



Media Release

7 December 2009

Short term political gain should not determine future of red gum forests

The National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI) calls on the New South Wales Government and the new Premier Kristina Keneally to reconsider its announcement of 3 December in relation to the Barmah-Millewa red gum forests until it has received the essential scientific information to make an informed decision.

So many times before we have seen decisions on the future of our forests made on the basis of political gains rather than what is really important - what is best for the health of the forests and the timber communities that rely on them.

The river red gum timber industry is a traditional industry that has supported local communities in the region for over a century. However, the decline in the health of the ecosystem of the river red gum forests is primarily a water management issue.

“Water has always been a critical factor for red gums, but the lack of regular flooding and drought threatens this iconic forest-river system – not the sustainable harvesting of them”, said NAFI CEO Allan Hansard

This is an issue for water authorities and placing the forest in a national park is no guarantee these forests will receive the flooding that is essential to their survival.

“Importantly, the report by the New South Wales Natural Resources Commission found that the long term decline of the river red gums has not been linked to forestry activities. Once again, sustainable forestry management practices are being confused with broader land management issues – such as the diversion of environmental water flows for other uses,” said Mr Hansard.

River red gum is also one of the few eucalypts sensitive to fire. For generations forest managers have managed these state forests to reduce fire risk. Selective thinning of trees in addition to a range of other uses such as recreation and grazing has ensured appropriate resources have been put into fire protection.

“In addition to the environmental aspects of this issue, we must not forget the local communities that rely on this sustainable timber industry for their livelihoods, and have done for generations,” said Mr Hansard.

We owe it to these local communities to assess the scientific evidence carefully. We need to see the scientific evidence as to whether putting the Barmah – Millewa red gum forest in a National Park is a better long term outcome for the health of the forests and the timber communities before a decision is made on the future of the forests.

One is reminded of the case of the sustainably managed Pilliga forests in western NSW that were put into a national park by the NSW Carr Government on the basis of a political decision, only to be ravaged and largely destroyed by fire a number of years later. Let’s hope the new Premier Kristina Keneally does not seal the Barmah-Millewa red gum forests to the same fate.

[ENDS]

Media contact: James Gray **0408 940 935** or **02 6285 3833** james.gray@nafi.com.au

Ph (02) 6285 3833 Fax: (02) 6285 3855 Email: james.gray@nafi.com.au Internet: www.nafi.com.au