



Flora, Fauna and Wood Production

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One of the most contentious issues surrounding wood production in native forests concerns its impact on flora and fauna. Conserving forest biodiversity is centred around a 'whole-of-forest' approach which balances the area available for wood production against other areas that will never be harvested. Most of Victoria's forests are in parks, reserves or other zones that will not be harvested. On a 'whole-of-forest' basis, the effect of timber harvesting on flora and fauna is almost insignificant because only a small proportion of forests are harvestable. Those that are harvested are immediately regenerated. These new forests are progressively recolonised by native plants and animals.



The available, suitable and accessible forests are planned for harvesting and regeneration on an average 100 year cycle. Currently, the annual harvested area is equivalent to about 0.1 per cent of the total area of public forest. Since 2002, the area of Victoria's National Parks and conservation reserves has increased by around 30 per cent. The conservation of flora and fauna in Victorian forests is catered for in an extensive, world class forest reserves network. Over the same period, the area of forest available, suitable, and accessible for timber production has been effectively reduced by over 100,000 ha through park expansion and the State Government buy-back of timber licences from around the state.

Since 1986, the proportion of Victoria's public forests available, suitable, and accessible for timber harvesting has fallen by more than two thirds, from 31 per cent to just under 10 per cent. Therefore, more than 90 per cent of Victoria's public forests are protected from timber harvesting.

In 1992, the Resource Assessment Commission's Forests and Timber Inquiry found no evidence to suggest that logging has caused the extinction of any species. This was supported by the *Australia's State of the Forests Report 2003* which did not consider wood production to be a process or agent that was affecting the health or vitality of forest ecosystems in any Australian state.

Similarly, the CSIRO's *Australia's State of the Environment Report 2001* regarded logging as an insignificant threat to flora and fauna. By contrast, it rated land clearing, salinity, pest animals, weeds and river health as very significant

Net proportion of Victoria's public forests

Victoria's Parks & Forests in 2002

National Parks and other conservation reserves

State Forests	Special Management Zone
	Special Protection Zone
	General Management Zone

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threats. In recent years, unnaturally severe or too frequent fire has also emerged as a significant threat to Victoria's flora and fauna.

Despite this, the environmental movement continues to question the ecological sustainability of wood production. However, it could be argued that the impact of foxes, feral cats, and invasive weeds such as blackberry, has a far greater influence than wood production which is restricted to just a minor portion of native forests.

Rainforests

- All rainforests and surrounding buffers in Victoria are protected from harvesting.

Old Growth Forest

Victoria's public forests comprise a wide range of forest age classes. Old growth forests range from 100 years to more than 300 years of age. A mix of age classes is essential to the health of the forest ecosystem, providing a mosaic of structure, habitat and food. Timber harvesting aims to recreate these mosaics with patches of regenerating forests important for food, shelter and carbon absorption and retained trees providing habitat incorporated into the larger mature forests. In Victoria there is around 841,000 hectares of old growth forest, of which approximately 68 per cent is formally reserved. In East Gippsland, in excess of 85 per cent of the 220,000 hectares of old growth forest is either in formal reserves or is not available for timber harvesting due to regulation.



Forest used for timber production (as of 29/10/2007)

	Area (ha)	Available for Harvesting	Available, suitable, and accessible for harvesting
	3,809,800	No	-
	125,900	No	-
	1,917,600	No	-
Code of Practice reserves	364,300	No	-
Steep, rocky or unproductive forest	164,200	Yes	0
Accessible productive forest	740,000	Yes	740,000
	7,121,800		740,000 ha.

Modified from Victoria's State of the Forests Report (up to 2003), Department of Sustainability & Environment

Conserving biodiversity at the coupe level

Timber harvesting can have short-term impacts on many flora and fauna species which then progressively recolonise the site as the forest regenerates. It can have longer-term impacts on birds and mammals that nest in tree hollows. This is addressed by retaining 'habitat' trees and recruitment trees. Further habitat retention is provided by adjacent streamside buffers and other reserves. In addition, adjacent or nearby areas that are inaccessible or unproductive also provide additional undisturbed habitat.

A landmark study of the long-term impact of logging on biodiversity was conducted in Gippsland's Boola Boola State Forest in the late 1970s. It found that after more than 30 years of logging, all expected species of flora and fauna were still present after having survived in unlogged reserves and unproductive forests eventually to recolonise regrowth on logged areas. A further finding was that the managed disturbance associated with logging created a broader range of habitats that increased biodiversity across the whole forest compared with not harvesting. This finding has been endorsed by more recent studies.

Victoria's native forests are resilient ecosystems that depend on periodic disturbance for renewal, and so regenerate strongly after fire or logging. As timber production is now limited to such a small portion of forests, it has little impact on flora and fauna at the landscape scale and all areas harvested and regenerated as soon as possible.



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