

**Submission
No 204**

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

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PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GENERAL
PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5.

Submission to:

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NEW SOUTH
WALES.

From: Barrie Dexter
3 August 2012

SUMMARY

This submission considers, in part, two terms of reference of the Inquiry into Management of Public Land in New South Wales with reference to River Red gum Forests in the Southern Riverina. Comments are based on the author's experience of the forests and wetlands over 52 years, including participation in both the Victorian Environment Assessment Council and NEW South Wales Natural Resources Commission assessments over 2004 to 2010

The conduct/process of the assessments is briefly reported on under Term of Reference 1(a). It is concluded that the process was flawed; outcomes were preordained and the underlying presumption that only National Park land tenure can guarantee the preservation of the environment is challenged.

Under Term of Reference 3 the challenge is taken up for developing a model that provides for conservation outcomes which utilise principles of "sustainable use". It is concluded that conservation outcomes in accord with the Ramsar Convention on wetlands, a requirement under the (Commonwealth) *Water Act* (2007) in developing a Plan for the Murray-Darling Basin, can be effectively achieved. The proviso is that governments must have sound policy directions and laws in place, demand and support diligent management and the managing agency the culture and skills to give effect to the policy.

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SUBMISSION TO: PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GENERAL
PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5.

SUBJECT: INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

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Organisation/Capacity: Private citizen/concerned conservationist.
Experience: Over 50 years experience in natural resource management including research and development in the silvics and silviculture of native and exotic forests, factors affecting bushfire behaviour, the planned use of fire, and the management of national and other parks.
I have worked in and have extensive knowledge on the ecology and management of the River Red Gum forests along the Murray River.
A list of my personal and collaborative publications on the subject is provided as background to this submission.

Why I have made this submission.

I graduated as a forester in 1954 and entered the Victorian Public Service [Forests Commission Victoria]. Towards the end of 1960 after completing a BScFor(Melb) I was posted to Barmah Forest District to investigate the natural regeneration of river red gum; at the time a politically driven decision aimed at resolving the then "hot" issue that cattle grazing was the cause of lack of regeneration. As it turned out under the grazing regime this was a false assumption.

This resulted in a life-long interest in the river red gum forests which already had a rich history. Prior to white settlement, indigenous people had well developed laws and practices based on manipulating the land and water resources to sustain their welfare and well-being.

Since European settlement the forests have made a huge contribution to Australia's early development through provision of durable timbers for marine and land transport infrastructure and now prized for speciality and general purpose durable timber and firewood.

Over the years many false assumptions abound and remain untested; in some cases deliberately promoted to the detriment of the community.

I am convinced, on the basis of my accumulated experience that these public forests [and others] can continue to make a significant contribution to our social, economic, environmental and cultural needs if managed under the principles of ecologically sustainable development. The tenure of the land is not a pre-requisite for their conservation.

So I am encouraged by your terms of reference to contribute to your inquiry, particularly for the management actions on public land that provide for conservation [wise use] outcomes which utilise the principles of "sustainable use".

SUBMISSION OVERVIEW

This submission is confined to just two of the Terms of reference; viz:

- * 1(a) *“The conversion of Crown Land, State Forests and agricultural land into National park estate or other types of conservation areas.”*

Matters of “process and assessment of potential operational, economic, social impacts” are briefly considered with reference to *“River Red Gum State Forests in the Southern Riverina”* including lessons learnt from a similar process in adjacent forest in Victoria.

- * Terms of Reference 3, *“Examination of models for the **management of public land, including models that provide for conservation outcomes which utilises the principles of ‘sustainable use’**”*. These are discussed in more detail again in the context of River Red Gum Forests in the Southern Riverina and provisions in the [Commonwealth] *Water Act (2007)* for their management including environmental watering, to meet national and international obligations under the Ramsar Convention.

Terms of Reference 1(a) will be addressed first.

1. ToR 1(a). Observations on the process and assessment on the conversion of Crown Land and State Forest into National Park estate.

The following observations are based on experience gained in directly participating¹ in the recent Victorian Environment Assessment Council's [VEAC] River Red Gum Forest Investigation² (from 2005 to 2008) and subsequently, the New South Wales Natural Resource Commission's [NSWNRC] – Riverina Bioregion – Regional Forest Assessment – River Red Gum and Woodland Forests in 2009-2010.

(1) Victorian Environment Assessment Council

The VEAC Investigation was politically compromised from Day 1 particularly through press leaks as the following history reveals.

Government policy and media reporting.

The due process and outcomes of the investigation suffered from many preconceptions and false assumptions such as:

- * Victorian Government's National Parks and Biodiversity Policy – 2006 Victorian election. The Premier and Minister for the Environment pledged – para 6, page 9; *“Create new Red Gum National and Forest Parks if recommended by VEAC”*.

The Government signalled some 16 months in advance; via an election promise, that it expects VEAC to recommend creation of new National and Forest Parks.

- * This was reinforced by various media; for example, a report (Kristin Favaloro) in the Shepparton News, Monday 20th November 2006, page 4 headed; *“Tentative nod for National Park Plan”* –

Leading conservation groups have cautiously welcomed a commitment to create new National Parks along the Murray River.

The commitment by the Victorian Government was made after the Victorian Environment Assessment Council conducted an independent investigation of river red gum public land in Northern Victoria.

This is two years prior to the government announcing its endorsement of its appointed Reference Group's findings on VEAC's final recommendations on 30th December 2008.

VEAC social and economic assessment.

VEAC's proposals concentrated on non-productive use values of the forests and knowingly proposed changes that would decimate sections of the community viz:

Page 68, Draft Proposals Paper:

“Most of the benefits from the proposed recommendations result from non-use values for environmental protection, which are heavily dependent on adequate environmental water. These benefits would accrue mostly to people outside the Investigation area, especially in Melbourne, while the costs of the proposed recommendations would be largely borne ... in the areas near where public land timber harvesting and grazing are focussed. The towns of Cohuna, Koondrook, Nathalia and Picola are likely to be most sensitive to these effects, as they would be occurring in the context of the contraction of local economies and populations in these areas that has been experienced in recent years.”

¹ Includes personal submissions to these Inquiries, participating on committees and contributing to industry submissions recorded on VEAC and NSWNRRC websites.

² A comprehensive evaluation of these issues and proposals for an equitable resolution of issues is given in: *Conservation and Community – a Community Plan for the Multiple Use of Public Lands in VEAC's River Red Gum Forests Investigation Area*. Prepared by the Rivers and Red Gum Environment Alliance. July 2008.

Page 85 Draft Proposals Paper:

"Overall the towns of Cohuna, Koondrook, Nathalia and Picola are likely to be the most sensitive to any job losses (and potential population losses).

At an individual level there are also a range of potential impacts of the loss of employment for individuals and their families including poverty and financial hardship, reduced future work opportunities, reduced participation in mainstream community life, strains in family relationships, and intergenerational welfare dependency."

Page 40 Socio–Economic Assessment:

"There may also be psychological difficulties that can cause a great deal of distress to sufferers and their families; prevent a return to work; and be costly to the community (Ganley 2002-2003)."

Are these statements to be applauded for their candour and transparency in reporting OR are they a condemnation of VEAC for their inability to equitably resolve key issues? I am very much of the latter opinion.

Fundamental assumption underpinning final recommendations.

There was the underlying belief/assumption of VEAC Councillors, VEAC executive and most of the bureaucracy that the only land tenure that would ensure the preservation of forest and wetlands ecological values for future generations was National Park status. Certainly, this was the position of green activists and many residing in metropolises and academia.

Turning now to the New South Wales Assessment.

(2) New South Wales Natural Resources Commission.

Commissioner Dr John Williams in the foreword to the Preliminary Assessment Report stated, *"The question before us is how best to conserve, protect, use and manage this most valuable asset into the future for all Australians"*.

From attending community meetings in the Riverina and in the forests with NSW NRC staff there is no doubt in my mind that VEAC's deliberations overly influenced the potential outcomes for NSW NRC's assessment. They certainly cemented the close bonds with those groups in Victoria and New South Wales that wanted to convert State Forest to National Park land tenure.

Initially, there were some in the [NSW] communities who felt reasonably secure, because of the huge changes to public land tenure in Victoria, there were enough RRG National Parks, and the present status in NSW would largely be retained. Some in the timber industry and local government who had experienced the tenacity of green activism knew better. So too did irrigation farmers who had followed VEAC's call for 4,000 gegalitres (GL) to meet environmental water requirements [despite a rebuke by Victoria's Premier] a figure also nominated by NSW NRC. As the assessment progressed, those that attended NRC community briefings, rather than genuine consultation, soon came to realise that the "science" underpinning the assessment was oriented to the premise that only National Park land tenure could guarantee environmental protection. Economic uses such as timber harvesting were regarded as incompatible with preserving ecological/environmental values. The farmers' fears were subsequently confirmed by closer scrutiny of the *Water Act* (2007) and the workings of the Murray Darling Basin Authority [MDBA]. Not unnaturally, the science was often concerned with what is most precious to the individual scientist. Such research reports, often peer reviewed for publication in prestigious scientific journals, make an important contribution to knowledge. However, papers covering a narrow field rarely consider the often competing and conflicting demands involved in meeting single issue environmental criteria. It is the responsibility of the land and resource manager to take a holistic approach, minimise competing and conflicting

issues by active/adaptive management to conserve a wide range of environmental values and deliver social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits for the whole community.

As with VEAC, the NSW NRC gave lip service to seriously exploring the potential for improved management under existing land tenures. The presumption was, on the eyeball evidence of the condition of the forests, that State Forest tenure did not adequately protect environmental values.

In my opinion this view was strongly influenced by four factors:

- * The successful campaigns relentlessly prosecuted by green groups widely reported by local, regional and capital city media;
- * The prolonged and debilitating el Nino event which hugely impacted on the overall appearance/lack of vitality of the forests and wetlands;
- * Satisfying perceived sectional expectations, particularly in metropolises, by increasing environmental protection via National Park status. Conveniently, this also coincided with the perceived imperative by government to shore up voter support in this largely city demographic. As with VEAC, the 'bush' was expendable in this process;
- * The lack of high quality resource data required to underpin sustainable yields of timber products. In Victoria, the responsible Department discontinued updating timber resource inventory early in VEAC's investigations on the prejudged belief that much of the resource would end up in National Parks and so the effort was not warranted. This was a serious situation because the most recent inventory available [2002] gathered between 1987 and 1990, was considered to be inadequate [one star out of five] by an Independent Expert Data Reference Group³. These matters are discussed in more detail in Community Plan for Multiple-use of Public Land⁴.

Similarly, the NSW data had not been upgraded for many years and it was not until late in the assessment that attempts were made to rectify this serious deficiency.

This is not a responsibility of industry whose licensed harvest is based on the sustainable yield calculated on the growth of the forest. Of course growth fluctuates according to seasonal conditions and overall yield is affected by pests, diseases and particularly losses due to bushfires. Resource security is fundamental to sustaining a viable industry and it is vital to have a regular reappraisal of inventory to underpin sustainable management.

The NRC's advisor on forestry matters was never convinced and indeed confused on resource issues and the inherent growth capacity of RRG in well managed stands.

It is also significant that neither VEAC nor NSW NRC members included an experienced general practitioner in forest management.

Term of Reference (2) for the NRC assessment, viz; *"Recommend conservation, protection, economic and ecological sustainable use of public land in the bioregion"* was addressed without recognising that applying principles of ecological sustainable use could cater for both conservation/protection and economic use of the forests in accordance with the international treaty, the Ramsar Convention.

Submissions supporting retention of State Forest tenure to permit on-going multiple-use management, including timber production, were not successful in persuading the NRC, nor ultimately the government, that this could provide an acceptable level of protection. Significantly, the NRC made only a tokenistic examination of the potential for improved management under existing land tenure. However, these groups were successful in getting government policy [Vic &

³ Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment – Estimate of Sawlog Resource – Mid-Murray Forest Management Area. March 2002. ISBN 0 73115183 6.

⁴ *Conservation and Community – a Community Plan for the Multiple Use of Public Lands in VEAC's River Red Gum Forests Investigation Area*. Prepared by the Rivers and Red Gum Environment Alliance. July 2008.

NSW] to recognise that forest ecosystems in National Parks must be actively managed, including 'ecological thinning', for their long term conservation.

Another important consideration is the wide support and scope, acknowledged in the draft MDB Plan, for publicly funded environmental infrastructure works within the floodplain forests and wetlands to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental watering. There is the potential here to significantly improve environmental outcomes using significantly less water than either VEAC's or NSW NRC's preferred over-bank flow proposals. These works can only be assessed on a case by case basis in keeping with the particular attributes of the reach of the river and attendant floodplain.

This leads into the second part of this submission.

2. Term of Reference (3) “Examination of models for the management of public land, including models that provide for conservation outcomes which utilise the principles of ‘sustainable use’”.

(1) Background.

Since the mid-1960s the community has become much more conscious of conservation of their natural heritage, providing new challenges for managing not just forest stands but forest ecosystems. Competing and conflicting demands made for significant management challenges. Environmental activists, particularly in metropolises divorced from management reality were successful in convincing government that National Park status was the only land tenure that could preserve the forests for future generations largely through passive management. Over the past three decades, single issues championed by groups not involved in the reality of integrating competing and conflicting demands into the holistic management of complex ecosystems have dominated debate. In the last decade while provision of environmental water was finally recognised as paramount for conserving flood dependent ecosystems, timber production is still perceived as destructive of environmental values.

Significantly, there is little independent evaluation that environmental values are being met in conservation reserves. In strong contrast, timber is harvested under strict codes of practice by world standards. Compliance with regulatory provisions is independently assessed, transparently reported and penalties apply for non-compliance.

(2) Obligations on developing management models for riverine red gum forests that provide for conservation outcomes which utilise principles of sustainable use.

There are two key interrelated obligations governing active forest management that apply to riverine forests regardless of land tenure.

- i) The Ramsar Convention (RC) on wetlands** provides a framework for national action and international co-operation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. The RC is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem. The RC can be applied to both private and public land. The majority of public forests concerning this submission came under this international treaty in 1982 (Victoria) and 2003 (New South Wales). At the time of listing most were under State forest tenure and managed for multiple-use, including timber production.

At the centre of RC philosophy is the “wise use” concept defined as “*maintenance of their (wetlands) ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches within the context of sustainable development*”. This is directly linked to principles of ecologically sustainable development.

There is no dispute that the most threatening process to the conservation of the forests and wetlands is inappropriate flood regimes [much reduced flooding/unseasonal flooding]. In recognition of this, environment groups are threatening a legal challenge to the proposed MDB Plan if environmental water needs are not met on the grounds this would breach obligations under the Ramsar convention powers enshrined in the *Water Act* (2007). There is considerable speculation that this challenge may eventually succeed.

In contrast, timber production is regarded as a potential moderate threat which is negated by highly regulated management actions specified in management plans. Periodic reviews of Ramsar compliance have confirmed this. There are no grounds for dispute under Ramsar’s ‘wise use’ framework when economic uses of the forests, including timber production are managed under ecologically sustainable development criteria.

ii) **Sustainable use/active management /adaptive management under the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (PESD).** ESD is an internationally recognised concept which strongly integrates the conservation of biodiversity with economic development and community well being and welfare.

A legislated example of principles of ecologically sustainable development can be found in Part 1, Section 4 of the *Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act (2003)*. See Table 1.

The (Commonwealth) *Water Act (2007)* empowers the Federal Government by using its powers under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)* to meet Australia's obligations to international treaties (in this case particularly the Ramsar Convention) to control land and water management actions in Ramsar listed RRG forests.

In preparing the MDB Plan Under the *Water Act (2007)*, the MDB Authority and the Minister must take into account (among others) the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

In my opinion the ESD principles defined in the *Water Act (2007)* are not sufficiently explicit. They do not adequately reflect the concept of "wise use" defined in Ramsar as "*maintenance of ecological character ... within the context of sustainable development*". See Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison of principles of ecologically sustainable development from (Commonwealth) *Water Act* (2007) [see page 19, Definitions] and guiding principles of ecologically sustainable development from Part 1, Section 4 of the *Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act* (2003) [Act No 15/2003]. [The emphasis is mine.]

<i>Water Act (2007)</i> (Commonwealth)	<i>Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act</i> (Vic) (2003)
Page 19. Definitions.	Section 4 Subsections 1, 2 & 3.
<p>(2) <i>The following principles are principles of ecologically sustainable development:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) <i>decision-making processes should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equitable considerations;</i> (b) <i>if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation;</i> (c) <i>the principle of inter-generational equity—that the present generation should ensure that the health, biodiversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations;</i> (d) <i>the conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity should be a fundamental consideration in decision-making;</i> (e) <i>improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms should be promoted.</i> 	<p>(1) <i>Ecologically sustainable development is development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains ecological processes on which life depends.</i></p> <p>(2) <i>The objectives of ecologically sustainable development are –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) <i>to enhance individual and community well-being and welfare by following a path of economic development that safeguards the welfare of future generations;</i> (b) <i>to provide for equity within and between generations;</i> (c) <i>to protect biological diversity and maintain essential ecological processes and life support systems.</i> <p>(3) <i>The following are considered as guiding principles of ecologically sustainable development –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) <i>that decision-making processes should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations;</i> (b) <i>if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation;</i> (c) <i>the need to consider the global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies;</i> (d) <i>the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy which can enhance the capacity for environmental protection;</i> (e) <i>the need to maintain and enhance international competitiveness in an environmentally sound manner;</i> (f) <i>the need to adopt cost-effective and flexible policy instruments such as improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms;</i> (g) <i>the need to facilitate community involvement in decisions and actions on issues that affect the community.</i>

(3) Developing a model that provides for conservation outcomes which utilises principles of sustainable use.

First decide on a definition of principles of sustainable use and identify the outcomes and attributes [social, economic, environmental and cultural] to be met. The challenge is how to achieve them on the ground. People's perception of what they would like to see and experience varies enormously. Certainly, it is not the drab uniformity of a plantation-like scene, but a mixture of open plains, swamps, billabongs, dense thickets of regeneration and more open maturing stands with scattered old growth/veteran trees. The red gum stands need constant management to maintain a healthy forest and habitat for flora and fauna. Thinning need not be uniform. Coarse woody debris need not be uniform and must be considered from a fire management as well as habitat perspective. Trees with hollows do not need to be uniformly distributed but can be clumped and still meet habitat criteria. In this way one can have areas of productive forest for timber and areas where harvesting and other activities are temporarily or permanently excluded.

The following is a list of activities that could be permitted in riverine red gum forest including National Parks under ESD principles. They are compatible with Ramsar criteria and do not threaten environmental values if they are properly managed in appropriate zones.

Zoning was introduced into Victorian riverine State Forests, to facilitate conserving a wide range of uses and values, following the Land Conservation Council, Victoria final recommendations for the Murray Valley Study Area (1985). Zones may be permanent or brought in at specific times, for example, Special Protection Zone [SPZ] when Superb Parrot is nesting. Year round prescriptions protect trees with hollows.

All harvesting operations under principles of ecologically sustainable development [PESD] can achieve a degree of ecological benefit and maintain forest health. There is no need for the policy to have a (poorly defined) term such as "ecological thinning" in an attempt to imply 'green' thinning. Sustainable timber production provides employment and income and royalties can contribute to management costs. Zoning is a practical way of managing a wide range of uses and values including cultural values, some requiring more protection than others. A guide to activities under principles of ecologically sustainable development that could be permitted within public forests managed under the Ramsar Convention is given in Table 2.

Table 2. A guide to activities undertaken under PESD that could be permitted within public forests managed under the Ramsar Convention.

Activity	Special Protection Zone	Special Management Zone	General Management Zone
Horse-riding	Conditional	Conditional	Yes
Dog walking on lead	No	Conditional	Yes
Hunting	Conditional	Conditional	Yes
Camping	Conditional	Conditional	Yes
Bush walking	Conditional	Yes	Yes
Trailbike riding	No	No	Conditional
Bus touring	No	Yes	Yes
Sawlog/sleeper production	No	Conditional	Yes
Firewood production	Conditional	Conditional	Yes
Post/pole production	No	Conditional	Yes
Firewood collection	Conditional	Conditional	Conditional
Regrowth thinning	Conditional	Conditional	Yes
Cattle grazing	Conditional	Conditional	Conditional
Apiculture	Conditional	Conditional	Yes
Extractive industries	No	Conditional	Yes
Fuel reduction burning	Conditional	Conditional	Conditional
Road & track construction & maintenance	Conditional	Conditional	Yes

Notes:

1. Yes = permitted subject to standard constraints and/or prescriptions i.e. Codes of Practice for Timber Production and Fire Management.

2. Conditional = will be regulated by management staff subject to the particular values and conditions prevailing within the zone – decisions made at local level and included in reserve management plan. May be seasonally flexible.

3. Road and track construction and maintenance – must be permitted at all times within SPZ and SMZ to maintain existing roads and tracks and perhaps make new trails for wildfire suppression and snig tracks for timber extraction. Temporary tracks are rehabilitated in accordance with Codes of Practice’

A zoning system initially worked well but this and any other management model that involves commercial harvesting of timber [even under the strictest of regulations] is an anathema to green activists. Their objective is to stop harvesting in all native forests, an outcome successfully achieved by having Government redesignate State Forest and Crown Land to National Park.

In my opinion, there is no reason, based on science and governing Acts, which precludes conservation outcomes, utilising principles of sustainable use, being met in river red gum forests in the Southern Riverina whether public land is designated State Forest or National Park.

The crucial caveat is that Government must have sound policy and laws in place, demand and support diligent management and the managing agency, the culture and skills, to give effect to the policy.

Finally, a word on forest fire management.

Forest fire management

Neither VEAC nor the NSW NRC took the threat of bushfires seriously in these forests. Careful attention should be made to forest fire management as bushfire is a serious risk to forest values and uses and to adjacent private land.

The following is the Abstract from a paper submitted to the NSW NRC. The full text can be provided if required.

Fire history and fire management to conserve social, economic and environmental values in floodplain river red gum forests.

"Flooding & fire are the major factors in the dynamics of the Riverina/Central Murray floodplain river red gum forests.

Frequency, season & duration of flooding control the timing & extent of prescribed fire & the influence of lightning-sourced fire. Prolonged drought produces an 8 – 10 month serious fire risk. Wildfire is not such a dominant feature of the forests, compared with the foothill & mountain forests, but they are highly sensitive to fire.

Fire danger is high to extreme on many days each year exacerbated by drought conditions & lack of active forest management in some forests.

"Broad-acre" fuel reduction burning is not an accepted practice & has the potential to significantly harm many values & uses. As yet, there are no prescriptions for prescribed burning many of the ecological vegetation classes [EVCs] in the floodplain forests. Grassy & herbaceous fuels make a significant contribution to the fine fuel load. A detailed description is provided on the role of these fuels in fire management.

Controlled grazing of domestic stock is useful for seasonally reducing the grassy and palatable weed component of fine fuels to more manageable levels from a forest fire management perspective and meet minimum parameters for the conservation of grasses without compromising other biological values.

It is concluded that there is no point in introducing inappropriate prescribed burning & failing to quickly & aggressively suppress wildfire, both of which reduce to ash & charcoal essential ecological values requiring conservation.

River red gum forest destroyed by wildfire must be regenerated & actively managed under the principles of ecologically sustainable development."

CONCLUSIONS

1. Both the Victorian and NSW Investigations were prejudged with outcomes pre-ordained and thus fatally flawed, particularly their assessments of social and economic matters. Some environmental assessments lacked scientific rigour, biased on the underlying presumption that only National Park status could preserve the forests for future generations.
2. Multiple use forests demonstrably have a long history of successful adaptive management but assessments gave only lip service to seriously exploring the potential for improved management under existing land tenures.
3. A National Park status is not the only management model that provides environmental protection. Conservation outcomes, in accord with Ramsar Convention “wise use” [ESD], can be achieved using models based on principles of sustainable use independent of land tenure.
4. Works to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental watering remain the highest priority for the long term conservation of forests and wetlands.
5. Government must have sound policy directives and laws in place, demand and support diligent management and the managing agency the culture and skills to give effect to the policy.

Barrie Dexter
3 August 2012.

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