

MOUNTAIN CATTLEMENS ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

POSITION STATEMENT April 2008.

MOUNTAIN CATTLEMEN ASSESS THEIR TREATMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT AND SAY

” IT’S TERRIBLE AND GETTING WORSE.”

Members of the MCAV continue to be treated badly by the Government.

The MCAV wishes it known that the Government, through its agencies Parks Victoria and DSE, has not kept its word to the Mountain Cattlemen.

In 2005 the Labor Government cancelled the grazing leases in the Alpine National Park.

That left created a huge logistical problem as many leases were then partly in the Park and partly out. Boundaries were only lines on a map. This meant that many leases were virtually unusable because of the invisible line. This was explained at the time to no avail.

There was no effort made to come to a sensible compromise on practical boundaries or to compensate cattlemen who were in this very difficult and no win position

However, the Government promised faithfully that the Mountain Cattlemen who had leases which adjoined the Park would be given every consideration and understanding. It pledged in Parliament that the DSE, Parks Victoria and the cattlemen would work closely together as containment plans were trialled and put in place.. It made many other promises and statements in Parliament and virtually none have been kept.

Last year one Cattleman had cattle impounded **without warning**, costing him hundreds of dollars in expenses. This broke the agreement we expected to be kept.

Another cattlemen has been told that if their cattle as much as walks up the old logging road from his forest lease into the Park they (the cattleman) will “be gone forever”

A Park Ranger went on ABC rural radio answering queries about why cattle were on a particular forest lease. The Ranger made statements and facts which were not accurate. The Ranger implied that it is probably only a matter of time before that particular lease and other leases will be closed. Listeners reported that they believed the interview revealed a personal bias of the ranger towards cattle grazing.

A Park Ranger rang a private landowner whose unfenced block adjoins a forest lease. The Ranger tried to get the landowner to object to the cattle on the lease so there would be grounds to bar the cattle. This Parks Victoria Ranger did this even though the grazing management is the responsibility of DSE not Parks.

Late last year, a well attended ‘good will’ meeting and field day was held between the MCAV and DSE officials. It was agreed on the day that both groups would have tolerance and understanding and better communication. When one MCAV member arrived home from the day, there was a letter waiting from the same DSE office, accusing him of serious of breeches to his licence which were never brought up that day. The so called “breeches” were later dropped as they were not correct. The cost and time that so called breech caused was significant to the Cattleman and delayed cattle entry to the lease. It also generated distrust for future dealings.

After last years bushfires burnt some of the forest grazing leases, the DSE stated categorically there would not be grazing for at least the following two years. It stated this without any scientific base for doing so. Forest runs are mostly at mid to low altitude and it was obvious there was going to be grass a metre high on some burnt runs and it was obvious to the experienced eye that most runs had fully recovered. After pressure from the MCAV and individuals, the DSE grudgingly commissioned the DPI to carry out tests to prove up what was obvious.

This took an enormous amount of time and money.

Many runs were then partly or fully reopened but up to six weeks late and after great inconvenience and expense to both the run holders and the DSE.

By far the most unfair situation is the loss and closure of many Forest licences which adjoin the Alpine Park because it is impossible to keep the cattle contained on the forest section. Compensation was paid for the loss of the section of licence in the Park but none was offered for the loss of the forest section even though the Forest licence loss is directly attributable to the creation of the Park. This has caused great hardship, anger and depression among many cattlemen's families as they attempt to contain cattle and having to deal with open hostility from Rangers. Eventually most or will have to let these joint runs go and walk away.. That appears to suit the agenda of the Authorities.

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Refusal to consider wider compensation shows utter callousness by the Government who gained all the kudos for creating the Park at the expense of the adjoining run holders who lost everything and who have been given nothing since but active aggression from Parks Victoria.

Of grave concern to the MCAV is the depressed state of some of its members who have virtually lost a lifetime's work and the work of generations before them. There has been no signal that the Government understands the depressed state some of our members are in, especially the older ones. There has been no understanding or concern about the impact the removal of their cattle has had on many of our members emotional well being.

They have lost their generational connection to the land they love and the Government apparently couldn't care less and hasn't offered to help people readjust.

**We are beginning to realise that the aggressive DSE and Parks Victoria attitude towards any slight incident with our cattle must be reflecting Government policy which is obviously to gradually force all cattle from Public land in Victoria
We have come to that conclusion because we have been treated very badly over so many issues and we want the people of Victoria to know the facts**