

THE CARRUTHERS GROUP OF ALPINE ECOLOGISTS AND SCIENTISTS

A STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSAL TO SEEK CULTURAL HERITAGE LISTING FOR THE VICTORIAN ALPINE NATIONAL PARK.

The Carruthers Group of alpine ecologists and scientists has for many years given support to the removal of domestic stock grazing from the Australian Alps National Parks in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria. The Group applauds the Victorian Government for making the decision not to renew grazing leases in the Victorian Alpine National Park.

The removal of grazing from the scientifically significant high mountain ecosystems, sensitive vegetation and groundwater communities is a major step forward in the protection and conservation of these communities and the unique flora and fauna that they support. The end of grazing is also a significant step for catchment management, particularly as the Alps are the headwaters of several major rivers of the Murray-Darling system – the most important river system in southeastern Australia.

The scientific evidence in support of the removal of grazing has been acknowledged for over 50 years. While this contributed to the removal of grazing from Kosciuszko National Park in NSW and Namadgi National Park in the ACT, many years ago, the Carruthers Group also recognises that many external factors and issues have delayed the decision to remove grazing from the Victorian Alpine National Park. A major issue has been the perceived strong link between high mountain grazing and the deeply entrenched folklore created by A.B ‘Banjo’ Paterson in his poem *The Man from Snowy River*.

This link has contributed to what is now recognised by many people, as the Australian ‘character and ethos’ which should be recognised and retained as part of our cultural heritage but not at the expense of our world-renowned high mountain natural heritage. This natural heritage lies in the diversity and cover of soils, the geology, the botanically significant and diverse flora, the scientifically important fauna, and the complex ecosystems of which these are a part. The ecosystems are very sensitive to external influences of which grazing has been a major impact over the past 150 years. The ecosystems will only survive and remain fully functional if they are managed for their intrinsic values and not for the external factors that have or would continue to utilise the very biota that management aims to conserve and protect in the Australian Alps parks.

Cattle grazing in the high mountains is a part of European cultural heritage but, in the same way as the man from Snowy River himself is immortalised in poetry and folklore, so has and will the cultural heritage of alpine grazing continue to be recognised. The many huts built and utilised by the cattlemen and the many grazier family names which are now a feature of the Alps, have also immortalised the high mountain grazing heritage and ensured it will continue to be recognised as part of the heritage of the Alps.

The family linkages to high mountain grazing will also not be lost, as a ‘living museum’ of this grazing tradition will continue in the high mountains in Victoria in areas other than the Alpine National Park. The European cultural heritage attached to high mountain grazing will, as such still be preserved and recognised, but without impact on the high mountain ecosystems and catchments within the Alpine National Park. The Carruthers Group supports a cultural heritage listing for the Australian Alps as part of a comprehensive listing of all

natural and other values of the mountains. That listing should be a celebration of the rich history of the grazing tradition but more significantly, an acknowledgement that the mountain environment can no longer sustain the impact of that activity.

The end of grazing will also provide a real opportunity for all the parks of the Alps to be managed as one biophysical unit; an objective of the interstate co-operative management program, as detailed in the *Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperative Management of the Alps Parks*, signed by State and Commonwealth Ministers for the Environment in 1986.

It will also provide an opportunity and stimulus to pursue appropriate national and international natural heritage recognition and listing for the Australian Alps Parks, which to date has not been possible while grazing continued within them.

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Prof. Jamie Kirkpatrick – Environmental Sciences (Alpine Ecologist), University of Tasmania

Prof. Geoff Hope - Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University

Dr Geoff Mosley – Environmental Consultant, . Past Director of Australian Conservation Foundation.

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Prof Ralf Buckley –Director of International Centre for Ecotourism Research, Griffith University

Attachments.

1. Background to *The Carruthers Group of Ecologists and Scientists*.

The Carruthers Group is a network of professional associates who have had a long-term involvement or interest in alpine ecology and research in the Australian Alps. The network has existed for several decades, formerly being known as the *Kosciuszko Committee of Interested Scientists*. As the Group now takes a more holistic view of research and management across the entire Australian Alps bioregion, it has changed its network name to *The Carruthers Group*.

This iconic name was chosen as Mt Carruthers in Kosciuszko National Park was the most severely eroded site as a result of domestic stock grazing in the Snowy Mountains.

2. Photographs of erosion and vegetation damage on Mt Carruthers as a result of grazing (a) and the recovery of the vegetation after extensive and costly rehabilitation and restoration works (b)

(a)



(b)



To:

Honourable Ian Campbell, Minister for the Environment, Australian Government

Copies to:

Hon. John Thwaites, Minister for the Environment, Victoria

Hon. Bob Debus, Minister for the Environment, NSW

Hon. John Stanhope, Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment, ACT