

## Native Timber Harvesting in Melbourne's Water Catchments

Melbourne's water catchments cover 157 000 hectares<sup>1</sup> across the State and public access to these areas is tightly restricted to protect water quality.

The majority of Melbourne's water comes from catchments where no timber harvesting occurs and public access is not permitted.

However, some of our water is sourced from catchments which contain farmland, rural residential properties and State forest where small amounts of timber harvesting can take place.

Along with water, another valuable resource produced from our catchments is high quality native timber.

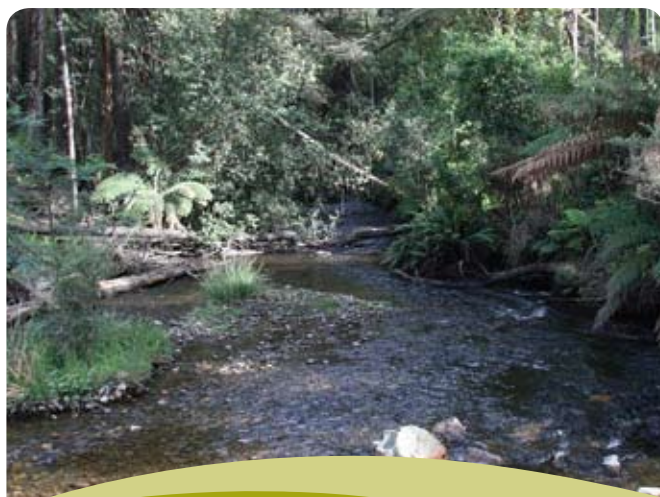
VicForests is permitted to harvest timber in a very small percentage of our catchment areas – under strict environmental guidelines.

Harvesting currently takes place in approximately 180 hectares<sup>2</sup>, or just over 0.1% of these catchments, on average each year.

Despite the small area within our water catchments being harvested, the wood produced by these forests is the highest quality timber in Victoria.

This timber goes towards high-grade furniture and building products and plays a vital role in Victoria's sustainable timber industry.

It is supplied to sawmills across the State, from the Central Highlands right through to mills in East Gippsland.



### Water Quality

Victoria's drinking water is considered to be among the best in the world<sup>3</sup>.

Harvesting in Melbourne's water catchments is tightly regulated to reduce any risk to water quality and supply, and VicForests' operations are closely monitored by Melbourne Water.

Limited timber harvesting has gone on for more than a century in the forests which make up Melbourne's water catchments.

### Research into Harvesting in Water Catchments

The Department of Sustainability and Environment has undertaken a significant amount of research into the impact of timber harvesting in Melbourne's catchments on water storage levels.

This research can be found on the Office of Water website – [www.water.vic.gov.au](http://www.water.vic.gov.au)

The research indicates little additional water would be available in water catchments if timber harvesting was to stop immediately.

In fact, a change of this type would actually lead to a reduction in water storage levels in the short term due to unharvested trees using more water<sup>4</sup>.

However, ceasing to harvest in Melbourne's water catchments would have a devastating impact on Victoria's timber industry.

According to the research a complete stop to timber harvesting in our catchments could see a total increase of as little as 1% in water yield over the next 40 years<sup>5</sup>.

To put this increase into perspective, the amount of water in Melbourne's catchments increased by 20.6% between April 2010 and April 2011<sup>6</sup> simply as a result of above average rain fall.

This research also shows that the practice of selectively harvesting smaller trees from the catchments (known as thinning) actually increases water yield.

### The impact of Fire on Melbourne's Water Catchments

Large scale bushfire remains the biggest threat to water supply and quality in the Melbourne's catchment areas.

VicForests and its contractors are actively involved in fire management and fire fighting in forests across Victoria including those in our water catchments.

Even a small scale fire in our water catchments would quickly rule out any increase in water yield which could be achieved by changing harvesting patterns.

This is due to growing trees soaking up more water than mature forests, meaning trees regrowing after fire leave less water available to run off into our dams.



Amount of forest in Water Catchment areas:

**157,000 hectares<sup>7</sup>**

Amount harvested on average:

**181 hectares per year<sup>8</sup>**

- <sup>1</sup> Harvesting in water catchments managing resources sustainably (Department of Sustainability and Environment 2008)
- <sup>2</sup> Sustainability Report 2009 (VicForests)
- <sup>3</sup> Tasty drop, The Source – Melbourne Water magazine (Issue No 28, November 2003)
- <sup>4</sup> Hydrological studies into the impact of timber harvesting on water yield in state forests supplying water to Melbourne (Feikema P, Lane P, Peel M, Sherwin C, Freebairn A, Salkin O)
- <sup>5</sup> Hydrological studies into the impact of timber harvesting on water yield in state forests supplying water to Melbourne (Feikema P, Lane P, Peel M, Sherwin C, Freebairn A, Salkin O)
- <sup>6</sup> Weekly Water Report – [www.melbournewater.com.au](http://www.melbournewater.com.au) (Melbourne Water 2010)
- <sup>7</sup> Harvesting in water catchments managing resources sustainably (Department of Sustainability and Environment 2008)
- <sup>8</sup> Sustainability Report 2009 (VicForests)

