



Media Release

Foresters Inspect Red Gums (110406)

The Institute of Foresters Australia have completed a field inspection of the red gum forests in the Barham/Koondrook area. The Chairman of the Victorian Division, Mr Gary Featherston said “The foresters were concerned about stories that the forests were in poor health and wanted to see for themselves”.

“We found that the drought and lack of flooding has affected the health and productivity of these forests. We also discovered that the authorities were doing something about it” he said.

The tour was attended by forty foresters and associates from Victoria, New South Wales and Canberra. It was conducted over the weekend of the 7th 8th and 9th of April.

Forestry and ecological experts attended the tour and they instructed the group on the natural processes that occur in these forests. Red gum trees compete very strongly with each other for water. They also were told that the forests contain large numbers of trees that were established after harvesting in the colonial days and from floods in the middle of last century. Active management by selective harvesting of these forests is reducing the number of the trees which in turn is decreasing the competition and increasing the survival and growth of the retained trees.

The foresters were shown the silvicultural practices on both sides of the Murray River. The foresters concluded that the gap selection method used for regeneration harvesting is the best method to ensure young trees have the greatest chance to reach their full potential and to grow sufficiently to replace the older trees that are dying due to the drought or have been removed. This method is approved for use on both sides of the river. It was noted that the size of the gaps is about the size of the forest occupied by one large tree.

Water is the life blood of these forests and the foresters are concerned that changes to river regulation during the life of the current trees have forever altered the naturalness of the forests. They were heartened to hear of the initiatives of the Living Murray Strategy. “The North Central Catchment Management Authority has done a great job in restoring the wetlands on Gunbower Island. They have started a process that may eventually return regular floods to the forest as a whole” Mr Featherston said. Although the forests will never return to their natural state they can be maintained as functioning ecosystems by actively managing the flood regimes and the stand structures within the approved parameters for environmental protection.

Active management of these forests is also generating sustainable quantities of timber that goes some way to meeting Australia’s need for timber and timber products. The local industries are at the forefront of value adding and the strong local furniture industry is contributing enormously to the \$54M a year that is generated from this timber. Red gum timber is top of its class for furniture, engineering products and even firewood.

The group stayed at Barham and was well catered for. The strong local tourism industry that generates these services relies on continued access to these forests and to the river to continue to prosper. Many campers were observed enjoying the forest and the river. These uses of the forest compliment active management which maintains roads and bridges, undertakes fuel management and controls pest plants and animals.

In conclusion Mr Featherston said “The forest ecosystems on the flood plains are under stress from the drought and we will campaign for intelligent and efficient water allocation for these forests. The current active management programs including timber harvesting are going some way to relieving these stresses and we will continue to work towards long term sustainable solutions”.

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