the High Country is now underway. This follows a series of MCAV meetings and the announcement of the campaign at the Gibbo River "Get-Together".

#### Bogong High Plains

The campaign will focus on the termination of licences on the Bogong High Plains with a rally on the Plains on Sunday, February 26. Members should meet at the corner of the Bogong High Plains Road and the Mt. Nelse track at 10.30 am. The aim of this rally will be to introduce the families to be evicted. The excellent state of the country on the Bogong High Plains will be highlighted to the media by key cattlemen.

#### Kosciusko National Park

A second significant part of the campaign will be a weekend rally in the Jindabyne region to highlight the huge problems of mismanagement in the Kosciusko National Park. This will ensure that the Park will never again be held up as a conservation model for the Victorian High Country.

#### Melbourne Rally

The initial phase of the campaign will culminate with a major public rally in Melbourne.

At the Benambra Get-Together, David Treasure said, "This fight is about our survival and the survival of the high country so that it can be passed on to future generations in good order. This is not just another campaign. This is THE campaign."

### **The Role of Members**

David Treasure, has said, "The success of the campaign will depend largely on the work and involvement of all members of the Association."

"This will be the only opportunity to fight against the evictions. If we fail, our numbers will be so reduced that it will not be possible to fight any other campaigns. This may be the last chance we will have to express our concern about current Government management practices, and to support the heritage left to us by our forebears."

### **Government has Refused to Review the Eviction Decision**

Just prior to the Get-Together, the President again asked CF&L Minister, Kay Setches to review the eviction decision. David Treasure advised the Minister that the cattlemen would be mounting a major public and political campaign.

David said, "As you can imagine this campaign will call on our considerable public support and will bring significant public focus onto the issue."

"In the interests of resolving this issue, I do urge you to reconsider your decision not to review the evictions.

The evictions are of paramount importance to us and have already created a great deal of emotion. Resolution of it would be achieved much more readily if I, or your representative, could announce to the gathering of over 3,000 cattlemen and supporters that you are willing to have the decision reviewed by a Government Working Party.

I do urge to act urgently on this request and allow an announcement to be made at our Get-Together that the eviction decision is to be properly reviewed. I shall contact your office next week for your decision."

### **Minister Refuses to Review Eviction Decision**

The Minister has responded by releasing a press statement on Wednesday 1 February. The statement read,

"Conservation, Forests and Lands Minister Kay Setches today said cattle grazing would continue in 95 per cent of Victoria's high country.

(This is incorrect - grazing will only continue in about 8% of the high country. The evictions are about 10% of the total area actually grazed.)

The statement continued, "She said the only areas where cattle grazing would be excluded were part of the Howitt high plains as recommended by the State's Land Conservation Council and those determined by the previous Liberal Government.

"The areas where grazing is to be phased out are all sensitive fragile environments

"All have been individually identified and recommended for phase out by the Land Conservation Council.

"Ms Setches said only 11 graziers out of about 100 were affected by the phase out by the Land Conservation Council.

"Ms Setches said it was most disappointing that the Mountain Cattlemens Association had done little to help CFL's efforts to minimise the impact of phase-outs on the few affected graziers.

"By making use of unallocated grazing areas, all existing graziers who wish to continue high country grazing beyond 1991 should have an opportunity to do so.

"Ms Setches said the Mountain Cattlemens Association had declined her department's invitation to join a working party to look at re-allocations.

(David Treasure has said that to join such a working party would be like co-operating with our own executioner.)

Ms. Setches continued, "It appears that the association is more concerned with political issues than looking after its member's interests.

"Nevertheless our offer to work with them remains open as we believe it is important to settle these details soon to ensure adequate time for the few licensees concerned to make adjustments before the phase-out date in 1991.

In a subsequent letter the Minister stated,

"Given the extensive public consultation during the LCC process and the detailed Government consideration of this issue, I do not believe that it is necessary or appropriate to establish a Government Working Party to review the phase-out of grazing from the LCC-recommended areas and I confirm the previous decision of my Government to implement this in 1991.



## SURVEY OF USAGE OF RUNS

Members were circulated with a one page questionnaire about the size of runs and the area actually used in 1977 compared to 1988. The responses are providing important information that will be vital in the campaign to have the eviction decisions reversed. Most of the questionnaires have been returned but we do need a full response.

If you have not returned yours please do so as soon as possible. If you have lost it "behind the fridge" please contact your Branch President or Tim Barker on 03 428 5353.

Whether it is lost or not, you might even like to ring Tim direct and give him your figures over the phone.



## PUBLIC LAND USE

The Association made several strong points in its response to the LCC's Report on Statewide Assessment of Public Land Use

### Membership of the LCC

The Association has called on the Government to review the membership of the Land Conservation Council.

The report stated that one of the important factors assisting in the practical operations of the Council is its independence. The MCAV said there are two significant reasons why **the LCC is no longer considered independent.**

With regard to the membership of the Council the MCAV is particularly concerned about:

- \* The dominance of representatives of the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands.
- \* The dominance of representatives drawn from Government.

### Political Interference

The MCAV also commented on the manner in which the LCC is susceptible to political interference and can be directed to produce a predetermined outcome. In May 1982 the then new Labor Government directed the Council to re-examine the Alpine area with a view to expanding the National Parks. In its directive the Government stated the review should be undertaken;

"bearing in mind the Government's conservation policy for the alpine region, to make recommendations ... on areas that might be added to the Alpine park system."

In this situation the Government clearly directed the LCC to produce a

predetermined outcome. The LCC subsequently did just that and destroyed its independence.

### Land Management

In its consideration of land management issues the Council stated

"There is thus a recognised need in some areas to improve standards of agricultural management of public lands but withdrawal of grazing from such lands is not a complete solution unless alternative management is supplied by the Crown. Continued but improved management by adjoining landholders maybe the most efficient option, where other important community values are not prejudiced.

The MCAV considers that the LCC should give further consideration to how standards of agricultural management should be improved and the mechanisms that could be implemented to ensure that this does occur.

The Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands has the power to impose any conditions on the grazing of cattle to ensure that the conservation of natural values is optimised. If the CF&L does not exercise this power, it can not expect, at a later date, to claim that cattle are causing any damage to the alpine environment.

The LCC was told that the mountain cattlemen are receptive at any time to discussions about co-operative land management regimes which ensure the conservation of natural and native flora and fauna.

### Security of Tenure

The report made some encouraging comments in relation to land tenure:

"Security of leasehold land tenure is an important determinant of the standard of

agricultural management likely to be applied. Improvements such as fencing and water supply are expensive but lessees will invest in such improvements more readily where they are confident that tenure will be secure enough to sustain the expenditure.

The MCAV supported this statement and suggested that the LCC make some recommendation about lengths of tenure in order for its views to have some bearing on discussions between CF&L and leasehold graziers.

### Damage caused by cattle grazing

The comments in relation to the damage caused by cattle:

"Concerns recently expressed about High Plain grazing in particular are that the cattle preferentially eat certain alpine herbs thus reducing their distribution, that they cause increases in shrub cover, that they damage the fragile moss beds around bogs, and that they foul springs and water holes with excreta carrying intestinal worms and liver fluke.

The Council has taken the view that these concerns although real, they do not justify the removal of grazing from areas other than the most sensitive or important for conservation or walking as previously mentioned. The Council has recommended further studies, however."

The MCAV expressed its concern about these unsubstantiated claims about which there continues to be controversy.



## CHARGES FOR BUSH RUNS

CF&L is now sending out accounts for "Bush Runs" at a rate of \$4.20 per dse. Bill Hicks, has received a CF&L account for a "Bush Run" which has increased from \$512 in 1986 to \$1940.

The Association has argued that the rate for "Bush Runs" should be \$3.00 per head per season not \$4.20 per dse/year. In other words, the charge for, say 100 head for 3 months should be \$300, not \$3780 which would be charged by CF&L.

This is supported by the following:

### Commitment by the Minister

In September 1988 the Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands advised the MCAV that charges would be:

"A rental rate of \$3.00 per beast per season for alpine grazing and contiguous bush grazing as recommended by the Pricing Panel. This rate will apply for 1986/87, 1987/88 and 1988/89 accounts."

The MCAV is of the firm view that this agreement meant that the rent would be charged at a rate of \$3.00/head/season for both alpine and bush runs (including licensed forest areas).

As the Minister accepted the recommendation of the Pricing Panel, it is important to review exactly what the Pricing Panel did recommend.

"The alpine and bush runs are relatively unique in the market place. The market place comprises a broad spectrum of legally occupied land. At one end is leasing/agisting of freehold land and at the other end is licensing alpine and sub

alpine Crown land. Leased freehold land for grazing is usually fenced and watered, and of a size and terrain which is relatively easily managed. Pastures are generally of improved or semi improved species and stock grazing the land achieve an expectation perceived by the farmer when he enters the lease.

"The alpine and bush runs on the other hand are rugged country, difficult to get to and isolated with no fences involving large areas where stock management is difficult. Costs associated with stock management are higher, nutritionally at best stock maintain condition and the availability of feed is limited by variability of the season and growing cycle of the herbage. In addition due to the management skills needed, type of stock required and the uniqueness of the operation, including an ability to farm effectively and compatibly with the environment, the market for the type of land under discussion is restricted.

"The distance stock are moved varies depending on the location of runs. **Some bush runs adjoin freehold land owned by the licensee** and these in turn adjoin alpine runs held by the same licensee."

The Pricing Panel then recommended that;

"The rent be charged at a rate of \$3.00/head/season for both alpine and bush runs (**including licensed forest areas**)."

It is therefore abundantly clear that the recommendation with which the Minister has agreed, in writing to both the MCAV and the Victorian Farmers Federation, is for licensed forest areas to be charged for at the rate of \$3.00/head/season.

### Meeting with the Minister

At a meeting with the Minister on 1 December 1988, the MCAV sought to clarify the fact that the non-alpine runs

(ie licensed forest areas, Bush runs or contiguous bush grazing) would be charged for at the rate of \$3.00 per head per year. It was clarified that the charge would be \$3.00.

### Equity

The rate of \$4.20/DSE which developed through negotiations with the VFF and relates to a totally different quality of grazing country.

Even if the rate of \$4.20 was to be used, this was a charge for a YEAR. Therefore if a block is to be used for, say 3 months, the charge should be \$1.05 per dse. The rate per dse for broad area grazing for 1988 was

Mallee	\$0.40 per dse
Wimmera	\$0.40 per dse
Murray Valley	\$1.20 per dse
Rest of State	\$4.20 per dse

Take the rate for the Murray Valley of \$1.20 per dse. For a 3 month period and at a conversion rate of 1 cow = 9 dse, the charge would be \$2.70 for the season.

### Latest Advice from the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands

CF&L has now advised (2-2-89):

"It is essential that the Department policies are consistent and equitable and it is clearly inappropriate that a rate of \$3 per head apply to bush grazing areas licenced to mountain cattlemen and a different rental assessment is applied to similar areas when the licensee is not a member of the MCAV.

For this reason, bush grazing areas are rated on the dse system and should not be treated in a similar way to alpine grazing except where grazing is restricted by time limits.

"The alpine charge of \$3.00 per head is only applicable where seasons are restricted by Departmental limits on grazing periods, the areas are above 1220 metres and licenced areas are remote from freehold properties."

Members should consult with your local CF&L Region to determine whether the time limit could be a workable option to reduce the charge to \$3.00 per head.

Any member who receives a substantially increased account should contact Tim Barker on 03 428 5353



### STATUTORY DECLARATIONS

The Government appears to be persisting in the use of Statutory Declarations in obtaining information such as the number of cattle on alpine runs. The Association has been disturbed by this trend which seems an overly bureaucratic way to obtain simple information. Members should resist completing these Declarations and simply provide the required information in writing and signed.



### SHOPS AT GET-TOGETHERS

There was a break down in communications about the arrangements for shops operated by outside retailers at this year's Get-Togethers. The Executive has confirmed the decision that permission for any outside retailer can only be given by the full Council of the Association.