

Benefits of salvaging

I viewed with concern the comments of Professor David Lindenmayer ([“We are fuelling state’s bushfire risk”](#), *The Age*, 16/7) regarding timber harvesting and bushfires within Victoria. Making recommendations to combat bushfire severity and intensity is complex, contextual and contingent on forest type. Therefore, to make a blanket statement that logged forests always burn at greater severity than intact forests is just plain wrong and to conflate the clearing of trees after storms and timber harvesting is misleading at best. All three major inquiries into the 2019-20 bushfires – the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, the NSW inquiry and the Victorian inquiry – made no reference or recommendations regarding timber harvesting and fire risk. The use of the Wombat State Forest, a dry eucalypt forest, as an example is also misleading. The question in the Wombat State Forest comes down to is it better to leave a large proportion of the fallen trees in the forest or salvage it for use as fibre products or firewood?

Lindenmayer himself in 2009 made the point that strategic forms of timber thinning in dry forests can reduce fire severity and this must entail removal of the timber from the forest site or risk unplanned ignition. In dry eucalyptus forest, more fuel load means more intense and severe bushfires more often.

Lindenmayer’s opinion reinforces prejudices towards forestry organisations and governments in ecosystem management. I fear his views could be used, on supposed environmental grounds, to justify cessation of salvage operations. This would in turn create greater fuel loads and the likelihood of bushfires due to climate change by leaving the salvage job half done.

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