



The Royal Society of Victoria

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Promoting science and science education

Patron

The Hon Alex Chernov AC QC, Governor of Victoria

President

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Response to proposed trial of cattle grazing in the Wonnangatta Valley

Preamble:

The Royal Society of Victoria is an independent, non-political body which has been promoting science and science education since 1854.

The Society remains strongly opposed to the grazing of cattle in designated National Parks because there will be likely adverse impacts on an area of National Heritage.

There is no valid scientific evidence to support the theory that such grazing reduces the impact of bushfires. Our position remains unchanged, especially in the light of the design of the EMP for this poorly controlled trial experiment in the Wonnangatta Valley (WV).

Specific Objections:

The EMP notes that the trial will affect only 0.01% (262 hectares) of all the high country land. It applies to a secluded valley that is predominantly grassy vegetation. Yet the EMP does not state how any results of the trial can be reliably extrapolated to the far more complex mix of flora represented in the rest of the high country. This is a fundamental flaw in the experiment. Any deductions from the experiment will be applicable only to the WV.

The EMP does not state why the WV was selected for this trial in the first place. If it has been grazed for over 100 years before 2003, then surely there is already an historical record of grazing and fire. This EMP could just have easily been established for grassland bordering native vegetation in similar terrain on **private** land. The inevitable question arises as to why the WV was selected over and above other regions. The EMP provides no evidence for any other areas outside national parks being considered.

The EMP refers to the likely habits of cattle in the grazing area, in particular access to drinking sources. It notes that access points will be restricted by blackberries yet makes no reference at all to the likely deleterious effect on water quality in the river caused by trampling and the concentration of defecation at drinking points. Nor does the EMP make any mention of the effect of 300 cattle on soil quality, biodiversity or protected species in the grazed areas.

The EMP makes no reference to the effects of other grazing animals already in the high country. There are estimates of thousands of brumbies and deer in various parts of the national parks. If the premise of the experiment is that cattle-grazing reduces the effect of wild fire, then surely these other grazing populations would be having a measurable effect already. Why add cattle to the mix?

It appears that the trial will allow cattle to graze half of the only population of the nationally threatened Pale Golden Moths orchid in a protected area, and a quarter of the entire known population.

Final remarks

The very short time available for public response has precluded a far more thorough analysis of the EMP, which might have exposed other shortcomings. The Society is not convinced that this EMP will result in any meaningful scientific evidence for concluding that cattle grazing will reduce the effects of wildfire in the alpine national park, for the reasons listed above.

Dr William Birch AM
President