

Subject: My submission to the River Red Gum Forest Assessment
26th August 2009

River Red Gum Forest Assessment

Dear NRC,

I am very glad that the Natural Resources Commission has been given the task of assessing the River Red Gum forests.

It is crucially important that the NRC rapidly assess the extreme threats facing the River Red Gum wetlands and recommend strong conservation action to avert those threats.

I would like to make the following comments on the terms of reference:

- The environmental crisis facing River Red Gum is severe - it is already well past the eleventh hour. I believe that a decision needs to be implemented and new National Parks created before the end of the year.
- I believe it is crucial that the precautionary principle is applied in full – given the paucity of detailed environmental survey in the region. It is important that proper precaution is applied on the side of environmental protection.
- I support the inclusion in the terms of reference of water management and the impacts of climate change on future water availability.
- I believe that the identification of large new National Parks should be specified in the terms of reference as a key outcome from the assessment.
- I support the inclusion of Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation matters in the assessment but believe that interim protections should be imposed to protect Ramsar wetlands from illegal patch-clearfelling while the assessment takes place.
- I believe it should be clear how the requirements of the EPBC Act will be met, and specifically what process under that Act will be applied and how the approval process will proceed.
- The Terms of Reference need to provide stronger and more specific involvement of indigenous people and consultation with indigenous communities. The TOR should require close investigation of Aboriginal Ownership of conservation reserves wherever sought by Traditional Owners.
- A structural adjustment package may be needed for the timber industry to get on track to sustainability
- It is essential that the remaining River Red Gum ecosystem be protected with National Park status.

Those workers who are effected need to be retrained, used to manage the new national park or directed to others workplaces where jobs are available. There is always a need for feral animal or pest plant reduction programs where these workers could be much more usefully employed.

I understand pest plants and animals cause millions of dollars of lost revenue to many rural communities and farming enterprises.

We need to change the existing political mentality of supporting forest destruction. Global warming has been accelerated by the the loss of forest such as these, as trees absorb carbon dioxide. Human activity (which includes the dramatic population increase the world has seen in the last 100 years - in Australia we have had a population increase of over 30% since 1986) is increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide and at the same time human activity is reducing forest cover. The River Red Gums are needed to help in CO2 absorption.

These trees will also be useful in in maintaining bird life that help with management of locust plagues. These plagues regularly effect many farmlands that have minimum tree cover. The cleared farmlands have upset the natural balance between bird life and locusts by removing the locust predators.

I believe we would see many less locust plagues if all farms were required to increase tree cover.

Here is another job opportunity for forestry workers - planting trees to encourage bird life on farms which will have the extra bonus of helping with soil and water retention and reduction of locust plagues. The workers could also help with the re-vegetation of creek and river banks that have been cleared, maybe be using Peter Andrew's ideas (see his book "Back From The Brink").

I regularly walk through Sydney bushland and even now, where Sydney and Newcastle have had minimum rainfall over the last 2 months, I still dodge puddles on the tracks. These puddles exist because the tree cover prevents evaporation to a significant extent.

These forests will help stop evaporation of water of any creek or river they are near or cover - an essential requirement in Australia as our climate is drying

Please consider this submission and its suggestions seriously and protect this very important forest from further logging.

Yours sincerely,

Ilona Renwick