



MEDIA RELEASE

Red gum decision not what it seems (24/05/2010)

The NSW Government decision to effectively shut down the Red gum timber industry may be seen as good for the environment by people in urban NSW, particularly those who are trying to be environmentally responsible.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) is however extremely disappointed by this decision and believes the people of NSW are being seriously misled as to benefits that it will deliver.

This decision transfers over 100,000 hectares of regrowth forest from State forest to National Park and commits \$97 million taxpayer dollars compensation to close a vibrant and sustainable industry that is producing around \$72 million per year in economic activity as well as committing millions of dollars each year for the administration of the new National Parks. An estimated 550 workers will lose their jobs comprising 250 direct losses, including forest management, and 300 indirect losses.

The Government's decision will deny Australians the opportunity to purchase home grown Red gum timber in future and is strongly opposed by the local communities who have built their lives around the sustainable multiple-use management of the forests. No less than eight local councils have documented their objection to the proposed land tenure changes. Their issues include: the very limited alternative employment opportunities in the area; the social implications of high unemployment, and; their satisfaction with the existing management arrangements.

The claim by the Government that their decision "protects in perpetuity - the ancient and nationally and internationally significant forest - the River Red Gum forest in the Riverina," is simply misleading. The "iconic" Red gum forests have a long history of careful management under State forest tenure of sustainable timber harvesting and conservation of environmental and cultural heritage values. Specific management protection prescriptions are already in place for the iconic "ancient" trees. Such trees are not harvested for timber. The Red gum wetlands and wildlife are also well protected through their Ramsar listing. This international recognition has been in place many years and was brought about by the existing forest managers. The listing permits sustainable timber harvesting.

It is also misleading not to mention that the forests are predominantly regrowth that are a product over 150 years of harvesting activity. Many of the forests being harvested to date, and now to be transferred to National Park tenure, have originated from changed water regimes on the Murray River since completion of the Hume Weir in 1931.

The last 9 years of drought to 2009 have had a serious impact on the Red gum forests, with many trees dying of water stress. The IFA acknowledges that Red gum timber supply will be reduced over time as part of responsible sustainable management. However, a downsized Red gum industry could continue contributing indefinitely. Proactive management including increased water supply, sustainable harvesting, including selective thinning of water stressed trees, and active management to prevent catastrophic fire, is the best way to protect these forests – not reserving them in National Park.

Peter Volker FIFIA RPF
President

MEDIA ENQUIRIES: Ron Wilson (NSW IFA Media Liaison) - 0419 142 913