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Natural Resources Commission

GPO Box 4206

Sydney NSW 2001

RE: River Red Gum Forest Assessment Preliminary Report

Dear Commission Members

Congratulations on producing an unbiased and balanced assessment of the River Redgum Forests within the Riverina Bioregion, based on scientific fact and substantiated input from all parties that have an interest in the current and future well being of the forests, as opposed to other previous reports from various groups that have often been based on emotion generated by "extreme greens".

From the outset, I would like to state that I am totally opposed to permanently locking up multi-use Redgum forests to "save" them under the tenure of "National Park".

Save them from what?

You have witnessed firsthand, while touring Yanga Station and the Nyah State Forest, that locking up Redgum forests does not, and never will, produce the best environmental outcomes for the forests.

In fact it is counterproductive.

I would like to forward the following comments relating to some of the nine key issues identified in the report:

1) Environmental, Economic and Social Values currently supported by the forests

Environmental: The current legislations that Forests NSW operate under have delivered a balance within the Redgum Forests that allows the forests to continue to be "multi-use", while protecting the environment, heritage sites, flora and fauna. I believe that if Forests NSW were not continually under pressure from extreme green third party groups, then overall forest health would improve if increased thinning of the forests was permitted. This would be at little or no cost to the government if commercial operations were used.

Economic and Social Values : In the past, there has been a lot of misrepresentation of economic data relating to the Redgum industry. The figures used in this report appear to be accurate and the importance of the industry to local communities is extremely significant and should not be understated.

2) How will climate change affect the forests and the values they support?

Regardless of the climate change models used, and assumptions about climate change in the future, the real issue that needs to be addressed is watering of the forests. There is no doubt, or reason to debate, that if sufficient water is provided to the Redgum forests, the forest environment will flourish, regardless of future prevailing climate conditions.

6) How should we manage forests through the transition that seems inevitable ?

This issue is again based on climate change models that may or may not eventuate. Granted, it may prove that the assumptions on climate change do eventuate , resulting in significant changes to the forests as we know them, but this may or may not be the case.

To assume that transitional changes to forest management are inevitable is a very strong assumption that may prove to be incorrect. If this is the case, any decisions based on perceived climate change should be introduced on a trial basis enabling the affects to be monitored and measured over a period of time. This would provide data to allow a determination to be made of the impact, successful or unsuccessful, of any such changes before introducing the changes on a broad scale.

7) How can forest industries transform in response to climate related drops in sustainable wood yields.

Quality, quantity or both ? The recent declaration of National Parks in the Victorian Redgum forests, as recommended in the VEAC report, means that the supply of Redgum timber from NSW forests is paramount to satisfy the commercial market. Any reduction in the log supply, particularly quality, from NSW may jeopardise long term contracts that companies have with major customers.

Summary:

As you are aware, Forests NSW employees are professional people, many with forestry degrees, who have studied silviculture for many years. These people care for and manage the Redgum forests which provide communities with employment opportunities and social / recreational activities while protecting the forest environment.

The Environmental Impact Statement -Part 5- (Under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act – 1979) is clearly in favour of continued logging in the Redgum Forests. This is further evidence that the various State Legislations that Forests NSW are obliged to operate under are successful in achieving the best environmental, social and economic results for all.

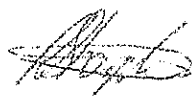
Rather than locking up areas of Redgum Forests I believe that industry should be allowed to continue working with Forests NSW under current policies and practices to achieve the best environmental outcomes for the forest, while continuing to provide an on-going, sustainable Redgum industry that fully supports local communities.

The introduction of long term timber licences would provide the security required for sawmills to develop new markets, introduce apprenticeship and scholarship schemes, further invest in community activities, and be part of the solution that produces the best environmental results for our Redgum Forests.

Regardless of the outcome of this study, people will continue to buy timber products. Is it better to supply them from environmentally friendly, sustainably managed Redgum Forests in Australia, or from unsustainable, unmanaged forests from other countries?

Locking up multi-use Redgum forests is not the answer.

Regards



Ron Sharples

Managing Director