

Levelling forests 'can kill species'

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By MARK BENDEICH
Forestry Reporter

THE clear-felling of native forest in Tasmania was unsustainable in terms of maintaining a full array of forest species, a visiting American forestry expert said in Hobart yesterday.

Professor Jerry Franklin, of the University of Washington, said that the days of clear-felling (where entire sections of forest are levelled) were numbered because of the growing emphasis on biodiversity.

He said that if the type of forest found in Tasmania was clear-felled and regenerated every 80 to 100 years — as practised by the Forestry Commission — the forest would gradually lose species.

Citing research by commission forester, Mr John Hickey, Professor Franklin said forests that were clear-felled needed at least 200 years without disturbance before they matured and resembled what they once were.

"You just lose an increasing number of species from those forests (by clear-felling)," Professor Franklin said.

The chief forestry commissioner, Mr Evan Rolley, denied that the use of clear-felling caused an unacceptable loss of species diversity and said it had so far proven to be the best in certain circumstances.

"There's no evidence of any adverse impact (of clear-felling, burning and sowing) on the ecological processes within those systems," Mr Rolley said.

The Wilderness Society, which is mounting a "long hot summer campaign" against native forest logging in Tasmania, said Professor Franklin's remarks amounted to a condemnation of clear-felling.



Evan Rolley: no adverse impact on forests.

The society's campaign coordinator, Mr Christian Bell, said Professor Franklin's remarks and the research by Mr Hickey supported the society's call for a Commonwealth environmental impact assessment of Tasmanian forestry.

The results of Mr Hickey's research, presented to a major life-sciences conference at the University of Tasmania, showed that in old-growth mixed forest the return of some rainforest species was worse after logging than after natural wildfire.

Professor Franklin said logged forests would mature earlier — at about 100 years instead of the roughly 200 needed after clear-felling — if the loggers left behind a cross-section of trees, including some of the oldest and best logs.

"It could provide for many of the species (to recover), but I am not going to say you could provide for all of them," Professor Franklin said.

Mr Rolley said the commission was already pursuing alternatives to clear-felling, including a method similar to the one proposed by Professor Franklin.