

Environment groups joint statement

Stop alpine grazing – it's a park not a paddock!

8 February 2011

To: The Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Australian Government on Victoria's Scientific Grazing Program

As Australia's leading environment and heritage groups we are gravely concerned that cattle grazing has been reintroduced by the Baillieu Government to Victoria's National Heritage listed Alpine National Park under the guise of a **'scientific grazing program'**.

We believe that grazing will damage and have a significant impact on areas of **'national environmental significance'** and call on federal environment minister, the **Hon Tony Burke MP**, to urgently intervene and use his powers under Commonwealth law to stop grazing in the Alpine National Park.

There is a **clear legal and scientific case** for legal action. **In a letter** to Victorian environment minister Ryan Smith 125 leading scientists have called for federal assessment, raised concerns over the proposed methodology and called for the project to be assessed under national laws (**Top scientists urge halt to alpine grazing trial, Sunday Age**).

Failure by Minister Burke to exercise federal powers will set a poor precedent, which may allow 'scientific grazing' or similar activities into a broad range of natural areas across Australia and undermine the integrity of our national environmental laws.

The Victorian Government appears to have shown a complete disregard for national environment laws by refusing to refer the project for proper assessment by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities before cattle were reintroduced.

Sixty years of science shows cattle damage soils, trample moss beds and watercourses, threaten rare native flora and fauna, spread weeds, and reduce water quality in streams and rivers fed by alpine headwaters. Since grazing was removed in 2005 there has been a marked recovery of these areas.

We believe the reintroduction of cattle grazing into the Alpine National Park will have a significant **negative effect on the natural heritage values** of the national park. It will **impact on a range of 'matters of national environmental significance'** protected under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

Victoria's Alpine National Park contains **endangered** Alpine Sphagnum Bogs and Fens and **at least a dozen cattle-sensitive EPBC Act listed species**. The Victorian Government's own limited data shows records for EPBC Act listed Alpine Bogs, Alpine Tree Frogs, Spotted Tree Frogs, and three species of plants in grazing research plots. Recent on-site investigations have confirmed the occurrence and impacts on EPBC listed species. For more detail please see the **VNPA website**.

Peer-reviewed research has shown grazing does not reduce the extent or severity of fire at a landscape scale in alpine regions. If there is a need for further research on the effects of grazing on fire, that research can easily be performed outside the national park.

We call for an end to the grazing by domestic stock in the Alpine National Park. There should be an increase in resources and expertise to manage alpine ecosystems in the face of climate change, including systematic control of feral deer and horses, not the introduction of new threats such as cattle grazing. Cattle spread invasive weeds in an ongoing cascade of damage to alpine habitats, for the benefit of a very small segment of the community.

Victoria's Alpine National Park is one of the most ecologically significant national parks in Australia and, as a key component of the internationally renowned Australian Alps National Parks, it warrants intervention **to ensure the protection of Australia's National Heritage**.

PLEASE ACT NOW MINISTER – IT'S A PARK NOT A Paddock.

For more information please contact Matt Ruchel, Executive Director of the Victorian National Parks Association, on 0418 357 813 or visit www.vnpa.org.au.

