

Riverine Red Gum Forests of the Southern Murray-Darling Basin

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 5.1.5

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates ecologically sustainable management of riverine red gum forests in the southern Murray-Darling Basin to conserve their social, economic, environmental and cultural values.

The Issue

The main threat to conservation of the riverine red gum forests and wetland ecosystems is the lack of appropriate flooding and drying regimes due to the intensive regulation of rivers since the 1930s. This is made worse by periodic, severe and prolonged rainfall deficits in both upper catchments and locally. Many floodplain species, including the river red gums, are now exposed to low moisture stress and watering regimes that they cannot cope with. This leads to increased stress and mortality, and negative impacts on fauna. Other threats include high intensity bushfires, weeds and feral animals that impact habitat and other values.

Background

The riverine red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) forests of the southern Murray-Darling Basin provide habitat for a wide range of flood dependent and flood tolerant flora and fauna. These areas also provide sustenance and spiritual and cultural benefits for indigenous communities. Since the 1840s floods, fire and human intervention have increasingly impacted on river red gum structures and the surrounding flora and fauna.

For these riverine forests, water resource development has approximately doubled the average period between significant flood events, and the average flood volume is now less than a quarter of what it was prior to the development of the dams. Changes to water regimes have adversely impacted on the riverine forest regeneration, forest health, and the habitat of flora and fauna.

There are two guidelines for forest management that underpin this policy statement: The Ramsar Convention on wetlands and the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Conservation of cultural values and promotion of indigenous opportunities to use the riverine forests to support their well-being and welfare
- Stand density manipulation to promote forest health and meet environmental and economic objectives
- Managed environmental watering of the forests to optimise and monitor use of the Murray-Darling Basin's scarce water resources.

The IFA considers that:

- The greatest threat to the riverine forests is inappropriate water regimes
- Well managed timber harvesting is not a threat to the values of these forests
- Environmental water allocations must be used appropriately to maintain forest health
- The needs and expectations of local communities must be appropriately provided for in land use decisions and management of public owned riverine forests
- Forests should be protected from high intensity bushfires, with appropriate salvage operations and silvicultural treatment for their rehabilitation after severe bushfires
- Professionals in forest ecosystem management should be employed to actively manage forests under principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development and the Ramsar Convention on wetlands
- Riverine forests have provided for human well-being and welfare for thousands of years.