

Media Release

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Leading scientists reject fire and timber claims

New research by some of Australia's leading fire scientists has rejected suggestions timber harvesting is making Victoria's forests more fire-prone.

The research, published in the internationally renowned Society for Conservation Biology journal, Conservation Letters, also found there is no evidence from recent mega-fires in Victoria to suggest younger forests burn with greater severity than older forest.

Lead author, Professor Peter Attiwill, said the research, '*Timber harvesting does not increase fire risk and severity in wet eucalypt forests of southern Australia*', brings together new evidence and specialised knowledge from some of Australia's best fire scientists.

"The intensity of these fires had nothing to do with timber harvesting," Professor Attiwill said.

"This research shows recent major bushfires did not burn anymore intensely in forests where timber harvesting takes place than they did in National Parks and reserves where there is no harvesting.

"Suggestions timber harvesting is making forests drier and more fire-prone has been the cause of concern for residents in some fire-affected communities.

"Our research shows this is simply not the case.

"As an ecologist, I believe this is a most important paper," he said.

This latest research was undertaken by academics and scientists from the University of Melbourne, the Department of Environment and Conservation (Western Australia), VicForests, Forestry Tasmania and the former head of the CSIRO's Bushfire Research Unit.

Professor Attiwill said the analysis looked at the impact of the 2003, 2007 and 2009 fires on ash forests in Victoria, as well as the impact of fire on forests in Western Australia.

"Aerial imagery taken after the 2009 bushfires in Victoria shows that areas of young forest regrowing after timber harvesting were some of the only areas unburnt during the high-intensity stages of the wildfire.

"Experience in Western Australia and Victoria shows that regrowing eucalypt forests less than five years old may not burn at all even under extreme conditions," he said.

"The research found the small amount of forest harvested for timber means these areas do not have an impact on overall fire severity. While harvested areas can provide some 'green' forest within a fire-killed landscape, they are only a small proportion of the overall landscape.

"Studies of the 2003 Alpine Fires and the 2006/07 Great Divide Fires showed the severity of these fires was no different in parks and reserves which have no timber harvesting than in State Forest where there has been timber harvesting for decades," Professor Attiwill said.

This new research follows on from a 2011 paper '*Wildfires, not logging, cause landscape traps*' published in *Australian Forestry* (vol 74) which disagreed with previous assertions that timber harvesting is responsible for creating 'landscape traps'.

The 2011 paper found that "contrary to assertions by Lindenmayer et al. (2011), logging roads and the break-up of the landscape into areas of very young (1–4 y(ears)) regeneration assisted fire protection of adjacent older mountain ash".

The latest research paper '*Timber harvesting does not increase fire risk and severity in wet eucalypt forests of southern Australia*' (Professor Peter Attiwill, Michael Ryan, Dr Neil Burrows, Phil Cheney, Dr Lachie McCaw, Dr Mark Neyland, Dr Steve Read) can be found at:
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.12062/full>

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