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# Australian forest profiles

## Melaleuca



Australia has 6.4 million hectares of Melaleuca native forest, mainly found in northern Australia. This is about 4.9% of the Australia's total native forest area.

There are more than 200 species of melaleucas, most of which are endemic to Australia. However, only a few species develop into trees. These taller melaleucas are commonly called paperbarks or tea-trees. Common species include broad-leaved paperbark (*Melaleuca viridiflora*) and weeping paperbark (*M. leucadendra*).

The bark of many melaleucas (particularly the larger tree species) is distinctive. The bark is made up of multiple thin layers of paper-like cork separated by thin fibrous layers. In some species, this papery bark can grow up to five centimetres thick before peeling.

Bark colours include off-white, light and dark brown, and almost black. The name melaleuca is derived from the Greek words *melas* (black) and *leukos* (white).



Broad-leaved paperbark forest (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), south-east Queensland  
Michael Ryan

## Distribution and ownership

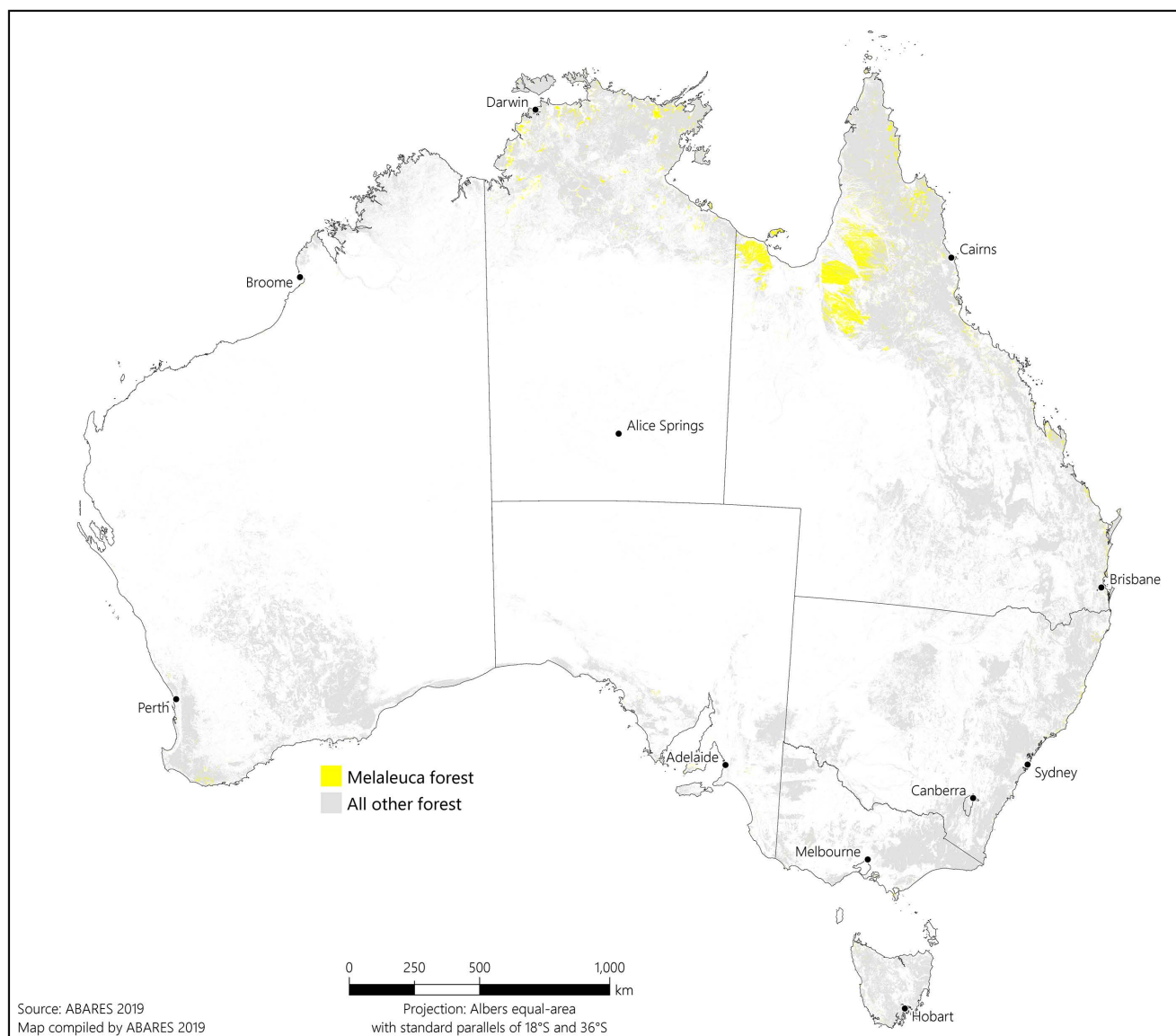
The Melaleuca forest type is found in all states and the Northern Territory (Map 1). It occurs mainly as areas of low woodland forest across estuarine plains and seasonal swamps in the coastal and near-coastal areas of monsoonal northern Australia. It also grows in narrow strips beside streams.

Most of the Melaleuca forest type is found in the Cape York region of Queensland and the northern part of the Northern Territory. A total

of 5.1 million hectares (81%) is in Queensland and 1.0 million hectares (16%) are in the Northern Territory. Swamps dominated by Melaleuca forest also occur on poorly drained sites on the east coast of mainland Australia and in north-western Tasmania.

A total of 4.5 million hectares (70%) of Melaleuca forest is on leasehold land and 1.3 million hectares (21%) are on private land (Table 1).

**MAP 1** Distribution of Melaleuca native forest, 2018



[Open a high-resolution version of Map 1 that can be saved as a PNG file](#)

**TABLE 1** Ownership of Melaleuca native forest, by state and territory, 2018 ('000 hectares)

Tenure	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas.	Vic.	WA	Australia
Leasehold forest	0	0.1	305	4,144	3	0	0	1	4,454
Multiple-use public forest	0	7	0	14	0.1	3	2	3	29
Nature conservation reserve	0	22	0.3	258	12	15	13	39	360
Other Crown land	0	4	70	82	2	1	0.4	3	162
Private forest	0	33	663	614	16	6	4	11	1,347
Unresolved tenure	0	1	0.1	29	0.1	0	0	0	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>1,038</b>	<b>5,141</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>6,382</b>

Note: Totals may not tally due to rounding. The six forest tenure categories are defined in *Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018*.

Source: ABARES (2019)

[Download Table 1 data as an Excel workbook](#)

## Forest structure

A total of 5.4 million hectares (85%) of Melaleuca forest is woodland forest and 5.0 million hectares (79%) are low forest (Figure 1).

### Native forest structural classes

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

- **woodland forest** (20 to 50% crown cover)
- **open forest** (>50 to 80% crown cover)
- **closed forest** (>80 to 100% crown cover).

and three classes based on mature tree height:

- **low** (2 to 10 metres)
- **medium** (>10 to 30 metres)
- **tall** (>30 metres).

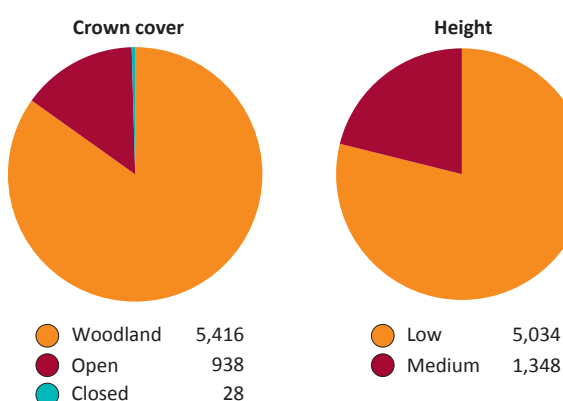
## Importance and uses

Melaleuca forests trap vegetation and debris deposited in coastal areas during floods and storms. This provides habitat for fish species, retains and filters water and reduces soil and sediment run-off.

Melaleuca forests also provide habitat for many species of birds, including herons, egrets, bitterns and spoonbills. Some birds, such as the great-billed heron, nest and breed only in melaleuca and mangrove trees in tropical estuaries.

The foliage of several species contains essential oils (such as tea-tree oil) that have medical and pharmacological uses. Some have germicidal and antibacterial properties and are used to treat a range of conditions.

Melaleuca wood is particularly durable in water and is highly resistant to termites. Melaleuca timber has historically been used for marine pilings, knee joints for vessels, framing and flooring.

**FIGURE 1** Structure of Melaleuca native forest, 2018 ('000 hectares)

Source: ABARES (2019)

[Download Figure 1 data as an Excel workbook](#)



## Bibliography

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Broad-leaved paperbark forest (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), south-east Queensland  
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This is one in a series of profiles on Australia's major forest types. It has been compiled using information from the Australia's State of the Forests Report series. The latest report, *Australia's State of the Forests Report 2018*, and the profiles, are available at [agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia](http://agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia).

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