Australian Government



**Department of Agriculture and Water Resources** ABARES

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# Australian forest profiles Acacia



Acacias are remarkably varied in appearance and habit, ranging from low-spreading shrubs to trees more than 30 metres tall. Commonly referred to as 'wattles', acacias are well known for their mass of bright yellow flowers. Golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) is the national floral emblem and appears on the coat of arms of Australia.

Acacias have a range of foliage types. Some species have true leaves that are divided into leaflets called pinnae. Others have leaf-like structures called phyllodes, which are flattened leaf stalks. The colour of the foliage varies from light or dark green to silver-grey.



Flowers of Cootamundra wattle (Acacia baileyana) John Davidson

## **Distribution and ownership**

Acacia forests are located in all Australian states and the Northern Territory (Map 1). They grow mainly in arid and semi-arid regions. A total of 4.5 million hectares (46 per cent) of the Acacia forest type is in Queensland and 3.2 million hectares (33 per cent) are in Western Australia.

Mulga (*A. aneura* and related species) is widespread across central Australia. Brigalow (*A. harpophylla*) is widespread across Queensland and northern New South Wales, forming dense forests on flat or undulating country with clay soils. Both mulga and brigalow form forest and non-forest communities. Some species of acacia are also present in wetter areas. For example, in Tasmania, blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) dominates stands of swamp forest on poorly drained sites. Silver wattle (*A. dealbata*) is common on tablelands and foothills from northern New South Wales to western Victoria and Tasmania.

A total of 7.3 million hectares (74 per cent) of Acacia forest is on leasehold land and 1.1 million hectares (12 per cent) are on private land (Table 1).



Projection: Albers equal-area with standard parallels 18°S and 36°S. Source: ABARES (2016). Map compiled by ABARES 2016 Open a high-resolution version of Map 1 that can be saved as a PNG file TABLE 1 Ownership of Acacia native forest, by state and territory, 2013 ('000 hectares)

Tenure	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas.	Vic.	WA	Australia
Leasehold	0	709	802	3 174	75	0	0	2 534	7 294
Multiple-use public forest	0	21	0	81	0	34	14	0	150
Nature conservation reserve	0	40	0	330	8	9	21	186	595
Other Crown land	0	2	6	46	0	10	3	485	552
Private	0	77	168	846	13	22	4	17	1 146
Unresolved tenure	0	0	0	68	0	0	0	0	69
Total	0	849	976	4 546	97	75	43	3 222	9 807

Note: Totals may not tally due to rounding. The six forest tenure categories are defined in *Australia's State of the Forests Report 2013*. Source: ABARES (2016)

Download Table 1 data as an Excel workbook

#### **Forest structure**

A total of 7.4 million hectares (75 per cent) of Acacia forest is woodland forest and 7.8 million hectares (80 per cent) are low forest (Figure 1). These characteristics are typical of Acacia forest in the arid and semi-arid regions.

Native forests are divided into three classes based on crown cover:

**woodland forest** (20 to 50 per cent crown cover)

open forest (>50 to 80 per cent crown cover)

closed forest (>80 to 100 per cent crown cover)

and three classes based on mature tree height:

low (2 to 10 metres)

medium (>10 to 30 metres)

tall (>30 metres).

FIGURE 1 Structure of Acacia native forest, 2013 ('000 hectares)



Source: ABARES (2016) <u>Download Figure 1 data as an Excel workbook</u>

#### **Importance and uses**

Acacias help to protect the landscape by stabilising soils and preventing erosion. They also enrich the soil by fixing nitrogen, an essential nutrient for plant growth. This process depends on symbiotic bacteria called rhizobia that live in the plant's root system. Acacias are one of the first plants to regenerate after a disturbance such as a bushfire.

Acacia wood has traditionally been used by Indigenous Australians for making spears, clubs and hunting boomerangs. Early in the colonial period the wood was widely used for cabinet-making and everyday furniture, but today its use is limited to fine furniture.

Acacias are among the most attractive flowering plants in Australia. Common flower colours are bright and golden yellows, but the flowers of some species are almost white to orange-yellow. Acacia flowers and foliage are often used in floral arrangements.

Acacias are used as fodder plants and feed for sheep, especially in drought-affected areas when alternative feed sources are scarce.

### Bibliography

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Bipinnate foliage of silver wattle (A. dealbata) Rohan Jacobsen

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Foliage (phyllodes) of lightwood (A. implexa) Rohan Jacobsen

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