

Canopy Native Forest Committee
Total Environment Centre of NSW
Level 4, 78 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Forests Assessment
Natural Resources Commission
GPO Box 4206
Sydney NSW 2001

**Submission on the Preliminary Assessment Report on the River Red Gums
and Woodland Forests of the Riverina Bioregion**

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing on behalf of the Canopy Native Forest Committee of the Total Environment Centre of NSW, a voluntary organisation concerned with the protection of our native forests and wildlife from damaging and inappropriate activities.

This Committee strongly supports the creation of extensive national parks in the Riverina Bioregion to safeguard the river red gum forests and associated woodlands for the future.

Canopy considers these areas to be national and international environmental assets that are severely threatened by neglect and short-sighted activities.

This Committee has previously made a submission to Forests NSW rejecting their Riverina Environmental Impact Statement in its entirety and calling for much of the land in question to be included in new national parks.

We are therefore disappointed to find that the Natural Resources Commission's current report appears to rely heavily on such material from Forests NSW rather than making an independent assessment of the situation. In particular, the NRC has not seriously considered the impacts of logging and grazing on these forests but simply repeats the mantra of "ecologically sustainable harvesting".

The report acknowledges the parlous state of the red gum ecosystems but relies on the unsubstantiated notion that this is entirely or essentially due to the effects of recent drought and climate change.

Forests NSW has basically acknowledged that these forests are being overcut by seeking to reduce its sustained yield figures. It is also clear that the environmental prescriptions on logging in this area are far inferior to those applying in other areas of the state. The streamside buffer zones are much smaller (20m from 50m), habitat tree retention is much lower (2 per ha from 5 per ha), pre-logging surveys are required for only two species and patch clear-felling practices are entrenched. The intensive levels of logging on slow growing eucalypt species would have a particular bearing on the declining populations of hollow-using fauna and woodland birds in this region.

In any event the deleterious effects of drought and climate change on these forests need to be addressed by applying the precautionary principle and acknowledging the key CSIRO finding that large reserves are vital for the survival of species. The protection of biological corridors and refuges has also become more important.

The draft preliminary report fails to take into account the most recent scientific research into the carbon storage qualities of native forests conducted by the Australian National University (Green Carbon – the role of natural forests in carbon storage – Mackey). This report underlines the importance of protecting native forests as part of the solution to climate change and the contribution of native forest logging to greenhouse gas emissions.

It must also be recognized that 95 per cent of the output of logging in these red gum forests consists of low value wood products such as firewood, the burning of which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, and wooden railway sleepers despite the fact that concrete sleepers are cheaper and longer lasting.

Canopy calls on the NRC to recommend the protection of most of these red gum and woodland forests in new national parks, with the remainder to be managed under a less intensive logging regime with stronger environmental prescriptions.

Grazing should be totally removed from these forests and there must be a substantial increase in environmental water flows to these areas.

The NRC must also begin to comprehensively address the ecological sustainability of private logging activity in this region.

These measures must be accompanied by a fair restructuring package for affected individuals and businesses.

There is no reason why the NRC cannot follow the fine and successful example set by its Victorian counterpart recently.

Our members look forward to visiting some marvellous new River Red Gum National Parks in the Riverina in the not too distant future.

Yours faithfully

Graham Daly
Chairperson
23/10/09