

**Northern Inland Council for the Environment  
c/- PO Box 185 Tamworth 2340**

Forests Assessment  
Natural Resources Commission  
Email: [forests@nrc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:forests@nrc.nsw.gov.au)

Friday 28 August 2009

**Submission**

**River Red Gum Forest Assessment terms of Reference**

Northern Inland Council for the Environment (NICE) is very happy that the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has been given the task of assessing the River Red Gum forests.

NICE member groups have been actively assisting the National Parks Association campaign to have the River Red Gum forests protected in large new national parks.

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.

NICE supports the following comments on the terms of reference:

- a) 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.
- b) We believe that the identification of large new National Parks should be specified in the terms of reference as a key outcome from the assessment. Secure reserve tenures that protect from all damaging uses, such as logging, mining grazing and inappropriate recreation are required.
- c) It is important that well-recognised experts in conservation planning and forest ecology are engaged directly to provide advice to the NRC on this issue. I can see no evidence from the existing information that any such expertise is currently involved. Given that the main goal of the process is ecological assessment, I cannot see how the community can have any confidence in the outcomes unless such experts are engaged to provide advice to the Commission.
- d) We 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.
- e) All relevant conservation criteria should be fully and objectively applied, including criteria for the development of a CAR reserve system and criteria relating to biodiversity and climate change. In particular, the extraordinary conservation

significance of River Red Gum forests as the only remaining large refuges for species from drought and a warming climate needs to be recognized.

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

g) We support the inclusion of EPBC 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.

h) We 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.

i) 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.

j) All data should be made available to the community to increase the transparency of the process.

Yours sincerely



Bev Smiles  
Convenor  
Northern Inland Council for the Environment