

**Submission
No 187**

**INQUIRY INTO LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND
FUTURE OF THE TIMBER AND FOREST PRODUCTS
INDUSTRY**

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Long term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry

Thank you for the opportunity of exploring the above issue from a grassroots level and the harm that was inflicted on one small rural community.

This is a joint submission from Christopher Crump, proprietor of Mathoura Red Gum Sawmills – the only large scale red gum sawmill still operating in New South Wales – and David Joss, a former journalist living in Mathoura, NSW.

We were both involved in the enquiry which resulted in the declaration of the Millewa Group of red gum forests as a national park and hope to make the Committee aware of what we have observed in the ten years since.

On March 6, 2010, Imre Salusinszky wrote in *The Australian* that NSW Environment Minister Frank Sartor had spent some of the summer holidays reading the report of the state's Natural Resources Commission. Hidden away in an appendix Sartor found that...

...in none of the seven largest towns in the area had more than 15 per cent of residents achieved a post-school qualification, compared with more than 50 per cent among the general population.

Sartor's recognition of the vulnerability of workers and livelihoods in towns such as Deniliquin, Balranald and Mathoura shaped his long-awaited announcement this week on the establishment of more than 107,000ha of protected forests in the Riverina...

This, nobody denies, is the death knell for about 15 sawmills and 150 jobs, and that's before you start counting employment captured by the multiplier effect of closing down the largest industry in the region.

But Sartor has decided to phase in the plan through five years: "We believe transitional logging can be carried out and achieve environmental outcomes," he said.

Well that was Sartor's original plan. The Minister warned that it might not please everyone and he was right. Salusinszky reported...

State Greens MP Ian Cohen immediately slammed Sartor's timetable as "a backflip of monumental proportions" and "a pathetic compromise that leaves half of the magnificent Millewa Forest open for logging."

Under pressure from the eco-lobby Sartor found some extra money, re-negotiated the terms and conditions and, in the prophetic words of the then-general manager of the Murray Shire, Greg Murdoch, “the red gum industry will come to a crashing end, which will severely affect the social and economic viability of our community.”

The word sustainability is one of the most overworked in the English language and it is mostly misapplied when discussing forests. For well over 100 years foresters and timber cutters have worked to ensure their forests survived. Along the way they found ways to enhance them.

In our local river red gum forests, the first in the state to have a forest ranger appointed, they discovered that the trees responded very well to being culled.

When the benefits offered by the timber, strong, resistant to insect attack and to water damage, ideal for railway sleepers, piles for jetties, durable fence posts and a host of other uses, an industry was born. Towns grew. Economies expanded. And collapsed in 2010 following the declaration of a huge national park formerly known as the Millewa group of river red gum forests.

Compensation was paid but was never going to replace an industry that, according to a survey by Arche Consulting commissioned by the Natural Resources Commission, had an annual turnover of \$86 million and supported 450 direct and indirect jobs. Note that these figures were obtained by consultation, not computer modelling.

Mathoura was hard hit by the downturn in tourism from which it continually struggles to return to profitability. In one brief period it lost five businesses.

On February 24, 2010 the Liberal Party’s Catherine Cusack MLC, then the NSW shadow minister for the environment, told the upper house she had attended the public forums in this region:

I encountered communities in deep distress, particularly at Mathoura where the whole town feels doomed by the pending declaration of a national park. I was deeply moved by the dignity and restraint of participants. Men with shaved heads, long beards and wearing blue singlets, who have never spoken in public, stood in turn to read out their pre-prepared questions, which were intelligent and pithy, but too often not given a straight response by the commission.

NSW Hansard, February 24 2010

Term of reference (e) talks about whether additional legislation and regulation is needed for the industry to be able to expand. To which our initial reaction was that the red gum branch of the industry had managed to prosper for well over a century while tree numbers increased, so why

would we change? But there does need to be protection – from the unelected, misguided, self-proclaimed guardians of our forests.

Here's how noted marine biologist Walter Starck summed up the rise of eco-warriors in *Quadrant* magazine, January 2013:

The dictionary defines 'stakeholder' as "a person or group that has a financial investment, share, or other significant personal interest in some thing or activity." In law such status is recognised by the concept of legal standing (locus standi) and it requires the ability to demonstrate sufficient connection to a matter to be potentially harmed by the legal outcome. There is a well-established body of law which recognises a right to have a voice in affairs which affect us personally; but, we have no right to interfere in matters remote from ourselves which are, in effect, none of our business.

However, almost without notice, environmentalism has redefined the fundamental concept of being a stakeholder in Australia. Despite having nothing invested and with no risk to themselves, environmental Non-government organisations (NGOs) have managed to claim the status of stakeholders in remote matters and be accorded an equal voice to those whose entire lives, livelihood and assets are being affected.

Chris Crump has had first hand experience of the economic sabotage used by these green fools who know that under present legislation their illegal disruption of the lawful pursuit of earning a dollar will bring a woefully inadequate punishment. Three of the protesters who had chained themselves to logging equipment were charged but released on a technicality. They had effectively shut down a legitimate business for 10 days and were given only a lecture by the magistrate.

So yes, we need protection in the form of realistic punishment for the hijacking and holding to ransom of businesses, many of them with huge investments in plant.

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