

## **VEAC Final Report Condemned as “*Perfume on a Pig*”**

Country Alliance today labeled the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council’s [VEAC] “River Red Gums Forest Investigation – Final Report” as an exercise in perfuming a pig.

Spokesman Russell Bate stated that the report contains little in the way of substantive changes to the areas of most concern in their earlier 2007 Draft Proposals Paper.

Mr. Bate added that the final report constituted a cynical exercise in spin rather than a real attempt to address the criticisms of the Draft Proposals Paper.

“At a time when rural Victorian communities are under huge economic and social pressures it will be difficult for them to swallow the Council’s complete disregard for their lives and livelihoods.”

“The Report’s statement that *“large centres including Melbourne and regional cities inside and outside the investigation area (will) receive major environmental benefits (but that) the costs would be largely borne within the investigation area (Executive Summary – xiv)”* may be flow easily from the pens of a bunch of urban academics but will not find ready acceptance among families who risk losing jobs and homes as a result of the report’s recommendations” Bate said.

“The Draft Proposal Paper callously acknowledged that the potential impacts of its recommendations included the loss of employment for individuals and their families including poverty and financial hardship, reduced future work opportunities, reduced participation in main stream community life, strains in family relationships and inter-generational welfare dependency. Nothing in the final report suggests that anything has changed” he said.

The Reports attempt to “spin” its lack of consultation was transparent Bate added.

“Leaders of a number of indigenous communities have been critical of VEAC’s failure to consult with their members during their original investigations; yet despite this criticism and the final report’s attempt to suggest that there has been widespread consultation with indigenous communities, there are still at least three of the affected indigenous communities that have not been consulted” he added.

Bate was also critical of the divisive nature of the report’s recommendation that “policies and legislative restrictions inhibiting traditional cultural practice on specified areas of public lands and waters be amended to provide for Aboriginal Traditional Owners to hunt (including using firearms), gather, collect and fish”.

“If adopted this recommendation would effectively grant exclusive rights that were at odds with the earlier Wotjobaluk and Gunditjmara native title consent determinations by the Federal Court that granted these rights on a non-exclusive basis. This is a potentially divisive issue that has been recognised and criticized by both the indigenous and European communities and yet remains unchanged within the final report.”

“If the Victorian Labor Government has any regard for regional Victoria it must reject this report. It is time to acknowledge that there is a need for balance between our environment and our people. If we fail to achieve this balance VEAC may well have created a new threatened species – rural Victorians.” Bate concluded.

For media comment contact:

Russell Bate on 0425 729 811 (mob) or (03) 5777 0750

Website: [www.countryalliance.org](http://www.countryalliance.org)

Admin: [admin@countryalliance.org](mailto:admin@countryalliance.org) / ph 0425 746 066