

A Submission to the Natural resources Commission (NRC) Draft report: active and adaptive cypress management in the Brigalow and Nandewar state conservation areas

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- 1) We oppose the proposed grazing in these State Conservation areas of White Cypress Pine in the Brigalow and Nandewar State Conservation Areas.
- 2) We oppose the draft report's recommendation to allow so-called "ecological thinning" in these State Conservation areas.
- 3) We oppose the report's proposal to allow cost recovery and cost sharing opportunities, as we believe this would essentially allow commercial logging in a protected area.
- 4) Human and ecological health will be damaged by a reversal of the reserve conditions.

- 1) Grazing should not be allowed in these remnant forests.

We have walked in Cypress Pine forests in Central Western NSW. We are alarmed to see the condition of forests that have been logged and grazed. In large areas, the ground under the trees resembles the underneath of a woolshed, all churned up by the hooves of sheep, no understory plants in sight, with the un-naturally high nutrient levels challenging the trees, and the signs of wind and water-driven soil erosion everywhere. The stumps of very large trees indicated that once things were different – few individuals grow to such size any more. Grazing of introduced livestock occurs on nearly all of the surface of our continent (even in National Parks. It should not be sanctioned here in reserved lands.

- 2) "Ecological thinning" is not a widely accepted concept amongst the scientific community.

We have met and spoken with and read the work of scientists who have studied these forest ecologies in depth. They work with intellectual rigour and without pecuniary interest. The science is incomplete. Where is the scientific evidence to support a belief in thinning as ecologically valuable?

The NRC has not given us any evidence that thinning will have any benefits for the native flora and fauna of these Cypress forests. In contradiction, we hear of studies that have shown the ecological value of a forest can be measured by the volume of fallen timber on the ground: this fallen timber is the habitat for the microbial and invertebrate life-forms that are at the base of a healthy food-chain that sustains all of life.

These forests deserve our utmost care and caution in their management. If the science is still unclear, we should be extremely careful of pecuniary

interests adopting those parts of the emerging scientific evidence that would suit their purpose.

Dense cypress forests including healthy forests, as suggested by early settler accounts, have always had parts that are dense. These dense areas have been shown to support more soil biota (non-vascular plants, mosses, lichens) that protect against erosion and allow good water holding capacity. The deep shade in these areas can provide useful refuge for animals during extreme heat.

It may well be that the sapling density is a response to forests under pressure, and only time will tell how the forest will heal itself. Thinning may have the opposite to the desired affect. For instance, the removal of large individual trees will allow seedlings to establish in dense thickets.

3) Commercial exploitation.

We are alarmed at the precedent that would be set if commercial interests were to take hold in these limited reserved lands. These reserves were made to protect and conserve country that is important for many reasons scientific and cultural.

Taxpayers put in a lot of money for the extensive consultation process and reservation of land. Taxpayers then funded \$51 million in compensation to the timber industry interests. It would be expensive, unjust and wrong to now enable these industries to re-enter the forests.

The Brigalow forests have been identified as unique, listed by the Federal Government as one of the nation's 15 biodiversity hotspots. Endangered species of animals and plants hang on there, in a landscape that is already heavily altered, and is continually being modified through the industrialisation of agriculture.

4) Human and ecological health are interlinked.

It is damaging to the health of human communities to see the degradation of the landscapes that once made Australia proud of its rural heritage. One only needs to see a nineteenth century woolshed and stockyards to see what we owe these forests. Today the forests are nearly exhausted. Yet even these remnants provide reprieve and inspiration In times of drought. We must take every measure possible to conserve and manage these remaining stands of native cypress in the best condition possible, in respect to our heritage and to our future generations.