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Forests Assessment  
Natural Resources Commission  
GPO Box 4206, Sydney NSW 2001

Wednesday 21 October 2009

#### Submission to Preliminary Report on River Red Gum Forest Assessment

The Central West Environment Council (CWEC) is an umbrella organization of conservation and field naturalist groups in the Central West and Lachlan catchment areas. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on the preliminary assessment (the report) of the River Red Gum remnant forests of south western NSW.

The level of broad scale clearing that has occurred in our region over time has caused major disturbance of ecosystem function and resilience across the landscape. All intact remnant vegetation is now critical as core building blocks for landscape restoration.

The level of species decline in western NSW is alarming and needs to be urgently addressed, particularly the decline of woodland birds. The protection of remnant habitats from unsustainable disturbance through logging and clearing is critical to reverse the trend towards mass extinctions.

Patch clear felling logging operations in remnant Red Gum forest areas along the Murray, Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and associated tributaries in State Forests and travelling stock reserves is a continuation of inappropriate vegetation clearing activities in these sensitive and critical riverine ecosystems.

CWEC is disappointed that the report fails to identify the biological impacts of patch clear felling operations in River Red Gum remnants. The assessment has failed to adequately consider the conservation values of the areas of interest. There is little recognition of or reference to independent studies applicable to the subject.

The report fails to provide a basis for any systematic conservation planning in the region. There is no review of the national reserve criteria or how these could be met by creating large new Red Gum National Parks in the region.

The significance of the landscape linkages from east to west along the three major southern river systems has not been adequately identified. Nor have the opportunities for rebuilding the north south linkages to mitigate climate change adaptation for migratory species.

A key finding of the CSIRO (2008) report on Climate Change and Biodiversity Adaptation identifies that large protected areas are vital to species survival.

The report identifies that only 157 jobs are directly associated with the Red Gum timber industry in this region. The main products from the destructive patch clear felling operations are low value firewood and railway sleepers for the Victorian market. The NSW economy barely benefits from the industry but suffers the ongoing depletion of ecosystem services.

CWEC supports a fair restructure package for individuals and businesses affected by the protection of the Red Gum forests from unsustainable and inappropriate logging practices. The industry restructure of the white cypress and ironbark logging operations in the Brigalow Belt South and Nandewar bioregions have led to positive economic outcomes for the region and the affected industry participants.

The long term future of south western NSW depends on a major change in direction away from industrial scale harvesting of natural resources. Appropriate use and distribution of water resources, protection of remnant vegetation from unsustainable disturbance and improved use of soils in the region will lead to a healthier landscape and more resilient communities.

The key focus of recommendations from the Natural Resources Commission should concentrate on arresting the decline of biodiversity and ecosystem function in the study area. This can only be achieved through the gazettal of large new Red Gum National Parks in the region as a core for rebuilding the landscape through restoration of key linkages.

Yours sincerely



Cilla Kinross  
President

21 October 2009