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Forests Assessment
Natural Resources Commission
GPO Box 4206
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Submission to the Natural Resource Commission regarding the Regional Forest Assessment
of River Red Gums and Woodland Forests

I am writing this submission on behalf of The Nationals in NSW and the NSW Liberals in Coalition. The red gum forests in the southwest of NSW are a significant resource that has been selectively and sustainably harvested for the past 150 years. During that time the Red Gums have continued to flourish, until the onset of the current drought, and native wildlife that have been referred to by some groups as being under threat from logging, continue to survive.

The major and immediate threat to red gums is the lack of water as regular flooding is vital to the forest's regeneration. If the drought does not break then more red gum forests will continue to become stressed and die. Red gums are also vitally important to the economy of the region. The timber industry in the southwest of New South Wales directly generates up to 589 jobs and some 1,092 secondary jobs. Each year the industry contributes take home wages into the region of more than \$30 million. The overall value of the industry to the region is some \$72 million and the combined value of private and Forests NSW stock and land probably exceeds \$3 billion.

The bottom line for the Coalition is that there must be no further restriction of access to red gum forests for selective sustainable harvesting.

I note the information provided in the Preliminary Assessment Report shows that river red gums in harvesting areas are about 20% healthy with the remainder being either stressed or dead or dying. Information obtained from the State government on the last available survey of the health of red gum forests in National Parks shows that in the Yanga National Park and Kemendoc Nature Reserve only 20% of the red gum is healthy. In the Kalyarr National Park and the Narrandera and Goonawarra Nature Reserves just 10% of red gums are healthy. This information¹ is from a study for the Murray Darling Basin Commission undertaken in 2004. While the information is somewhat dated the lack of available water since that date and the worsening drought conditions means that this data must now be considered a best-case scenario. Note that the Yanga National Park was in the process of being purchased at the

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time of the Murray Darling Basin study, with the NSW government announcing finalisation of the purchase in July 2005. The health of the reg gum forest therefore reflects active forest management practices as a result of selective and sustainable harvesting.

The difference in health between red gums that are available to selective and sustainable harvesting and those locked up in National Parks and Nature Reserves is small but significant. It bears out the logic that with limited water, timber that is being selectively and sustainably harvested will do better than timber locked up in National Parks and choked with too many trees competing for too little water or sunlight.

I draw the conclusion from this that the best way to preserve and protect the existing red gum forests in the current drought conditions is the retention of the status quo. The NSW Coalition is strongly of the belief that no further areas of red gum should be locked up in National Parks or Nature Reserves.

Another area of concern is the alternative to red gum timber if further restrictions are placed on the selective and sustainable harvesting of this timber. The Commission should take into account the environmental impact of alternative products that will be required to replace red gum timber.

The EIS produced by the Department of Primary Industries looks at the use of substitute products for red gum, which includes concrete, metals including steel, iron and aluminium, plastics and other hardwoods including timber sourced from uncontrolled, illegal or poorly regulated logging in the rainforests of South East Asia.ⁱⁱ All of these products have much higher impacts on the environment than the selective and sustainable harvesting of red gums.

The NSW Coalition believes that the retention of the existing level of commercial access to red gum for selective and sustainable harvesting is the minimum outcome that will be acceptable for both the environment and economy of southwest NSW.

Yours sincerely,



KATRINA HODGKINSON MP

Member for Burrinjuck

Shadow Minister for Natural Resource Management

ⁱ NSW Parliament Hansard Question on Notice 7368 – River Red Gums answer received 7 October 2009.

ⁱⁱ Department of Primary Industries Environmental Impact Statement May 2009 Harvesting and associated road work operations in south western NSW page 64