

Recent Australian wildfires made worse by logging

5 May 2020



Bushfire. Credit: The University of Queensland

Logging of native forests increases the risk and severity of fire and likely had a profound effect on the recent, catastrophic Australian bushfires, according to new research.

In the wake of the country's worst [forest](#) fires in recorded history, University of Queensland researchers have been part of an international collaboration, investigating Australia's historical and contemporary land-use.

UQ Professor and Wildlife Conservation Society Director James Watson said logging regimes have made many forests more [fire](#) prone for a host of reasons.

"Logging causes a rise in fuel loads, increases potential drying of wet forests and causes a decrease in forest height," Professor Watson said.

"It can leave up to 450 tonnes of combustible fuel per hectare close to the ground—by any measure, that's an incredibly dangerous level of combustible

material in seasonally dry landscapes.

"By allowing these practices to increase fire severity and flammability, we undermine the safety of some of our [rural communities](#).

"It affects wildlife too by creating habitat loss, fragmentation and disturbance for many species, with major negative effects on forest wildlife."

Lead author, Australian National University's Professor David Lindenmayer, said there are land management actions we can take to stop these fires from occurring in the future.



Logging. Credit: The University of Queensland

"The first is to prevent logging of moist forests, particularly those close to urban areas," Professor Lindenmayer said.

"We must also reduce forest fragmentation by proactively restoring some previously logged forests.

"In the event of wildfires, land managers must avoid practices such as 'salvage' logging—or [logging](#) of

burnt forests—which severely reduces recovery of a forest."

The Federal Government has launched a Royal Commission to find ways to improve Australia's preparedness, resilience, and response to [natural disasters](#).

Researcher Michelle Ward, from UQ's School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, said it was time for government to act.

"We urge [policy makers](#) to recognise and account for the critical values of intact, undisturbed native forests, not only for the protection of biodiversity, but for human safety," Ms Ward said.

"Let's act strongly and swiftly for the sake of our communities, the species they house, our climate and Australia's wild heritage."

The study has been published in *Nature Ecology and Evolution*.

More information: *Nature Ecology and Evolution* (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/s41559-020-1195-5](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-1195-5)

Provided by University of Queensland

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