

Balranald Shire Council



Further Submission to Natural Resources Commission

Relevant Issues
in Relation to the
Future Management Options
for Red Gum Forests
in New South Wales

Aboriginal Perspective.

Having spoken to Smokey Murray, Bes Murray and John Jackson, men considered elders in the Balranald Aboriginal community with ages respectively about 70, 80 and 52, it is clear that the Initial Assessment of the Red Gum Forest has omitted a significant traditional use of the forest by Indigenous Australians.

The verbal account these men provided to Council indicates much more activity in the forest than leaving canoe scars on large gums.

These men indicated that their occupation of the forest had significant environmental impacts as the forest provided everything for the Aboriginal people, from small saplings which could be used for spears, to larger stems which could be used for shelter, right through to the bark of large trees for canoes.

Combined, these activities provided the thinning of the forest that has continued with forestry activity for the last 150 years. The incidence of Aboriginal activities in the forests is now almost non-existent, meaning some other mechanism must take their place.

What We Already Know

The Federal Government is committed to purchasing more water for the environment. This should assist maintain the level of water needed to sustain the forest.

Locking up forests has not proven to produce better outcomes. There is ample photographic evidence of this.

The existing forestry regulations are very prescriptive and robust, if anything they may need review to ensure more active thinning takes place when active silviculture and harvesting is being undertaken.

The existing forestry industry has the infrastructure and market mechanisms to quickly adapt to whatever forest management strategy is selected. They also have expertise, resources and capacity to undertake the physical aspects of maintaining health forests. This capacity is demonstrated with 150 years of history of good forestry practices.

Tourism will not replace the number of jobs that creation of national parks displaces. Balranald Shire completed a survey of the two camp sites which have been opened at Yanga from 18/08/2009 to 17/10/2009 which included two weeks of school holidays. There is no count of day visitors but the 50,000 visitors per year predicted by NP to sell the concept to the local community is highly exaggerated.

Closing red gum forests to the existing diverse range of recreational and commercial uses will result in less visitor numbers as NSW gets a large spill over of disgruntled Victorians who feel over regulated in their home state.

The red gum forests are under immediate threat. The issues are pressing and there is limited time, certainly not years, to make the decisions and implement the actions to save the forests. This is the one agreed point between the extremist green movement and the sustainable forest industry proponents.

The forestry industry provides a diversity of income streams for local communities. Removal of a significant industry will mean that the capacity of the community to survive downturns in other key economic activities will be substantially diminished.

In addition the social fabric of the communities will diminish as the timber industry is keystone of fund raising for most clubs.

Balranald Shire Council **strongly disagrees** with the job figures wrongly attributed to a Council survey (page 236). The **correct numbers** supplied to Arche consulting for verification **are in excess of 120** reliant on the timber industry for their primary source of income. The figures quoted on this page refer to ABS data. The ABS survey is not designed to capture the data needed to produce accurate figures for this specific question.

What is Not Known

The Report has a remarkable amount of detail about the environment but a severe shortage of accurate detail about the socio-economic relationships within the affected communities. This is a major flaw.

The report assumes that there is no real nexus between the forestry operations on private land and public lands. While the operations are not totally dependent on each other, they are definitely linked in terms of economies of scale and the cessation of one will most certainly have a huge detrimental effect on the other.

How long it may take to get any new management mechanism to a functional position is certainly unknown. The track record of National parks in areas where they have expertise (refer opening Yanga NP to the public) is less than outstanding. To place the future of red gum forests in their hands and expect timely outcomes is sheer folly. Even their best considered actions are not generally successful (refer fire destroying Superb Parrot habitat Browns Camp and (un) controlled burns at Wilsons Prom).

National parks do not have the capacity to manage what they currently have. Senior NP staff freely admit that they insufficient funds / tight budgets to provide improved facilities in their existing parks. Mungo NP is another example where there has been a lukewarm financial commitment to development, e.g. no apparent recognition or resolve to address the deficiencies of road access and signage, communications or visitor needs. In addition the State Government is cutting back programs because their revenue streams have diminished, exacerbating this problem will be the imposition of additional lands to manage.

Government is not noted for its ability to respond quickly, their typical response would be to start with an extensive consultation and management planning phase which will take years. In the end they will be unlikely to get consensus on a best approach, leaving the forest to die. This is especially true as there is an element in the NP hierarchy with the farcical belief that the forests should be returned to some (in their minds utopian) state which they incorrectly believe existed prior to the arrival of the first fleet. The notion of ancient red gum forests conjures up an image similar to the European Oak Forests, something which has never existed in Australia.

The opposite is true for private enterprise, driven by efficiency and governed by sound management practices.

From Balranald Shire's previous submission

- Tourism is not the saviour of affected communities
- Fuel loads in forests are a critical management issue
- Inadequate feral animal, invasive weeds and native fauna populations management by NP's seriously damages this model as a credible option
- History of the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park and Murray Sunset National Park demonstrates NP's are not "the answer".
- Immediate consequences are not as significant as the flow-on effects of closing the timber industry
- There is an issue with the age demographic of the likely affected workers
- Education standards and economic circumstances of those impacted must be taken into account
- Timber sleepers are 5 times more energy efficient to produce than concrete, plus they sequester carbon and are recyclable
- Extremists use emotive language and lies to make points, (refer Superb Parrot and statements in the media about "clear felling")
- Red gum as a fuel is more efficient than fossil fuels
- Red gum is invasive to the point of being unstoppable if watered
- The response to the local issue needs to take in the global context of responsible timber harvesting, (stop using timber from raped SE Asian forests)
- Thinned forests are healthier and use less water to maintain.
- Balranald may be at the "tipping point" for sustainability
- National parks cost shift their development responsibilities back to the community
- World Best Practice in relation to saving forests is to create value and ensure survival through free market decisions

In conclusion, local communities have a vested interest in continuing timber harvesting, but also in the long term survival of the red gum forests. This interest far exceeds any passing interest of extremists who will simply move on to the next project or cause once they get their way, without regard to the cost and who will meet the costs.