

Friday 28 August, 2009

Forests Assessment
Natural Resources Commission
GPO Box 4206
Sydney NSW 2001

Email: forests@nrc.nsw.gov.au

RE: River Red Gum Forest Assessment

Dear Commissioner,

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness is pleased that the Natural Resources Commission received direction to undertake a forest assessment for the River Red Gum and Cypress forests of south-west NSW.

Noting the current circumstances it would be prudent for the Natural Resources Commission proceed with a threat assessment for the River Red Gum wetlands and recommend particularly strong conservation action to stop the damage.

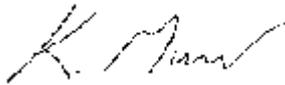
In relation to the terms of reference the Colong Foundation makes the following comments:

1. The matters of national importance under the Federal EPBC Act should be included in the assessment and that interim protection measures to protect Ramsar wetlands from illegal patch-clearfelling while the assessment takes place should be imposed, as similar logging moratoria were established for the forest assessments undertaken during the 1990s.
2. The Commission should specify in the terms of reference how the protection measures required for values that are subject to EPBC Act provisions will be applied under that Act, for any forest approval given under NSW law.
3. The severe crisis facing River Red Gum communities must be immediately and effectively addressed and a recommendation for comprehensive, representative and adequate system of River Red Gum National Parks within the assessment area tabled before the end of the year.
4. To give community confidence in the outcomes from the Commission, well-recognised experts in forest ecology and conservation planning should be engaged directly by the Commission to provide independent advice on this assessment so as to significantly augment the expertise is currently involved, noting that the main goal is an ecological assessment.
5. The precautionary principle must be applied given the inadequate ecological data for the Riverina and South-Western Cypress regions and to mitigate climate uncertainty by ensuring comprehensive environmental protection.

6. The survival of the River Red Gum communities in the Riverina is contingent upon increased water allocations and so the terms of reference should include of water management and the impacts of climate change on future water availability.
7. When applying all the conservation criteria as fully and objectively as possible, the parameters for a CAR reserve system and survival of biodiversity under the duress of climate change should be applied.
8. The River Red Gum woodlands of the Riverina are the only remaining large drought refuges and their potential as wildlife refuges in a warming climate should be specified in the terms of reference.
9. Only a term of reference that specifies the identification of large new National Parks will provide the secure reserve tenure that is needed to ensure adequate conservation outcomes from the assessment and protect the River Red Gum communities from environmentally damaging uses, such as logging, mining, grazing and high impact recreation.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Muir', written in a cursive style.

Keith Muir
Director
The Colong Foundation for Wilderness Ltd