



MEDIA RELEASE

IFA urges pro-active management for river red gum (18/11/09)

The Institute of Foresters (IFA) has urged the NSW Natural Resources Commission, in its current review of public river red gum forests in the Riverina, to take a pro-active management approach in addressing the declining health of the forests. As a consequence of a prolonged drought, now generally accepted as being linked to climate change, some sixteen years has now elapsed since the forests received a major natural flood. Being dependent on river flood waters for its survival the condition of the river red gum forests has now reached a critical stage.

The IFA has made a comprehensive proposal for the future of the river red gum forests, based on decades of experience by its members in management and scientific research roles in these forests.

Expansive areas of the regrowth river red gum forest are dying from a lack of water. Due to the uncertainty of future water availability, the IFA believe that restoring the health and vigor of river red gum forests around this limiting factor must be the primary objective.

The key to having healthy river red gum forests in the future is to ensure that the number of trees on any area is kept in balance with available water supply. Healthy forests in turn support wildlife and all the conservation values which the community needs. This requires pro-active management, including thinning out areas where trees are too dense.

The IFA also believe that the features of river red gum forests most valued by the public will be better preserved under long term responsible management, where the management agency has all options open. This includes managing forest fuel loads to prevent disastrous wild fires, by utilising timber for a range of markets, including the recovery of dead and dying trees from water stressed forests.

This proposed emphasis on restoring and sustaining forest health may cause reductions in timber supply and a change to the design of timber allocations, but if managed in cooperation with the timber processors and local communities, such changes should be acceptable to those communities.

The IFA is concerned that widespread change of tenure from State forest to National Park will be counterproductive to the objective of conservation. River red gum forests are very different to the coastal and tablelands forests of which most Australians are familiar. There are no pristine old growth stands or wilderness but instead these are regrowth forests found along inland rivers, which have developed from a long history of human activity, pre and post European settlement.

Creation of more National Parks, now in river red gum, may generate a "feel good" reaction by many Australians, but it will not help to restore the forest's health, and for those people who live and work in the communities around river red gum forests, it is a very unwelcome prospect. Widespread conversion of State forest to National park will however cause closure of dependent timber businesses, with deep impact on local communities and come at a very high cost to the taxpayer in compensation.



Dr Peter Volker IFA President

For further information contact Nick Cameron - 0409 442 876 or Ron Wilson - 0419 142 913