



**A/Prof Phil Zylstra**

@Phil\_Zylstra Twitter Thread - 8 August 2024

[https://x.com/Phil\\_Zylstra/status/1821360260365656437](https://x.com/Phil_Zylstra/status/1821360260365656437)

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"We're environmentalists. We're not loggers." Dja Dja Wurrung elder Gary Murray.

That's "offensive and racist". Spokesperson for "Healthy Forests" set up by previous CEO of VicForests to log Dja Dja Wurrung country.

What's going on?

[abc.net.au/news/2024-08-0...](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-08-0...)

***(After the closure of VicForests, senior staff have joined a new forest venture*** By national science and environment reporter [Michael Slezak](#)) ABC News 8.8.2024

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Dja Dja Wurrung traditional owners are concerned that land has been returned to them dense with young trees instead of widely-spaced older trees. Foresters are telling them the widely-spaced forest can be brought back by mechanical thinning. Here's the issue

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The reason the forests are dense with saplings is because the original large trees were felled. You cut down big trees and small ones come back. Given time, these mature into the widely spaced old trees. This is how forests survived without chainsaws and bulldozers

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Regrowing in dense stands, these skinny trees can withstand the wind, effectively working together to keep it above the canopy. They race each other for light and become tall while staying skinny. Over time, weaker ones die, the forest opens, and the trunks thicken up.

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Thinning takes out the competition, leaving resources for the remaining trees which use them to get thicker. They slow their height growth because they aren't in competition, so you get a shorter forest of thicker trunks. But that's only a small part of the picture.

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The freed-up resources also feed new growth on the ground. Now the understorey becomes thick with shrubs and saplings, and because the canopy has been opened, there is a lot more

wind down there and a lot less shade. You have a dry, windy forest that is highly flammable

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That extra wind does something else as well. The trees were skinny because they supported each other to get tall. Without their neighbours, they are vulnerable to the wind. Thinned forests are far more vulnerable to big windthrow events where storms flatten forests.

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Not only does thinning create huge risks of bushfire and windthrow, the new saplings restart the clock, recreating the dense forest that thinning was supposed to fix.

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One of the biggest changes though is that these trees will never get as tall as they would in a natural forest because thinning made them focus on getting thick trunks before height. Great for sawlogs, but it means there is now forever a higher risk of crown fire.

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The idea that we can make forests healthy by cutting them down was taken from America's Bush era "Healthy Forests" initiative. In 2014, the Abbott Government funded research to investigate "mechanical fuel reduction", which was a euphemism for thinning.

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The project was kicked off with a review by Deloitte, which argued that despite zero evidence that it worked in Australia, thinning could be profitable if you didn't account for the full carbon cycle, and you sold the "mechanically recovered matter".

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[ausfpa.com.au/wp-content/upl...](https://ausfpa.com.au/wp-content/upl...)

The final report on how well it worked was due in 2021 but never delivered. Even the proponents of "Healthy Forests" aren't claiming in this article that logging actually will help, only that they don't know and we should try it.

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We do know; this is core forest ecology. But here's the thing: even the idea that we should err on the side of logging a forest rather than letting it do what it has done since Gondwana is coloniser mindset 101.

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So, when you hear someone say that First Nations can improve on what they did for 65,000 years by bringing in logging contractors with bulldozers and chainsaws and that anyone who disagrees is a racist, you have some idea of what's going on.