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Forests Assessment
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Dear Sir/Madam

RE: ASSESSMENT OF RED GUM FORESTS IN THE RIVERINA

Murray Shire Council is a Local Government Area (LGA) that includes significant areas of State red gum forests. These forests are critical to the social and economic security of residents of Murray Shire. The continuation of the red gum industry is strongly supported by Murray Shire Council. The conversion of these forests to National Parks is strongly opposed by Murray Shire Council.

In making a submission to the Assessment, Council acknowledges that there has already been significant work carried out by the NSW Department of Primary Industries in the development of the *Environment Impact Statement – Harvesting and Associated Road Work Operations in South-Western NSW*. Perusal of this document certainly makes the case for the continuation of the red gum industry as it exists today.

However, Council would make the following points:

1. The red gum forests are essentially “man made” forests and as such need to be actively managed. Forests NSW have a long and proven record in responsibly managing these forests.
2. The *Environment Impact Statement – Harvesting and Associated Road Work Operations in South-Western NSW (EIS)* provides substantial data on the socio-economic impacts. Council is of the view that the figures within the EIS are very conservative and understate the real economic benefits of the industry to the area. In addition, there is minimal information on the industry that exists in Echuca and Moama. It is considered that a more comprehensive study on socio-economic impacts should be carried out.
3. The town of Mathoura within the Murray Shire is a focal point for the red gum industry. Mathoura has been holding its population over an extended period of time. However, the Council has endeavoured to stimulate growth with the development of the Mathoura Business and Visitor Centre. In addition, some years ago the Council sponsored a “Land Give Away” scheme, which

resulted in over 20 new houses being built in the town. This scheme required a huge effort on behalf of Council. The loss of the red gum industry would quickly undo the positive effects of this scheme.

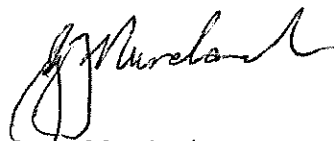
4. It is considered that the security of timber licences should be strengthened. Instead of the current 12 month annual licences, operators should have longer term wood supply agreements for say, 20 years.
5. The State Forests are already accessible to the public and many campers utilise the Forest to access the Murray River. This activity contributes to the tourism industry in the region. It is the Council's view that this contribution would not be altered by any change in management, ie State Forest to National Park. In fact, Council considers that there will be an adverse affect on tourism due to more restrictions being placed on campers. This includes banning of pets and hunting of pests.
6. The red gum industry is part of the heritage of the area. The historic Port of Echuca, as an example, showcases the red gum industry from a historical and working point of view. Red gum products, such as furniture, are still sold in this precinct.
7. The State Forests around Mathoura and Picnic Point have the potential to severely impact on property and human life in a bush fire. Therefore, it is critical that the forests be managed to ensure the risks are minimized. The management of the forests to date by Forests NSW has not resulted in many severe incidents. Council would not be confident that a National Park Management System would provide the same level of protection for life and property.
8. It is recognised that there are Aboriginal sites of significance within the forests. Forests NSW have been effective in protecting these sites over along period of time.
9. Forests NSW have worked effectively with the community and Council to protect and enhance the environmental values of the forest. Council has been involved in joint projects, such as the Bird Hide off Picnic Point Road, as well as a number of walking tracks including bridge structures to enhance the forest for visitors. In addition, Council has been very active in preserving and enhancing native vegetation along its road reserves outside the forest. The Murray Catchment Management Authority (CMA) has also played a key role in fencing and planting native vegetation to enhance habitat for species such as the superb parrot. This work compliments work done on forests by creating connectivity across the landscape.

10. Most of the forest in Murray Shire is managed by Forests NSW. There are minimal opportunities for the use of private forests. Therefore, should the industry cease in State Forests, the industry and economic outcomes would effectively be lost in Murray Shire.
11. Mathoura is a community with low income levels. Natural Gas was proposed for the town some years ago, however, it did not proceed. Firewood is the prime fuel for heating in the town. A change in status of the forest will threaten the availability of lower cost fuel for heating for the Mathoura community.
12. The Cummeragunja community is a small Aboriginal village within Murray Shire. I would point your attention to page 53 of Volume 2 of the EIS, which demonstrates the importance of the red gum industry to the village. In addition, it is understood that at least one (1) Aboriginal person has a wood supply agreement in his own right.
13. The State Forests in Murray Shire are designated as working forests, in conjunction with the RAMSAR Convention. This is international recognition of a working forest that also protects the environment.

I trust you will take this submission into consideration and keep Council informed during the assessment process.

Should you require further information, please contact the undersigned on 03 5884 3302.

Yours sincerely



Greg Murdoch
General Manager

GJM/km