

SUBMISSION TO SUPPORT DEPUTATION TO THE
HON. KAY SETCHES M.L.A. MINISTER FOR
CONSERVATION FORESTS AND LANDS
TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF ALPINE GRAZING
IN THE VICTORIAN ALPS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Mrs. Setches, on behalf of the Mountain Cattlemans Association please accept our gratitude for receiving this deputation in order to discuss this extremely important topic. The deputation comprises of Mr. Harry Ryder, Mr. Bill Hicks, Mr. Ian Roper and Mr. Bill Hodgskin.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The grazing of cattle on the high plains has a history of over 100 years and many of the current leases are held by families who have carried out this practice for many generations.
- 2.2 In 1978 a report by the Land Conservation Council recommended areas of the Victorian Alps where alpine grazing was to cease. In 1981 the Land Conservation Council report came before the Victorian Parliament and a number of cattlemen were given 10 years notice to vacate leases that they currently hold. These leases will expire in 1991.
- 2.3 When the Land Conservation Council was established and its environmental reports released it was originally understood that the reports were to be evaluated each decade and yet this original intent has not been complied with and a further report on grazing on the high plains should have been released in 1988.
- 2.4 During this time a number of studies have been undertaken by academics as part of research on the effect of cattle on the high plains. A report by R. J. Williams was published, the general thrust being that it did not support cattle grazing on the high plains. Yet a contrary report prepared by Haram Van Rees stated that there were benefits from this activity. This report has never been published.
- 2.5 Lease owners that have been advised that their current lease will be terminated in 1991 are supposedly to be offered alternative country for lease yet upon inspection, alternatives provided are in appropriate as the country is too steep or heavily timbered to provide adequate grazing resource.
- 2.6 The point is made that if the alternatives now being offered were suitable for grazing these areas would have been taken up by the lease generations ago.

3.0 THE CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The effect on the lease holders of the removal of their leases in 1991 will be that most will suffer a likely loss of approximately one third of their income by this action. Most cattlemans' family livelihoods will be dramatically effected. The assessment of people who know the high plains well, the cattlemen, is that there are no real alternatives available for lease holders that will be displaced.
- 3.2 As an industry we have lost some of Mount Bogong, Mount Feathertop, Mount Hotham. Now it is proposed that the rest of Mount Bogong and Mount Nelse will be taken and it would be assumed that in another couple of years there will be a continued push for the removal of other grazing leases.
- 3.3 The Mountain Cattlemen have significant concerns about the removal of cattle from the high plains and the creation of a National Park and significant problems with feral cats and dogs, noxious weeds and most importantly wild horses could intrude. If these issues are not addressed, significant damage will be done to the high country environment which is far beyond that now created by cattle grazing.
- 3.4 The Mountain Cattlemen consider that there is ample support for the continuance of cattle grazing on the high plains, in particular in the leased areas now under review.
- 3.5 The Alpine Planning Team have stated that cattle and cattlemen are a tool of management in the high plains area and it is considered that we are the only tool of management and whats more we pay for this right. Our continued presence on the high plains would assist the Department in its management and care of the area and mutual co-operation can occur assisting the Government in meeting its objectives for land management on the high plains.
- 3.6 The Bogong area, one of Australias most important water catchments must be preserved at all costs and we believe we have a place in the conservation of this area. The biggest users of water in the Kiewa Catchment, the State Electricity Commission of Victoria have always advocated grazing in the catchment area and still does.
- 3.7 Over the border in Mount Kosiosko no grazing does occur and almost every year fires are started and escape into Victoria and onto private land with vast expense to the taxpayer. We know from our experience that if the high plains area is closed that this will happen again.
- 3.8 It is considered that cattle and control burning linked together are beneficial and if no control burning occurs above 1200 metres then the continued grazing of cattle in this area is a must as a means of fire prevention.

4.0 THE FUTURE

- 4.1 The future for the families holding high plains leases in the Bogong area after 1991 is bleak.
- 4.2 It is argued that further studies must be undertaken to determine the effect on not only cattle but other activities in these areas.
- 4.3 As pointed out in the submission, a Land Conservation Council report should be undertaken each 10 years and it is now over a decade since the original report was released. Academic assessment of the effect of cattle on the high plains varies and is disputed and accordingly further work needs to be undertaken.
- 4.4 The families that have grazed cattle on the high plains for generations have great affinity with the area. They do not want to see its destruction, and have a passionate concern for its conservation and enhancement. It is feared that by removal of a variety of activities that the problems experienced north of the border will be transferred in Victoria.
- 4.5 In summary we ask the Minister to consider and support the following scenerio:-
- (a) That a further Land Conservation Council report be prepared on the effect of grazing cattle on the high plains in the Bogong area.
 - (b) That a moratorium on the cancellation of leases in the area until this study is completed be put in place.
- 4.6 In conclusion we invite the Minister to come and examine the area in question in mid December with representatives of the Department and the Mountain Cattlemen in order that the points explained in this submission can be further expanded upon. The area is at its most magnificent at this time of the year and it would be an extremely worthwhile visit.

IAN ROPER

For and on behalf of the Mountain Cattleman's Association

22nd June, 1989.