

Indicator 1.1a: Area of forest by forest type and tenure

This indicator uses the area for each forest type over time as a broad measure of the extent to which forest ecosystems and their diversity are being maintained. Reporting on forest tenure aids our understanding of how different land management regimes may impact on forest biodiversity.



1.1a.ii Forest area by tenure (2023)

This part of Indicator 1.1a presents the area of Australia's forests by tenure.

The three other parts of Indicator 1.1a are:

1.1a.i Forest area by forest type

1.1a.iii Forest area in Regional Forest Agreement regions

1.1a.iv Forest area change over time

Context

Land tenure is the mechanism that declares the legal relationship between people and land. Tenure is a key forest attribute and has a major bearing on the management intent for forests.

Definition

The National Forest Inventory classifies land into six tenure classes: Leasehold forest, Multiple-use public forest, Nature conservation reserve, Other Crown land, Private forest, and Unresolved tenure.

Other terms used here can be found in [Australia's forests and forestry glossary](#).

Key points

- The majority of Australia's 133.6 million hectares of forest is privately managed under private and leasehold land (90.8 million hectares, 68% of total native forest).
- 22.1 million hectares (17%) of Australia's forest is on formal nature conservation reserves.
- 10.7 million hectares (8.0%) of Australia's forest is on multiple-use public native forest tenure.
- 10.0 million hectares (7.6%) of Australia's forest is on other Crown land or where tenure is unresolved.

What is tenure?

Land tenure is the formal land title system that declares the legal relationship between people and land. Tenure describes who owns which land, and determines who has the right to use and occupy land and the activities that are permitted on that land. For forests, land tenure is a key attribute that has a major bearing on how forests can be managed, and underpins the identification of who has access to, and rights of use over, forests and forest resources. Tenure of forest land cannot always be used to determine ownership of trees.

In the National Forest Inventory, forest tenure is reported in six national tenure classes that bring together the range of tenures used by each state and territory across Australia:

- **Leasehold forest** – Crown land held under leasehold title, and generally privately managed although state and territory governments may retain various rights over the land, including over forests or timber on the land. This class includes land held leasehold title with special conditions attached for designated Indigenous communities.

- **Multiple-use public forest** – Publicly owned state forest, timber reserves and other land on which a range of forest values are managed by state and territory government agencies in accordance with relevant Acts and regulations. The forest values can include provision of wood for harvest, supply of water, conservation of biodiversity, recreation, and environmental protection.
- **Nature conservation reserve** – Crown land that is formally reserved for environmental, conservation and recreational purposes, including national parks, nature reserves, state and territory recreation and conservation areas, and some formal reserves in state forests as defined by jurisdictions. It does not include informal reserves and those pending gazettal. The commercial harvesting of wood and non-wood forest products is generally not permitted in nature conservation reserves.
- **Other Crown land** – Crown land reserved for a variety of purposes, including utilities, scientific research, education, stock routes, mining, water-supply catchments, and use by Indigenous communities. Includes Crown land that is unreserved or unallocated. Excludes leasehold forest, nature conservation reserve, and multiple-use public forest.
- **Private forest** – Land held under freehold title and typically under private ownership. It excludes leased Crown land, but includes land held under freehold title with special conditions attached for designated Indigenous communities.
- **Unresolved tenure** – Land where data are insufficient to determine land ownership status.

The process for determining the tenure of Australia’s forest is summarised in the [Supporting information for Indicator 1.1a.ii – Forest area by tenure](#) and in Jacobsen et al. (2019). The process accepts state and territory datasets as the authoritative source of tenure data, where they are available. The most recent spatial compilation for this indicator, [Tenure of Australia’s forests \(2023\)](#), supplements these state and territory datasets with national land tenure information from PSMA Australia Limited and previous NFI national tenure compilations.

Changes over time in the area of forest in different tenure classes reflect both changes in the total area of forest and changes in tenure classification of some areas of forest (see [Supporting information for Indicator 1.1a.ii – Forest area by tenure](#)).

Australia’s forest area by tenure class

Private and Leasehold forests account for 90.8 million hectares of Australia forests (68% of Australia’s total forest area) (Table 1.1a.ii-1a). Queensland contains the largest area of Leasehold forest, with 27.4 million hectares, and Private forest with 16.1 million hectares (Figure 1.1a.ii-1).

Forest on Nature conservation reserve tenure accounts for 22 million hectares of forest (17%), most of which is native forest (Table 1.1a.ii-1b). Large areas of these are found in New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland (Figure 1.1a.ii-1).

Table 1.1a.ii-1a: Area of forest by jurisdiction and tenure

Tenure class	Area ('000 hectares)									Proportion of total forest (%)
	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas.	Vic.	WA	Total forest	
Leasehold forest	8	3,913	9,749	27,428	1,427	9	0.2	5,422	47,956	36
Multiple-use public forest	16	2,122	0	3,140	29	762	3,292	1,352	10,715	8.0
Nature conservation reserve	117	5,638	11	4,236	1,758	1,533	3,458	5,301	22,052	17
Other Crown land	1	837	487	932	74	379	131	6,971	9,812	7.3
Private forest	0	7,708	13,064	16,114	1,839	1,024	1,342	1,720	42,811	32
Unresolved tenure	0	66	23	126	3	0	0	0	218	0.2
Total forest	143	20,284	23,333	51,977	5,131	3,707	8,224	20,766	133,565	100

Totals may not tally due to rounding.

Source: ABARES, National Forest Inventory.

[Click here for a Microsoft Excel workbook of the data for Table 1.1a.ii-1a.](#)

Table 1.1a.ii-1b: Area of native forest, by tenure class and jurisdiction

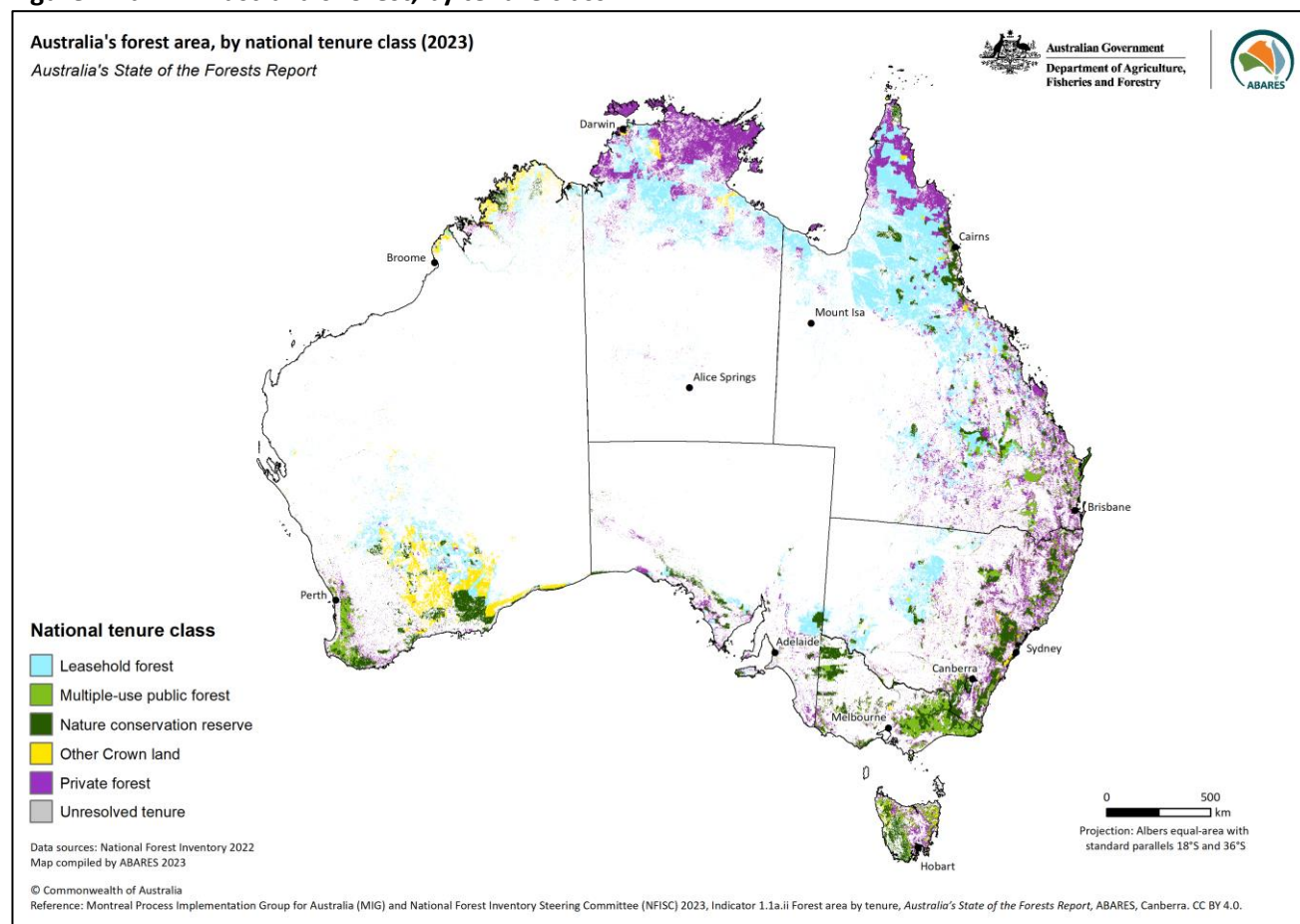
Tenure class	Area ('000 hectares)								Total native forest	Proportion of total native forest (%)
	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas.	Vic.	WA		
Leasehold forest	8	3,913	9,749	27,428	1,406	8	0.2	5,414	47,926	36
Multiple-use public forest	5	1,857	0	2,948	16	645	3,162	1,294	9,927	7.5
Nature conservation reserve	117	5,637	11	4,236	1,756	1,532	3,456	5,292	22,037	17
Other Crown land	0.5	829	486	932	72	377	127	6,938	9,763	7.4
Private forest	0	7,580	13,011	16,081	1,613	831	1,044	1,471	41,631	32
Unresolved tenure	0	66	23	126	3	0	0	0	218	0.2
Total native forest	130	19,882	23,280	51,750	4,866	3,393	7,790	20,409	131,501	100

Totals may not tally due to rounding.

Source: ABARES, National Forest Inventory.

[Click here for a Microsoft Excel workbook of the data for Table 1.1a.ii-1b.](#)

Figure 1.1a.ii-1: Australia’s forest, by tenure class



[Click here to download a high-resolution version of Figure 1.1a.ii-1.](#)

Forest on Private and Leasehold tenure

Private and Leasehold forest contain the largest area of Australia's forests, totaling 90.8 million hectares (Table 1.1a.ii-1a). The largest areas of these are in the Northern Territory and Queensland (Figure 1.1a.ii-1).

Of Australia's total forest area of 134 million hectares:

- 48.0 million hectares (36%) is on Leasehold tenure and
- 42.8 million hectares (32%) is on Private tenure.

This combined 90.8 million hectares is privately managed forest¹ and covers 68% of the total area of Australia's forest. Freehold land held by Indigenous communities is included in the national land tenure class of Private forest.

Of the total area of 132 million hectares of native forest (Table 1.1a.ii-1b):

- 47.9 million hectares (36% of the total area of Australia's native forest) is on Leasehold tenure
- 41.6 million (32%) hectares is on Private tenure.

Together, a total of 89.6 million hectares (68%) of native forest are privately managed. Some of these forests are privately managed for wood production.

The jurisdictions with the highest proportion of their native forest that is privately managed are:

- the Northern Territory (96% of native forest area)
- Queensland (84% of native forest area).

In Queensland, under the *Forestry Act 1959* the state retains rights of ownership and access to timber and associated forest products of commercial value on all Crown land, including land leased to a private lessee under the *Land Act 1994*.

The jurisdictions with the lowest proportions of their native forest that is privately managed are:

- Victoria (13% of native forest area)
- the Australian Capital Territory (6% of native forest area).

Forest on Nature conservation reserve tenure

Forest on Nature conservation reserve tenure total 22.1 million hectares of Australia's total forest area of 134 million hectares (17% of total forest area) (Table 1.1a.ii-1a). Effectively all of this is native forest (Table 1.1a.ii-1b).

By jurisdiction, the largest area of native forest on Nature conservation reserve tenure is in:

- New South Wales with 5.6 million hectares (26% of the total native forest on Nature conservation reserve tenure)
- Western Australia with 5.3 million hectares (24%).

The Australian Capital Territory has the highest proportion of its total native forest area on Nature conservation reserve tenure (90%), followed by Tasmania (45%), Victoria (44%) and South Australia (36%) (Table 1.1a.ii-1a).

Nature conservation reserves have a range of legislated management intents including the protection of biodiversity. Some forest areas in other land tenure classes also have their legislated management intent as protection of biodiversity, including Indigenous-owned or Indigenous-managed land on private, leasehold or other Crown land. Further information and data can be found in:

- forest in protected area categories (Indicator 1.1c)
- Indigenous forest estate (Indicators 6.4a and 6.4c in Criterion 6).

¹ Excluding the small areas of Leasehold tenure where the Commonwealth is the lessee

Multiple-use public forest tenure

Forest on Multiple-use public forest tenure totals 10.7 million hectares (8.0% of Australia's total 134 million hectares of forest) (Table 1.1a.ii-1a). These forests are predominately in the south-east and south-west of Australia (Figure 1.1a.ii-1).

- 9.9 million hectares of Multiple-use public forest is native forest (7.5% of Australia's total native forest area) (Table 1.1a.ii-1b).

Multiple-use public native forests have multiple management objectives. In some jurisdictions, wood harvesting is permitted in multiple-use forests, but not where restricted by jurisdictional forest management codes of practice (see Indicator 2.1a).

By jurisdiction, the largest areas of multiple-use public native forests (Table 1.1a.ii-1b) occur in:

- Victoria, with 3.1 million hectares (32% of the total area of multiple-use public native forests)
- Queensland, with 2.9 million hectares (30%)
- New South Wales, with 1.9 million hectares (19%).

By proportion of total native forest, Victoria (41%) and Tasmania (19%) have the highest proportions of their native forest area in Multiple-use public forests. For all other jurisdictions the proportion of their native forest area in Multiple-use public forests is less than 10%.

Forests on Other Crown land tenure and Unresolved tenure

Forest on Other Crown land tenure and Unresolved tenure total 10.0 million hectares (7.8% of Australia's total forest area) (Table 1.1a.ii-1a). The largest areas of Other Crown land are found in Western Australia (Figure 1.1a.ii-1).

Of Australia's total forest area of 134 million hectares:

- 9.8 million hectares of forest is on Other Crown land (7.3% of Australia's total forest area).

Western Australia has 6.9 million hectares of native forest on Other Crown land (71% of the total native forest on Other Crown land).

Other Crown land includes land owned by Commonwealth or state and territory governments that is used for a variety of purposes such as utilities, research, education, mining and water supply catchments, and is not covered by other national tenure classes. This tenure class also includes unreserved Crown land and unallocated Crown land.

An additional 0.2 million hectares of forest is on land with Unresolved tenure (0.2% of Australia's total forest area).

Supporting information for Indicator 1.1a.ii Forest area by tenure

Methodology for determining the tenure of Australia's forests

The method used to determine tenure recognises state and territory land title registers as the formal legal sources of tenure information, specifies the sourcing of data from the most accurate spatial representations of these land registers, and provides transparent translation of the range of jurisdictional tenure classes into the six national tenure classes (see Jacobsen et al. 2019). This method was applied to assemble both the [Tenure of Australia's forests \(2018\)](#) spatial dataset and the current update to the [Tenure of Australia's forests \(2023\)](#) dataset.

State and territory tenure datasets used for the 2018 spatial compilation were updated for the 2023 spatial compilation. In addition, newly available tenure information was sourced for the entire state of South Australia, and large parts of Western Australia, providing coverage of known gaps in the national tenure dataset.

National land tenure information from PSMA Australia Limited (operating as Geoscape Australia) and previous NFI national tenure compilations were used to fill remaining gaps in coverage. Land managed by the Department of Defence occurs across multiple tenures, and information from the Department of Defence was not used in this most recent spatial compilation.

Differences in native forest areas by tenure class since SOFR 2018

The tenure area data reported in this 2023 update of tenure for *Australia's State of the Forests Report* (SOFR) differ from the tenure area data reported in [Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018](#). The areas reported in this 2023 update are drawn from the [Tenure of Australia's forests \(2023\)](#) dataset, whereas the areas reported in *Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018* were drawn from the [Tenure of Australia's forests \(2018\)](#) dataset. These differences have a variety of causes, of which only some are actual change in tenure over time. The main driver of differences is the increased accuracy of the datasets now used.

Forest on Private and Leasehold tenure

The total area of native forest on Private tenure reported here is 600 thousand hectares more than reported in SOFR 2018. This is primarily due to the transfer of forest on Leasehold tenure to Private tenure; and the transfer of national parks to Indigenous freehold (Private) tenure (noting that these areas continue to be managed as conservation reserves).

The total area of native forest on Leasehold tenure reported here is 680 thousand hectares more than reported in SOFR 2018. This is largely due to more accurate input data for Western Australia.

Forest on Nature conservation reserve tenure

The area of native forest on Nature conservation reserve tenure reported here is 318 thousand hectares more than reported in SOFR 2018. This is due to a combination of more accurate tenure data for Western Australia, and transfer of land on other tenures to conservation reserves in New South Wales and Victoria.

Forest on Multiple-use public forest tenure

The area of native forest on Multiple-use public forest tenure reported here is 155 thousand hectares more than reported in SOFR 2018. In Victoria, an additional 110 thousand hectares of Multiple-use public forest results from using more accurate Victorian tenure information (land previously classed as Other Crown land is now classified as Multiple-use public forest). Increases of 67 thousand and 33 thousand hectares of Multiple-use public forest in Queensland and Tasmania, respectively, were driven by an increase in forest area reported on this tenure class. There was a decrease of 50 thousand hectares in Western Australia resulting from the use of more accurate tenure information.

Forests on Other Crown land tenure and Unresolved tenure

The area of native forest on Other Crown land tenure reported here is 1.3 million hectares less than reported in SOFR 2018. This is due to more accurate tenure data for Western Australia, and the transfer of unallocated Crown land to freehold tenure across multiple states.

The area of forest on Unresolved tenure reported here is 587 thousand hectares less than reported in SOFR 2018. This is due to improved attribution and spatial completeness of input tenure datasets.

References

Jacobsen R, Mutendeuzi M, Howell CI, Read SM (2019). [Development of a national tenure dataset for reporting the tenure of Australia's forests](#), ABARES technical report, Canberra, August. CC BY 4.0. doi.org/10.25814/5d5e34e2d3dcc

More information

Learn more about the [Criterion 1 of Australia's State of the Forest Report](#).

Web agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/sofr/

Download a [Microsoft Excel workbook of the data presented in Indicator 1.1a.i](#).

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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