

From: Cecile van der Burgh
Sent: Tuesday, 6 October 2009 9:12 PM
To: Felicity Calvert
Subject: Submission - NRC Regional Assessment of Red Gums

Forests Assessment
Natural Resources Commission
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To whom it may concern,

RE: Submission River Red Gum Assessment

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the first report produced for the River Red Gum Regional Assessment conducted by the Natural Resource Commission.

I visited these river red gum forests, including Barmah-Millewah, Gunbower-Koondrook-Perricoota for the first time in 2003, when i met several local people who were very concerned about their health and passionate about their protection. Major impacts that were having a toll on these forests were logging, grazing and inappropriate water regimes.

Representatives from the Yorta Yorta Nation told me about their attempt to claim their land back and protect these forests, and how their quest was rejected by the Governments. This rejection has been a travesty for Australia and for these forests, for the Yorta Yorta nation have been the custodians of these lands and waters, in particular Barmah-Millewah, for thousands of years. Finally, around Christmas time last year the Victorian Government showed some leadership and took the important step forward to protect a large part of the Victorian Murray River Red Gum Forests as national parks - my understanding is that the input and wishes of the Indigenous traditional owners will be central to the new management regimes, and this is an important step forward.

However, NSW's River Red Gum forests, as magnificent, as naturally and culturally important, were left behind, slicing the management of this extraordinary wetland system in two at the state boundary and putting more pressure on the NSW part of the system. With an assessment only to start now in NSW and no moratorium on practices that damage these forests and the culture of the people who depend on them, it is of critical importance to get the assessment done quickly and that it will quickly lead to better management of these forests. It is also of vital importance that the unique natural conservation values of these forests are adequately identified, recognised and protected.

The first report by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has a few critical omissions that should be looked at to ensure that the natural values of these forests are properly assessed and protected:

1. The NRC has not conducted or documented a scientific assessment or an overview of the conservation values of River Red Gum forests in the study area
2. There is no consideration of the national reserve criteria or how they will be met - if these criteria would be applied, one would conclude that Red Gum is a vulnerable ecosystem that needs at least 60% reservation target
3. The impact of logging on ecosystems has not been considered

4. CSIRO findings that large protected areas are vital to the survival of species in a warming world have been ignored
5. Refugia, corridors and linking habitats in the region have not been identified
6. The report fails to address the legal requirements of that EPBC Act 1999

I have visited these Murray River Red Gum forests again recently on two occasions. As part of the trip in 2008, I visited a tiny reserve within Moira State Forest, where logging is excluded and where people can witness ancient River Red Gums in their full glory. The difference between this small zone and the red gum forests that are regularly logged is incredible. I recommend for your staff to visit this place to get a full understanding of the scale of the damage done by logging. Logging has changed these forests forever and clearfelling practices are changing the entire structure of these forests. Inappropriate water regimes are severely stressing these forests, who rely on natural floods to grow.

It is time that the NSW Government takes this issue seriously and considers what will be needed for Australia in the long term. If the current management continues like this, there will be no healthy forests left and this will also see its inevitable impacts on the logging industry. I believe it is better to face the facts up-front and make a clear decision on what is best for the Australian society. Surely this would be to protect the kidneys of our greatest river system, the Murray? Surely it would look after the international tourism industry that is based on national parks and cultural tourism? Surely it would be about recognising the traditional owners of these lands and to embrace their quest for these lands?

It is therefore important for the NRC assessment to include the essential information about the unique natural values of these forests, which seems to be missing at this stage.

The only way to protect the unique natural and cultural values of the Murray River Red Gum Forests is to give them secure and statutory protection in extensive national parks managed by Indigenous people and national park rangers. Aboriginal ownership of these lands (new National Parks) should be supported wherever sought by Traditional Owners, it is about time that these requests were honoured.

In a time of climate change, burning native forests for firewood is simply not an acceptable scenario. Most NSW River Red Gums end up as firewood in Melbourne. If your Government is interested in combatting climate change, protecting the NSW River Red Gum Forests is an important opportunity to do so. In addition, the protection of River Red Gum forests will give refuge to many endangered species who are affected by climate change and habitat destruction.

Hand in hand with the protection from logging and grazing is the need for environmental and cultural water flows to ensure the health of Red Gums into the future. Water allocations must be addressed to ensure these forests will live in the future. There is ample of evidence that the current water management regimes are inadequate and that these are seriously stressing these forests.

Finally, a fair restructure package for individuals and businesses affected by the changes in the management of these forests and their protection in National Parks is critical to make necessary steps. I fully support taxpayer money to be spent on this restructure and support a generous package to facilitate buy-in and support from local people for the protection of these magnificent forests. I would assume that the Federal Government would be willing to assist here, since the protection of these forests as National Parks would contribute to enlarging the national reserve system. Many people have spent many years working in these forests and have come to love them. It was concerning to hear the story of retired local foresters from Koondrook who were concerned about the modern clearfelling silvicultural techniques and the rate of logging in these

fragile environments. Even they are alarmed at the state of these forests. I believe the time has come for the NRC to show leadership on this critically important issue.

I look forward to seeing these comments addressed in your process and look forward to receiving your response to my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Cecile van der Burgh