

A new beginning for the Alpine National Park

Fact Sheet: Cattle grazing in Victoria's high country

May 2005

Victoria's high country (which today includes the Alpine National Park as well as large areas of State forest and areas of freehold land) has a long history of use for stock grazing. Early settlers grazed their cattle, sheep and horses in various parts of the high country and seeking out the alpine herbfields and grasslands for summer feed.

High country grazing was initially unregulated. However, in response to concerns about damage to important water catchments, controls were progressively introduced from the 1940s. Sheep and horses and burning-off were banned, restrictions on the length of the grazing season introduced, maximum stocking levels set, and grazing progressively removed from several areas including the highest peaks.

Cattle grazing is currently licensed on public land in the Alpine National Park and in State forest.

How is grazing allowed in the Alpine National Park?

When the Alpine National Park was created in 1989, the legislation allowed grazing to continue over most of the previously grazed areas of the park. Seven-year licences with standard terms and conditions were issued under the National Parks Act.

How many licences are there in the park?

There are 61 licences to graze cattle in the Alpine National Park. All but two are seven-year licences which expire in August 2005 or June 2006. There are two annual licences.

Who holds the licences?

The National Parks Act states that anyone who held a licence to graze cattle in the area which was to become the Alpine National Park was entitled to a seven-year grazing licence to graze cattle in the park. Seven-year licences were issued in 1991 and renewed in 1998. A licence can be transferred, with the permission of the Minister, to a member of a licensee's family or other approved person.

How much of the park is licensed?

About 310 000 hectares (or about 47%) of the Alpine National Park is licensed for grazing, although less than that area is actually grazed. Cattle prefer particular vegetation types such as the grasslands and herbfields of the high plains, and the grassy flats of the lower river valleys. (See map)

How many cattle are allowed to graze in the park?

A total of 7914 adult equivalent (AE) cattle (where two calves count as one adult) are licensed to graze in the park. On average, about 4500–5000 cattle are recorded as grazing in the park in a normal season. Following the 2003 fires, the maximum number of cattle allowed to graze has been reduced to 1759 AE.

What are the licence fees?

Licensees pay \$5.50 (including GST) per adult equivalent for a season of grazing (generally about 18–20 weeks from early summer to mid Autumn). Grazing is administered by Parks Victoria.

How many cattle are allowed to graze in the high country outside the park?

There are extensive areas of State forest outside the park which are licensed for cattle grazing. Approximately 10 000 cattle are licensed to graze in the areas of State forest in the general vicinity of the park (see map). About 4000 of these are licensed to graze under licences which include areas above the snowline (1220 metres). The actual number that graze varies from year to year.

How have the 1998 and 2003 bushfires affected grazing in the national park?

The 1998 Caledonia Fire and the 2003 Victorian Alpine Fires burnt in total more than 1 million hectares in eastern and north-eastern Victoria. The fires together burnt more than 60% of the Alpine National Park and more than 80% of the area of the park licensed for grazing. The 2003 fire also burnt extensive areas of State forest licensed for grazing.

To allow the burnt areas to recover, grazing has been significantly reduced since 2003. Last summer, only 1759 AE cattle were allowed to graze in the park. However, even less than that actually grazed – 739 AE (or less than 10% of normal maximum allocation) were recorded as potentially grazing in the park.

An independent Scientific Advisory Panel has advised that grazing should be excluded from all burnt areas above the snowline (approximately 1220 metres) and severely burnt areas below that level for at least a decade. For some areas where recovery is very slow, it could be several decades.

See Fact Sheet on the decision on the future of cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.

