THE Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria (MCAV) are cautiously accepting of the Land Use Activity Agreement, brokered between the Victorian Government and the Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation.

President of the MCAV, Bruce McCormack, said today that High Country cattlemen have always worked alongside the First People, and that – pending more information – he would expect this to continue.

“In principal, we have no problem with this agreement,” he explained.

“We have always paid fees to have our cattle in the High Country, and expect this to be ongoing.

“We have never had a problem with the Taungurung people – we have just finalised a submission on Biodiversity decline in Victoria and in that we proudly detail our on-going association with Australia’s First People, and our adoption of their cool burning techniques.”

The Land Use Activity Agreement was gazetted on August 11, and details how some Victorians engaging in activities on crown land will be required to pay rent to the Taungurung people.

It is expected this will potentially impact not only Cattlemen with State Forest leases but also farmers, loggers, miners and even recreational activities.

Despite his Association’s provisional support, Mr McCormack did say he was disappointed that the MCAV had not been consulted as part of the agreement process, even after the deal was finalized.

“It is disappointing to read of these agreements in the media, rather than being contacted first-hand,” Mr McCormack said.

“This would have been courteous: ideally, we would have liked to be involved with formulating the agreement from the beginning, given our association with the High Country and the Taungurung People over the last 186 years.”

The agreement covers 800,000 hectares of Parks and State Forest, stretching from Rochester to Bright and down to Warburton.

It includes sections of the Goulburn, King and Ovens Rivers.

When contacted, Mr McCormack said he was still wading through the document but did say he was hopeful there would be few changes for those within the MCAV.

“Without knowing the full implications, at this stage we have no problem with the Agreement assuming the fees will be passed on out of the current lease fees our members pay to the Government, and provided negotiations are between the Government and the Corporation,” he said.

“I just hope this agreement does not result in more paperwork for country Victorians; any more red tape and bureaucratic discussion is unhelpful to individuals who now just want to get on with their lives.”

Mr McCormack is keen to hear from other user groups who would be similarly affected by the agreement.

“While we support the theory of this agreement, we are also determined that the bush remain a space for all interested parties rather than it being controlled by a single entity.

“We will work hard to make sure this happens.”

The MCAV had attempted to contact the Taungurung following the announcement but had so far not received a response.