

# SouthEastTIMBERassociation

## Peer Review Process and Research Publishing Needs Reform

Over the past 10 years, there has been an increasing number of concerns raised by forest scientists about the findings of a significant amount of fire and ecological research in Australia.

Universities and academics seem more intent on protecting reputations, than ensuring that research under their direction has properly followed the Scientific Method. Institutions involved in various forms of medical research champions or agencies prepared to reveal what "is rotten in the State of Denmark," than has been the case within the fields of fire and ecological research.

For example, About a year after she was appointed to a senior editorial role at an academic journal, psychology researcher Professor Simine Vazire was [admonished for upsetting eminent researchers](#) by "desk rejecting" their papers.

Professor Vazire was rejecting the papers because she believed they had serious flaws. But the committee that appointed her was worried that in upsetting famous researchers, the journal's reputation could be put at risk.

Background about bringing more transparency and accountability to the peer review process can be found at the following links.

<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/science-needs-to-look-inward-to-move-forward>

<https://www.wired.com/story/peer-reviewed-scientific-journals-dont-really-do-their-job/>

On 23 November 2021, the Sydney morning Herald reported: "One of Australia's leading cancer scientists, who secured almost \$40 million in taxpayer-funded research grants, has been referred to Queensland's Crime and Corruption Commission by his institute over allegations of research misconduct."

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/top-scientist-referred-to-corruption-watchdog-over-alleged-research-misconduct-20211123-p59bar.html>

On 28 August 2020, the MDPI Fire research journal published a retraction notice for the Winoto-Lewin, Sangar and Kirkpatrick paper "*Propensities of Old-Growth, Mature and Regrowth Wet Eucalypt Forest, and Eucalyptus Nitens Plantation, to Burn during Wildfire and Suffer Fire-Induced Crown Death.*"

The paper had been published on 14 May 2020 and the findings were widely promoted in the media. One of the authors, Dr Jennifer Sanger, on behalf of the Independent Science Council of Tasmania wrote to all Tasmanian state and federal politicians. Among other things, Dr Sanger recommended that 336,000 hectares of Future Potential Production Forests be placed under permanent reservation.



[southeasttimberassociation.com](http://southeasttimberassociation.com) OR find us on Facebook

# SouthEastTIMBERassociation

The University of Tasmania promoted this flawed paper on the university website from 26 May 2022, until it the paper was withdrawn. The paper was withdrawn following concerns raised about data errors. Following analysis of revised data, it was determined that minor corrections to the original paper were not appropriate. Consequently, the authors retracted the paper.

This issue does beg the question as to how many fundamentally flawed fire research papers have passed through the peer review process to publication. Is this paper just the visible tip of a longer list of fire research papers that appear to be driven more by eco-political campaigns than high quality science?

If flawed fire research findings are used to inform forest management regulations and policies, there is an increased risk of harm to the environmental, social and economic assets of Australia.

The Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry failed to address the SETA recommendation "that a bush fire research scientist who has a strong grounding in the science of fire behaviour be engaged to review the outputs of the University of Wollongong - Centre for Environmental Risk Management of Bushfires and discard all material that lacks a sound science basis."

