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**Vic: Alpine grazing remains a sore point in Narracan**

By Melissa Jenkins

MELBOURNE, Nov 2 AAP - Labor MP Ian Maxfield will not only have to contend with his Liberal rival ahead of the November 25 Victorian poll.

Hundreds of men and women on horses are also aiming to trample his hopes of being elected for a third term as MP for Narracan in the state's south-east.

As chair of the Alpine Grazing Taskforce, he is enemy number one for a group calling itself Push For The Bush.

The group, sponsored by the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, mustered more than 100 horses outside Mr Maxfield's Warragul electorate office last month to protest against the government's ban on cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park.

The campaign is centred on Mr Maxfield but will draw attention to the wider issue of whether the government has delivered to rural voters.

The Narracan electorate covers towns including Drouin, Moe, Neerim, Trafalgar and Warragul and is serviced by the government's VLocity fast trains.

Mr Maxfield was elected in 1999 and was re-elected in 2002 by a margin of 6.9 per cent.

The former electrician and union organiser will be working to stave off Liberal candidate Gary Blackwood.

The lifetime Warragul resident is CEO of the Victorian Forest Harvesting and Cartage Council, which represents logging contractors.

Logging is a major industry in the area, as well as coal mining, dairy farming and potato growing.

Mr Maxfield said the government had delivered on a 2002 election promise by opening a \$21 million new cancer unit at Latrobe Regional Hospital in Traralgon West.

He also pointed to an \$8 million mental health residential facility in Traralgon as another example of the government delivering on health.

But Mr Blackwood said health services in the electorate were inadequate as pressure on emergency departments rose.

He pledged to lobby for more funding for the West Gippsland Hospital, which he said needed an extra \$1.5 million a year.

Mr Blackwood said there was a police shortage in Neerim South, near Drouin, where the station was only staffed 16 hours a day.

"That particular police station services a large area of state forest and a large area of rural farming communities," he said.

"When police are not available from Neerim South they must be called from Warragul, Drouin or Trafalgar, which is at least 15 to 30 minutes away."

Mr Maxfield said it was not up to the government to dictate to Victoria Police how to allocate resources.

"The only way the Liberals can fund their (election) spending spree is to cut teachers, nurses and police," he said.

"If the Liberals get their opportunity to govern, we will see crime rising again."

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