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SUBMISSION

to

Forests Assessment Natural Resources Commission

on

The Regional Assessment of River Red Gums and Woodland Forests

From the Clarence Environment Centre
Dated 6th October 2009

SUBMISSION to Forests Assessment Natural Resources Commission on The Regional Assessment of River Red Gums and Woodland Forests.

Preamble.

The Clarence Environment has had a strong record of protecting the Australian environment, particularly forests, for over 20 years, maintaining the while an active shop front in Grafton.

We are seriously concerned at the plight of the River Red Gums across the whole of southern and inland NSW. Inappropriate cropping and irrigation methods, coupled with shocking government management of water allocation over the past half century have led to massive salinity problems across the region, leaving a legacy of poisoned waterways.



A dead River Murray Valley, a legacy of agricultural stupidity, and government ineptitude.

Once healthy inland lakes and billabongs, brimming with fish and aquatic birds, have been reduced to lifeless deserts.

With the onset of climate change, and governments' seeming inability to wean themselves off the revenues generated by coal mining and cheap fossil fuel power generation, the future looks bleak indeed for the iconic River Red Gums. Immediate action is needed for their protection against exploitation for such purposes as railway sleepers and firewood.



Salt encrusted poisoned vegetation, the legacy of one and a half centuries of uncontrolled land-clearing

The Issues.

Based on the Commission's first report it appears that:

1. The Commission has yet to commission any scientific assessment of conservation values of River Red Gum forests.
2. The future impact of Climate Change on species utilising these forests has not been considered. Scientific opinion (CSIRO) suggests there needs to be larger contiguous tracts of intact natural ecosystems in place to enable fauna species in particular to survive.
3. In relation to the survival of fauna species in a warming world, and their need to migrate over time, the report fails to identify any refugia areas or corridors to facilitate movement.
4. The report does not consider the legal implications of the Federal Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, 1999. i.e. protection of matters of national significance.
5. Surprisingly, given the ongoing controversy relating to logging in proximity to RAMSAR wetlands that many believe to be illegal, the report fails to consider the impact of logging on the region's biodiversity.
6. Most importantly, the report should have considered the national reserve criteria and the means of achieving them, but has failed to do so.



Robbed of its water for decades to irrigate orchards, vegetable crops, vineyards and cotton, it is hard to imagine that the once majestic Darling River formerly supported a thriving paddle steamer service. River Red Gums lining the entire length of the river are already showing major signs of stress as a result of water deprivation.

Recommendation:

It is our opinion that the only way to conserve this highly threatened community, is through a comprehensive reserve system that protects the minimum 60% needed for survival, with connectivity a vital component in providing on-going security for those species reliant on the River Red Gum ecosystems.

We also believe there needs to be a greater focus on the maintenance of environmental flows, something that will become increasingly difficult to maintain if climate change predictions are correct. However, if the River Red Gum is to survive, water is essential.

We therefore urge the Natural Resources Commission to recommend the protection of all remaining River Red Gum forests, with at least 60% placed in reserves to ensure ecosystem resilience over the long-term.

We accept that such moves will impact detrimentally on some industries, and believe adequate compensation for restructuring and retraining should be offered to those impacted by the decision.

While these measures will be costly, the expense will be minor compared with costs that will accrue in the future through a reduction in water quality, and other eco-services, currently provided free by these forests, should they disappear.



Well worth protecting.

We thank the Commission for the opportunity to comment, and hope our suggestions will receive serious consideration.

Yours sincerely
John Edwards (Honorary Secretary)