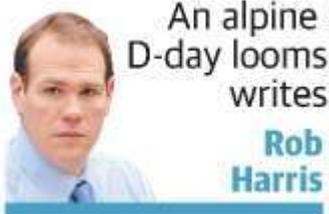




It's high noon on grazing

Looking for hope: Cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park and (inset) cattlemen spokesman Graeme Stoney



An alpine D-day looms writes
Rob Harris

CATTLEMEN must remain an active part of Victoria's High Country and not be assigned to legend, Graeme Stoney believes.

A push to return cattle to Victoria's Alpine National Park will be played out in Canberra over the coming weeks after submissions, for and against, closed yesterday.

Mr Stoney, executive officer of the Mountain Cattlemen's

Association of Victoria, knows the latest bid, albeit for a three-year trial, could be the last roll of the dice.

With cattle periodically removed from the High Country over the past 60 years, culminating in the 2005 blanket ban by the Victorian Government, it's probably a case of now or never.

Mr Stoney knows federal and state Coalition govern-

ments could be the cattlemen's best chance.

"We are at a point where there must be a total change to the management of the High Country," he said.

"We obviously believe cattle grazing should play a role in that strategy, but the knowledge and experience won't be around forever. We're getting older and that knowledge needs to be passed on."

He remains defiant despite a stream of scientific reports including from the CSIRO claiming otherwise, that cattle in grazing areas of the High Country must be reintroduced where it can be useful, while protecting any extremely sensitive areas.

"It is a question of accepting there has to be a trade-off and balance to achieve the greater good," he says.





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“Environmental groups have done both the land and the general public a huge disservice by claiming that all the Alpine National Park is pristine and would be trashed by cattle.”

Mr Stoney claims they “extrapolated some minor scientific work” to claim that the findings apply to the entire park. He hopes Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt will approve the bid to send about 60 cattle into the Wonnangatta Valley as early as next month.

Since Victoria announced it would reapply to the new government for its trial — quashed by the former Gillard

Government two years ago — environmental concerns have again been aired.

Royal Society of Victoria president Dr Bill Birch questioned the trial merits, claiming it was “not clear” and showed “little evidence of sound scientific structure”.

Victoria’s application claims previous scientific reports were “tricky and misleading”.

In its application to the Federal Government, Victoria looked to appease the concerns of the Native Orchid Society of Victoria, which wrote to the Commonwealth with its concerns.

The trial would monitor any effects on a native flower de-

tected in the valley because of the “considerable uncertainty” about the “potentially positive and negative” effects grazing could have.

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries promised a “combination of passive and active controls” including temporary cattle grids and electric fences to ensure cattle were prevented from affecting “matters of na-

tional environmental significance” such as the orchid.

But Phil Ingamells, of the Victorian National Parks Association, said the latest “scientific trial” was still “without any scientists” and would waste “valuable bushfire research money on a deal for their cattlemen mates”.

“The cattlemen and the Government have never acknowledged the peer-reviewed published studies that show grazing had no significant impact on actual bushfires,” Mr Ingamells said.

“It’s time the cattlemen accepted that the Alpine National Park is not their paddock.”