

Hunt to rule on grazing

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A THREE-year alpine grazing trial in the Wonnangatta Valley will be assessed under federal laws by Environment Minister Greg Hunt.

The Victorian Government's application seeking permission for a trial as early as January has been received by the Federal Government.

A spokesman for Mr Hunt said the Government would assess the referral under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Victoria's latest push to return cattle to the national park follows new research by the University of Melbourne and University of Tasmania claiming cattle grazing did little to reduce Australia's most destructive bushfires.

Mountain Cattlemens Association of Victoria president Charlie Lovick, who hosted Victorian Environment Minister Ryan Smith at Wonnangatta Station recently, said the former Bracks Government's decision to stop grazing in Wonnangatta was "a mistake".

"Since the decision to stop grazing, Wonnangatta has grown into a fire trap," he said.

"The valley is now tinder dry, with metre-high grass and infested with invasive species." Previous studies, including by the CSIRO, suggested cattle did not reduce the incidence and intensity of fire by grazing the vegetation, although some have disputed this.

The latest report by academics Grant Williamson, Brett Murphy and David Bowman found cattle grazing would not reduce their likelihood of fire in eucalypt forests and woodlands in alpine areas but did not rule out the use of cattle to manage "tropical savannas" where invasive grasses fuel fires and compromise native vegetation.

More than 11,400 square kilometres of the Victorian Alps were analysed using historical satellite pictures, where the researchers overlaid maps of crown scorch derived from satellite imagery following bushfires in 2002-03 and 2006-07, with the location of pastoral leases.

Former environment minister Tony Burke blocked a bid for a grazing trial in 2011.