

Jonathon Howard

John Williams, Commissioner
Forests Assessment
Natural Resources Commission
Sydney, NSW

23rd October, 2010

Dear John,

Please find below my response to the preliminary assessment report "Riverina Bioregion Regional Forest Assessment River Red Gums and Woodland Forests".

I believe the overriding message ignores that, for better or worse, forest ecosystems are experiencing, and will also continue to face change associated with the institutional/governance arrangements. Any decision about the institutional/governance arrangements is therefore also critical for the future of these forests. History indicates that change is required.

Issue 1 the values detailed outline the most transparent issues of conservation, indigenous heritage, and forestry. It largely ignores the less obvious issues of amenity, recreation, sense of place, etc. The values identified may therefore be the most obvious and loudest but may not be the most important.

Issue 5 suggests we should maintain forest values. I am not sure we need to maintain these values rather than ensure a range of values or opportunities are not lost. Moreover I do not see change as a bad thing but something that needs to be managed. In sum we should manage (i.e intervene) in order to maximise future opportunities.

Issue 6. This is a narrow interpretation. I would suggest that forests provide a range of ecosystem services. In this context why manage for a forest if long term succession suggests it will change? Additionally forest industries need to be defined beyond simply timber to a range of other uses. The cost of sustaining something against change means important sacrifices are made elsewhere. It should be discouraged if change is inevitable.

Issue 7. I have no doubt that, just as the government encouraged social change in the 1930-60s with irrigation, the government will need to support social change with the changes to the Murray Darling Basin. Such transformation will require both facilitation and strategic direction.

Issue 8. This again shows a narrow interpretation. I would suggest that the forests provide a range of ecosystem services. If it is timber is assumed to be the entire "forestry industry" the most common way to change under such circumstances is to support value adding. For example the whale industry responded to declining meat yields by making the same item a gourmet item, by harvesters moving to other prey species, or conducting whale tourism. I do not believe the government should overly support specific industries any more than they intervened when my local Milk Bar closed. However, the impact on the wider community may need to be managed.

Issue 9. Unfortunately my knowledge of the issue is that the institutional arrangements are seen as either forestry or national parks. There are many other possible institutional arrangements (eg biosphere reserves) that could be considered. It may require a matrix across the landscape of:

- Governance arrangements. Including the permanency, statutory/legislative basis, management processes.
- Values conserved. Including were do the JANIS criteria fit, Bioregions fit, landscape processes or even thresholds under climate change fit
- Monitoring. Including ability to support management, meeting the objectives of that area, etc

The NRC could therefore make a decision that is sees a mix of these three areas of institutional management across the landscape. Those natural areas that provide a range of values, are resilient, and have the ability to be managed might be managed to largely for natural values. But the department that manages these needs to have the governance arrangements and the ability to monitor for such values. Moreover any institutional change would need to be supported by resources that reduce the impact of to the broader society.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jonathon Howard