



Craspedia, or Billy Buttons, flowering abundantly since cattle were removed from the Bogong High Plains. Photo: Henrik Wahren

Nationally threatened species at risk from alpine cattle grazing

Nationally threatened species at risk from cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park

The Victorian National Parks Association has reviewed the information supplied by the Victorian Government to justify its decision not to refer the reintroduction of cattle grazing for assessment under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act.

We have looked at the six 'research sites' to which cattle have been introduced, and at the Victorian Government's assessment of likely impacts on the park's natural values.

We have discovered numerous flaws in the assessment. Our review of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) desktop study found that:

- **Four of the six research sites contain threatened species** and vegetation communities already appearing in DSE's database as listed under the EPBC Act, but not all of this information was included in its public information.
- **No on-site surveys were conducted before the cattle were introduced** to ascertain the presence of threatened species. In other words, no baseline monitoring has been undertaken and it cannot be inferred that other endangered species do not occur.
- **Many sites have EPBC-listed species** or vegetation communities adjacent to them, and there is no guarantee cattle can be kept within the boundaries as defined because many areas are unfenced.
- **The desktop study conducted by the Victorian Government** has information that is not always up to date. Some of the information (eg presence of peatbeds and wetlands) had been mapped from aerial photographs only.

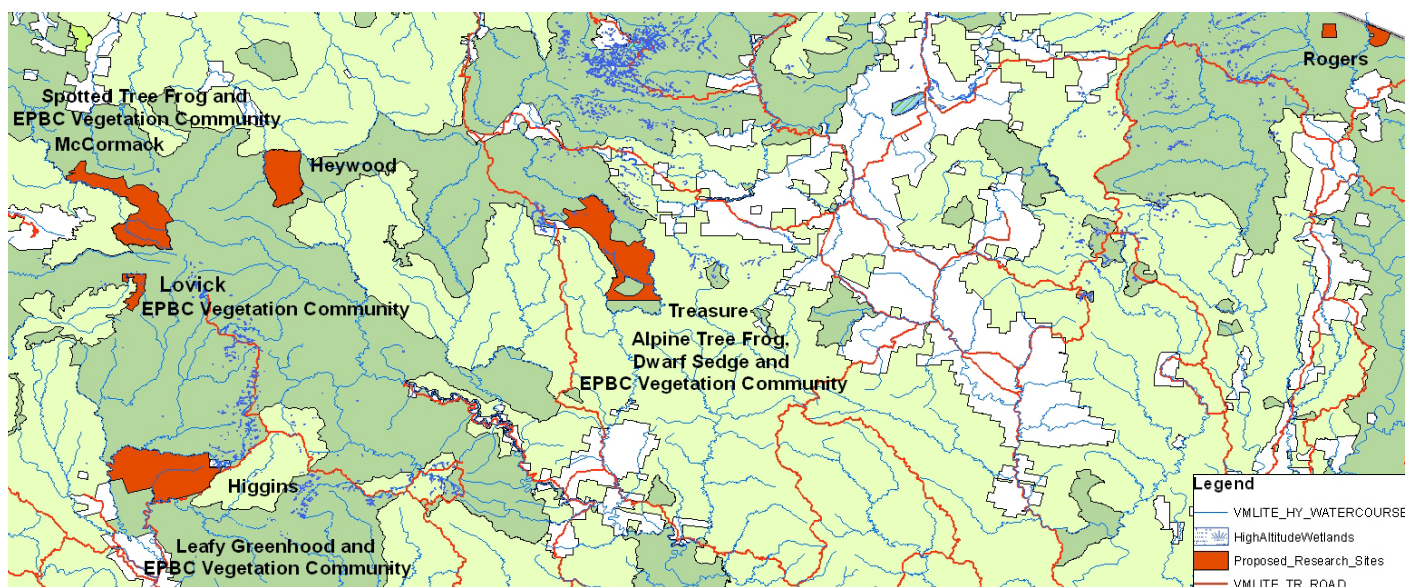
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Cattle grazing on Holmes Plain, shortly after the 1998 Caledonia fire in the Alpine National Park.



Nationally threatened species at risk from alpine cattle grazing



Desktop study of EPBC listed species and vegetation communities in alpine national park grazing sites

| Grazing area | Location within Alpine National Park | Animals | Plants | Vegetation communities |
|--------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Treasure | South east of Mt Hotham, in the headwaters of the Dargo River, 6938 ha. | Alpine Tree Frog (vulnerable) | Dwarf Sedge (vulnerable) | Alpine sphagnum bogs and fens (endangered) |
| McCormack | East of Mt Buller, 6227 ha. | Spotted tree frog (endangered) | - | Alpine sphagnum bogs and fens (endangered) |
| Lovick | South east of Mt Buller, 862 ha. | - | - | Alpine sphagnum bogs and fens (endangered) |
| Higgins | North of Licola near McAllister River, 7920 ha. | - | Leafy greenhood orchid (vulnerable) | Alpine sphagnum bogs and fens (endangered) |
| Rogers | On NSW border, near Suggan Buggan, 975 ha. | - | - | - |
| Heywood | Near Wonangatta Valley, 3308 ha. | - | - | - |

Key nationally threatened species

ALPINE TREE FROG

- Listed as vulnerable under EPBC Act, numbers declining.
- Only tree frog known to occur above the winter snowline on mainland Australia.
- Inhabits alpine wetlands and pools of creeks in grassland, alpine woodland and partly open land.
- Breeding sites are vulnerable to trampling by livestock.



Alpine Tree Frog
Photo: Peter Robinson

- Dargo and Mt Bogong, generally above 1200m altitude.
- Listed as Vulnerable under the EPBC Act.
- Major threats include weed invasion, grazing, off-road vehicle use, and climate change.

SPOTTED TREE FROG

- Estimated that around 4000 individuals remain in 12 isolated populations.
- Listed as endangered under the EPBC Act.
- Found in the cold mountain streams from the Central Highlands in Victoria to Mt Kosciuszko in New South Wales.
- Habitat disturbance near streams affects water quality and increases sedimentation of habitat.



Spotted Tree Frog
Photo: Peter Robinson

ALPINE SPHAGNUM BOGS AND FENS

- Mossy vegetated peatbeds and wetlands found in waterlogged areas in the high country, often scattered with small pools of water.
- Listed as endangered under the EPBC Act.
- Often contain rare plant species and provide habitat for threatened frogs and reptiles.
- Threatened by livestock grazing and trampling, fire, weed invasion and climate change.

DWARF SEDGE

- Tufted grass-like plant, grows to 15cm.
- Only found in the highlands of eastern Victoria, between

MONTANE LEAFY GREENHOOD ORCHID

- Listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act.
- Found in drier subalpine forest and woodland, on moist grassy slopes or in thickets of teatree close to creeks.
- Major threats include weed invasion, grazing and disturbance to and destruction of plants and habitat.