



MEDIA RELEASE

Foresters critical of recommendations to the NSW Government to lock up NSW red gum forests and close down red gum forest industries – (22/02/2010)

The NSW Government is expected to decide on the future of the NSW red gum forests and timber industry within a month, having received and reviewed a final report and recommendations from the NSW Natural Resources Commission (NRC). Irreversible steps will then be taken to declare National Park over State forest and to enter into binding business exit arrangements with the timber industry.

The NRC has recommended the transfer of the most productive regrowth red gum forests under management by Forests NSW into National Park and to cut supply of timber by almost 90%. The recommendation will see the end of a local but nationally significant timber industry that has a history dating back more than 150 years. Forest workers, harvesting and haulage contractors, sawmillers and retailers of specialised red gum timber as well as local Riverina communities will all be affected.

The Institute of Foresters Australia (IFA) is the peak professional body for forest scientists, forest educators and forested land managers in Australia. We are a non-profit organisation with 1,350 members.

The IFA believes that the recommendations to create a large new National Park over the best areas of regrowth red gum forest near Deniliquin on the Murray River, managed for many decades by professional foresters for multiple-use, including conservation and timber production, is flawed and not justified or supported by the evidence collected during the assessment process.

A major weakness of the NRC's recommendations is that they have failed to provide the NSW Government with options that fully account for the environmental, social and economic values of the forests. In doing so the NRC has effectively hindered the NSW Government's capacity to make a balanced decision.

The NRC has also used inappropriate and out of date forest assessment principles. There are no wilderness or old-growth forests within the red gum forests and important environmental values, such as the region's renowned ancient trees, are already well protected.

The IFA is pleased that the NRC has recognised that river regulation and inequitable water allocation is a key threatening process for the forests. The IFA does not however agree with the NRC that tenure changes are necessary to secure much needed environmental water flows.

The red gum forests are true regrowth forests with a long history of human intervention –not iconic forests which have developed away from human activity. Foresters have historically managed these forests for a broad array of environmental and socio-economic values. Some of the region's most impressive even-aged forests may be found in the State forests at Moira Plains. These have only arisen since the late 1950s when changed water flows were caused by the construction of the Hume Weir. Ironically, the NRC has recommended that the tenure of these forests be changed to national park.

Part of the NRC's justification for essentially closing down the existing timber industry was the modeling of future timber supply scenarios using quite pessimistic assumptions about future water flows, climate change and consequent growth rate of the red gum trees. The NRC used a horizon of 100 years, and rejected use of a 70 year horizon used by Forests NSW, which provide long term yield 40 percent higher than the 100 year scenario.

The IFA believes that if the NRC's recommendations are implemented they will come at considerable cost to the Government and people of NSW. Financial compensation for closing down the timber industry has been estimated to be in the range of \$50 to \$70 million, based on the previous outcome for the Brigalow Belt Bio-region forest agreement process of \$80 million.

The IFA believes that an option with a new National Park, with a reasonable and representative spread over the region, but a lesser area than that recommended by NRC, managing the remainder as State forest, with enhanced management and water flow, and allowing continuation of the existing industry at a level of say two thirds of the total sawlog supply is a better overall outcome for NSW.

The IFA strongly recommends that the NSW Government considers alternative options to the one recommended by the NRC and to have a well rounded review group appointed to advise Government about the options available and what will be a lasting and acceptable outcome.

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