

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

Name: Mr Chris Crump

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Partially Confidential

I have lived in Mathoura my entire life. I am appalled at the corrupt and unjust manner the Millewa State Forest has been converted into a National Park. We have taken great pride in growing and managing the forest over the past 100 years.

24th July 2012

Mr Robert Brown MLC
Chair, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5
Legislative Council, Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir

Re: Submission for Inquiry into public land management

My family first came to Mathoura about 1865, just a few years after the town was first surveyed.

That year, according to the Deniliquin Pastoral Times, they bought a block of land at the edge of the forest on part of the Moira pastoral lease.

It appears to have been the first block in the district sold under the provisions of the Robertson Land Act.

Various members of the family bought more land in the area. Before the state forests were proclaimed and private lands were resumed, parts of Gulpa Island were owned by members of my family.

So when I talk about the forests it is with a lot of pride in what my ancestors did to build prosperity in this area. Members of every generation have either owned land within the forest area or worked in the forests, sometimes both.



ABOVE: Crump family members hauling logs in 1915.

I have worked in the forests all my life. I learned a lot of what I know about trees and timber from my father who was also a timber cutter and a woodworker.

Therefore I was deeply disappointed that the Natural Resources Commission and the NSW Government did not inquire further into matters like the real age of the trees, the way they can survive long droughts and the way they recover even when heavy logging is carried out.

A report in the Pastoral Times said that during World War 2 more than 5 million railway sleepers were cut in the Millewa forest. Yet the forest is still there and shows no trace of the huge amount of felling done during what were mostly years of serious drought.

It is assumed the demand for such an enormous number of sleepers was because maintenance of railway lines such as the transcontinental railway was important for the safety of troop trains and wartime supplies.

Admittedly this information only came to light recently and by chance but there would have to be supporting evidence in Forestry Commission files as the paper said the information was supplied by them. The NRC appears not to have researched historical documents.

I have attached a photocopy of the newspaper report over page.

If they had known about this perhaps they would not have miscalculated the sustainable yield potential as badly as they did.

The demand for almost 300,000 bags of charcoal was also due to the war when petrol rationing led to wide-spread use of "gas producers" on motor vehicles.

The forests are not "old growth" - they are a product of white settlement.

We have a map obtained from the state archives office in Sydney, drawn by a government surveyor in 1848. It does not show any trees in the area where the forest grows today, only sandhills and reed beds. This backs what our ancestors told us! The only forests marked on the map are box forests on the west side of the Gulpa Creek.

So white settlement grew a forest for logs and in doing so created habitat for the flora and fauna that was not there before. And is now locked up!

5,000,000 Sleepers from Millewa Forest

MAMMOTH OUTPUT OF MATHOURA INDUSTRY

Some idea of the phenomenal output of Millewa Forest, Mathoura, is indicated in figures released by Murray Shire Council.

The deputy shire president (Cr. B. Dolan) who tabled the information at Monday's meeting, stated that it was obtained from the Forestry Commission. The figures cover a period of five years.

The 5½ million railway sleepers alone (more than a million a year average) is a staggering total.

This is something like 21,000 sleepers a week. What makes it all the more remarkable is the fact that sleepers are shaped by axe.

The figures are:

12,000 bee hives

5,578,788 sleepers

5698 heavy logs

25,980 bags of charcoal

73,875 poles

20,831 fuel tons

18,412 fencing posts

13,489 piles.

The details were obtained so that council could provide the Main Roads Department with evidence to support its claim to have Aratula road reclassified as a developmental road.

The road winds through the Millewa Forest after leaving Mathoura, crosses the Gulpa Creek and Edward River, cuts Pine Grove and Morocco West properties and joins the Deniliquin-Tocumwal road.

Cr. Lea, at a recent meeting of the Central Murray Regional Committee, drew attention to the amount of traffic passing over this artery.

Conargo Shire Council's support in the reclassification of Aratula road will be sought.

When the NRC first visited Mathoura we were told their inquiry would be fair, open and transparent, based on facts and science. But they asked Professor Cris Brack to authenticate that the FRAMES software used by Forests NSW to predict future yields. Professor Brack said that FRAMES was a suitable tool and could be adjusted to allow for the effects of long droughts. They had him sign a confidentiality agreement and then hid the report from the public who had presumably paid for it. They did not mention it in the list of papers they had referred to in preparing the report. They told no one about it.

I know about the Professor Brack report being hidden from the public because I personally rang him and asked for a copy. He said he could not send me one because of that confidentiality agreement.

I managed to get a (leaked) copy and sent it to a forest scientist at the Institute of Foresters for his comment.

In their final report the NRC advised that they had used their own spreadsheet calculation instead of FRAMES to predict sustainable yield. They said they did not think FRAMES would be able to calculate the effects of long drought. Subsequently and after further consultation with Forests NSW they admitted that their calculations were wrong. In one case their revised calculation showed an error of over 50%.

They also left out around 20,000 hectares of smaller forests. I specifically asked Dr John Williams at a public meeting in Mathoura if all available forest areas had been included because I was aware that those forests had good timber which had not been harvested for many years. He assured me that they had. But here is what they said in the revised calculations:

The NRC's published estimates of long-term sustainable yield of quota and ex-quota sawlogs did not include yields from Werai or other smaller forests in the Central Murray area. These areas were considered unlikely to produce significant volumes of sawlogs over a 100 year timeframe due to their relatively small size and poor condition.

When I asked Forests NSW they said they had wanted those forests included but the NRC left them out. That led to the premier, Nathan Rees, being badly advised before he announced the national park. I suspect those forests were deliberately excluded to keep the sustainable yield figure down to fit in with their agenda.

I also asked Dr Williams to clarify recommendations 3 and 4 in the NRC recommendations report because they seemed to me to be covered by a regime already being practised under current forestry management rules covering thinning, grazing, fire management, silviculture and firewood collection. The thinning that they recommended in their final report was already happening and had been for a long time. My uncle, John Valuntas, was one of the people who was in the thinning camp at Cumalong just after the war. Were they trying to re-invent the wheel? Dr Williams did not offer an answer.

However he did agree that the slow response to fire salvage after the March 2008 fire in the Moira forest was a waste of resources. Although Forests NSW wanted a quick decision so that the trees killed by fire could be salvaged while their wood was still green, a Land Court decision which in effect gave the power of veto to the NSW National Parks Association on compartments to be harvested, resulted in a delay of almost two years on the Order of Works requested by FNSW. By that time the timber had dried and cracked to such an extent that almost all of the trees in an area of at least 500 hectares were only suitable for firewood.

PHOTO (right): Salvaged logs showing extent of cracking due to delayed removal.

If this is an example of how the National Parks Association wanted the forest managed I fear for the future of the trees because of the association's influence over the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

We know that influence was there and so did the minister responsible. At a meeting held at Gulpa Sawmills in Deniliquin Frank Sartor offered legislation to remove the power of the NPA if the industry would accept the five-year phase out of logging in the Millewa forests (this was in the original Bill).



He also told us the national park was needed to satisfy the demands of the Greens.

He said: "I am going to give you a lesson in politics. The Greens hold 15% of the votes. We need those votes to stay in power. They want a significant national park and they want it in red gum."

We all heard him say that but he later claimed that he did not say it!

I am glad this inquiry is being held because we want the public to know the truth about the way the issue was handled. There was never any justification for shutting down the timber industry.

The main reason given for the decision was that the trees were dying of thirst.

The NRC saw the forests at the worst possible time after many years of drought. I believe they were panicked by questionable forecasts of future climate conditions.

Now that the drought has broken the forests have had water in them for three consecutive years. That was partly natural and partly man-made. If the NRC had been given the three years that the Victorian inquiry took they would have had a chance to see at first-hand how quickly the forests respond not just to a good flood but to the rainfall which broke the drought locally weeks before the flood arrived.

Professor Brack in his "hidden" report also urged caution from the NRC. He wrote:

A long term reduction in the growth to only 60% of that predicted by FRAMES is likely to over estimate the impact of the drought as it allows for no post drought recovery. If increased mortality is also included as a part of the drought effect, then it is likely that the remaining trees will approach pre drought growth as there will be less competition for available water. However, such a reduction may be worthwhile as a lower value in part of a comprehensive sensitivity test.

Returning to the subject of thinning for a moment, I would like you to read something written on the subject in 1895 by the local forester, John Manton.

I may state that red gum possesses a remarkable aptitude for reproduction, and I have no hesitation in stating that where there was one young tree in 1875 when I took charge of these forest reserves, there are now twenty, and all that is required to make these reserves practically inexhaustible is the inexpensive work of thinning.

With reference to what has been said regarding the work being useless* owing to the continuous reproduction of young trees, judging from the work first done, I think there need not be the slightest apprehension in this respect.

*There had been critical letters from anonymous writers to the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald.

SOURCE: Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, 1895, Volume 4, pp. 1155-1156. Appendix 2 in Donovan P. *A History of the Millewa Group of River Red Gum Forests*. 1997

We have known the benefits of thinning for well over 100 years. So why did the NRC have to re-invent the wheel?

Summing up I would like to repeat what has happened here.

- ▲ The forests were not here before white settlement.
- ▲ Most NRC recommendations were already carried out by Forests NSW.
- ▲ Frank Sartor said the national park was to keep green voters happy.
- ▲ The then government and the NRC were not OPEN and TRANSPARENT as they promised they would be. They hid, or never tabled, the report by Professor Cris Brack which backed up what Forests NSW had been saying. They did not even list it in their references and would not let Professor Brack talk about it.

How's that for OPEN and TRANSPARENT?

Chris Crump

Sawmill proprietor

Mathoura Red Gum Sawmills NSW Pty Ltd