

# Wood and Water

## towards a plan for State forests supplying water to Melbourne

### Sustainable management

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is conducting a project that will provide information for the Government to develop a future management plan for the State forests that supply water to Melbourne.

It's called the 'Harvesting in Water Catchments' study — sometimes referred to more simply as the 'Wood and Water' study.

The four-year project commenced in late 2004 to fulfil the Victorian Government's Water White Paper commitment to investigate the impact of timber harvesting on water yield within Melbourne's catchments. It is due to be completed by September 2008.

Community participation is important in working toward solutions to this complex issue.

### Why we need to undertake this project

The fundamental objective is to assess options to improve water yield in Melbourne's water supply catchments while meeting existing timber supply commitments.

There has been a long history of debate about the relative costs and benefits of wood production and water supply from the catchments.

After 10 years of below average rainfall and in the midst of drought, water yield from catchments has become increasingly important. Victoria's prosperity depends on a secure water supply for our homes, farms, environment and industry. DSE is currently working with the community, other government departments, water authorities, catchment management authorities and local government to deliver the 110 initiatives outlined in the *Our Water, Our Future* reform agenda.

Timber harvesting in these water catchments provides economic benefit to regional Victoria in particular, however timber harvesting impacts on the available water yield due to the high water-use of young, regenerating forests.

### How we're developing a plan

#### Undertaking research

The research will provide reliable, up-to-date information for the Victorian Government to develop a plan to sustainably manage State forests that supply water to Melbourne.

#### The research consists of:

- **Hydrological studies:** Develop models that estimate water yields within Melbourne catchments based on the existing water, climate, landscape and forest conditions. The impact of bushfire and climate change on water yield is also considered.  
These models are used to predict the impact of a range of forest management regimes that include timber harvesting, on water and timber yield in Melbourne catchments.
- **Timber substitution studies:** Investigate the feasibility of using plantation grown timber to replace native forest timber harvested from Melbourne's catchments.
- **Water quality review:** Examine the water quality issues associated with timber harvesting through a review of relevant literature, and environmental audits of timber harvesting in Melbourne's catchments.
- **Peer review:** The hydrological and timber substitution studies have been reviewed by independent experts ensuring the research is to a very high standard.

### Sustainability Assessment

The sustainability assessment investigates the social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of a range of potential future forest management regimes for Melbourne's catchments. The Sustainability Assessment is conducted in two stages:

**Stage 1:** Development of a credible method for the assessment in consultation with stakeholders including the community via a public consultation phase.

**Stage 2:** Use the method to evaluate the economic, social and environmental impacts of State forests supplying water to Melbourne under a range of potential future forest management regimes.

A Peer Review Panel with expertise in the areas of hydrology, forestry, ecology, economics, sustainability and public consultation is providing advice and expertise throughout Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the sustainability assessment.

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### Using the best scientific data available

The current hydrological studies substantially improve our understanding of the relationships between timber harvesting and water yield in order to make decisions based on the best possible scientific data.

The project is innovative and is considering factors that have not been considered in previous major studies that include:

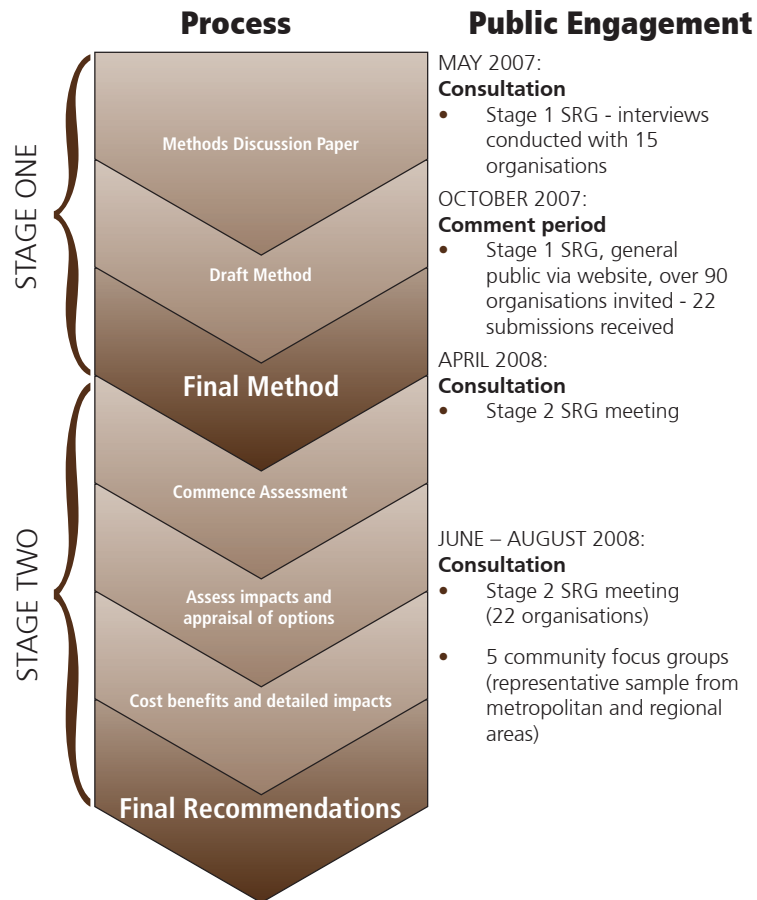
- The current area of forest harvested within Melbourne's catchments. When previous studies were conducted during the 1990s, approximately 60 percent more of the Thomson catchment was available for timber harvesting in comparison to the area currently available.
- A pattern of lower rainfall over the past ten years.
- All values in the catchments including economic, social and environmental. Previous studies focussed primarily on the economic value of timber and water.

### We're consulting widely

The issues surrounding wood production and water supply are complex and the answers are not black and white. This innovative study will draw together scientific information and community views to develop a way forward to sustainably manage the State forests that supply water to Melbourne.

As part of this highly consultative approach, the following stakeholder groups have been formed:

- Steering Committee – interdepartmental committee to oversee the project.
- Technical Working Group – interdepartmental group to provide technical information to the project.
- Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) – consists of interest groups and peak bodies.
- Peer Review Panel – consists of scientists and academics to provide expert advice throughout the sustainability assessment.
- Focus Groups – consist of representatives from a range of community interest groups who will meet once and provide feedback on the approach to impact analysis.



### Further Information:

#### General inquiries

The studies completed so far are available on the DSE website [www.dse.vic.gov.au](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au) or by calling the DSE Customer Service Centre Ph 136 186.

#### Media inquiries

Contact the DSE Communications office on (03) 9637 8911.

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