

National Park 'under threat'

Move to de-gazette new park for logging

BY JOHN ELLICOTT

THE battle for the seat of Murray in the forthcoming NSW by-election has flown into a full-scale battle over the future of a national park.

The Nationals candidate Austin Evans is strongly advocating de-gazetting Murray Valley National Park, which was only gazetted in 2010. Mr Evans is fighting to restore red gum logging in the park and says he will introduce a private member's bill, if elected, to seek de-gazetting of the park.

He claimed the Labor candidate Michael Kidd supported the move, but Mr Kidd, a radiographer from Leeton, said Mr Evans had misrepresented him. He said he'd only raised issues about the lack of consultation at the time the park was declared by a previous Labor Government.

Mr Kidd said the Nationals own Minister for Tourism Adam Marshall had recently sprung the benefits of visiting the Park. The National Parks Association says tourist numbers have actually increased to the Riverina because of the park in the last few years. Mr Evans claims

the park is a tourism failure.

"I reckon Mr Evans will get a clip around the ears from his colleagues and told to shut up," Mr Kidd, a Leeton councillor said. The decision won't be reversed, he said.

But perhaps not. Nationals MPs have voiced strong support for logging in the area, and also the locally owned Gulpa Sawmill, a Nationals supporter, with its owner Ben Dankert, the president of the Nationals Red Gum branch. Nationals leader John Barilaro recently visited the area and announced 15,000 tonnes of timber from the Murray Valley National Park taken by mechanical thinning would be allocated to the commercial timber harvesting industry.

A local paper reported the Nationals wanted the 41,000 hectare National Park converted to a state forest.

It has struck many that the sawmill industry has already received a \$97m restructuring plan after logging was stopped. Mechanical thinning has created a huge red gum stockpile within the Park, which was proposed to be accessible by the community for firewood - but has never happened, much to



Is it really prepared to tear up all of the Commission's findings, and Australia's reputation, to vandalise the Murray Valley National Park?

We will be working hard to get the Liberals onside and get rid of these national parks."

— Austin Evans, Nationals candidate for Murray.

— Oisín Sweeney, senior ecologist, National Parks Association.

The Nationals in the seat of Murray have declared their hand on the future of Murray Valley National Park, wanting it de-gazetted to allow the return of logging. But conservationists say this would be a new low point in conservation.

The fire of locals who say they have little energy alternatives with no natural gas supply to Deniliquin. Conservationists are outraged a government could threaten the Park's future. Oisín Sweeney, senior ecologist with the National Parks Association, said he was alarmed that any government could consider de-gazetting a National Park, which clearly had significant and unique habitats including swamps and red gum forests.

"This would be a low point in Australian conservation history," Mr Sweeney said. "Let's be clear: Logging in the red gums has not been 'sustainable,' nor improved the biodiversity values."

Turnbull advocates 'forestry powerhouse'

A STRATEGIC plan to help inject longer term certainty and sustainability to boost the \$23 billion forest industry's economic output - especially in the regions - has been revealed by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Mr Turnbull announced the National Forest Industries Plan would be pursued

by his government to ensure the forestry industry was a "growth engine" for regional Australia.

"Now we understand that you have long lead times, you need long term certainty and so it's vital that governments get the policy settings right," Mr Turnbull told the Australian Forest Products

Association (AFPA) gala dinner in Canberra.

"So tonight I'm very pleased to announce that (Assistant Agriculture and Water Resources Minister) Anne Ruston will help us develop a new government plan that will underpin growth in the renewable timber and wood-fibre industry.

"Anne's work and our new government plan will give you the vision and certainty you need. We're committed to developing this industry as a growth engine for regional Australia."

Senator Ruston said if you were given the challenge of inventing the ultimate renewable, recyclable, carbon

positive thing, "I'd bet you'd invent a tree".

"The modern face of forest products is engineers and chemists - just ask the guys at Vias and Australian Paper," she said. "Everyone is realising just how great forestry is and the huge role is can and should play in Australia's future. The decisions of the

Victorian government regarding the renewal of the Central Highlands and East Gippsland Regional Forest Agreements are critical for the future of forestry in that state. Probably the greatest challenge facing our industry is investment in new plantations."

— COL BETTLES



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