

Submission to Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

My name is Philip Maguire. I am a Mountain Cattleman from Omeo, Victoria.

At the present time I hold grazing licences on the southern Bogong High Plains in Victoria's Alpine National Park and in state forest surrounding the park. My current ANP licence is due to expire at the conclusion of the 2006-2007 grazing season.

I wish to point out to the inquiry the value of alpine grazing as demonstrated on my ANP licence area during the fires of January 2003. Secondly, I wish to point out the value of alpine grazing as an Australian cultural heritage and as a source of creative endeavour in the arts including painting, feature films, music and literature.

I have enclosed two attachments in support of this submission. The first is a PDF document prepared by the Mountain Cattlemens' Association of Victoria. The second is an MP3 file of a song entitled Down The Track which I wrote and recorded in protest at the eviction of Mountain Cattlemen from our grazing licence areas and as evidence that our traditions and heritage are a source of artistic creativity.

1. The fires of January 2003 burned very hot causing widespread destruction of eucalypt forest in the sub-alpine sector of my licences but when it emerged on to the grazed area of the high plains it petered out. The only sections of the licence area on the plains that were burned were some small areas of snowgum forest which were set alight by embers carried on the wind. The plains themselves were untouched in stark contrast to the non-grazed areas on the Northern Bogongs.

1.1 Mountain Cattlemen have been forced to listen to some very specious and contorted arguments from green activists and scientists to explain this phenomenon when the truth is plain to the eye. I was informed by Parks Victoria's alleged experts that my licence area was spared due to a wind change which is sheer nonsense when you consider the fact that the small patches of snowgum were set alight by embers carried through the air.

1.2 Since the fires I have been not been allowed to return cattle to the ANP despite the fact that my area of the high plains was mostly untouched. Yet late last year Parks Victoria notified me that I could return cattle to the Park at elevations below 800 metres for this grazing season - the very area that was most severely burned. I agree that this section needs to be grazed because the regrowth of grass and shrub since the fires is astounding and needs some kind of management and control and I believe the offer to graze by PV was an acknowledgment of this.

1.3 The above is representative of the hypocrisy of Parks Victoria and the Victorian Government. My cattle have been excluded from unburned areas since the fires to allegedly assist recovery from non-existent damage but I am encouraged to graze in the most severely burned areas because the recovery (mostly of noxious weeds and introduced grasses) is complete enough to pose another serious fire risk.

1.4 I submit that the greatest threat to the Bogong High Plains is wildfire emerging from sub-alpine forests which carry an unprecedented fuel load and pose an extreme risk. Following each successive hot fire the fuel load increases substantially and the risk to the plains increases exponentially. This risk will be exacerbated seriously by the cessation of grazing due to a build up waste grass and other combustible material.

2. Another threat to the high plains which is almost completely ignored by the Victorian government is the exploding population of feral deer. Over the past decade deer, particularly Sambar have appeared in increasing numbers at the highest elevations and are causing substantial damage; in fact the very damage that has been widely attributed to mountain cattle.

2.1 Deer wallow in moss beds and transform them into muddied dams whereas cattle rarely enter them. Moss beds play a critical role in the regulation of water into mountain streams and while cattle have been blamed for visible damage the real culprit continues to be protected in water catchments and the state government refuses to declare it a feral pest species. Deer also browse on native plant species and have a substantial impact on their recovery after wildfire. This again demonstrates the disingenuous nature of the Victorian Government's case against alpine grazing.

2.2 On Parks Victoria's own estimates there are up to 200,000 feral deer running in the Victorian high country, in contrast to 8000 well managed cattle with a limited annual presence of 16 weeks. Yet Parks Victoria has concluded a concordat with the Australian Deer Association which speaks of improving habitat for feral deer. I find this alarming. The ADA is an organisation which, in its own words, seeks to see deer take their "rightful place amongst Australia's wildlife." It sounds like a joke but it is not.

3. For 170 years cattle have been grazed in the Victorian Alps - on the Bogong High Plains since 1851. For much of that time stocking allocations were far greater than the most recent. For example up until the 1940's around 18,000 cattle grazed The Bogongs but the most recent figure was 3,160 adult equivalents. If, for the first 90 years or so of grazing on The Bogongs nearly 20,000 head caused no permanent damage and left the plains worthy of inclusion in a huge national park how can it be said that only 3000 are doing irreparable damage?

3.1 The argument against alpine grazing is transparent and wrong. The science we hear so much about is deliberately distorted to provide conclusions aimed at justifying the desired result. This brings science into disrepute. How dare the green movement abuse a discipline that is supposed to advance human knowledge. We only ever hear the deliberately distorted findings of green scientists. Reputable and eminent scientists

such as Dick Condon and Peter Attiwill are ignored. Dick Condon was largely responsible for the removal of cattle from Kosciuszko, a move he now thinks was a mistake. The truth about "the science" is that there is no scientific consensus on alpine grazing.

4. Since the 1890's and the bush balladry of A.B. Banjo Paterson the lifestyle of Mountain Cattlemen has achieved legendary status and the cattlemen themselves have become an Australian icon as evidenced by the international acclaim given to the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Mountain Cattlemen are living symbols of The Man From Snowy River and their image and the pioneering spirit they symbolise is highly valued by the vast majority of Australians. Despite this, with one ill advised piece of legislation the Victorian Government attempted to wipe out a living cultural heritage that belongs not just to Victoria but to the entire nation.

4.1 The lifestyle of the mountain cattleman has been celebrated widely in art and has provided a source of creative inspiration that will be sorely missed if they are removed. The movie of The Man From Snowy River was for a long time Australia's highest grossing feature film and its musical soundtrack is one of the most awarded and acclaimed in motion picture history. Mountain Cattlemen were the horsemen in perhaps the most spectacular riding sequences ever captured on film. More recently The Man From Snowy River Arena Spectacular has attracted record crowds and captivated audiences throughout Australia. There has also been a long running television series based on The Man From Snowy River and other movies celebrating mountain cattlemen including Cool Change, High Country and The Silver Brumby.

4.2 A. B. Paterson himself wrote widely about the lifestyle of the Mountain Cattlemen in poems such as "Snowy River", A Mountain Station, At The Melting Of The Snow, Brumby's Run, The Mountain Squatter and The Open Steeplechase. Many other writers including Elyne Mitchell, daughter of Sir Harry Chauvel and author of the world renowned Silver Bumby books have done the same. In recent years artists such as John Duncan Firth and Kevin Best have sold paintings based on alpine grazing scenes to art lovers all over the world.

Conclusion: Management of National Parks and reserves throughout Australia must not be limited to radical green philosophies. Cultural heritage and traditional use of land have important values of their own which must be balanced against conservation issues. The trend to locking up vast areas of public land to all but narrowly focused interest groups such as bushwalkers has to stop. We are reaching a place where the frustrations of many user groups of public land is reaching boiling point. These issues need to be addressed urgently. Public land, whether it be National Park, state forest or nature reserves is the common property of all Australians and there is room for all including those like Mountain Cattlemen to pursue traditional activities.

Management of National Parks and Reserves has to be better funded and more professional. The reliance on volunteer groups, like that touted recently by Victorian Minister for Environment and Sustainability, John Thwaites, is nonsense. If we are to have huge National Parks like the Alpine and Kosciuszko parks then we must be

prepared to spend the money to manage them professionally lest we destroy them through neglect. User groups like Mountain Cattlemen with generations of experience should be utilised, not ignored, as is the case in Victoria now.

Philip Maguire.