

## Indicator 6.4a: Area of forest to which Indigenous people have use and rights that protect their special values and are recognised through formal and informal management regimes (2024)



This indicator monitors the degree to which land is placed under appropriate tenure classifications or management regimes to protect Indigenous peoples' values in forests. An acceptable level of accountability for the protection of Indigenous peoples' cultural, religious, social and spiritual needs and values is an essential part of forest management.

### Context and definitions

The extent to which Indigenous people participate, have access to, or are recognised in, the management arrangements of Australia's forests is reported here.

The [Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate \(2024\)](#) dataset assembled in Australia's National Forest Inventory identifies and reports across four attributes of the Indigenous estate: Indigenous ownership, Indigenous management or Indigenous co-management, or Other special rights.

**Indigenous estate (land or forest):** Land or forest over which Indigenous peoples and communities have ownership, management, or rights of use for customary purposes.

### Key points

- The Indigenous forest estate is the forest over which Indigenous peoples and communities have ownership, management or co-management, and/or rights of use for customary purposes, and occurs across all public and private tenures.
- The Indigenous forest estate comprises 79.9 million hectares of forest, representing 60% of Australia's total forest area in 2023.
- The Indigenous forest estate area has increased by 10.4 million hectares since 2018, resulting mainly from new Indigenous Protected Areas, Indigenous Land Use Agreements and areas subject to Native Title.

### Reporting the Indigenous estate

The Indigenous estate dataset captures the range of management arrangements between Indigenous peoples and land and forest across all public and private land tenures. The process for assembling and reporting Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate is described in [Jacobsen et al. \(2020\)](#), which applies an updated methodology to that used for [Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018](#). The updated methodology reports individually four Indigenous estate attributes:

#### Indigenous ownership

- **Indigenous owned** – Freehold land or forest that is owned by Indigenous communities, or land or forest for which ownership is vested through other mechanisms.

#### Indigenous management arrangement

- **Indigenous managed** – Land or forest that is managed by Indigenous communities, or
- **Indigenous co-managed** – Land or forest that has a formal, legally binding agreement in place to include

input from Indigenous people in the process of developing and implementing a management plan.

Other special rights for Indigenous peoples and communities

- **Other special rights** – Land or forest subject to Native Title determinations, registered Indigenous Land Use Agreements and legislated special cultural use provisions.

Land and forest in the Indigenous estate will have one, and likely more, of these four attributes (except for the management attributes of ‘managed’ and ‘co-managed’ which are mutually exclusive). As such, the cumulative area of land with these attributes is greater than the total Indigenous estate. Spatial analysis is therefore required to calculate the total Indigenous estate to prevent double counting of areas subject to more than attribute.

### Area of forest in the Indigenous estate

The Indigenous estate covers 536 million hectares of land, of which 79.9 million hectares is forest in 2023 (taken together and accounting for overlaps of areas that are in more than one attribute). This represents 60% of Australia’s total forest area of 134 million hectares in 2023 (Table 6.4a-1).

By jurisdiction the largest areas in the Indigenous forest estate occur in Queensland (33.6 million hectares), the Northern Territory (19.3 million hectares) and Western Australia (15.4 million hectares) and together comprise 85% of the total Indigenous forest estate (Table 6.4a-1). Figure 6.4a-1 shows the distribution of the Indigenous forest estate across Australia.

The Indigenous forest estate in 2023 includes the following, noting that these areas should not be totalled as double counting will occur for areas having more than one attribute:

- 24.2 million hectares of forest attributed as **Indigenous owned**
- 31.4 million hectares of forest subject to an Indigenous management arrangement with
  - 20.7 million hectares attributed as **Indigenous managed** and
  - 10.6 million hectares attributed as **Indigenous co-managed**
- 62.4 million hectares of forest subject to **other special rights**.

**Table 6.4a-1: Area of land and forest in the Indigenous estate, by Indigenous estate attribute and jurisdiction, 2023**

Indigenous estate attribute	Land cover type	Area ('000 hectares)								
		ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas.	Vic.	WA	Australia
Indigenous owned	All	0	539	65,691	10,092	22,126	70	18	55,124	153,660
	Forest	0	176	12,924	6,878	311	10	13	3,883	24,194
Indigenous managed	All	0	535	61,552	6,387	20,294	69	7	67,194	156,039
	Forest	0	169	11,113	4,820	269	9	3	4,358	20,740
Indigenous co-managed	All	107	3,858	4,479	5,204	14,935	1,559	1,085	4,417	35,643
	Forest	101	2,805	1,821	3,280	694	854	948	120	10,622
Other special rights	All	0	2,785	48,165	100,860	61,658	0	9,727	219,624	442,820
	Forest	0	1,770	6,641	32,424	2,306	0	4,069	15,163	62,372
Total Indigenous estate	All	107	6,321	111,316	102,392	82,635	1,628	9,801	221,683	535,883
	Forest	101	3,972	19,313	33,636	2,552	863	4,132	15,362	79,931
<b>Total forest in jurisdiction</b>		<b>143</b>	<b>20,284</b>	<b>23,333</b>	<b>51,977</b>	<b>5,131</b>	<b>3,707</b>	<b>8,224</b>	<b>20,766</b>	<b>133,565</b>
<b>Proportion of total forest that is in the Indigenous estate</b>		<b>70%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>60%</b>

Values for the 'Total Indigenous estate' account for overlap of areas with more than one attribute, except for the attributes of Indigenous managed and Indigenous co-managed which are mutually exclusive and thus will have no overlap.

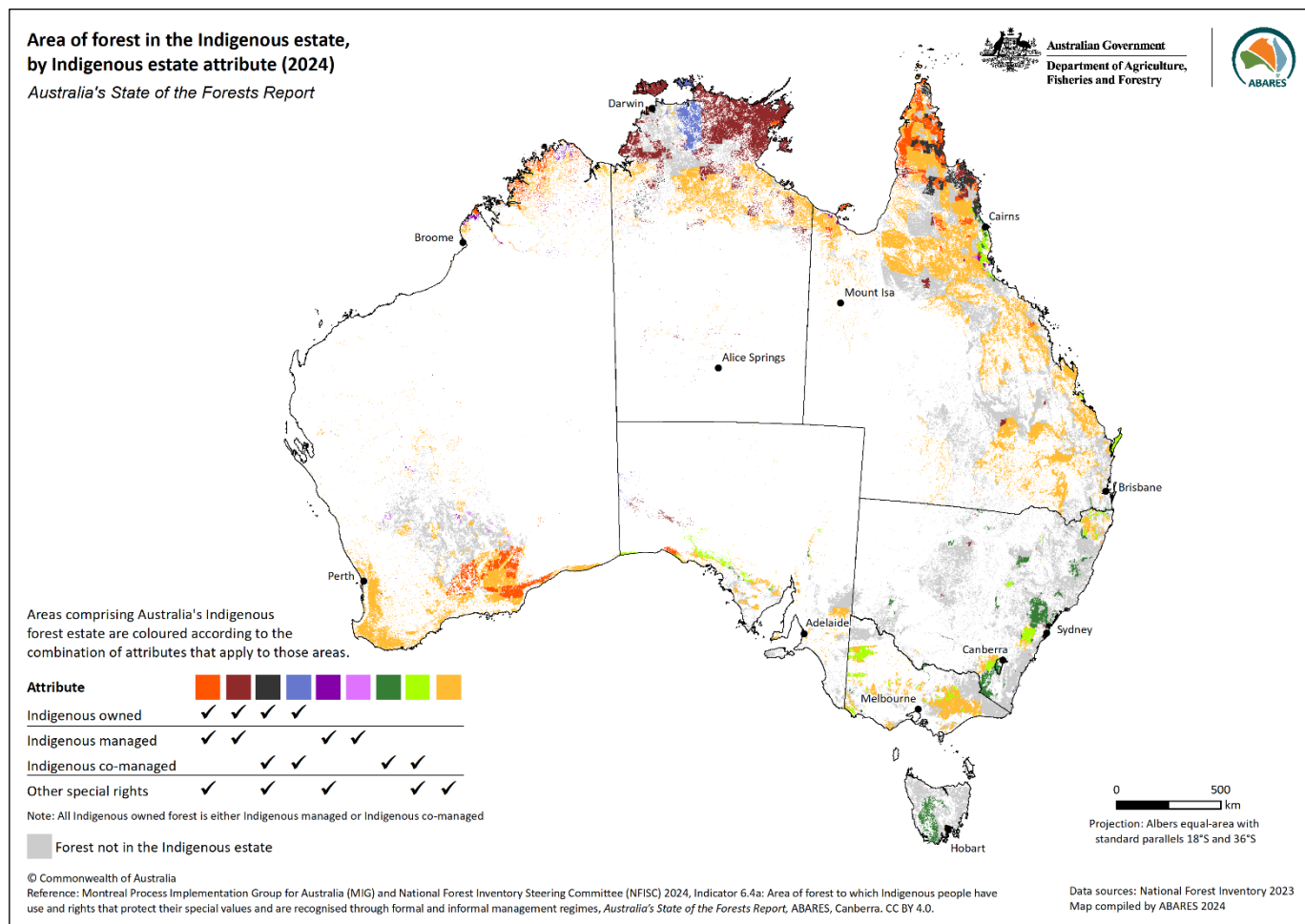
Total forest area from Indicator 1.1a.i Forest area by forest type.

Totals may not tally due to rounding.

Source: ABARES, National Forest Inventory; national, state and territory government data and non-government data on Indigenous management arrangements.

[Click here for a Microsoft Excel workbook of the data for Table 6.4a-1.](#)

**Figure 6.4a-1: Area of forest in the Indigenous estate, by Indigenous estate attribute**



[Click here for a high-definition copy of Figure 6.4a-1.](#)

## Changes in the area of the Indigenous estate

To report the change in the area of the Indigenous estate, the methodology described in [Jacobsen et al. \(2020\)](#) was applied to the data used to report the Indigenous estate in [Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018](#) and also to data current to 2023, thus providing for a direct comparison between the two time series and the Indigenous estate attributes therein.

The 536 million hectares of land in the Indigenous estate in 2023 is an increase of 98.2 million hectares from 2018. This change includes an increase in the area of land that is Indigenous owned, an increase in the area with an Indigenous management arrangement, and an increase in the area subject to other special rights. The 79.9 million hectares of forest in the Indigenous estate in 2023 is an increase of 10.4 million hectares from the 69.5 million hectares of forest in the Indigenous estate in 2018. As with the increase in the Indigenous land estate, the increase in the Indigenous forest estate includes an increase in the area of forest land that is Indigenous owned, an increase in the forest area with an Indigenous management arrangement, and an increase in the forest area subject to other special rights, rather than an expansion of forest on the Indigenous land estate.

The area of forest that is **Indigenous owned** increased by 2.2 million hectares between 2018 and 2023, and forest that is Indigenous managed (either **Indigenous managed** or **Indigenous co-managed**) increased by 2.7 million hectares. Both increases occur mostly through the expansion of the network of Indigenous Protected Areas.

The area of forest subject to **other special rights** increased by 12 million hectares between 2018 and 2023, through the registration of new Indigenous Land Use Agreements and recognition of Native Title claims.

These increases also include some areas previously reported in the Indigenous estate but under other attributes.

## References

Jacobsen R, Howell C, Read SM (2020). [Australia's Indigenous land and forest estate: separate reporting of Indigenous ownership, management and other special rights](#), ABARES technical report, Canberra, December. CC BY 4.0. [doi.org/10.25814/bqr0-4m20](https://doi.org/10.25814/bqr0-4m20)

## More information

Learn more about [Criterion 6 of Australia's State of the Forests Report](#).

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

Download a [Microsoft Excel workbook of the data presented in Indicator 6.4a](#).

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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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