

Loggers return to native forests burnt in summer bushfires

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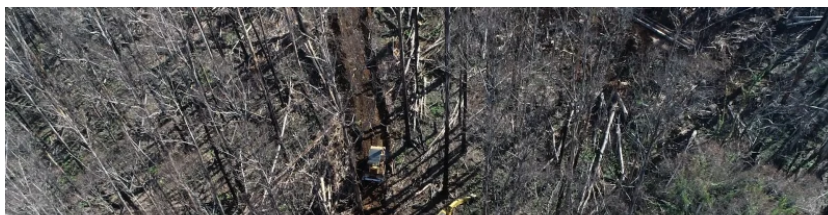
Logging has resumed in fire-damaged forests in Victoria and New South Wales despite warnings that devastated bushland and endangered wildlife are too fragile to withstand "business as usual".

The Victorian government's logging agency, VicForests, has [revealed plans](#) to log 3500 hectares of forests burnt during the catastrophic summer fires in the next few years, saying salvage logging will occur in areas where "most of the standing trees have been killed".

Footage supplied by Goongerah Environment Centre shows salvage logging south of the Alpine National Park in the Boulun-Deera State Forest, north of Dargo.

The agency's chief executive officer, Monique Dawson, has also levelled criticism at internationally regarded Australian ecologist Professor David Lindenmayer, saying the agency "does not accept his published opinions".

Conservationists, including Professor Lindenmayer, say salvage logging has a lasting effect on wildlife, which relies on burnt and unburnt forest for refuge. They also say logging forests after bushfires increases future fire risk, damages soil with trucks and equipment and causes run-off to waterways.





Salvage logging south of the Alpine National Park in the Boulun-Deera State Forest, north of Dargo. GECO

"Salvage logging will have devastating consequences for forests and wildlife impacted by the fires," said Chris Schuringa, spokesperson for the Goongerah Environment Centre in East Gippsland. Post-fire logging has already begun in a state park north of Dargo, in East Gippsland.

"There still hasn't been a comprehensive assessment of the bushfire impact on threatened species - what's the harm in waiting for these to be completed? This is grossly irresponsible," Ms Schuringa said.

Recently released documents from the NSW state government's logging agency, the Forestry Corporation, reveal that at least 85 per cent of harvestable native hardwood forests in the south coast region was burnt in the fires.



Post-fire forests in Rich Forest in the Murrungower area, east of Orbost in East Gippsland. These partially-burnt coupes could be logged. GOONGERAH ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

Despite this, in a letter sent to wood supply contract holders and released during budget estimates, the corporation assures them it remains "optimistic" it can meet its supply entitlements.

Independent NSW MP Justin Field said the government was acting as if the worst fires in recorded history had never happened.

"Communities across NSW have been devastated to see logging return to burnt and unburnt forests across NSW," Mr Field said.

“This is the Victorian department of ostriches who want to put their heads in the sand”

David Lindenmayer

In March, the Goongerah Environment Centre wrote to Ms Dawson to inquire about logging in fire-affected forests, referring to research by Professor Lindenmayer on the impact of salvage logging.

In her response, Ms Dawson said: "We do not accept the published opinions of Professor David Lindenmayer as reflective of evidence and do not consider him to be an authority in these matters."





Professor David Lindenmayer. MICHAEL CLAYTON-JONES

Professor Lindenmayer, a researcher at the Australian National University and one of the world's most cited forest ecologists, described her comments as "outrageous".

"This is the Victorian department of ostriches who want to put their heads in the sand," he said.

"Somehow I'm not the world expert on salvage logging even though I've written the only global textbook on the topic. Comments like this reflect an organisation that is unscientific and is baseless in terms of how it manages its forests."

Professor Lindenmayer has previously called for an immediate end to native forest logging after the catastrophic summer bushfires, saying his research demonstrates logging makes native forests more prone to fire.

Fire-behaviour scientist Phil Zylstra, from Curtin University, said Professor Lindenmayer was one of the top published and respected ecologists in Australia. "To simply dismiss what he has found in that way is similar to a politician saying we don't accept that climate change is real."

Last November, Victorian [Premier Daniel Andrews announced the logging of old-growth forest](#) would cease immediately and all native forest logging would end by 2030.

This week, logging was [temporarily halted in 26 unburnt areas](#) of Victorian native forest after environmentalists argued in court there was a risk of "serious and irreversible damage" to threatened species after last summer's bushfires.

A NSW Forestry Corporation spokesperson said the state-owned logging company had worked with the EPA to develop "appropriate mitigation measures" for post-bushfire logging, including conditions specific to each site, which "substantially increase the area of habitat protected".



Fire-ravaged bushland on the NSW South Coast. JAMES BRICKWOOD

[More than a billion Australian animals are believed to have died during the bushfires.](#)

The Victorian government said salvage logging had commenced but would be limited to younger mountain ash forests that do not provide habitat for hollow-dependent species.

The government offered support for Professor David Lindenmayer, saying in a statement he was a respected scientist who had worked on threatened species conservation for many years.

VicForests said it was not currently harvesting unburnt forest in fire-impacted areas, and has developed a recovery approach in consultation with the Office of the Conservation Regulator.

“All VicForests’ operations, including its bushfire recovery timber harvesting, are closely scrutinised by the Office of the Conservation Regulator and its regulatory guidelines strictly adhere to rules to protect threatened flora and fauna,” a spokesperson said.



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