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The Editor
Narooma News

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Dear Stan,

RE: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR – “FIRE INTENSITY”

Further to my letter to Kevin Petty of our Forestry Corporation, he advised that my request for information is being assessed. He did however provide a 14 page Mini Review suggesting “*you might like to read the facts from experts on timber harvesting and fire risks*”.

This recent article by Attiwill, Ryan, Burrows, Cheney, McCaw, Neyland & Read posits that timber harvesting does not increase fire risk and severity in wet eucalypt forests of southern Australia. It thankfully points out that 3 of these 7 contributors are employed in state government owned forestry agencies, 2 more are from the WA Department of Environment and Conservation, 1 from CSIRO and a scientist from University of Melbourne (Attiwill).

Unfortunately the data in this review is riddled with flaws as the information provided is selective and statistically biased towards stands of forests across the southern area of this country younger than 10 years of age that didn't burn in wild fires – it did happen. There is regrettably little statistical analysis of scientific data from the wide range of forest types where detailed studies have been undertaken, particularly the predominant forest types of south-eastern Australia.

Attiwell concentrates on disproving the judgements of scientists such as Lindenmayer and Possingham who questioned the forestry and silviculture practices of our forest managers in terms of increased fire vulnerability. Much is also made in this review of discrediting the analyses of Mueck & Peacock (1992) in their “*Impacts of intensive timber harvesting on the forests of East Gippsland, Victoria*”. Interestingly, Dr Peter Attiwell is actually Dr Peter Muecke Attiwell so I wonder if there's a family connection.

Dr Attiwell's 2011 publication Burning Issues says “*Southern Australia is one of the three most fire prone areas on Earth.*” He also adds “*A long running drought and a predicted warming climate have ensured that bushfire is a dominant factor in our nation's long-term planning.*”

He doesn't address the recent data analysis of scientists such as Dr Chris Taylor, also from University of Melbourne, who examined the recent disastrous Victorian forest fires and concluded that disturbance of native forests by logging or forest fires can result in increased intensity of wild fires, whereas undisturbed forests with a fully established canopy (it takes about 30 years) can retard fire intensity.

I'll get back to you and your readers when my other questions to Kevin Petty are answered.

Yours sincerely,

Seán Burke