



About
VicForests

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VicForests is a state-owned enterprise established in August 2004 to manage the sustainable harvest and commercial sale of hardwood timber from Victoria's public land native forests.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) retains overall responsibility for forest management except when areas designated for timber production are being harvested and regenerated.



Victorian Wood Production

- Currently about 10 per cent of Victoria's public native forests are both available and suitable for timber production
- All current and future timber production is limited to within this portion of forest
- The 90 per cent of Victoria's forests not utilised for timber production are contained in:
 - ▶ National parks, State parks, regional parks, and other formal conservation reserves
 - ▶ State forest special protection zones and special management zones
 - ▶ Operational management reserves under the Code of Forest Practices
 - ▶ Steep, rocky, or otherwise inaccessible areas
 - ▶ Uneconomic, low productivity forest types
 - ▶ Unsuitable, unproductive forest types

Sustainable Timber Production

- Sustainable production means that a pre-determined timber volume equivalent to the annual growth of the forest can be harvested in perpetuity
- The sustainable harvest level is equivalent to the annual growth of the 9–10 per cent of Victoria's forests designated as being available and suitable for wood production
- Victoria's sustainable harvest is calculated in terms of sawlog production. The volume of residual log by-product from sawlog harvesting will vary from year to year according to the quality of forest stands harvested
- Residual logs are mainly used for pulpwood (ie. woodchips for paper manufacture). VicForests is working with the timber industry to find other high value uses for these logs as well
- Soon after harvesting, forests are regenerated either by natural or artificial seeding, or a combination of both
- Depending on forest type, Victoria's available and suitable forests are planned for harvest on an 80 – 120 year cycle. Some forests may be thinned at least once during this period to increase the tree size at the final harvest.

Native Forests, Wood and Climate Change

- Using wood products is one of the most effective ways to combat climate change because timber is a renewable resource and there are low carbon emissions associated with its harvesting, processing, and manufacturing
- Although timber comprises around 50 per cent of the industrial raw materials used globally, it requires only 4 per cent of the energy employed to convert these materials into usable products
- Compared to the same productive unit of solid wood, steel emits 350 times more carbon, aluminium emits over 1400 times more carbon, and concrete 6–8 times more carbon in its manufacturing
- Currently, about nine million m³ of logs are harvested each year from Australia's available native forests. These contain an estimated three million tonnes of carbon
- While old growth forests are an important component for conserving biodiversity, vigorously growing younger regrowth and mature forests are also essential and additionally far better at combating climate change
- In 2004, Australian landfills contained an estimated 136 million tonnes of carbon – this is 45 per cent more than estimated carbon storage within in-service wood and paper products
- The use of wood products during Australian house construction can save greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to up to 25 tonnes of CO₂ per house.

Native Forests, Wood and Water

- Forest ecosystems require water to function. Therefore, a significant proportion of the rain falling in forested catchments does not run-off into streams and dams. Pastured, agricultural catchments with few trees permit more water to run-off into streams and storages
- Wood has been harvested from parts of Melbourne's catchments for decades. Currently around 13 per cent of Melbourne's catchment forests are legally available and suitable for timber production
- Annual harvesting in the available and suitable portion of Melbourne's catchments is limited to a maximum of 272 hectares, or 0.16 per cent of the total catchment area
- Melbourne is the only Australian capital city with fully forested catchments, and the only city for which timber harvesting occurs. Melbourne has the best drinking water of any major city in Australia
- Around 65,000 ha (or around 40 per cent) of Melbourne's catchments are regrowth forests from the

1939 bushfires. The 13 per cent portion available and suitable for timber production is 1939 regrowth

- No 'old growth' forests are being harvested in Melbourne's water catchments
- It is neither natural, desirable, nor feasible to permanently exclude all regrowth from catchment forests
- Several studies in the Thomson Dam catchment predict that it will experience at least one major fire in every 100 years. This will create new regrowth regardless of whether or not logging continues
- Fire is by far the greatest threat to Victoria's water supplies
- The potential 3 – 4 per cent reduction in water yield from producing timber is small in comparison to the 12 per cent annual water loss through leaky pipes and miscellaneous means (including illegal use)
- In the absence of fire, water yield from Melbourne's catchments will increase in the future regardless of whether or not logging continues
- Forest thinning can significantly boost run-off into storages. Various thinning trials have produced increased stream flows of 20 – 26 per cent persisting for up to 12 years. One trial quantified the effect of thinning as being equivalent to 2.5 million litres of additional run-off per year per thinned hectare.

Commercial Forestry and Fire

- Log sales generate funding that contributes significantly to the infrastructure required to assist in the management of wildfires through the:
 - ▶ maintenance of road networks for rapid early response
 - ▶ provision of an on-tap resource of staff and contractors with good local knowledge
 - ▶ provision of readily available fire fighting machinery working in the area
 - ▶ maintenance of an experienced workforce which deals with fire as part of day to day responsibilities (through conducting fuel reduction burns and regeneration burns)
- A sustainable native forest timber industry enhances the capability to protect private property, regional communities and natural assets forest, as well as maintaining good forest stewardship in general across all forest tenures – both within parks, reserves and production forests
- On-going timber production has important socio-economic benefits for regional Victoria. Maintaining regional jobs helps to maintain and enhance local volunteer services such as the Country Fire Authority.

How timber harvesting benefits Victoria

- VicForests is a profitable stand alone Government-owned business
- Contributes to the State Revenue annually
- Provides active participation in fire protection
- Creates local employment across regional Victoria
- Contributes to the maintenance of roads in State forests
- Sequesters greenhouse gas emissions.

Flora, fauna and wood production

- Conserving forest biodiversity is centred on a whole-of-forest approach which balances the area available for wood production against the far greater areas that will never be harvested
- Since 1986, the proportion of Victoria's public forests available, suitable, and accessible for timber harvesting has been reduced by more than two thirds
- On a whole-of-forest basis, the effect of timber harvesting on flora and fauna is minimal and is monitored actively. Harvested areas are actively regenerated and progressively recolonised by native plants and animals
- Forest ecosystems are naturally dynamic. The maintenance of a range of forest structures and age-classes through active management is actually beneficial to many flora and fauna species
- The CSIRO's *Australia's State of the Environment Report 2001* cited logging as an insignificant threat to flora and fauna. It rated land clearing for agriculture, salinity, pest animals, weeds and river health as very significant threats.
- Assessing the ecological sustainability of wood production must acknowledge the huge contribution made to biodiversity conservation by the areas that have been set aside never to be logged.

Wood Supplies – VicForests' role

Victoria's State forests cover 3.4 million hectares, or about half of the public land in Victoria. These forests have important roles to play in protecting biodiversity and water catchments. They also contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of communities by providing jobs in timber, non-timber resources and eco-tourism as well as opportunities for recreation, camping and quiet enjoyment. Only 20 per cent of Victoria's State forests is set aside for commercial harvesting of native hardwoods and approximately 0.2 per cent of this area is set aside for commercial harvesting each year. It is then regenerated.

This harvesting and regeneration will be VicForests' responsibility, along with the sale of the timber. VicForests was declared a State business corporation in October 2003, and commenced operations on August 1 2004. The State Government policy *Our Forests Our Future* heralded the need for the separation of land stewardship responsibilities from those of commercial harvesting and licensing of sawlog production.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment remains custodian of all public land. In the areas entrusted to VicForests, a core responsibility is to pursue the commercial operations of coupe preparation, harvesting and regeneration, and the commercial sales of the harvested forest timber.

Other key facts:

- The global demand for wood is largely met from native forests
- In Australia since the mid-1990s, maturing softwood (radiata pine) plantations have become the major source of Australia's sawn timber as State Governments have progressively reduced the native forest harvest
- Softwood plantations now supply over 70 per cent of Australia's sawlogs, yet comprise less than 1 per cent of the forest area
- Native forests are still Australia's major source of fibre (woodchips for paper products). However, by 2010, the volume of fibre sourced from hardwood plantations (mostly Blue Gum) is expected to have exceeded native forest production
- There is an urgent need for corporate investment if a significant hardwood plantation sawlog resource is to develop
- The most authoritative State Government review of the opportunities for hardwood sawlog plantations predicted that by 2035, sawlog production from existing hardwood plantations would be equivalent to just 15 per cent of the 2001 native forest supply level.

For further information, contact
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