



16 February 2010

The Hon. Kristina Keneally MP  
Premier of NSW  
Level 39, Governor Macquarie Tower  
1 Farrer Place  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Premier,

**NRC assessment of river red gum and other woodland forests**

I refer to the assessment and recommendations reports on the management of the river red gum forests in the Riverina bioregion, submitted to you on 18 December 2009.

In order to assist community understanding of the reports, I have recently toured the region with Ministers Sartor and Macdonald, held four community information sessions in the Riverina, and met with local government representatives. The NRC has also liaised with and provided additional analysis to the interagency committee led by Mr Peter Duncan, Deputy Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), that you established to coordinate the Government's implementation of the NRCs recommendations.

There have been concerns raised by the timber industry and local communities in regard to direct and indirect job losses from a rationalisation of timber industry, the need for government action in support of regional development opportunities, and support for active management and ecological thinning in national parks.

Nothing in these additional consultations or analysis has led me to change any of the NRCs findings and recommendations provided to you on 18 December 2009. In particular, it is important for the future of the forest areas and the region that the entire area of the Millewa forest group should be reserved as part of an iconic cross border national park with management linked to the neighbouring Barmah National Park in Victoria.

The NRC's scientific assessment has shown that due to river regulation, reduced water availability, and much of the region's river flows being used for irrigation, the red gum forests do not receive the regular flooding needed to replace the older and larger trees at the rate they are being harvested. This continued harvesting at the current rate is unsustainable and rationalisation of the timber industry from 6 major mills to 1 or 2 mills is required to match the long-term sustainable yield of timber.

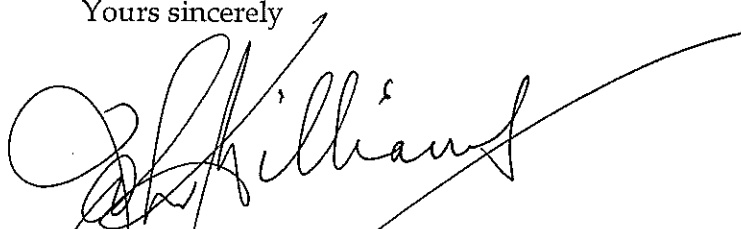
Now that the scale of reductions required has been revealed, regional towns dependent on the forestry industry are deeply concerned about the potential impact on regional economies. The ongoing drought and likely reductions in water for irrigation under the pending Murray Darling Basin Plan will only exacerbate these concerns. Our regional consultations have reinforced our understanding that the rationalisation of the timber industry needs to happen as part of a broader

regional development plan, which should also help the region adjust to less water being available for irrigation.

The regional communities have stressed to me that they require clear decisions by Government on the NRC's recommendations and need assistance to transition to a more sustainable future through active programs around regional development. I believe the NRC's recommendations contain sufficient flexibility to cater for the practical challenges of what is a complex situation.

Once again, I thank the Government for the opportunity to do this important work and would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how the forests and wetlands can continue to be the lifeblood of the natural landscape and the communities of the region.

Yours sincerely

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr John Williams'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the page.

Dr John Williams  
*Commissioner*