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Sent: Friday, 23 October 2009 4:38 PM
To: Avtar Singh
Subject: Submission: Riverina Bioregion Regional Forest Assessment
Forest Assessment

Natural Resources Commission

GPO Box 4206

Sydney NSW 2001

To Whom It May Concern

Deniliquin Council would like to take this opportunity to make a brief submission to the Natural Resources Commission for its consideration during the Riverina Bioregion Regional Forest Assessment.

The main concerns of the Deniliquin Council involve three main areas:

- 1) The socio-economic impact of any reduction in forestry activity in the region,
- 2) The ongoing management of the red gum forests in the region, and
- 3) The obvious increase in fire danger to the region if the red gum forests are not managed appropriately.

The socio-economic impact of any reduction in forestry activity in the region

Before any major decision is made to significantly reduce forestry activities in State Forests, a full Socio-Economic Impact Study would need to be undertaken. Throughout the region many people are employed directly and indirectly in managing the timber industry in the Riverina. This number would include those harvesting and transporting the timber products, as well as those processing the products in mills and furniture factories.

The contribution of NSW Forestry employees to the regional economy should also not be overlooked.

The supply of firewood, mainly from timber scraps, by-products and thinning should not be overlooked. While this activity is often criticised by those opposed to forestry activities, it is a very valuable activity in an area that has little to offer by way alternative sources of household heating. It is also noted, with a little irony, that some who strongly oppose these activities, were seen warming themselves by campfires when protesting in the forests.

Should there be a major reduction in area available for timber harvesting, there would need to be significant assistance given to the area to retrain those adversely affected by such a decision. There would also need to be a major investment into alternative methods of home heating, such as the connection of natural gas, to towns such as Deniliquin and Mathoura.

The ongoing management of the red gum forests in the region

26/10/2009

Deniliquin Council is firmly of the view that the forests in the southern regions of New South Wales have been well managed by NSW Forestry for many years. The very fact that parts of the region have been listed as RAMSAR sites is a testament to the quality of the management systems in place. It is obvious that any deterioration in forest conditions in recent years has been because of the prolonged drought.

One of the reasons NSW Forest have been able to manage the forests effectively, is that royalties from timber harvesting have funded the management systems in place. It is felt that if forestry is markedly reduced, then an alternative source of funding would need to be found to fund the management of the forest areas. Should areas be handed over as national parks, it is essential that the budget for national park activities be increased substantially. The ability and motivation of the Department of Environment and Climate Change to manage the red gum forests is not doubted. The resources available to this department are limited and would still need to be allocated in the State Budget. Deniliquin Council doubts the ability of the NSW budget to deliver additional resources to the Department of Environment and Climate Change, when taking into account competing demands from other departments that appear just as deserving, e.g. Education, Health and Police.

There are a number of isolated pockets of State Forest, such as Deniliquin State Forest, that are not being actively logged at present. The management of these isolated pockets of forest are still financed by forestry activity. Should these small areas be removed from the control of NSW Forests, Deniliquin Council would have concerns about their ongoing management. While Deniliquin Council would be in a physical position to manage the Deniliquin State Forest, as a nature reserve, it is doubtful if it could be achieved without some financial assistance from the State Government. The commission would be well aware of the limitations of local council funding after 30 odd years of rate pegging.

The obvious increase in fire danger to the region if the red gum forests are not managed appropriately

Deniliquin Council has grave concerns about a possible increase in fire hazards in the forest areas should they not be managed appropriately. The recent tragic fires in Victoria are still fresh in the minds of local residents, and they confirm the danger of living in a forest area that is not managed to reduce the fire danger. The Deniliquin State Forest extends to the middle of the town (within a few hundred metres of the CBD). NSW Forests have been undertaking ongoing hazard reduction burns in the forests under their management. The ability and desire of other agencies to undertake this work is not known. The local community has the impression that a national park would be 'locked up' with little done in the way of active hazard reduction. This is of significant concern to the local community.

The Deniliquin community is very committed to the health of the forests in this region. Their continued good management is essential. Should the management regime of the forests be changed, it is important that any new regime be appropriately resourced to undertake this task. Community safety aspects, such as hazard reduction, should not be neglected.

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