

Our Ref (A194826)

4 September 2009

Mr Alex McMillan
Executive Director
Natural Resource Commission
GPO Box 4206
Sydney NSW 2001

Pre-notified via email Alex.McMillan@nrc.nsw.gov.au

Dear Alex

Re: Assessments of river red gum forests in the Riverina and South-western cypress forests in NSW

The following comments are submitted by the Lower Murray Darling Catchment management Authority.

- 1) The LMD CMA vegetation target for each vegetation community is 20% reservation. Currently 5.5% of the catchment's red gum areas are in some type of reserve of varying security. The remaining red gum is unprotected in either State Forest or on Western Lands Lease, where harvesting of trees, firewood collection, grazing of under storey and/or recreational pressures exist. There are minor Flora and Fauna Reserves but protection from grazing is not guaranteed. Full protection in substantial and strategic patches is required.
- 2) A Western Lands Lease (including a reserve on a WLL) does not exclude State Forests from harvesting; a review of the Western Lands Act to remove this right would provide better protection for red gum forests.
- 4) Condition of red gum communities also be influenced by the availability of water and changed flooding regimes therefore accessibility to flood water (or e-flows) should be a consideration for any area to be reserved. Conversely, rising saline groundwater is another potential threat due to weir pools impact. Another threat to red gum forests is the development of acid sulphate wetlands adjacent to the main river, where wetting cycles have been absent for long periods of time.
- 5) There have been 33 threatened species recorded in red gum forests (NPWS Atlas) but only 14 of these are recorded in the red gum reserves.
- 6) In a regional biodiversity analysis of the potential impacts of climate change, the potential loss of any red gum and black box forests >100 m from the river was evaluated. In terms of generic biodiversity (ie vegetation as a surrogate) a loss of around 4% catchment wide resulted. This may sound a small figure but in any evaluation it takes a comparatively large amount of change in land use or vegetation extent to produce a change to biodiversity outcomes. Consequently, without an increase in conservation actions, the loss of a

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significant portion of red gum can be expected to have a comparatively high impact on biodiversity. This suggests any red gum forests existing under this climate change scenario would be a priority for action and supports NRC actions to address climate change.

Sincerely,

Mark King
Chair
Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Authority

MK/LP/lp