

**Submission  
No 254**

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

**Organisation:** RAMROC Councils

**Name:** Mr Ray Stubbs

**Date received:** 2/08/2012

---



PO Box 3572,  
Level 3, 553 Kiewa Street,  
ALBURY NSW 2640

Phone (02) 6023 8791  
Fax (02) 6023 8169  
Email [rstubbs@alburycity.nsw.gov.au](mailto:rstubbs@alburycity.nsw.gov.au)

02 August 2012

The Chair and Committee Members,  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5,  
Parliament House,  
Macquarie Street,  
SYDNEY, NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

### **Inquiry into the Management of Public Land in NSW**

The Riverina and Murray Regional Organisation of Councils (RAMROC) represents the interests of eighteen Member Councils in the Riverina and Murray regions of south west New South Wales, which cover an area of 126,595 sq km and have a 2011 ABS Statistics total population of 168,643.

The 2010 decision of the New South Wales Labor Government to create substantial areas of Redgum National Parks has already resulted in severe economic and social consequences for affected Councils and communities in the Balranald, Berrigan, Deniliquin, Leeton, Murray, Murrumbidgee and Wakool LGA areas, all of which fall within the RAMROC region.

In short, the Government's decision unnecessarily decimated an \$80 to \$100 million per annum redgum timber industry that had been successfully and environmentally well managed for some 150 years, and replaced it with a once off structural adjustment package of only \$12 million, referred to as the Regional Employment and Community Development Fund.

As a result, there have been substantial closures of timber mills and the associated loss of both full time and part time redgum industry employment throughout the region, not to mention the indirect job losses and consequent economic and social flow-on impacts.

This was without doubt a rushed political decision by the State Government at that time, well known to be influenced by an approaching State election and a desperate attempt by that Government to attract the electoral support of environmental lobby groups. The decision flew strongly in the face of reliable science, common sense and evidence based objections which had been presented to both the Natural Resources Commission Inquiry and to State Government Ministers by professional experts, timber industry and forestry peak bodies, local councils, and businesses, historians, community organisations and residents of the region.

Although not entirely relevant to your current Inquiry, these areas are now the subject of a further likely political decision in relation to the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan, which will unnecessarily divert huge quantities of irrigation water from food and fibre production for environmental purposes. Again, the draft Basin Plan demonstrates a lack of sensible forward strategic planning and contains serious flaws and deficiencies, with the proposed water diversions being driven to a very large extent by extremist and powerful lobby groups.

However, the point is made that in relation to the issue of environmental water resources, one of the recommendations in the Natural Resources Commission redgum report was that an additional 1200 GL of environmental water entitlements be acquired for the forest areas.

**MEMBER COUNCILS** [Albury](#), [Balranald](#), [Berrigan](#), [Carrathool](#), [Conargo](#), [Corowa](#), [Deniliquin](#), [Greater Hume](#), [Griffith](#), [Hay](#), [Jerilderie](#), [Leeton](#), [Murray](#), [Murrumbidgee](#), [Narrandera](#), [Urana](#), [Wakool](#) and [Wentworth](#)

The specific recommendation encouraged the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder to recover and assign to the Murray system an additional 1200 GL as follows:-

*"which should be used to enhance current water entitlements, which include 500GL for the Murray River system under the Living Murray, 100 GL for the Barmah-Millewa Forests and entitlements recently recovered by the Commonwealth Water Holder (under the Commonwealth Government's \$3.1 billion water recovery program".*

Assuming that the proposed Murray Darling Basin Plan is adopted by the Commonwealth Government in its current form, there will certainly be further devastating economic and social consequences for the Murray and western Riverina foodbowl region and its communities.

As you know, water security and availability are the lifeblood of the RAMROC region's food and fibre production, food processing and other water dependent industries, tourism, urban and rural domestic supplies, local industries, businesses, recreation and community services.

At the time of the Redgum National Parks declarations, the State Government was quick to announce that substantially increased tourism numbers to the region would provide positive economic returns for the affected areas, and that NSW National Parks would work closely with all stakeholders to make the Barmah-Millewa Redgum Forest a first class tourist destination, attracting thousands of tourists annually.

This undertaking was in fact viewed quite cynically at the time by our local communities, because similar unfulfilled promises had previously been made in respect of the Yanga National Park, where ridiculous predictions of 50,000 tourists per annum were forecast. The community doubts about those promises have now become evident, with little if any progress being made to develop any of the Redgum National Park areas as tourist attractions.

In reality, tourist numbers to these areas have apparently reduced, very likely because of lack of access and greater restrictions on public use of the forest areas and the absence of any development of iconic features or tourism friendly facilities.

In conclusion, it is critically important to now look to the future and to investigate all possible means by which this deplorable situation can be reversed. RAMROC Councils strongly suggest that such reversal can be achieved by the following actions by the State Government:-

1. That the National Parks legislation be amended, so as to enable the restoration of redgum timber operations in appropriate forest areas, under exactly the same sustainable and environmentally sensitive forest management practices that existed prior to the declarations under the oversight of NSW Forests;
2. That the State Government immediately remove unnecessary access and visitor use restrictions that are currently in place, as well as expediting the development of tourism generating projects and practices for the appropriate forest areas.

The RAMROC Executive Committee would be pleased to address the Standing Committee, in order to support and augment the representations which are also being made by the individual Councils and community stakeholders in the region.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require clarification or more detail on any aspect referred to in this submission.

Yours faithfully,

Ray Stubbs  
Executive Officer