

John Williams
Commissioner
Natural Resources Commission

RE; Submission to Riverina Redgum Investigation

Dear Commissioner Williams

This is my submission to the Riverina Redgum Investigation undertaken by the Natural Resources Commission of NSW. This submission deals mainly with Werai State Forest.

The values supported by the forest have not been adequately described in the preliminary report. Page 32 describes Aboriginal people-used the tree, were a source of food and firewood, were turned into liniment for pain relief.

We are not a past people we still live our culture to this day. Evidence of this is our use and occupancy mapping which recorded over 10,000 sites used by 18 to 80 yr olds. Our connection to country is unforgettable. Also shown in the preliminary report there are 349 registered Aboriginal cultural sites.

The report also mentions European cultural heritage. To me this is like trying to paint on a canvas that is already been used and is another way of denying our rights as First Nations Peoples.

The management of Werai Forest has been non-existent unless you call logging, cattle grazing and restricting water management. Werai has been vandalized and robbed and has been getting worse. There used to be a sign at the Forest gate saying "no firearms". Now you have to seek written permission which has lead to more degradation, including hunting in dried wetlands. River regulation has already affected the Forest; trees are dying, turtles dying and there is an increase of birds of prey.

Werai should be given back to the Traditional Owners with cultural flows so that the significant Ramsar sites continue to exist and to ensure that Traditional Owners are able to continue to live our culture and

protect our sites. Logging cannot be sustained in the future as the forest cannot continue to support the industry.

Water should be the number one priority and a more watchful eye on irrigation and water theft by farmers. Our burial grounds have been robbed without our knowledge and signposts of the bush have been stolen.

The protection should be written as an agreement and sending someone to check that the work has been done. We need to do that work and ensure that it has been done.

We have audits on land councils, so we should do the same with the management of the forests. If you have mismanagement it is detrimental to everyone.

The environment affects our spirit. It's frustrating as a Traditional Owner to see truck load after truck load of red gum coming out of Werai. We have no input into issues that affect our land and even more frustrating it's not actually recognized as our land (except in speeches by politicians).

People talk about loss of employment. How many Traditional Owners work in those mills?

They talk about inter-generational welfare dependency and depression but everything they worry about we have been experiencing for over 200 years.

Whatever tenure is recommended we all have a responsibility to the past, present and future peoples of Werai Forest.

I wouldn't like to see Werai as a National Park as it would hinder our cultural connection to the land and our hunting and gathering rights. As stated I believe Werai should be handed back as freehold title to Traditional Owners and managed by them for the advancement of our people.

Stewart Taylor