

# Regional Forest Agreement Harvest Level Review FAQs

November 2021

## What is the *Harvest Level in Victorian Regional Forest Agreement regions* report?

It is an assessment of the available timber volume as at August 2021 that meets Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM) requirements and considers the Victorian Government decision to cease native timber harvesting in 2030. The report also considers the 2019-20 bushfire impacts on Harvest Levels.

The Harvest Level figures are based on post-fire 'operable inventory' which applies some – but not all – of the constraints applied in other wood volume models.

Harvest Levels are not:

- A resource outlook or for use for commercial purposes
- A forecast of how much timber will be available for harvest in future years
- An indicator of the volume of timber VicForests can enter into contracts to supply
- A 'sustainable harvest volume' for a long term (i.e., post-2030) forestry industry
- An indicator of capacity to reduce harvestable areas or increase supply.

## How is the Harvest Level calculated?

VicForests uses a Strategic Wood Supply Model in the east of the state to calculate Harvest Levels. The approach is a widely used industry-standard modelling tool.

It considers how much timber resource is available in the areas where timber harvesting is permitted (which excludes parks and reserves and other areas protected from timber harvesting through zoning or regulatory requirements).

## Why has the report been published?

In March 2020, the Commonwealth and Victorian governments modernised the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs).

As part of the sustainable management of Victoria's forests, the RFAs between the state and Commonwealth governments require Victoria to:

- forecast and publish the Harvest Level from State forests
- commence a review of the Harvest Level within 12 months of a Major Event with the potential to significantly impact the Harvest Level.

## What is the Harvest Level?

'Harvest Level' is defined in the RFAs broadly as the volume of timber resources that can be harvested from native forests in RFA regions in any financial year, consistent with ESFM, until native forest harvesting ceases on 30 June 2030.

Harvest Level in the *Harvest Level in Victorian RFA regions* report provides the D+ ash and mixed species' sawlog volume available in each eastern RFA region per financial year, as calculated in August 2021.

## What are the available volumes under the Harvest Level?

As at August 2021 the maximum sawlog volume available in the eastern Victorian RFA regions per financial year is:

- Central Highlands – Ash D+ Sawlog = 108,000m<sup>3</sup>, Mixed Species = 52,000m<sup>3</sup>
- East Gippsland – Ash D+ Sawlog = 2,000m<sup>3</sup>, Mixed Species = 73,000m<sup>3</sup>
- Gippsland – Ash D+ Sawlog = 35,000m<sup>3</sup>, Mixed Species = 13,000m<sup>3</sup>
- North East – Ash D+ Sawlog = 27,000m<sup>3</sup>, Mixed Species = 6,000m<sup>3</sup>

### **Why are there no volumes for the west of the state?**

The west of the state currently operates under a select and small-scale harvest model.

The harvest levels established in the 2013 *Review of Commercial Forestry Management in Western Victoria Timber Resources, Harvest Levels, Silviculture, and Systems and Processes* report are still valid and have been used for the purposes of the *Harvest Level in Victorian RFA regions* report.

### **It seems like there is a lot of timber available. Why is the government saying there is not enough?**

The Harvest Level report is not a forecast of the volume of commercial timber resources.

Less than 20 percent of State forest is categorised as suitable and available for harvesting. Only a portion of the suitable and available area will be harvested and regenerated prior to phasing out of native timber harvesting by 2030.

The Harvest Level figures are based on the total merchantable volume of timber available post-fire which applies some – but not all – of the constraints applied in other wood volume models.

The figures are expected to be greater than the volume that will be harvested as the calculation includes a margin that accounts for unquantifiable reductions (for example, coupe injunctions and detection-based threatened species' protections) and allows scheduling flexibility to ensure delivery of timber supply commitments.

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### **How is the Harvest Level different to the other wood modelling reports?**

The Harvest Level is not a forecast of how much timber will be available for harvest in future years or an indicator of the volume of timber available to VicForests for future contracts.

It is the maximum level that can be harvested from State forests while supporting ecologically sustainable forest management.

### **Why isn't harvesting happening at the levels in the Harvest level review?**

VicForests are harvesting at volumes under the Harvest Level consistent with the government's commitments to the native forest industry under the Victorian Forestry Plan.

### **How is the volume loss from the 2019-20 bushfires accounted for?**

Bushfire impacts are built into the Harvest Level modelling process, which adjusted the available volumes post bushfire.

The 2019-20 bushfires impacted mostly mixed species eucalypt forests in eastern Victoria. Mixed species eucalypts are more resilient to fire and as a consequence the fire has not significantly affected operable volumes and in turn the overall Harvest Level. More detail is provided in the report about how the impact of the fires on the mixed species resource was calculated.

The majority of the ash resource is in the Central Highlands, which was not affected by the 2019-20 bushfires and so has had little impact on the Harvest Level for this species.

This is the first time the Harvest Level has been calculated as this is a new requirement of Victoria's amended RFAs and there are no previous Harvest Levels to compare against.

### **The report doesn't take in future changes to the Code of Practice for Timber Production. How will future changes to the code of practice impact this report?**

The report includes the Harvest Level as at August 2021.

Any future changes to the Code of Practice for Timber Production, or areas available for timber harvesting through changes to forest zoning, will be incorporated into the forest resource model and may alter future Harvest Levels.

### **How do Harvest Levels support Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM)?**

Victorian forests are managed under Victoria's Forest Management System.

Timber harvesting must comply with regulatory and legislative requirements that form part of the broader forest management system.

For example, timber harvesting can only occur in areas where the land tenure and forest zoning scheme allow for these operations.

ESFM continues to apply through to the operational level, with detection-based zoning.

### **How are threatened species accounted for in the Harvest Level?**

The Code of Practice for Timber Production and the associated Forest Management Zoning Scheme detail how specific biodiversity, cultural and landscape values are protected or managed. As such, there are restrictions in the areas where timber harvesting can occur. Timber Harvesting can only occur in areas of State forest that are General Management Zones and Special Management Zones.

Harvest Level calculations take into consideration the forest management zoning scheme and factor in known constraints for protecting and managing ecological values and a range of landscape and cultural features. These include areas containing habitat trees, threatened species, protected flora and fauna and their habitats. When threatened species are detected as part of pre-harvest surveys, these areas are accounted for in further modelling and removed from the available harvestable area in accordance with the regulatory requirements. The harvest level calculations also take into account operational considerations and exclude areas unsuitable or unviable for timber harvesting.

Details about the constraints and reductions applied to the available timber resource are in the report.