

Submission
No 284

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially Confidential

Hon. Robert Brown M.L.C.

27.7.2012.

Dear Sir,

National Parks were created in N.S.W. amidst much controversy, local communities clearly had no faith in the N.R.C. report as a petition signed by about 1000 people called for another report into logging in the Riverina. While the N.R.C. report claimed there would only be 120 full time equivalent job losses. Riverina and Murray regional organisation of councils (R.A.M.R.O.C) claimed impact of National Parks on Timber industry would cost more than 1,000 direct and indirect jobs. R.A.M.R.O.C. also claimed \$80 million worth of funding was inadequate and only equated to about 1 years economic value of the Red Gum Timber industry to the region. The general perception among the local communities was that creating National Parks was more about protecting the Green preference votes than Red Gum Forests.

~~This raises the following by Nathan Rees the day before being topped~~

This raises the following questions, why was the National Park decision publicly announced by Nathan Rees the day before being toppled as Premier and before the N.R.C. report was released?

Could it be just a coincidence that on 23/2/2010 Greens M.P Ian Cohen was quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald as saying "It would be a crushing blow to Labor's chances of re-election if the Greens opted to withhold preferences in more than 10 marginal seats. Labor will come begging - but if they don't deliver on these Forests in a sustainable way, they can go to hell." Six days later Frank Sartor declared 107,000 H.A. of Red Gum National Parks, securing the preferences that Ian Cohen had threatened to withhold from the Government?

Considering the V.E.A.C. investigation into the Victorian

Red Gum Forests had taken 3 years, How could the N.S.W. Government properly investigate and formulate a report in just four months? (But perhaps determining how and where Green preferences were needed could easily have been achieved in four months.)

Why did Environment Minister Frank Sartor not commission a cost-benefit analysis before committing \$80 million of N.S.W. taxpayers funds to the project?

Considering that the N.R.C.'s report claimed that if logging was continued in Millewa there would only be 50% of the current work, why had Forest Resource Minister Ian MacDonald declared the Timber Industry sustainable and advised Chris Crump to borrow money just two years prior to purchase extra Firewood licences and equipment?

Legislation to create Millewa National Park was introduced to the N.S.W. Parliament under the Riverina Red Gum Reservations Bill on 22/4/10 with a five year transition period. Frank Sartor claimed this would provide ^{the} Timber Industry and affected communities with time to adjust to a future without timber harvesting. When the bill passed in N.S.W. Parliament on 21/5/2010 why was the original plan for 52% of the Millewa Forest to become National Park on July 1st 2010 and the remainder to become National Park on July 1st 2015 abandoned? There was speculation from Riverina communities that the Government had dropped the transition period in return for Green's preferences at the next years State Election as Environment Groups were demanding a National Park immediately. N.S.W. Premier Kristina Keneally announced another \$17 million to compensate but timber workers would have trouble selling equipment specifically designed for the Red Gum Timber Industry other workers would be paid

\$81,360 as a handout and lose their jobs and would likely have to move elsewhere to seek employment.

N.S.W Forests Products Association Executive Director Russ Ainley said an extra \$17 million was simply not enough.

Some Victorian Timber Workers who took jobs with Parks Victoria as part of a compensation package after Barmah Forest became a National Park 2 years ago have already been retrenched while others have still not found full time employment. Others from small towns like Picola have been forced to move away and still have been unable to sell their houses.

Why has the N.S.W Government continued to insist these new Parks would attract so many visitors despite other Parks continually failing to meet expectations? Balranald was promised \$50,000 tourists a year when the N.S.W. Government converted Yanga Station to a National Park. Three years later (2009) only 1500 Tourists visited Yanga National Park and not only is the Town dying so is Yanga National Park. Fourteen years after Bob Carr said 30,000 Tourists a year would replace their sawmill the people of the small Town of Coolah are still waiting. Soon after the Mill closed 10 Families moved away. Soon after 10 commercial properties including a Motel, Hotel, Supermarket, the N.R.M.A. Service Depot were for sale. These are hardly the signs of a Town enjoying a Tourism Boom. Two years ago after a somewhat shoddy V.E.A.C. investigation Barmah Forest was turned into a Red Gum National Park clearly against the wishes of Local Communities. The former ~~labor~~ Brumby Labor Government and Local Environment Groups promised more funding, better management and an increase in Tourism which would create jobs. Thousands of dollars of Red Gum Parks compensation money has been poured into Barmah Forest Heritage Centre at Nathalia but it is

failing to attract many visitors. Two years on Tourism in Barmah is down by around 50%, in Picola the shop and garage have closed and in Strathmerton the Newsagency-cafe has closed and the Cafe across the Road is now only open some days of the week. The population of Picola and Barmah (3639 postcode) has dropped from 955 people at the 2006 census to 508 people now and the median age of the population has increased from 45 to 52 which is hardly an indorsement for National Park job creation.

The N.S.W Government's response to the report prepared by the centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics which was used by the N.S.W. Environment Minister to assess the economic growth from the Tourism brought about by the creation of River Red Gum National Parks seemed a little dodgy. It predicted 27,100 new visitors a year would spend \$2.3 million within the Riverina Bio-Region. It admitted most of the \$14 million it claims will be spent by Tourists, due to the New Parks, will be spent outside the region by Tourists just getting here and fails to determine where these Tourists will come from. However Tourism research Australia say 60% of visitors to the Riverina are from Victoria. Picnic Point Caravan Park owner Brad Davidson said most of his visitors came from Melbourne. As Victoria has its own Red Gum National Parks one would wonder why visitors would bypass Barmah to go to Millewa as both Parks are similar.

Presuming most Victorians will stay at Barmah it leaves the N.S.W. Government spending \$30 million to replace a \$76 million a year Timber Industry with National Parks which will likely generate just \$1.4 million a year for the region. This hardly represents Economic growth for the region even in the unlikely event that the extra Tourists do turn up. Another report commissioned by the Federal Department of Environment, Climate and Water found Riverina Communities would suffer

an Economic loss of \$105 million a year.

Of course we now know the real truth that there are very few Tourists coming to these new Red Gum National Parks, both in Victoria and N.S.W., and it is unlikely that Tourist numbers will ever ^{achieve} pre-National Park numbers because bans on dogs, hunting and shooting and other restrictive rules have chased them away.

Hopefully this inquiry may help return these Forests to multiple use which will benefit Local Communities and Visitors alike as well as the Forests themselves.

Sincerely yours



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