

**Submission
No 42**

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

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FORMAL SUBMISSION INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NSW.

THIS SUBMISSION IS ADDRESSED TO THE GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 5.

Thank you for the opportunity for us to make a submission to the Committee on the Management of Public Land in NSW.

Our submission details information about the Red Gum Forests in Southern NSW in particular. We live in Deniliquin in Southern NSW. Deniliquin is surrounded by the smaller towns of Wakool, Barham, Mathoura and Moama.

These five towns have been very badly impacted on, by the introduction of a National Park in the Millewa, Moira, Gulpa Island and Weiri forests.

The Red Gum Forests have only been part of our region for approximately 150 years. They became forests because when the white man used to move his cattle from place to place and there was a rain event following movement of horses, cattle and man, it created the perfect growing conditions for the young red gum trees. The disturbance of the grasses and reeds was the perfect scenario and the seeds captured the light and moisture which was needed and before anyone knew it a new forest was on the "grow". Prior to this there were no forests. That year would have been around 1848/49. The aboriginal people called these trees "white man's weed". The only trees that then grew in clumps were the box trees on the high ground.

Once the conditions were suitable for the red gums, they grew quickly and abundantly. The next thing to occur was the red gum forests as we know them today, in the making.

From this point on, the timber was used extensively, housing, fencing, bridges, railways, sleepers, furniture.

Good strong, heavy, durable timbers. White ant resistant and could be used for almost anything at all.

From this, became a very viable industry. So then many timber mills started up, employment for timber cutters, wood cutters and mill hands, bullock teams and transport drivers flourished.

While all of this was happening of course, there was more disturbance in the bush and so many more trees grew rapidly, making it viable for many small towns and settlements to spring up around the forests.

From this, the red gum timber industry grew into a huge sustainable productive industry, highly respected, internationally renowned industry.

This very valuable industry which was capable of earning up to eighty million dollars per year allowed communities, citizens, local government and government agencies to work together as one, enabling communities to be independent, pro-active and influential and took pride in the management of the forests which enabled people to be independent and having a real knowledge of the forest and their surrounds. Local knowledge was paramount.

In July, 2010 all of the above was changed against the wishes of the entire region. The process which followed, to make the forests into National Parks was completely flawed. It was a political travesty for our region. The closure, of these sustainable forests have had a far reaching affect, on the whole region and it is still being felt to this very day.

The local councils came together as the RAMROC group of councils to fight this decision, but they fell on totally deaf ears, as Nathan Rees was ready sign us away, with the stroke of a pen, just three hours before his sacking as Premier. The then Premier Nathan Rees, signed off on this only to secure the Greens votes for the upcoming election. The NRC, who was doing the report, was not given enough time to conduct its assessment weeks after the National Park was announced and the NRC admitted that some of its calculations were wrong, but the decision was allowed to stand without further examination.

The whole region was very much against allowing this set of circumstances to stand, but once again it had fallen on deaf ears and leaving all of the communities of the region reeling from the decision.

The decision was totally wrong and flawed. There was no scientific evidence which was backed up by the Institute of Foresters and they did not receive the courtesy of a reply to their concerns. When this National Park was declared, it was at that time, a "one size fits all" approach was taken and for the red gum forests, this is absolutely not what should have happened.

The time has come to make some real decisions, decisions which help and respect our communities. In actual fact the people who live and work in these regions are the real experts. It is these people and communities that the bureaucrats are making the decisions for and on many occasions, the wrong decisions, as they should be listening and genuinely taking on board the information that is being given to them. But throughout this whole process, this has not happened. It has been like dealing with a secret society. This process has to change and communities must be informed and genuinely given the opportunity to have an input into all process where change is taking place on such a huge scale.

One huge concern, which was hardly mentioned by the NRC and has not been recognised by the Greens at all, is the threat of fire. This threat will be a complete catastrophe as there is so much residue on the ground and the overgrowth of the forests since the floods, has not been taken into consideration. Entire sections of the forests, farms, caravan parks, small towns, houses along the roadways will be burnt to the ground and not to mention human life, because of the rapid growth and no management. Roadways in the forest areas have been let go and so, less access for fire trucks, bulldozers or whatever may be needed at the time to control and fight fires.

This is where the "thinnings" process could occur. Thinnings would allow for a less volatile fire problem and it would also allow the "disturbance" of the ground to continue, which the red gums thrive on and would also keep tracks and roads open and accessible.

The closure of the red gum state forest is a classic example of where the decision makers got it wrong, because these forests need to be actively managed and worked.

When this decision was made, it literally brought this region to it's knees.

The devastation and the stopping of work in these working forests and the jobs and employment it stopped, totally wrecked lively hoods, confidence, towns, sporting teams, business such as closures of car yards, shops, small business and it still has not stopped. It has been like a train wreck, moving through communities, making families move, when they have not wanted change for their families. There are, less children at schools, pre-schools and less income for so many.

There was a payout in a lump sum for around 86 people, but in actual fact, around 1,200 have been affected. The payout varied, for some it was good and for others, very bad.

Of course it was a one off payment of \$43 million – one off and this industry was capable of earning \$80 million every single year. This has been an absolute travesty. Where else is this region going to earn \$ 80 million dollars per year.

The most magnificent furniture maker in Barham closed was forced to close, depriving people and communities of his expertise, his apprentices will not now learn the art of red gum furniture making. It was such a pleasure to experience the visits to that beautiful place, but now it has gone.

Did Nathan Rees even know about this very special place, or what he helped take away from Barham and the people, who may have wished to own a beautiful piece of red gum furniture? It was a fantastic place to visit for the tourists, so like all of the towns that have been affected by this decision, yet another significant business has been taken away. This has been the end of an era. We are angry, just so angry to have had all of this taken from us, by the stroke of a pen to do a deal with the minority Greens, who are radical extremists and who listen to no one. They had nothing to lose, but we had so much.

We are now, living in hope, that common sense and strength will prevail, by the decisions of a genuine Committee who can see the bigger picture and have the concerns of the communities of NSW, at heart.

From this inquiry, Public Land Management in NSW must introduce active land management for many regions and a strong decision must be made to re-vitalize the State of NSW.

For example, land that has been made into National Parks must be made to pay rates to the Councils, Shires etc. as this has been a major drain and loss of income to the Councils and Shires as it is a complete "dead loss" of their income.

The management of land should be managed within the regions themselves, not from a giant sized bureaucratic office in the heart of Sydney, where no experience or knowledge is known about any of the particular areas.

Since National Parks have been declared here in this area, our tourists have declined, because of the lack of freedom to access the park, the lack of active management on behalf of the NP, overgrowth of weeds, camping along river systems is almost an impossibility because of continued road closures, caused by the environmental flooding continually flowing through the forest areas.

We appreciate the efforts of this Committee and the setting up of this Inquiry and sincerely trust that something good and beneficial comes from this Inquiry.

The people of this region are resilient, strong and hardworking, but we cannot stand by and see this wonderful resource, which our forefathers and generations have followed on from, taken away from this region by a bureaucracy, working for a campaign that backed a minority, radical group that has had a devastating and long lasting effect on New South Wales.

This decision in conclusion, as we all know, was wholly a political decision for this area and has been so detrimental to the whole region.

For the State of NSW to be in the debt it has been left with by the previous government, this is a wonderful opportunity to overturn this decision and take this forest back to a real, working and profitable forest, where this current Government could take millions and millions of dollars in royalties each year from this forest, create so many more jobs and just maybe this region could be at the forefront to help reduce the debt of NSW more quickly than anticipated.

We would be so pleased to help with the reduction of the debt of NSW.

Hopefully we can take a leaf from Campbell Newman's new reign and re-introduce working forests and Public Lands. He is doing what is best for his State. Let common sense prevail.

Thanking you for the opportunity of making this submission.

18th July, 2012