



Arbuthnot Sawmills Pty Ltd

Est. 1889

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Forest Assessment
Forest Assessment Commission
GPO 4206
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Commission Members

Re; Red Gum Forest Assessment

Arbuthnot Sawmills Pty Ltd is a red gum sawmilling company that has been milling red gum timber from NSW and Victoria since 1889. The mill was founded by Alexander Arbuthnot and the shareholders of the company today are in the main, descendants of A. Arbuthnot. Today's modern mill is located on the same site in Koondrook where the founder commenced milling with a steam engine which had previously powered a paddle steamer for the busy Murray River trade.

The Arbuthnot mill under the guidance of the Forestry Commissions has complied with all codes of forest practice and occupational health and safety requirements in the harvesting of logs from the red gum State Forests of NSW.

Arbuthnot Sawmills is a major employer in our small community and has created full time employment and prosperity, for the past one hundred and twenty years in the Barham-Koondrook communities.

The companies investment in property, buildings, equipment, and mobile plant is at today's values, in the vicinity of \$8,000,000.

The timber products we supply include the following;

- Wharf timber- our company currently holds the contract to supply the Echuca Wharf restoration. The wharf is a National Heritage listed structure and the timbers must be replaced with the same species as the original, which is Red Gum. This is only one of the National heritage structures that require red gum for upgrades and maintenance.
- Bridge and Rail Crossing Timbers which are large section and require a minimum durability two species timber. Red gum meets this specification.
- Furniture timbers; our company supplies furniture timber throughout NSW, Vic. and S.A. Local manufacturers who employ young apprentices and qualified tradesman rely on our dried product to maintain their businesses.
- Merchant timbers for housing, including dry products; Tongue & Grooved Flooring, Wall panelling, Skirting & Architrave, Studs, joists, bearers.
- Green merchant products including suburban fencing, verandah posts, house stumps, sole plates, stakes, fence droppers, survey pegs.
- Railway sleepers supplied to NSW, Victoria, and South Australia.
- Landscaping timbers, for shire streetscapes and retaining walls
- Residues from non-merchantable sections of logs are either, docked into firewood or chipped subject to demand at given times of the year.
- The sawdust is utilised by local farmers for their calving yards and horse stables
- 100% of every log is utilised

In addressing the terms of reference for your study, it is important to note that Victorian Environment Assessment Councils study showed that of all the threats to Victorian Red Gum Forests, sustainable timber harvesting was not a threatening process.

Local expertise and history proves that the red gum forests and red gum vegetation has increased as a result of European management including, ring barking, levee banks, water management, the lack of burning as carried out by the aboriginal community prior to white settlement.

The redgum industry which has operated for the past one hundred and fifty years, thins less than one percent of the forest annually, and due to continual growth and regeneration, this has allowed a sustainable harvest of timber continue.

It is very important to be aware of the forest areas that are unavailable to thinning as a result of being locked up into some form of park, are in the worst condition and are very stressed to the point of trees being dead or dieing. Of course the drought combined with climate change is exacerbating this problem.

Opportunities for future employment outside of the current sustainable jobs created by the red gum industry are realistically non existent. As the status quo remains, tourism is complimented by the red gum industry. In actual fact the red gum industry within the district is one of the major tourism attractions in the region. Events such as the forest to furniture tours conducted by industry, the annual Redgum Showcase that draws up to

3,000 people annually and the red gum statue walk created by the red gum industry are very strong drawcards for tourists to visit the Barham Koondrook area.

It is important to point out to the NRC Commissioners that there are times when tourism is non-existent in the red gum forest areas due to a range of natural events. These events include forest flooding which does not allow access for camping or other forest recreation activity, mosquito outbreaks which carry the encephalitis plague, blue green algae outbreaks which cause visitors to stay away, and extreme summer temperatures which are far too excessive for comfortable recreation in the forests.

Also it is important for the commissioners to understand that the red gum industry continues despite the above natural events because it has adapted over the many decades to work around these difficulties and is still able to create full-time employment and community prosperity.

In addressing ongoing forest management, the proof is evident, that the red gum industry is a vital part of forest management in maintaining the health of the forest by thinning the regeneration stands. And by being the eyes and ears of the forest, the industry is on hand to be the first strike against bushfires or any other threats to the health of the forest. Alternatively locking up of the forest will surely be the death knell and destroy all the values that generations of foresters and industry have protected over the past one hundred and fifty years.

With regard to international agreements, the RAMSAR listing of the red gum forests includes the wise multiple use, which also includes sustainable timber harvesting.

With regard to Govt. policies and Catchment Action plans, the Koondrook – Perricoota, Living Murray Icon Sites, watering plan will be of invaluable benefit to the environmental health of these forests. The watering will result in even more regeneration and growth, which will require ongoing, thinning by industry.

Opportunities for indigenous can be developed in conjunction with industry for forest and mill processing, with the aim of full-time employment that is not a burden on taxpayers, but is a result of productivity in a commercial sense. Industry has always been willing to assist in this area and employ indigenous people.

Appropriate access for industry is extremely important for the timber communities along the river. The economic and social welfare of small towns like Barham-Koondrook and Deniliquin rely heavily on a secure red gum industry. The red gum industry directly employs 537 people, with wages of \$30.7 million annually and production to the value of \$71.6 million. Of this revenue the red gum timber businesses spend an additional \$18 million per year in our local communities.

In terms of the social benefits, the industry supports the schools, sporting clubs and are represented in all the community groups within our communities. A case in point is the local football team which would have to close down due to a lack of players if the timber industry closed. Also the timber industry sponsors the cost of all the teams' football guernseys, from the junior teams right through to the senior teams. In our rural town, the

football club is the hub of social entertainment and gives the youth in our community an outlet. If the football club is forced to close because the timber workers have to move away to seek work elsewhere, it spells disaster for the youth and our towns.

With regard to existing science and body of knowledge within the region the NRC have the benefit of mistakes made in Victoria by the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC). Due to the pre ordained outcome in Victoria, the council members gave only lip service to a wealth of local knowledge and also to red gum foresters who had so much to offer for the best environmental, economic and social outcomes. From feedback I have had from the field trip undertaken by the NRC Commissioners on the 20th & 21st of August, I understand that there was a strong interest in the science and local knowledge forthcoming from the attendees during the course of the visit. And as a result of submissions and future planned visits to the region there will be considerably more information provided that will give a fuller background of the redgum forests and the management practices that have taken place over the history of the forests.

Finally I ask that the NRC Commissioners to consider the environmental benefits of timber as a renewable building product, with 50% of its weight as stored carbon, whilst we have a regenerating, renewable forest sequestering more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Please also be aware that the demand for red gum for infrastructure, furniture and housing is very high and the only replacement for this timber with its unique qualities is from Asian or South American rain forest where sustainable and legal logging practices are highly questionable.

Forgive me if I'm old fashioned, but surely, maintaining rural jobs in Australia in a sustainable healthy industry, sharing prosperity to our local economies, providing real social benefits as a result of real jobs and working families and helping reduce our trade imbalance for timber must be the priorities of the NRC.

Thank you for the opportunity of making a submission to this very important investigation.

Yours Sincerely



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