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To: Avtar Singh
Subject: Red Gum Forests

Submission to NRC on Red Gum Forests

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Comments

1/ Timber harvesting should be seen as one of the few tools currently available to keep forest canopy structures in a state approximating pre European settlement.

In the absence of aboriginal fire management, timber harvesting represents the only tool (and a no cost one) preventing Red Gum, which is an highly invasive coloniser, dominating wetlands to the detriment other understory wetland flora and consequently some dependant fauna. Adequate watering also kept red gums out off the wetter low land flood types (reed beds and open swamps), the correct watering regimes need to be reinstated continued.

The shading effects of overstory canopy on uderstory wetland plant composition needs to be more clearly understood.

2/ Red Gum wetlands are efficient water users. Usage figures from my experience is less than half that of a rice crop (based on Red Bank Lowbidgee figures) and figures supporting this should be obtainable from State Water and DECC, who are doing a Water Management Plan for the Lowbidgee (Red Bank)area. Watering the forests of the Riverinia are absolutely essential or otherwise they will die. To let these forests degrade and die is unacceptable.

The forests should be allocated water from the water buy back on a specific megalitres per hectare basis dependant on the type of particular wetland concerned.

Infrastructure should be provided so that water can be diverted from low river flow levels.

Private forests and publis forests should NOT be treated differently based on land tenure for access to water bought back by the Government. It was the Government that took the water of the forests for irrigation and river regulation and it is up to the Government to address this issue, although private land holders can make some contribution based on economic benifit they can derive from the forests.

3/ Both the removal of aboriginals and the broad scale abstraction of water resources from the rivers have led to habitat alteration, which is listed as a threatening process (under legislation). There is little scientific research on either subject, future management without a clear understanding of the past management will not lead to successful outcomes. The knowledge gaps need to be filled, even if it takes a significant number of years to undertake the research.

In closing, I consider that water buy back scheme was undertaken to secure a future for the environment of the rivers of the Murray darling Basin which include the flood plains and wetlands associated with these rivers. It was not undertaken to assure the security of supply to either cities towns or irrigators in the face of reduced supply because of climate change. Our rivers have suffered enough. These floodplains and red gum forests need to have the water put back into them and this will mean providing the diversion infrastructure to do so; just as it was supplied in the past to our irrigation areas and towns and cities. Not to do so condemns our rivers to a slow and highly visibleddeath, this will not be accepted by the Australian people.