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LEADING BOTANIST BACKS CATTLE GRAZING IN RED GUM FORESTS

The Brumby Government should use targeted cattle grazing to reduce the risk of fire in red gum forests, a leading forest ecologist believes.

Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Deputy Leader of The Nationals Peter Walsh said University of Melbourne botanist Peter Attiwill backed the measure as part of an investigation into the site of an intense Department of Sustainability and Environment burn in the Barmah Forest.

“Dr Attiwill investigated the site at Browns Camp and wrote a report on his observations at the request of the Rivers and Red Gum Environment Alliance,” Mr Walsh said.

“He concluded the government could better mitigate the risk of fire in red gum forests by using targeted spring and summer grazing in conjunction with cool prescribed burning.

“While cool burns are vital as a fire mitigation measure, Dr Attiwill’s report shows in river red gum forests they must be conducted in combination with controlled grazing.”

Mr Walsh, who today inspected Browns Camp with The Nationals Member for Rodney Paul Weller and members of the Rivers and Red Gum Environment Alliance, said the report validated concerns about the government’s plan to turn the forests into national parks.

“Last year a cross-party parliamentary inquiry supported the use of grazing as a tool to complement other fuel reduction strategies on public land,” Mr Walsh said.

“Even the Department of Primary Industries advises landholders to use targeted spring and summer grazing as a simple and effective way to reduce the risk of fire on their properties.

“The Brumby Government has ignored expert advice, including that of its own department, which agrees cattle grazing should be used to reduce fuel loads,” Mr Walsh said.

Mr Weller said the release of the report was timely, with the Brumby Government’s legislation to permanently ban cattle grazing in river red gum forests set to be debated as early as next week.

“The Nationals will use this study to inform the debate of the expert opinion opposing the government’s plans to end traditional practices in forests,” Mr Weller said.

“Dr Attiwill’s study shows conclusively that the government’s plan to turn river red gum forests into national parks is not the best means of either conserving the forest or controlling the fire risk.

“The government would achieve much more if it worked with northern Victorian communities and landholders, instead of riding roughshod over communities who have generations of knowledge and experience,” Mr Weller said.

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