

## Indicator 4.1a: Area of forest managed primarily for protective functions (2024)



The area of forest land where priority is given to protecting soil and hydrological functions provides an indication of the emphasis being placed by society on the conservation of these values. This indicator includes areas managed to protect soil and water by excluding incompatible activities.

### Context

Soil and water are fundamental components of a forest ecosystem. Forests contribute directly to soil production, maintenance and protection, and provide and protect water including for high-quality water supplies.

### Key points

- A total of 37.0 million hectares (28%) of Australia's forest is managed for protection of soil and water values, most of which is native forest.
- The area of forest managed primarily for protection of soil and water values includes formal nature conservation reserves, informal reserves in multiple-use public native forests, forests protected by prescription and forested catchments managed specifically for water supply.
- There has been a slight increase in the area and proportion of forest managed for protection of soil and water values since the last report in 2018.

### Area of forest managed for protective functions

Forests are vital for soil conservation, preventing soil erosion, protecting water supplies and maintaining other ecosystem functions. Relevant state and territory regulations and guidelines that provide for sustainable forest management are designed to minimise soil erosion, protect soil physical properties, manage activities that could affect water yields and quality, and manage risks to water quality. State and territory based processes are also in place to monitor and ensure compliance with measures that protect forest soil and water resources.

A total of 37.0 million hectares of forest is managed for protection of soil and water values, and comprised largely of native forest with smaller areas of commercial plantations and other forest. This is 28% of Australia's total forest area of [133.6 million hectares](#) (Table 4.1a-1), and represents an increase in both the area and proportion reported in [Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018](#) (36.6 million hectares and 27%, respectively).

The area of forest managed primarily for protection of soil and water values includes formal nature conservation reserves, informal reserves in multiple-use public forests, forests protected by prescription (such as steep slopes, erodible soil types and riparian (streamside) zones where harvesting and road construction are not permitted), and forested catchments managed specifically for water supply.

**Table 4.1a-1: Area of forest managed primarily for protective functions including protection of soil and water values**

Year	Area of forest managed for protective functions ('000 hectares)									Total forest area ('000 hectares)	Proportion of total forest
	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas.	Vic.	WA	Total		
2021	121	6,114	6,743	8,891	2,688	2,098	4,851	5,510	37,016	133,562	28%

Forest area derived from [Forests of Australia \(2023\)](#) spatial dataset.

Area figures for the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia are for total forest in the comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) reserve system on public and private land. The CAR reserve system on public land comprises dedicated formal reserves, informal reserves, and areas where forest values are protected by management prescriptions (see [Indicator 1.1c Area of forest in protected area categories – Supporting information](#)).

Area figures for the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia are the area of forest in Australia's National Reserve System (NRS), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected area categories I to VI (see [Indicator 1.1c Area of forest in protected area categories – Supporting information](#)).

Source: ABARES; National Forest Inventory; Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database 2020, Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; state and territory data.

[Click here for a Microsoft Excel workbook of the data for Table 4.1a-1.](#)

*Subsequent updates to Indicator 4.1a will cover forests in catchments specifically to supply drinking water.*

## More information

Learn more about [Criterion 4 of Australia's State of the Forests Report](#).

Web [agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/sofr/](http://agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/sofr/)

Download a [Microsoft Excel workbook of the data presented in Indicator 4.1a](#).

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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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