

Native Timber Harvesting in Melbourne's Water Catchments

Melbourne's water catchments cover 157,000 hectares¹ across the State and public access to these areas is tightly restricted to protect water quality.

Along with water, another valuable resource produced from our catchments is high quality native timber.

The majority of Melbourne's water comes from catchments where no timber harvesting occurs and public access is not permitted.

However, some of our water is sourced from regions which contain farmland, rural residential properties and State forest where small amounts of timber harvesting can take place.

Our forests, including the forests in our water catchment's are protected by a detailed legislative framework which considers environmental, social and economic factors.

VicForests is permitted to harvest timber in a very small percentage of our catchment areas – under strict environmental guidelines.

Harvesting currently takes place in approximately 215 hectares², or just over 0.14% of these catchments, on average each year.

Despite the small area within our water catchments being harvested, the wood produced by these forests is the highest quality timber in Victoria.

This timber goes towards high-grade furniture and building products and plays a vital role in Victoria's sustainable timber industry.

It is supplied to sawmills across the State, from the Central Highlands right through to mills in East Gippsland.

Water Quality

Victoria's drinking water is considered to be among the best in the world³.

Harvesting in Melbourne's water catchments is tightly regulated to reduce any risk to water quality and supply, and VicForests' operations are closely monitored by Melbourne Water.

Limited timber harvesting has gone on for more than a century in the forests which make up Melbourne's water catchments.

Amount of forest in Water Catchment areas : 157 000 hectares⁷

Allowable harvesting limit: 310 hectares per year⁸

Amount harvested on average : 215 hectares per year⁹



Research into Harvesting in Water Catchments

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries has undertaken a significant amount of research into the impact of timber harvesting in Melbourne's catchments on water storage levels. This research can be found on the Office of Water website – www.depi.vic.gov.au/water

The research indicates little additional water would be available in water catchments if timber harvesting was to stop immediately. In fact, a change of this type would actually lead to a reduction in water storage levels in the short term due to unharvested trees using more water⁴.

However, ceasing to harvest in Melbourne's water catchments would have a devastating impact on Victoria's timber industry.

According to the research a complete stop to timber harvesting in our catchments could see a total increase of as little as 1% in water yield over the next 40 years⁵.

To put this change into perspective, the amount of water in Melbourne's catchments has increased by almost 44% since 2010 with a small amount of timber harvesting continuing to take place⁶.

This research also shows that the practice of selectively harvesting smaller trees from the catchments (known as thinning) actually increases water yield.

The Impact of fire on Melbourne's Water Catchments

Large scale bushfire remains the biggest threat to water supply and quality in the Melbourne's catchment areas. The 2009 wildfires impacted some 30% of Melbourne's water catchments.

VicForests and its contractors are actively involved in fire management and fire fighting in forests across Victoria including those in our water catchments.

Even a small scale fire in our water catchments would quickly rule out any increase in water yield which could be achieved by changing harvesting patterns.

This is due to growing trees soaking up more water than mature forests, meaning trees regrowing after fire leave less water available to run off into our dams.

1 www.melbournewater.com.au (Melbourne Water 2014)

2 VicForests Logging History (2014)

3 www.melbournewater.com.au (Melbourne water 2014)

4 Hydrological studies into the impact of timber harvesting on water yield in state forests supplying water to Melbourne (Feikema P, Lane P, Peel M, Sherwin C, Freebairn A, Salkin O)

5 Hydrological studies into the impact of timber harvesting on water yield in state forests supplying water to Melbourne (Feikema P, Lane P, Peel M, Sherwin C, Freebairn A, Salkin O)

6 Weekly Water Report – www.melbournewater.com.au (Melbourne Water 2014)

7 www.melbournewater.com.au (Melbourne Water 2014)

8 www.melbournewater.com.au (Melbourne Water 2014)

9 VicForests' Logging History (2014)