



CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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The NSW Premier
The Hon Barry O'Farrell MP
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney.

Dear Premier

Grazing in National Parks

The Clarence Environment Centre is appalled at your Environment Minister's decision to allow a "trial" of grazing in national parks, and can see no justification for such a move, and point out in the strongest possible terms that these parks belong to all the people of NSW, not just a handful of graziers and right-wing national party members.

The suggestion that this 'trial' has anything to do with research is laughable, and point out that if any study into the impacts of grazing is needed, then there are numerous state forests across NSW, where cattle grazing already occurs, in which such studies could take place.

As it is there has been endless research proving conclusively that grazing has had, and continues to have, serious negative impacts on the environment, and biodiversity in general. Those impacts are not only on flora, but also on a variety of threatened fauna species such as the Rufous Bettong which relies on clumping grass for its nest site, or the Grass Parrot that is dependent on sedgeland for refuge from predators, or the Grass Owl that cannot exist without tall grassy plains country which supports its food source. Then there is the Black-breasted Button-quail which, according to the literature, is directly threatened by trampling of its habitat by cattle.

These are just four examples out of hundreds of species that are known to be at risk from grazing activities.

There has also been research, for example, provided to the NSW Scientific Committee supporting nominations for each of the hundreds of threatened plant species that are now listed in NSW, where one of the most commonly listed threats to those species, all of which are all in decline and facing extinction as a result, is: "*Degradation of habitat by grazing*".

The negative impacts of grazing are well documented. However in 2006, to check claims by some in the community that grazing reduces bushfire risk, the Clarence Environment Centre undertook an assessment of the effects of grazing in the Boundary Creek State Forest in the Clarence Valley. Our findings revealed that the cattle had little interest in seeking fodder on drier slopes, but **congregated in the lush damp gullies and creek lines, turning pristine pools into mud wallows, causing major erosion of creek banks, and trampling and killing the riparian vegetation.**

That creek bank vegetation, which normally includes a variety of rainforest species, provides a significant degree of resistance to bushfire, acting as a natural fire break, but at Boundary Creek, the now dead and dry trampled vegetation was rendered significantly more flammable, proving the lie to claims by graziers that their activities reduce the threat of bushfire.

Very few of these rivers, creeks, and drainage lines on public land are fenced, so livestock cannot be excluded and prevented from causing massive erosion of stream banks, and fencing by its very nature should never be allowed in areas allocated for fauna conservation.

Anecdotal evidence shows that where grazing is allowed in State forests, the incidence of unexplained bushfire is greatly increased, as landowners seek to reduce canopy and understorey vegetation to encourage grass for their livestock. There is no doubt in our minds that there will be a higher bushfire frequency in all national parks where grazing is allowed.

There is also no doubt that, if there are listed threatened species occurring in the national parks where grazing is to be 'trialled', that those species will suffer significant impacts as a result.

We remind you that the overriding reason for the creation of national parks is the conservation of nature, with the aim to conserve a comprehensive, adequate and representative cross section of habitats, communities and ecosystems across the State.

Therefore we implore you to instruct the Minister to reconsider this ill-conceived idea.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary.

Copy to Environment Minister.