

SUBMISSION TO NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION RIVER REDGUM FOREST ASSESSMENT FROM FIREWOOD AND LOG RESIDUE WORKING GROUP

The Firewood and Log Residue Working Group Incorporated (FW& LRWG) is one of two industry working groups formed in 2002 following the completion of the Red Gum Industry Strategy.

As background the Red Gum Industry strategy was an initiative of the NSW Red Gum Industry consisting of Sawmiller owners, firewood operators, Forests NSW, the Forest Product Association and the Department of State and Regional Development. The Industry Strategy identified the importance of the Red Gum Industry to local employment, and the benefits it has to regional communities. It also identified opportunities for the industry to develop.

One of the recommendations of the report was for the industry to form working groups as a forum to identify common issues affecting their business and jointly tackle the opportunities for each of their sectors. Since its formation in 2002 the FW&LRWG has been meeting on a regular basis and addressing issues affecting their sector. The forum has also been an important communication link with Forest NSW.

Some of the achievements of the FW&LRWG over the past 7 years are:

- Completion of a report into the impact of firewood operations on invertebrates.
- Development of Code of Practice for NSW Redgum Firewood producers in accordance with National Strategy for the Collection and Use of Firewood.
- ATIC Certification of NSW Red Gum Firewood.
- Implementation of a transition timetable from harvesting Dry Firewood (greater than 12 months age) to Green Residue (less than 12 months age).

- Revue of Forest NSW of residue licensing policy in 2008 to allow operators to purchase licences to achieve economies of scale and improve the level of investment in the sector.

The FW&LRWG represents all residue operators in the Mildura, Central Murray and Murrumbidgee Supply areas.

FW&LRG producers process approximately 101,000 tonnes of residue annually. Our industry is a major employer and investor in our communities. FW&LRWG members take pride in our work and believe our activities make a significant contribution to forest health. We believe the recent environmental impact study supports this point of view.

In the response to the NRC preliminary assessment report, we submit as follows.

1) Current Forest values.

Family and Human Values must be considered. And the impact loss of jobs will have on our communities.

It must be remembered that our communities are suffering through a severe drought and currently there are very poor employment prospects for any who lose their work through any reduction in the capacity of our industry to employ.

Remember the Red Gum Industry employs over 500 people directly in the supply area and indirectly over 1000 are employed.

We are concerned that the socio economic tables used in your assessment do not accurately reflect the current position of our communities as the drought continues. For example, 2 engineering businesses in Barham have noted that until recently their work was 75 % non forestry generated and 25% from the Red Gum Industry.

It is now 95% from the Red Gum Industry – Drought has stopped farmers from spending. These and many other businesses in our communities are threatened by any reduction of our Red Gum Industry.

People who lose their employment have indicated in most cases that they will have to relocate to major regional cities in search of work. This must impact on all services such as health, hospitals, schools, community clubs, churches and sporting clubs etc.

Some members have expressed disappointment with Arche consulting who advised them that they would contact these members once the figures for their businesses were compiled, to allow for correction of any errors. Some members were contacted, others were not.

2) We submit that the impact on Victorian Fire Wood retailers located in Regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne must be considered as part of this review. After all businesses are part of our biofuel supply chain and any impacts on our business as a result of this assessment will directly impact on their businesses.

3) The timber industry is part of the solution in combating 13 years of drought. Active management is the key tool in ensuring survival of our forests. This is readily seen by viewing ecologically thinned forest areas and comparing with non thinned areas and forest that has had no active management – see Nyah Vinifera forest and more recently Yanga Station.

4) Much better outcomes will be achieved through the nurturing of partnership between industry and forest ownership than by the “big stick” approach.

Active management over all the forest, including targeting silvicultural thinnings in drought stressed stands will achieve survival of habitat and recruitment trees and ensure ongoing forest health until the next flood event.

A major project to allow environmental flooding of the Perricoota and Koondrook State Forests is scheduled for completion in 2010. This will allow controlled flooding of the forest in environmental flows in the Murray River. See attachment Number 1. Also we will not be in drought forever.

5) Silvicultural thinnings as currently being carried out will ensure survival of all forest species. Sustainable yield is not adjusted to take advantage of peaks in growth rate but is averaged over a long period of time. Thus it is sustainable.

Active management reduces fire risk and intensity. Red Gums do not survive even moderate fires. Before white settlement it is believed fires were frequent and of low intensity. It is inevitable that national parks will suffer high intensity fires as fuel loads in the forest increase.

VEAC stated that they wanted debris in Victorian Red Gum Forests to reach 50 tonnes per hectare.

The Marysville Victoria fire in 2009 which burnt out the township and killed 40 people was fuelled by debris of around 50 tonnes per hectare on forest floor. Source – Melbourne Sun Newspaper. Wednesday October 7th 2009. Page 23. (see attachment No. 2)

Currently most contractors working in Red Gum Forests have qualified fire fighters on staff and make their men and machinery available to fight forest fires.

6) We submit that no one can accurately predict future weather and most assumptions on future climate are in the main, speculation. There is a growing body of scientists now questioning the basis of calculation and studies on climate change.

Water and active management of Red Gum Forests through selective harvesting using best practice and modern equipment is the only way to ensure the long term survival of our forests. "Lock em up and leave em" has been clearly shown not to work.

Long term wood supply agreements will ensure investment in equipment, technology and long term jobs in our industry.

7) Our communities have struggled through 13 years of drought and will continue to survive if industry and employment are not stifled by government interference.

In talking to members of our communities, the general belief is that tourism will not increase sufficiently to even begin to replace any jobs lost in our industry.

Just look at Yanga, 50,000 visitors per annum? 1000 visitors per week going to Balranald? No one believes this, in fact Balranald locals laugh at the idea.

8) It is yet to be shown that long term wood yields would decline. The drought will not last forever and the forest will be receiving environmental flooding within 2 years.

Silvicultural thinnings must continue. This is contributing to forest health and produces various types of resource – High Grade Sawlog for Furniture, Veneer, Structural Timber, Sleepers, Landscape Timber, Mulch, Sawdust and Firewood.

The forest is responding very well to the current ecological thinning program carried out by forest operators.

9) The F&LRWG submits that Forest NSW is the only NSW Government forest management agency capable of sustainably managing our forests and ensure their long term survival.

To thin the forests on a non commercial basis (leave timber on ground – do not sell it) would cost tax payers approximately \$2500 per hectare. Multiply this by 100,000 hectares = \$250,000,000. Leaving timber on the ground = high intensity fires = dead forests.

To run a national park costs tax payers between \$35 and \$100 per hectare per annum. By continuing active and sustainable management, combined with ecological thinnings will deliver the same outcomes and at the same time provide employment throughout our region and put money into government coffers.

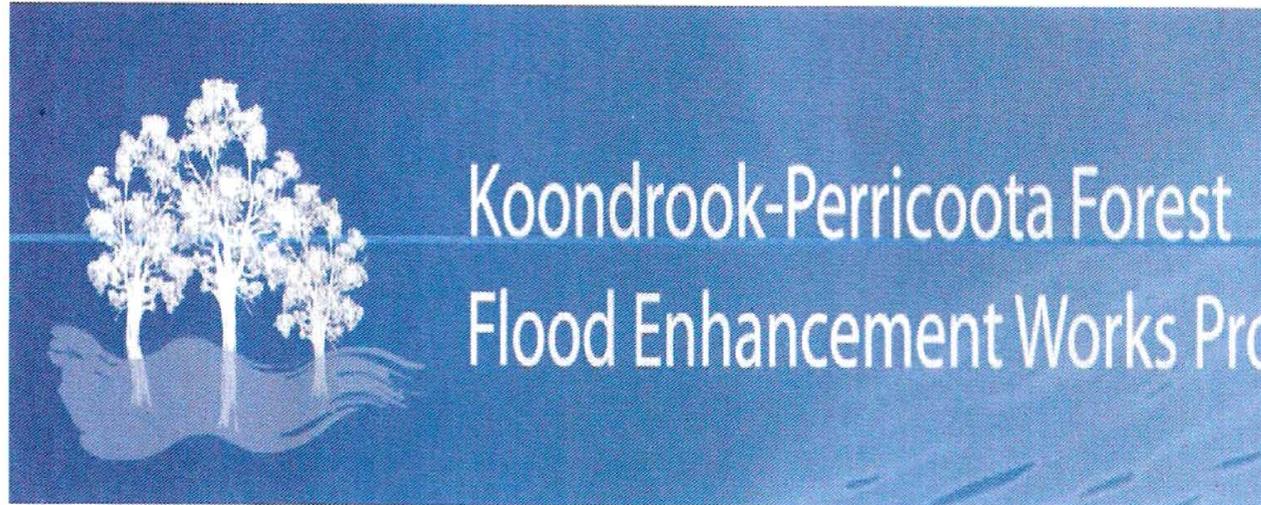
G.R Gelletly

Chairman

Firewood and Log Residue Working Group.

gelletly@bigpond.com.au

Attachment #1



Our ref:

21 September 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

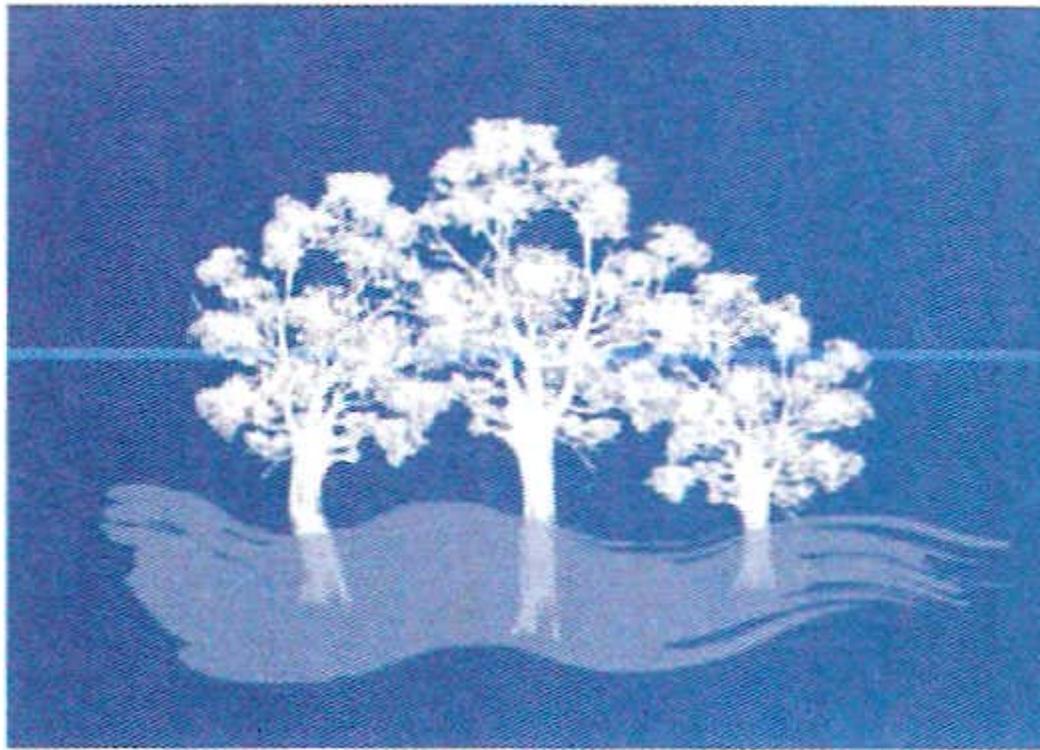
Community Survey

our ref 21/18573/153683 The Living Murray is Australia's Largest River Restoration Program and a major step towards ensuring that the Murray is a healthy working river for the future. Six sites along the River Murray have been identified as priority 'icon sites' and the Koondrook-Perricoota Forest with Gunbower Forest is one of these sites.

The Koondrook Perricoota Flood Enhancement Project aims to reinstate a more natural flooding regime to a large area of the forest. In a managed flood event approximately 6,000 ML/day will enter the forest for around 100 days at a time. Of the 466 GL that is needed, 244 GL will be used in the forest in anyone watering event, with the remainder returned to the Murray River.

The works are expected to commence in late 2010 and take approximately 40 weeks to complete.

In order for the project to proceed, the appropriate approvals must be received from the NSW Department of Planning. f,\.n environmental assessment (EA) must be



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Community update September 2009

The Living Murray is Australia's Largest River Restoration Program and a major step towards ensuring that the Murray is a healthy working river for the future. Six sites along the River Murray have been identified as priority 'icon sites' and the Koondrook-Perricoota Forest with Gunbower Forest is one of these sites.

The Project

The Koondrook-Perricoota Forest covers approximately 32,000 ha and is part of the second largest red gum forest in Australia. Changed flow regimes due to river regulation and a drier climate have impacted on forest health leaving up to 70% of trees severely stressed or dead. Works planned within the forest aim to improve the management and timing of floodwaters which is vital for colonial waterbird and native fish breeding as well as the health of the iconic red gum.

A 'natural' forest flood occurs when flows at Torrumbarry Weir exceed approximately 30,000 ML/day. The length and frequency of floods of this magnitude has reduced since the regulation of the river. Predictions indicate that within 50 years, floods of this size might only occur as infrequently as once every 25 years. This would have a devastating effect on the health of our forest.

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The project is part of The Living Murray (TLM) program - a joint initiative funded by the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, Australian Capital Territory, and the Commonwealth governments.

The proponent for this project is the NSW Office of Water and Forest NSW. GHD have been engaged to undertake the Environmental Assessment of the project.

Proposed work

The proposed work includes:

- Inlet regulator
- 3.8 km channel from Torrumbarry weir pool
- Upper and lower forest regulators
- Return channel to Murray River
- Levee banks

The work is expected to begin in late 2010 and take about 40 weeks to complete.

Community

In order for the project to proceed, the appropriate approvals must be received from the NSW Department of Planning. A key part of the Environmental Assessment process is consultation with adjoining and downstream

land holders, forest users, together with the general community. The consultation process provides an opportunity for social and community issues to be identified and where possible, addressed through the development of appropriate strategies.

A survey is being distributed now to help us identify and quantify key issues relevant to the community.

Further information

To learn more about the project or the consultation process, please contact the GHD community liaison team on 1800 810 680, visit www.kpforest.com.au from 10 October or email us at communityinput@ghd.com. You can now also visit our Project Information Centre at 12B Mellool St, Barham.
heraldsun.com.au

DSE says fuel reduction burns slowed Black Saturday bushfire

Fire took off at 25km/h

THE Murrindindi blaze that destroyed Marysville was moving at 25km/h within five minutes of starting, the bushfires royal commission was told yesterday.

Pictures taken from a water bomber showed the power of the blaze, which effectively wiped out Marysville, killing 40 people and destroying more than 500 homes.

Geraldine Mitchell

The royal commission is this week investigating the Murrindindi fire, which is believed to have been deliberately lit and is still subject to a police investigation.

The commission heard the fire, fanned by extreme temperatures and strong north-westerly wind, was out of control within minutes of starting near the Murrin-

dindi sawmill just before 3pm on February 7.

Within five minutes it had burnt through 2km of forest and was moving at 25km/h. And half an hour later it was burning out of control.

There was absolutely no possibility of fighting the fire, Glenburn CFA brigade captain David Webb Ware said.

Mr Webb Ware said it would have been too dangerous for firefighters to enter the forest and try to contain it.

It was out of control and at that stage efforts concentrated on asset protection, houses or grass, he said.

About 90 minutes after it started, the fire had travelled 40km at 11km/h and the fire front was 5km wide.

Flames were reaching 100m and spot fires were starting up to 15km from the front.

Department of Sustainability and Environment district officer Shaun Lawlor, who took photos of the blaze that

were shown to the inquiry, described it as something he had never seen before.

Mr Lawlor said the fuel type and load where the fire travelled, as well as the conditions, created its intensity.

He said ash trees were about 60-80m high, had long ribbons of bark and branches in the crown enabling a fire to easily be ignited and travel.

"These forests have one of the greatest accumulations of fuel on the planet with avail-

able fuel amounts of up to 50 tonnes a hectare," he said.

Mr Lawlor said areas where fuel loads had been reduced significantly slowed the fire and prevented it from destroying entire forest areas.

It demonstrated that even under the worst conditions, a moderating effect on fire intensity was achieved with a fuel reduction burn.

Picture gallery,
heraldsun.com.au