

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Natural Resources Commission

Name: Mr Bryce Wilde

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31 August 2012

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Foley,

Supplementary submission to the Inquiry into the management of public land in NSW

The Natural Resources Commission (the Commission) provided a previous submission to the inquiry, drawing attention to the following regional forest assessments carried out by the Commission under Terms of Reference from the NSW Government:

- Riverina bioregion river red gums and woodland forests (December 2009)
- South-western cypress state forests (May 2010).

The Commission's recommendations and assessment reports for these regional forest assessments were included with the previous submission.

I note the Hansard record of the Inquiry's public forum in Deniliquin on 1 August 2012, where aspects of the Commission's assessment of the Riverina bioregion river red gums and woodland forests were raised and discussed. I also note discrepancies between some of the aspects discussed and the findings presented in our assessment and recommendations report for the Riverina bioregion river red gums and woodland forests, for example issues such as the total contribution of the timber industry to the regional economy and the number of people directly employed by the timber industry in the region.

Attachment 1 provides the Inquiry with further details on these issues and other key findings in order to inform the committee's deliberations. In particular, it draws the inquiry's attention to:

- **management of river red gum reserves and state forests** – for example, the principles for active management of the forests to support both conservation and production values
- **socio-economic values** – for example, the contribution of the river red gum timber industry and tourism to the bioregion's economy
- **cultural and heritage values** – for example, the traditional tribal groups or nations and Indigenous organisations of the bioregion and the historical influence of human intervention on the forests
- **water flows** – for example, the impact of current river regulation and predicted climate change
- **natural values** – for example, threatened species listed under Commonwealth and NSW legislation
- **consultation process** – for example, how the Commission consulted with local communities.

I would also like to draw the inquiry's attention to the Commission's overall rationale for its findings and recommendations for the river red gums and woodland forests. In summary:

1. the Riverina river red gum forests ecosystems require **particular flooding regimes** (quantity and timing) to promote reproduction and germination and maintain overall ecosystem health, including promoting timber growth;
2. river regulation, over-allocation of water, climate variability and drought have **altered flooding regimes** causing a **decline** in the health of Riverina river red gum forests;
3. the decline is **predicted to worsen** under climate change, with river red gum forests transitioning to drier vegetation communities such as Box woodlands;
4. over the longer term this **will impact**:
 - the local timber industry due to **diminishing yields** of high grade quality timber
 - **ecological processes** from basin to individual forests scale
 - global, national, state and local **environmental values** (for example, international agreements such as the Ramsar convention on wetlands and migratory bird agreements such as JAMBA¹, *matters of environmental significance* under the Australian Government environmental legislation, threatened species listed under NSW legislation);
5. even with extensive water reform, it will not be enough to restore **all** the Riverina river red gum forests to health;
6. the future health of the river red gum forests will depend on whether particular forest stands can be **artificially** flooded and how they are managed, in particular the application of **ecological thinning**;
7. better results will be achieved by aligning reserves and state forests with Victoria's to maximise both **conservation and production outcomes** from flooding and enhance the status of red gum forests under the pending Murray Darling Basin Plan, for example ensuring funds are available to complete the planned infrastructure project to improve water delivery to the Koondrook-Perricoota forests to maintain suitable timber growth for forestry and Australia's obligations under international agreements (i.e. Ramsar convention for wetlands).

At the request of the Government, the Commission provided **further advice** on sustainable yields in February 2010. In consultation with NSW Forests, the Commission provided a revised reduction of up to **50 per cent** in timber yields over a 100 year time frame. This advice was prepared under the leadership of Peter Kanowski, Professor of Forestry at the Australian National University and now Deputy Director General at the Center for International Forestry Research with peer support from Cris Brack, Professor and Chair of Forestry, Waiariki Institute of Technology, New Zealand.

The Commission also published this advice to the Government on its website in February 2010 (and replicated in **Attachment 2** for the convenience of the Inquiry).

Detailed findings, recommendations, references and methodologies are documented in the Commission's recommendations and assessment reports.

Yours sincerely

 Dr John Keniry AM
Commissioner