



**NORTH CENTRAL**

Catchment Management Authority

*Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People*



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Forests Assessment  
Natural Resources Commission  
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Dear Natural Resources Commissioners,

**North Central Catchment Management Authority (Victoria) submission on the River Red Gum Riverina Bioregion Forests Assessment**

I am writing to you to support the Natural Resources Commission Forests Assessment in principle, and to provide some limited input using the 'key issues for submissions'.

The North Central Catchment Management Authority's (CMA's) northern border extends from Echuca downstream along the Murray River to around Swan Hill. Consequently, as a lead natural resources manager for the region, we have an interest in ecologically sustainable management of the River Red Gum forests, regardless of tenure or State borders.

The CMA is currently implementing a major project to deliver environmental water to the Gunbower Icon Site as part of the Living Murray initiative. The threats and declining health that face our River Red Gum forests on the Victorian side of the border are part of a wider River Red Gum ecosystem issue within the entire Riverina Bioregion.

You are probably aware that the Victorian government, through the Victorian Environmental Assessment Commission (VEAC), recently completed its River Red Gum Forests Investigation. The Victorian Government Response to VEAC's investigation has been published, and I encourage you to incorporate (if appropriate) recommendations that involve, or a relevant to, your New South Wales assessment.

**Key issues for submissions**

**Current forest values** - *Issue 2: What other information is available to inform the assessment, particularly on areas outside the Central Murray?*

I encourage you to examine the VEAC investigations to identify any possible gaps in information, or to seek access to information that might complement your forests assessment.

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***Future forest values under river regulation, climate variability and climate change***

*Issue 3: How will river regulation, climate variability and climate change affect the forests and the values they can support in the future?*

The predicted drier winters, hotter temperatures and slightly wetter summers will inevitably have an affect on the River Red Gum ecosystem and its processes. To what degree, and which species will be most affected, is difficult to predict. No doubt, however, changes will occur and they need to be monitored to enable adaptive management.

Environmental flows and more frequent flooding than currently experienced (probably) will be necessary. As mentioned earlier, the CMA is undertaking a major project to deliver water to the Gunbower Icon Site. This will involve major infrastructure changes and substantial investment. It would be useful for the Natural Resources Commission to identify flood-dependant flora, fauna and vegetation types and critical flood intervals in order to demonstrate the need for water. As a guide, refer to VEAC's Final Report <http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/> as well as the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) benchmarks <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/nrence.nsf/LinkView/6FB4886C86D894CACA256F1F00224A8C8062D358172E420C4A256DEA0012F71C> .

*Issue 4: What are the key forest values and core ecological processes we should seek to maintain in this dynamic context?*

Connectivity in the landscape, and thus corridors for movement, are key factors to enable adaptation to climate change. The substantial riparian corridors afforded by the River Red Gum forests are critical to the maintenance of biodiversity in the face of climate change. Ecological management of these forests is an imperative.

The issues of flood frequency for ecosystem health; ecological thinning to restore a forest structure more akin to pre-European settlement; habitat protection, including large old trees; grazing exclusion; fire management; and so on, all need to be addressed to restore and maintain core ecological processes. Collection of baseline data, and ongoing monitoring and adaptive management are also essential.

***Conserving and sustaining forest values-*** *Issue 5: What approaches should we take to maintaining the forest values and processes through the transitions that seem inevitable?*

As you have already alluded to, the present-day forests are highly altered and are in a relatively 'unstable state'. The consequences of these disturbances, as well as ongoing drought and climate change, will further exaggerate the changing environment. Intervention and manipulation, such as eliminating grazing by



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domestic stock; ecological thinning; and environmental flows and flooding, will all need to be employed during this uncertain transition period.

The Victorian Government is also grappling with these issues, and I encourage the Natural Resources Commission to work with the Victorian Government and its relevant agencies (including the North Central CMA) to work towards an ecologically sustainable River Red Gum ecosystem within the Riverina Bioregion.

***A sustainable future for the forests, the forestry industry and local communities*** - Issue 6: *What are the key features of a sustainable future for the forests, forest industries and the local communities?*

Achieving a balance between ecological sustainability and the interests of the forest industry and local communities is extremely difficult. Once again, I encourage you to learn from VEAC's experience on this highly sensitive issue.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission. If you need any clarification, or would like to discuss any issues, please do not hesitate to contact me on 5448 7148.

Yours sincerely,

Emer Campbell  
**Manager – NRM Strategy**

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