

Forests Assessment
Natural Resources Commission

RE: River Red Gum Forest Assessment

It is a relief to be able to imagine that due respect will finally be accorded to the Riverina Bioregion. I understand that more than 98% of the land area is under sheer exploitative landuse or land management for private gain. It is only proper that the identification of large new National Parks should be specified in the terms of reference as a key outcome from the assessment.

The Terms of Reference need to specify that the additions to the Reserve System must provide formal protection by appropriate tenure.

Categories that allow logging, grazing, mining or inappropriate (compromising the conservation values) recreational use must be specifically precluded.

The value and vulnerability of the ecosystem functioning of the River Red Gum wetlands at the landscape scale is so poignant as climate change and drought continues. The value of refugia for biodiversity cannot be overstated.

I support the inclusion in the terms of reference of water management and the impacts of climate change on future water availability.

It is sensible to include the EPBC matters in the assessment but interim protections should be imposed to protect Ramsar wetlands from illegal patch-clearfelling while the assessment takes place. 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 include consideration of this area's contribution to the National Reserve System with respect to comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness, but it is imperative to signify the regional impact of the European occupation of this country over nearly two hundred years and the paucity of environmental survey.

The terms of reference must include giving heavy weight to a precautionary approach to protect the environment.

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.

Community acceptance of the assessment and recommendations by the Natural Resources Commission will be facilitated by the confidence that the best available information and expertise has been used.

Objective scientific advice from the best proponents in the fields of conservation planning and forest ecology needs to be obtained by the NRC.

Yours sincerely,
Marg McLean
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