

**Submission
No 434**

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

Organisation: Deniliquin Council

Name: Mr Des Bilske

Date received: 5/09/2012

FF

31 August 2012

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

RECEIVED

05 SEP 2012

GPSC's

Dear Minister

Public Land Management

Further to verbal submissions made at the Public Hearing held in Deniliquin on 2 August, 2012 I wish to make the following points regarding the National Parks, and while Council participated in the process in good faith it is disappointed in the outcome.

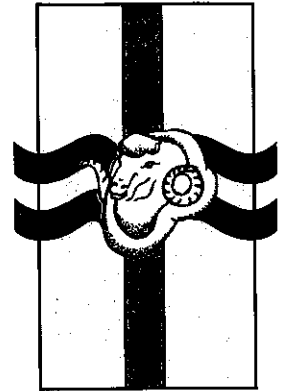
Council is of the view that since significant areas of this region have been declared National Park there are community concerns about a number of items. These concerns include the apparent lack of resources for the control of bush fires and noxious weeds in National Parks. The people of this district are very concerned that the change in management of the State forest has resulted in increased fire danger and the spread of noxious weeds into neighbouring properties.

With the declaration of National Parks, the communities of the Riverina expected a significant increase in budget for National Parks Service to appropriately manage these parks.

Assistance Needed

The loss of the timber industry has had a significant adverse impact on the region. The \$80M restructure package has not had any effect on employment in Deniliquin. The regional economic loss of \$120M and the direct job losses of approximately 200 have had a marked influence on many of the local businesses with several being forced to close after surviving the 10 years of drought the continually declining customer base has been too much to sustain.

Whilst Council agrees that it was appropriate for structural adjustment packages to be paid to timber workers and timber mill owners, it believes that additional structural adjustment packages are required to assist the communities themselves. There are many people affected by this decision, apart from those directly employed in the timber industry.



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be directed to the
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The primary source of home heating in much of the Riverina is by firewood and while access to the forest for firewood is still offered under permit, the areas available have been limited. Also many residents are not equipped to collect their own firewood. This has directly affected the availability of firewood and its price which has increased from less than \$100.00 per tonne to as much as \$280.00 per tonne. In many parts of the region there is no alternative form of heating except for relatively expensive electrical heating.

While it is understood that firewood collection is permitted in regional parks and possibly in indigenous protected areas a major source of firewood in the Deniliquin township was the use of off cuts from the Gulpa Sawmill. This mill has now closed removing a significant source of firewood for the community.

Infrastructure

One of the ways to further assist the region is through an investment in natural gas. Due to a decline in industry and population it is not viable as a stand alone project, however with government assistance to meet the project cost shortfall it would become a catalyst to attract some new industries to the area.

It is suggested that natural gas be extended throughout the region in two directions,

- 1) from Finley to Deniliquin to Mathoura and on to Moama, forming a ring main to improve the natural gas supply to Moama and to also provide natural gas to Deniliquin and Mathoura.
- 2) provision of natural gas to Darlington Point from Griffith. It is suggested it may be possible to extend this main to Coleambally, Jerilderie and then join up with the natural gas grid at Finley.

This would provide economic assistance for industrial expansion at Darlington Point, Coleambally, Jerilderie, Deniliquin and Mathoura.

It is not suggested that the government entirely fund the construction of a gas supply main to these towns through the region. It is suggested that the state government directly, or indirectly, by obtaining federal assistance, subsidise the natural gas company so that the construction of such a pipeline is financially feasible.

There would be a need to assist the local communities in the extension of a reticulation network throughout the towns. There would also be a need to assist homes to install natural gas appliances. Many of the residents of the region, who do have wood fires, are elderly and of poor financial means. Assistance in conversion to natural gas would be needed for these people. It would also be anticipated there would be environmental benefits in such a program.

Another major infrastructure boost to this region, which would help tourism, would be the provision of regular passenger transport services by an airline to Deniliquin. Deniliquin Council has been searching for such a service for a number of years. Council intends investing substantially in airport infrastructure in Deniliquin and needs assistance. Both the Victorian and Queensland governments have special funds set aside for airport infrastructure at regional airports. It is strongly suggested that such a scheme be introduced in NSW to assist in the redevelopment of essential airport infrastructure. In order to cater for larger aircraft, the main runway at the Deniliquin Airport needs to be extended. Deniliquin Council has made a submission to the Federal government under its Local Infrastructure Program - Strategic Projects to fund the construction of a parallel runway at Deniliquin. State government support for such a proposal would be appreciated.

Tourism

The predicted increase in tourism has simply just not eventuated, some of the reasons could be attributed to the continued flooding of the forest, however the restriction in taking dogs into the areas and other restrictions on camping and access to parts of the rivers has impacted negatively on visitor numbers to the area.

There have been a number of suggestions made regarding how to improve tourism in the Southern Riverina region.

This increase in tourism has been held up by some as a solution to the drop in economic activity to offset the loss of the timber industry. A number of steps need to be taken in this regard. These are

1. Employment of an National Parks Eco-Tourism Project Officer in Mathoura and Deniliquin to:
 - Flesh out new Eco-Tourism opportunities in Deniliquin and Mathoura (ie. bird watching tours, canoe tours, forest tours);
 - Manage the overall marketing and promotion of National Parks in the area; and
 - Develop mapping and promotional information on trails, species etc.

2. A blanket opposition to entry fees on the existing National Park to:
 - Keep our destination affordable for families; and
 - Keep our exiting caravan, camping and RV / wanderer market.

3. Development of River Red Gum Forest Educational / Research Centres to:
 - Ensure existing local knowledge of the timber industry is retained;
 - Encourage Universities to undertake local research; and
 - Provide a centre for Eco-Tourism in Deniliquin and Mathoura.

There has been a distinct loss of knowledge from the timber industry and unless the currently skilled and experienced people are engaged back within the timber and forest management areas this will be lost forever.

Economic Development

There needs to be a number of other steps taken to overcome the economic disadvantage of this region. It is suggested that government departments could be relocated back into the smaller rural towns. For many years there has been a process of the regionalisation of government departments being centred on the large regional cities that are growing in any event. Much of this regionalisation has been to the disadvantage of smaller country centres, such as Deniliquin, Leeton, Narrandera, Cootamundra, Junee, Forbes and Parkes.

Carbon Sequestration.

There is huge potential to explore the development of carbon sequestration and storage in this region – both at landholder and regional level. This need not be limited to trees – but involve the use of grass and shrubs such as saltbush. This could involve a number of green job outcomes in seed collecting, direct seeding, bush foods, seed saving and eco tourism. There needs to be a scheme to explore the opportunities for local landholders to be paid to leave the country alone or to plant it out as carbon offset, or alternatively to moderately graze it with stock that could be marketed as organic and free range.

Education for Sustainability

There is a lot of expertise in this area including water efficiencies and sustainability farming that could be utilised and expanded upon. Deniliquin TAFE is well equipped to run workshops in conjunction with online programs. There are existing strong partnerships between Charles Sturt University and the Riverina Institute of TAFE using distance and flexible delivery methods. This could be expanded upon considerably with appropriate funding.

Deniliquin Council and the other councils of this region remain willing to meet with representatives of the NSW government to develop these projects. We realise that there would need to be a lot of research into these suggestions. These suggestions are made to show that the people in this district are willing to assist on appropriate investment in the region to offset the damage caused by the shut down of the timber industry.

Background information

Prior to the decision on National Parks there was significant loss of Government employment in Deniliquin. Please find attached a chart of the population of Deniliquin from raw census data showing the change in population in 1976 until 2006. This indicates a reasonable drop in population since 1991. In that period there has been a significant loss of government employment in this region. Losses could be attributed to the closure of the CSIRO research facility, transfer of staff from RTA, reduction in staff by NSW Health, reduction in staff by the Department of Primary Industries.

Deniliquin is a very disadvantaged local government area as a result of government decisions (both State and Federal) in recent decades. Whilst much of this loss has been because of drought, government decisions and the loss of professional jobs would have to be a leading cause of the loss of high income earners.

As they are no longer working forests the undergrowth increases the fire loading, and the tracks within the forests are also being overgrown which will make access for fire management impossible.

The forests in their natural environment under indigenous management had approximately 4 to 5 stems per acre compared to the forests today with 200 – 300 stems per acre, making fire loading and fire management much more difficult, if not impossible to manage.

As stated earlier Deniliquin Council stands willing to meet with government officials at any time to try and find solutions to these problems.

Deniliquin Council is firmly of the belief that changes to the Act could make it possible for the forests to become working forests that maintain their environmental significance and asset value while at the same time provide for significant economic and social benefit outcomes.

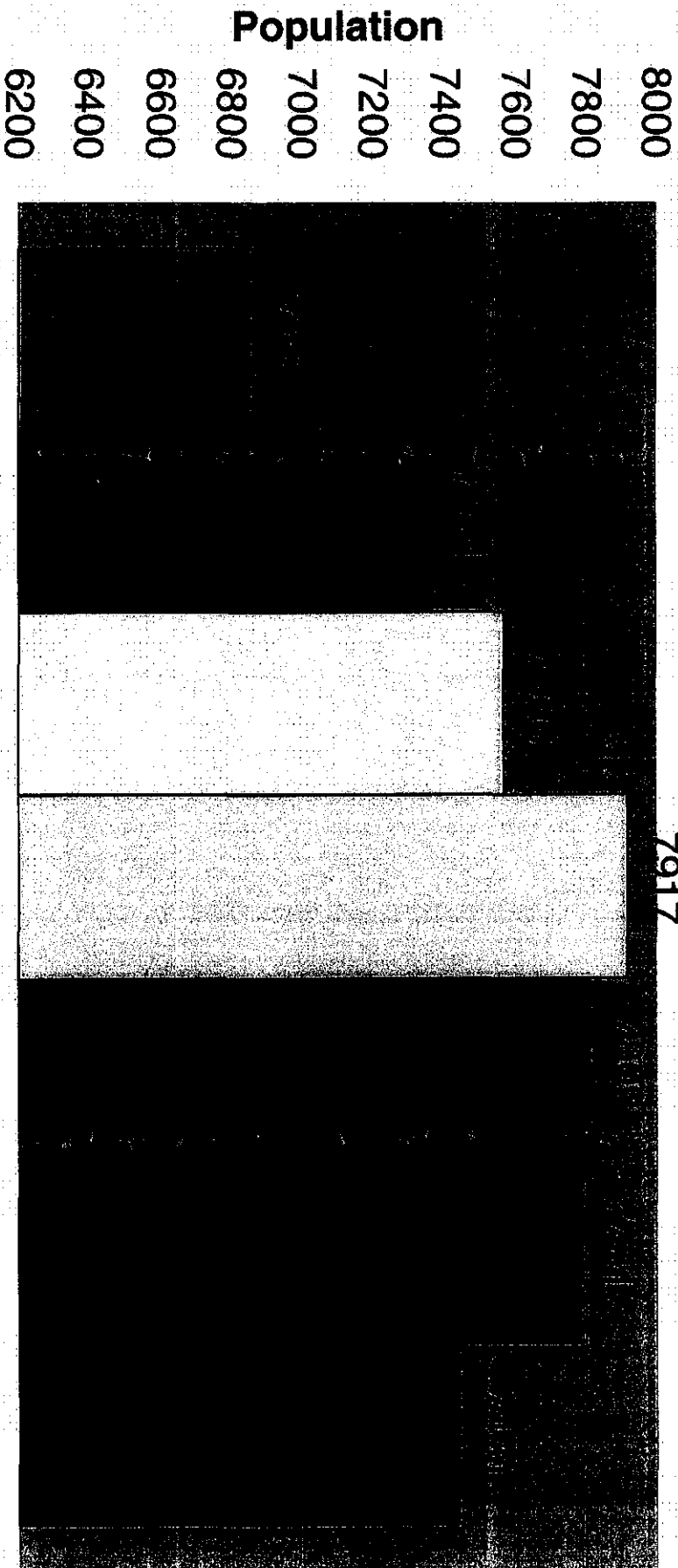
Yours faithfully

Des Bilske
GENERAL MANAGER

Encl:

Deniliquin Total Population

Raw Census Data



Compiled by Brian Mitsch

Census year

- 1976
- 1981
- 1986
- 1991
- 1996
- 2001
- 2006