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NRC PUBLIC HEARINGS NEXT WEEK

Community urged to attend

THE deadline for public submissions to the Natural Resources Commission expires this Friday, October 23rd, but the communities of the Riverina still have a valuable opportunity to have their say on the future of our red gum forests.

Next week, the NRC returns to the Riverina to hold a series of formal public hearings on the forest assessment process.

NSW Forest Products Association chief executive Russ Ainley said it was vital that as many people as possible from the forest communities attend to ensure their voices are heard.

"The public forums next week represent the last substantial opportunity for the collective red gum community to have its say and ensure that the Natural Resources Commissioner John Williams is properly informed about the realities of forest management and the need to maintain a sustainable timber industry in the Riverina red gum forests," Mr Ainley said.

"Hundreds of jobs and millions of

dollars are at risk if we don't speak up now and let the NRC know just how important these forests and the industry that sustains them are.

"I would urge as many people as possible to attend one or more of the public forums—the livelihoods and indeed the future of the red gum communities are at stake."

The commissioner released his preliminary assessment report into the Riverina red gum forests on September 30, though it largely focused on water management issues and the effects of climate change on red gums and did not wholly acknowledge the role that active management should play in maintaining the forests for future generations.

The NRC's public forums will be held from Monday, October 26 to Wednesday 28 at Balranald Football Club, then Barham Services Club and finally Deniliquin RSL club, with a fourth meeting to be held in Sydney on November 2.

Further info: www.nrc.nsw.gov.au

Interpreting the interim NRC assessment

The health of the whole of the forest environment and the totality of forest values – *including environmental values, social and economic values, including timber production* – is dependent upon water.

The current drought is blamed and the NRC identifies climate change as a further threat.

Red Gum forests get their water from the river, originally from flood events and now from government water allocation policies, which make little or no priority of environmental flows or forest health.

Less than 5 per cent of water used for irrigation would be sufficient to provide all the water needed to sustain healthy Red Gum forests.

Provision of the water for forest health must be given priority over increasing agriculture and domestic (city) demands.

If the environmental health of the forest is a priority for water supply, then growth and sustainable yield from the forests is consequential.

That is, timber supply and sustainable yield from a healthy forest is not directly dependent on climate change. The issue is an allocation policy for forest health.

Changed timber supply arrangements will not change the need for water to sustain the health of the forest, regardless of climate change.



NSW FOREST PRODUCTS ASSOCIATION

YOUR voice in the Riverina and NSW forest industry

The Fire Factor

Regeneration growth and health of Red Gum forests is a very fine balance of flood and fire.

Red gums are the most sensitive eucalypts to fire and there is a large record of environmental fire disasters - luckily on a small scale.

The balance can only be achieved by very careful and experienced forest management.

Now drought stressed trees and many dead trees in unthinned regrowth stands have increased fuel loads to very dangerous levels - well above 120 tonnes per hectare at both ground and canopy levels.

Regardless of climate change impacts, the hazard will only increase unless something is done about it. Firewood and thinning operations are the only tools available for forest managers to control the threat. And it is done as an economically viable operation.

If management is removed, then all red gum communities are sitting on a time bomb.

The more forests that are put into benign neglect of national parks the more inevitable an environmental disaster and community disaster becomes.

Silviculture & thinning

Silviculture, including the Australian Group Selection system, guarantees regeneration of forests.

Regeneration, when it occurs, is prolific, thickets and high mortality are the result. In times of drought wetlands and grass plains are invaded by Red Gum.

Thinning is essential to control stocking, to ensure forest health and to grow a valuable timber crop.

Thinning operations now have a proven role in economically removing dead

and dying trees, sustaining a healthy forest environment (and tree growth) and reducing fire hazard.

Active forest management is the only means of achieving these critical environmental, productive and protection measures.

How, and at what cost, might similar protection be achieved in reserves? National parks are the greatest threat to Red Gum forests.

Desperate NPA pulls another FoI stunt

THE Greens have once again resorted to the desperate tactic of pulling Freedom of Information (FoI) documents in an effort to distort the truth about red gum forest management.

Last week, the National Parks Association accused forest managers of being involved in illegal logging activities.

They claimed the FoI report showed the federal government ordered logging around the Riverina to stop because it was illegal.

But is yet more arrant nonsense and shows just how desperate their arguments are.

It's a bit rich for the greens to claim we are engaging in illegal activities when they are the ones who, at the drop of a hat, illegally blockade legitimate forest operations, says Russ Ainley, NSW FPA executive director.

"The reality is the government requested the stop-work to allow for an assessment, which as we know is now under way and which we are abiding by," Mr Ainley said.

INDUSTRY FIELD DAY, MEETING WITH NRC

As well as the NRC's formal public hearings next week, industry will also meet with the Commissioner over two days, firstly on a field trip looking at forest regeneration, growth trials, flooding and management, re-colonisation of Moira grass plains and regeneration after fire.

The following day, industry and the NRC will meet to discuss the report on the preliminary assessment, industry strategy for future development, development opportunities and implications for the NRC assessment.

The NRC is hosting three public hearings on consecutive evenings in Balranald, Barham and Deniliquin.

NSW FOREST PRODUCTS ASSOCIATION:



Level 2, 60 York Street,
 Sydney NSW 2000
 PO Box Q953
 QVB NSW 1230
 Phone: (02) 9279-2344
 Fax: (02) 9279-2355
 fpa@nswfpa.asn.au

The NSW Forest Products Association was established in 1906 as the representative organisation of the forest and forest products industry in NSW.

TIMBER COMMUNITIES AUSTRALIA:



24 Napier Close,
 Deakin ACT 2600
 PO Box 289
 DEAKIN WEST ACT 2600
 Phone: (02) 6282-2455
 Fax: (02) 6282-2314
 jim.adams@tca.org.au

Timber Communities Australia exists to encourage the sensible, balanced multiple use of our forests for the benefit of all Australians.