



RIVERINA RED GUM FORESTS PROTECTED

Wednesday 19 May, 2010

The NSW Government will protect the internationally significant ***River Red Gum forests and woodlands***.

The landmark decision will preserve in perpetuity 100,000 hectares of ancient trees – many of which are more than 300 years old – and their ecosystems including 50 species of threatened fauna and significant breeding habitat for 18 migratory birds.

It will create two wetlands of international significance - Millewa and Werai, and two Living Murray icon sites - Millewa Forest and the River Murray Channel.

The announcement, made by Premier Kristina Keneally and the Minister for Environment, Frank Sartor, today, marks the largest protection of land for conservation in NSW since 2005 - when the State Government protected 350,000 hectares in the Brigalow bio-region.

Premier Keneally said an increased management and industry assistance package totalling \$97 million was also secured as part of the historic agreement.

“Today we are protecting in perpetuity – the ancient and nationally and internationally significant forest – the River Red Gum forest in the Riverina,” Ms Keneally said.

“From July 1, we will protect more than 100,000 hectares of ancient trees and their invaluable ecosystems in its entirety.

“This is the most significant environmental outcome in NSW in the past 5 years.

“Many of these trees are estimated to be over 300 years old, which means they were here before Captain Cook arrived and if protected they can live beyond 1,000 years.

“As well as providing long term protection for the river red gums, the new parks will continue providing local residents and tourists with access to this special environment.

“It will also ensure that land set aside as Indigenous Protected Areas will not be logged.”

“This is an historic day for NSW and an environmental gain that will be enjoyed for generations,” Ms Keneally said.

The ***Riverina Red Gum forests*** agreement will protect:

- 66,000 hectares of national parks;
- More than 15,000 hectares of regional parks;
- More than 20,000 hectares of proposed Indigenous Protected Areas;
- Two wetlands of international significance, Millewa and Werai;
- Two Living Murray icon sites, Millewa Forest and the River Murray Channel;
- Five terrestrial and two aquatic endangered ecological communities and habitat for 50 species of threatened terrestrial fauna – this includes the Squirrel Glider, Superb Parrot and Regent Parrot
- Significant breeding habitat for 18 migratory bird species listed under international agreements with China, Japan and Korea – this includes the Garganey Teal, Latham's Snipe and the Common Sand Piper.

Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, Frank Sartor said further negotiations on the River Red Gums Reservations Bill led to agreement over the Millewa transition area, where timber harvesting was proposed to continue until 2015.

“This area is often described as the Kakadu of the South, so I’m pleased that this decision includes the immediate protection of the Millewa Group of Forests, the Barooga Group of Forests and areas of River Red Gum State Forests on the Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and Lower Murray Rivers,” Mr Sartor said.

“Through continuing talks with industry and conservation groups, we will now amend the Bill to remove what was the 18,000 hectare Millewa transition area.

“We have listened to industry who have told us that they are prepared to cease logging provided they have access to additional compensation.

“Accordingly, \$17 million has been added to the River Red Gum package for structural adjustment, and community development,” Mr Sartor said.

A joint management arrangement of the Millewa forests will be undertaken with the Yorta Yorta people.

The Bill follows recommendations made by the independent Natural Resources Commission (NRC) after their report in 2009 found that the forests were facing severe stress as a result of the combined effect of river regulation, the over-allocation of water and drought.

A Structural Adjustment Committee, chaired by Peter Duncan who is Director General of the Department of Services, Technology and Administration, has been established to oversee the implementation of the structural adjustment package.

Timber businesses or employees seeking information and assistance regarding the industry restructure can contact the Forest Programs and Industry Adjustment Unit of the Department of Industry and Investment on 1300 360 844.