Mountain Cattlemen call for a return to traditional forest management

RETURNING cattle to the Alpine areas of Victoria and an increase in ‘cool burns’ are being recommended by the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria (MCAV) as a means to reduce bushfire fuel in the High Country

Making their submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangement (the Bushfire Royal Commission), the MCAV has come up with six recommendations they want implemented into future fire management strategies

They not only include returning cattle to graze increased areas of the High Country – the groups champion cause – but also a change in the way residents are able to access their properties post- bushfire and the implementation of backburning programs based on traditional aboriginal techniques.

“It is clear that cattle grazing is one of the most effective tools to reduce bushfire fuel loads in some areas of the High country,” MCAV president, Bruce McCormack, said.

“So it will come as no surprise that one of our recommendations includes this – but what the general public may not realise is that controlled burns are not carried out beyond a certain altitude, so in genuine ‘high’ country one of the only methods of fuel reduction is Alpine grazing.”

The MCAV’s submission, which is available on the group’s website, details the on-the-ground experience garnered by cattlemen across generations.

“Our submission and recommendations come not from book learning and sitting behind a desk, but from more than 160 years of our families living and working in the forest,” Mr McCormack said.

What sets the MCAVs submission apart is the group is not focused just on returning cattle, but in incorporating a combined approach to the management of the entire Victorian High Country.

“Cattlemen learnt many of our fire management practices from Indigenous Australians,” Mr McCormack said.

“It has been proven that Indigenous Australians used to burn the country regularly, and that is why the early explorers noted that the forests were “open and park like”.

“We want the Alpine and State Forest areas to be in the best condition possible, and that comes from combining a number of strategies to get the best result.”

The MCAV has suggested to the Royal Commission that Indigenous fire practitioner, Victor Steffenson, and historian Professor Bill Gammage, be invited to explain the positive effect cultural burning has on the health of the forests.

Former MCAV president, Graeme Stoney, undertook much of the research required for the group’s submission - including a detailed look at past Bushfire Royal Commissions.

“In 1939 Judge Leonard Stretton led an inquiry into the Black Friday bushfires, and much of the current thinking is still based on what he found at the time,” Mr Stoney said.

“It has become clear in recent times that much of what Stretton found was incorrect, such as that lightning starts few if any bushfires – but his report has been held up as something for the authorities and conservation groups to follow ever since.

“As a group we have been constantly calling for a better system based on common sense and practical strategies to reduce fuel loads and therefore the intensity of bushfires,” Mr Stoney said.

To read the MCAV’s submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangement head to [www.mcav.com.au](http://www.mcav.com.au).