

**Submission
No 214**

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

Name: Mr John Harris

Date received: 5/08/2012

The conversion of the River Red Gum State Forests of the Southern Riverina into National Park Estate was a hastily made error, based on poor information for short-term political gain.

This conversion is an ideological experiment that has negatively affected the ongoing prosperity and confidence of the local communities

SUBMISSION TO:

**GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5
INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

CHAired BY: The Hon Robert Brown MLC

FOCUS OF THIS SUBMISSION:

**THE CONVERSION OF THE RIVER RED GUM STATE
FORESTS IN THE SOUTHERN RIVERINA INTO
NATIONAL PARK ESTATE**

SUBMITTED BY:

JOHN HARRIS

3U

Please consider this submission in regards to inquiry on the management of public land in New South Wales, including State Forests and National Park estate. My submission will address the points in the terms of reference for general standing committee number 5 as downloaded from the NSW Government website.

The conversion of the Red Gum Forests of the Southern Riverina into National Park Estate was a hastily made mistake, based on poor information and for short term political gain. An ideological experiment based on the premise that 'one hat fits all' that struck at the ongoing prosperity and confidence of the local communities.

Unfortunately one of the longest periods of drought in our history since white settlement was used emotively by city based pressure groups to campaign on the basis of concern for the environment beyond our capital cities. This led to a poorly informed campaign, based on ideological 'motherhood statements' of intent, with little practical supporting evidence, for purely political aims, coupled with scant regard for the obvious evidence of the existing sound management practices at this time. The result of this campaign was the conversion of large areas of previously well-managed State Parks being converted to National Parks.

This decision deprived our community of a thriving industry that was a significant employer and financial contributor to our communal well being, from being able to use our naturally renewable forest resources to produce environmentally sensible products.

Jobs and prosperity were traded for an ideological experiment based on emotional misinformation.

The conversion has also hampered the freedom of recreational holidaymakers and restricted their basic rights to use our forests and waterways for their sport and enjoyment.

Since the River Red Gum Forests of the Riverina have been converted to national Parks, the knowledge acquired over generations of forest users since white settlement, has been ignored. In particular the experience in regard to the successful thinning of the forests which had been carried out by the commercial users of the forests working in close partnership with Forests NSW and the Australian people to harvest and care for this wonderful renewable resource.

With the stated aim of thinning the forest to allow grandparent trees to survive and grow more branches that will eventually hollow and fall to create creature habitat, the National Parks are attempting to return the Parks to a time when the area under management was a timbered plain rather than ensure the long term viability of the forests as they existed when they became national Parks.

The National Parks intention is to allow forty-five tons per hectare growth to remain on the forest floor. Experienced forest users believe that this is far too much usable fuel and local populations are genuinely concerned that their forests will be severely damaged and may even be burnt to the ground in future fire risk periods.

This is also a serious OHS risk to all who border the Parks and all those who would be required to and be expected to, lend a hand when these fires take hold.

Stock are no longer welcome in these parks and it was largely due to a regulated stocking rate that undergrowth and weeds were kept in check and the forest floor maintained at a safe amount of fuel over the summer periods.

The State Parks were being run along strict guidelines in respect to timber gathering and the joint husbandry of the Parks management, recreational users and the timber industry. The forest was in the best possible condition, roads were maintained and fishers, shooters and campers all benefited from the others input.

The loss of the timber and associated industries has had a dramatic affect on the District and the towns that depended on them. This is evident in the general confidence and fiscal health of these towns.

The social cost in losing an industry employing more than one hundred people from the communities that depended on the River Red gum Forests of the Southern Riverina would correlate to over twenty thousand people being put out of work in one fell swoop in Sydney and deserved a far more serious debate. (1)

This trashing of one of our small community's, basically drought proof, commercial enterprises is even more peculiar when set alongside the growing concern for the increasing size of our major cities and a shrinking of population in our country areas.

The community was assured that 'eco tourism' would more than compensate for the loss of these jobs and revenue would pour into the area through tourism and associated enterprises. As expected this has proven to be unsubstantiated spin and while a worthy idea to pursue, as it always has and will be by local business people, will only ever add up to a small percentage of the amount of income lost to the local

community and by extension the State and Commonwealth's coffers. Eco-tourism was always going to struggle to reach large numbers in the Red Gum areas because anyone who resides in, or visits Australia doesn't have to go far to see a gum tree.

This is especially so as far as attracting people to the forests of the Riverina. Forests that on the best evidence available are less than one hundred and fifty years old.

Locals and visitors, eco tourists included, would benefit better by exploring the beauty of the forests as they were before their conversion to National Parks because of the industry maintained tracks and the safer situation due to grazing having kept down the summer grass.

The argument that stock destroy the native flora and fauna is not sustainable under the magnifying glass of practical results due to the fact that all these were in tact when the conversion occurred. Any truly susceptible area would always have been protected, as was any block where young trees were growing.

A walk along the border of a National park would soon convince any fair-minded person that it is less than reasonable that a landholder should have to cope with the weeds and vermin who use the forest for protection and then encroach on bordering properties, destroying and consuming with minimal control.

Farmers, landholders and users are paying a significant price for the misplaced utopian ideas of a politically powerful few.

Timber and especially red gum is a renewable natural source. It isn't dug out of the ground, it takes carbon di-oxide out of the atmosphere, especially when trees are young and vigorously growing and takes less energy than its competitors to manufacture into a usable product. Why wouldn't we use our own resource instead of expecting those overseas to use their forests to supply our needs. A tree whether farmed or growing naturally, requires the same amount of land and water and with a natural forest we can have a viable environment where industry operates side by side with recreational pursuits and public benefit.

Although it would be more sensible and cost effective for our society to revert to the previous State Park system where management was based on international forestry standards, I understand that there are many competing opinions and it may be necessary to reach a compromise to return to sanity.

State Park management could allow a small section in each Park to be set aside to accommodate the ideological aim of the pressure groups who have been at the forefront of the original conversion to National Park.

The majority of our forest should then be reverted back to a State Park, thinned, used and cared for by industry in the time proven practical way that will benefit the community, the forest and all forest users as a whole.

We need to move on this quickly because as previously stated it is imperative that we don't lose the skills and experience from the area and we restart an industry that uses a renewable source and deals in the basic needs of our society.

It is evident that the closer you go to the heart of a city and more especially the sections of those cities that were the first to be settled by white settlement the more the original landscape has been violated.

This is of course not to say that there is no beauty, but it is reasonable to say that it is far removed from its original landscape before white settlement.

It would be ludicrous to suggest that these areas be razed and returned to their original state, but no more so than the premise that timber should not be harvested from a forest that is no older than European settlement, or to be fair from any other forested area that our natural forest resources can be sensibly used for commercial pursuit. After all timber is a renewable asset and proper husbandry will ensure that the timber and eco system of the forests will prosper forever.

After a prolonged period of drought the weather pattern has changed and we have again witnessed the flood and drought cycle of our Australian landscape. Once again and as expected by those who understand the process, the weather cycle supplied the water that is needed by our forests to prosper.

I firmly believe that these forests were converted to National Parks for political reasons only and not based on the objective evidence available or with the best interest of the forest's future or the dependant local communities in view.

People who love the forest, know the forest, lived with, and in the forest before the idea of National Parks became the aim of a small pressure group within our society, were satisfied that these forests were healthy and well managed for all society under the previous guidelines and the shared care of the State Government, commercial entities, anglers, shooters and recreational groups.

The system of locking up our National Parks has been a failed enterprise and the failures of the current management system need to be redressed. Timber gathering needs to be reinstated as soon as possible, before all the practical knowledge and ability to harvest this wonderful resource is lost or the whole lot is up in smoke.

In conclusion I implore this enquiry to recommend that the River Red Gum Forests of the Southern Riverina be reverted back to their previous management under

Forests NSW that ensured that these assets were best used for the benefit of all Australians. Every Australian should have the right to fish and hunt with due regard to the presiding regulations along our rivers and in our State Forests and the poor science and misguided attitude of, 'the few knowing what is best for all', should be resisted and common sense once again be the main guide to our decisions regarding the use of our natural assets.

Notes. (1)

The figures here are based on the assumption that the population in the areas surrounding the River Red Gum Forests of the Southern Riverina. Deniliquin, Mathoura, Balranald, Barham and Wakool, will add up to around 20,000 people. The population of Sydney is said to be 4.2 million people.

The loss of 100 jobs in the timber industry is an estimation based on reported figures and allowing for others that I don't have, to arrive at a reasonable number of affected employees and contractors. This equates to .5% of the estimated 20,000 population and this figure of .5% is equal to 20,000 +people in the city of Sydney.

I have brought these figures to attention because it had apparently escaped the original enquiry's attention that a significant number of working people would lose their income and also because of the loss of industry, the value of their homes and assets would also plummet.

Regardless of compensation packages, I'm sure that any politician in the city would be diving for cover if they had dared to bring this result down on their own electorates.