



HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

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Forests Assessment
Natural Resources Commission
GPO Box 4206
Sydney NSW 2001

22 October 2009

Dear Natural Resources Commission,

Re: River Red Gum Assessment

Humane Society International (HSI) understands that the Natural Resources Commission is currently undertaking an assessment of River Red Gum forests in south-west NSW. HSI has an enormous interest in Red Gum communities across Australia, having successfully protected Gippsland Red Gum grassy woodlands as a critically endangered ecological community under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

The expanse of River Red Gum forests currently being assessed includes the largest remaining Red Gum Forests on earth. They play a vital role in protecting the health of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers, are home to a plethora of endangered species such as the barking owls and southern bell frogs, and are an important breeding site for migratory birds. Yet, continuing threats are taking a toll on the survival of this habitat, with severe stress and altered water regimes resulting in over 75% of the trees either dead or dying. Despite this, vast tracts of Red Gum are still being targeted for intensive logging, patch clear felling and grazing.

HSI is concerned that the assessment of this habitat by the Natural Resources Commission has not scientifically considered the vast conservation values of River Red Gum forests, nor has there been any consideration of the national reserve criteria or how they will be met. CSIRO findings that large protected areas are vital to the survival of species in a warming world have been ignored, and refugia or corridors linking habitats have not been identified. Furthermore, the impact of logging on River Red Gum ecosystems has not been considered.

Given the rapid rate of decline of this ecosystem, HSI recommends that the current logging industry across the entirety of the region's State Forests is replaced with National Parks. Red Gum is a vulnerable habitat requiring urgent protection and National Parks are crucial to ecosystem resilience. Moreover, a recent report by independent economic consultants has shown that a much greater economic return would be derived from protecting River Red Gum forests than is currently being derived by exploiting them. The experience in Victoria, where new

National Parks have already been declared, corroborates these findings. A fair restructure package could be implemented for individuals and businesses affected by the changes. In addition, greatly improved water flows to ensure the long-term health of River Red Gum forests is urgently required to ensure their survival.

Thank you for considering our views on this matter of great ecological importance.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Kennedy
Director