

Media Release



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The evidence is in – Forestry has no impact on fire severity

While anti forestry industry activists continue to support a retracted*, error laden, so called scientific report claiming fires are more severe in areas harvested for forestry, that support flies in the face of a large body of evidence.**

The Chief Executive of the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) Ross Hampton said, “You don’t have to look far to find evidence which leaves the activists’ claims in tatters. In June the NSW Legislative Council’s report: [Koala populations and habitat in New South Wales](#), included the finding that during the 2019-20 bushfires the fire severity was most intense in National Parks.”***

“Also, the [Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry](#), released last week found that ‘the effect of stand age on fire severity is of minor importance compared to weather’ and that there is ‘no significant difference between harvested and unharvested areas in the probability of elevated fire severity’.”

“Despite this, those opposed to Australia’s sustainably managed forest products industries continue to show support for a retracted report, and seem to be demanding that the only voice governments, the media and the public should listen to is theirs. They have even gone as far as belittling other studies which dare to question the prognosis they want to support.”

“The forest industries are happy to stand behind and support any forest research which shows real rigour and thoroughness, but not these so called “scientific” research papers compiled by activist academics just to attack sustainable forestry in Australia.”

This week the Australian Senate supported a motion labelling the article originally published in the FIRE, as “Bodgy”, and it is time Australia’s research institutes get serious about making sure this doesn’t happen again,” Mr Hampton concluded.

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SEE OVER FOR NOTES

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*You can read the retraction [here](#).

**Perhaps the best dissection of the inaccuracies underpinning this claim is by the University of Melbourne's Professor Peter Attiwill in 2014, who wrote for a scientific journal:

"...there is no evidence from recent megafires in Victoria that younger regrowth (<10 years) burnt with greater severity than older forest (>70 years); furthermore, forests in reserves (with no logging) did not burn with less severity than multiple-use forests (with some logging).

"The evidence we have presented here gives little support for the argument that logging in the wet eucalypt forests across southern Australia results in forests that are drier and more fire-prone."^[1]

Similarly, Professor Jerry Vanclay from Southern Cross University and Associate Professor Kevin Tolhurst from the University of Melbourne penned a piece for the Hobart Mercury published on 25 March 2020:

Scientists suggesting that timber harvesting leads to more severe fires are basing their conclusions on selective, local-scale observations where the only variable considered is the time since harvesting. This is poor science because it is well established that several factors lead to fire severity.

A landscape scale study of fire severity published in 2014 based on an analysis of more than 2 million ha burnt in Victoria in 2003 and 2007, shows there is no significant difference between a fire severity in parks compared with forests (including timber harvesting areas).

Fire severity does change with time after timber harvesting (both up and down), but if the whole harvested landscape is considered rather than isolated local areas, the conclusion that harvesting increases bushfire risk and severity cannot be supported.^[2]

And just last week, the NSW Bushfire Inquiry Research Hub^[3] and a separate study recently completed by NSW Department of Primary Industries^[4] (referenced through the Inquiry) found that at the landscape scale, fire severity was much the same regardless of tenure and in State forests fire severity does not appear to have been influenced by harvesting. It appears during the 2019-20 Black Summer fires in NSW there was no significant difference between harvested and unharvested areas in the probability of elevated fire severity and inconsistent and minor effects of time since harvest on probability of elevated fire severity.

FOR MORE SEE OVER

^[1] Attiwill et al, 'Timber harvesting does not increase fire risk and severity in wet eucalypt forests of southern Australia', Society for Conservation Biology journal, Conservation Letters, July/August 2014, 7(4), 341–35
<https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/conl.12062>

^[2] <https://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-stopping-native-forest-logging-to-fight-fire-doesnt-stack-up/news-story/d15897c6a2d1e244d5458d180099be17>

^[3] <https://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/assets/dpc-nsw-gov-au/publications/NSW-Bushfire-Inquiry-1630/Final-Report-of-the-NSW-Bushfire-Inquiry.pdf>

^[4] https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1222391/fire-severity-in-harvested-areas.pdf

AFPA represents forest growers, harvesters, and manufacturers of timber and paper products.

***Table 2 Fire severity in major NSW tenures within the RFS fire ground

Tenure	Fire severity class (percentage of tenure area within the RFS fire ground)				
	Percent canopy fully affected	Percent canopy partially affected	Percent little change	Percent canopy unburnt	Percent not yet assessed
National park	23	36	8	27	6
State forest	17	32	7	21	24
Other Crown land	19	32	10	27	12
Freehold	13	35	7	24	12
Other	12	30	12	23	24

Source: NSW Government, *Fire and the Environment 2019–20 Summary*, May 2020, p 12.