



MEDIA RELEASE

Logging and fire - alarmist headlines hindering rational discourse

(16/09/2011)

Australia's forest scientists and forest managers have expressed dismay at the alarmist message being promoted by Australian National University academic Professor David Lindenmayer who insists that "forest logging increases the risk of mega-fires" (ANU press release 12th September 2011).

Professor Lindenmayer's most recent paper "Newly discovered landscape traps produce regime shifts in wet forests" published online in the Proceedings of the National Association of Science of the United States of America asserts that the interactive effects of wildfire and logging are creating far more fire prone landscapes. While he claims to have supporting data for this theoretical effect, none has been provided apart from some photographs, charts, and an incomplete reference list.

While the paper focuses on the preponderance of regrowth in Victoria's Mountain Ash forests, it greatly overstates the impact of logging by ignoring the fact that around 70% of these forests are contained in formal parks, management reserves and other areas that will never be logged. The extent of existing forest reservation is a critically important aspect which is continually overlooked in campaigns against logging.

Professor Lindenmayer asserts that 60 – 80% of these Mountain Ash forests were 200 to 450 years old prior to European settlement, but this seems highly unlikely given his own earlier research which concluded that stand replacement wildfires occur at an average frequency of once every 100-years.

Victoria suffered terrible loss of life in the February 2009 'Black Saturday' wildfires and lessons need to be learnt from these fires based on impartial analysis, supported by evidence and practical, realistic land management options. The last thing residents of the impacted areas need is unwarranted scare-mongering created by invented terms such as 'landscape traps' while emotions and memories are still so raw.

Independent authoritative advice on fire behaviour can be found with fire scientists within organisations such as the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. These experts could also provide critical review of theoretical concepts to see if they make practical sense.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia welcomes sound scientific contributions to improving forest management. However, we believe it is imperative for academics to convey their research results objectively without embellishment, rather than via sensationally-worded media releases.

Dr Peter Volker RPF FIFA MAICD
President

Media enquiries: Mark Poynter - 0415 846 819