

River Red Gum Forests Investigation

INFORMATION SHEET

VEAC's River Red Gum Forests Investigation process

In 2005 the Victorian Government formally asked the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to investigate the River Red Gum Forests of the River Murray and its Victorian tributaries and make recommendations relating to the conservation, protection and ecologically sustainable use of public land.¹

In carrying out its investigation, VEAC has had to take into account the protection of biodiversity and other environmental values along with competing demands on the land and its resources, as well as the full range of social and economic considerations. These requirements are specified in the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001* and the Terms of Reference provided by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

The River Red Gum Forests Investigation process commenced in April 2005 and a Discussion Paper was released for public comment in October 2006. The Draft Proposals Paper was released in July 2007, also for public comment.

VEAC has completed its investigation and provided its River Red Gum Forests Final Report to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change in July 2008. Under VEAC's legislation, the Government must respond to the Final Report within 6 months of the tabling the report in Parliament.

Location of the River Red Gum Forests Investigation area

The investigation area encompasses a 1600 kilometre corridor of public land along the River Murray in Northern Victoria, between Wodonga and the South Australian border, and along tributary river systems such as the Avoca, Goulburn and Ovens Rivers. The investigation area encompasses 270,000 hectares of public land.

Many cities, towns and communities are located along the river systems and value the public land areas for nature conservation, recreation, commercial and lifestyle uses.

VEACs Terms of Reference

VEAC's Terms of Reference were to evaluate the resources and uses of riverine red gum forests and associated ecosystems and make recommendations relating to the conservation, protection and ecologically sustainable use of public land.

VEAC must also take into consideration: nationally agreed criteria for a conservation reserve system; relevant policies, programs and reports; appropriate access for commercial, and recreation opportunities and for community values and uses; opportunities for indigenous management involvement; and opportunities for a joint management regime with the New South Wales Government for the River Murray and public land on its floodplains.

Consultation program

Three community consultation methods were used during this investigation: the use of advisory groups for the provision of information and advice; direct consultation with individuals, groups and organisations; and formal submission processes based on the release

¹ Public land encompasses Crown land forests, parks, water frontages and other reserves and land owned by certain government departments such as water utilities

of documents for public comment. VEAC received approximately 9000 written submissions during the investigation. The views and comments expressed were carefully considered in formulating the final recommendations. Community forums were held in regional areas including in Mildura, Echuca, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Cohuna, Swan Hill and Nathalia.

Environmental, social and economic studies

VEAC is required to address the potential environmental, social and economic consequences of its recommendations. The implications were assessed by independent consultants, who prepared benefit–cost analyses and regional assessments for both the Draft Proposals Paper and the Final Report.

Previous land use investigations

The River Red Gum Forests Investigation is not a new process. VEAC and its predecessors have conducted 36 investigations throughout Victoria over the past 35 years, making land use recommendations which have been very largely accepted by governments.

These processes have resulted in creation of parks such as the Alpine, Grampians, Great Otway, Snowy River, Croajingolong, Errinundra, Wilsons Promontory, Yarra Ranges National Parks.

Impacts on industry resulting from previous recommendations have been addressed by government through mechanisms such as industry restructure and funding assistance.