



WWF

FACT SHEET

# TREE-CLEARING IN AUSTRALIA

Forests are one of the planet's most extraordinary natural assets. Covering a little under one third of the Earth's total landmass area, they provide a home to two thirds of the known biodiversity and play a critical role in the regulation of the climate and oxygen cycle. Forests help maintain fresh water reserves, limit soil erosion, and provide shelter and sustenance to more than a billion human beings.

But while this resource is of enormous benefit to mankind, it's also under serious threat from human activity. Satellite studies suggest that the world's forests are being cleared at a rate of 177,000 square kilometres a year, destroying vital habitat for plant and animal species.

While some of the most severe deforestation is occurring in developing countries in Southeast Asia and South America, tree-clearing is also a significant environmental threat in Australia. WWF estimates that more than 80% of the deforestation set to occur globally between 2015 and 2030 will take place in 11 deforestation 'fronts'. One of these is eastern Australia in the states of Queensland and New South Wales, meaning that Australia ranks among the likes of the Amazon, Borneo, the Congo Basin and other threatened tropical regions.

## Causes of deforestation

The primary cause of deforestation globally is demand for land for use in agriculture, with mining and infrastructure projects also taking a destructive toll. In Southeast Asia, the clearing of land for palm oil and pulp production has had a devastating effect on the region's rainforests.

In Australia, most tree-clearing is undertaken to create pasture for livestock. This process was largely halted following the introduction of bans on excessive tree-clearing in New South Wales and Queensland in the 1990s and early 2000s, but recent changes to legislation in both states have again made it easier for farmers and landowners to clear trees. Another cause of deforestation is climate change which can lead to increased frequency and intensity of bushfires and droughts.



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## Impacts of tree-clearing

The impacts of tree-clearing are significant on both plants and animals and the wider health of the planet. Some 964 of the 1,250 Australian terrestrial animal species listed as threatened have habitat fragmentation or degradation listed as a threat, while the same is true for 286 of the 390 threatened plant species.

Species under threat due to tree-clearing include Carnaby's cockatoo, the southern cassowary, Bennet's tree kangaroo, the Cape York rock-wallaby, and the black-flanked rock-wallaby, as well as the iconic koala, recently listed as vulnerable to extinction in Queensland and New South Wales.



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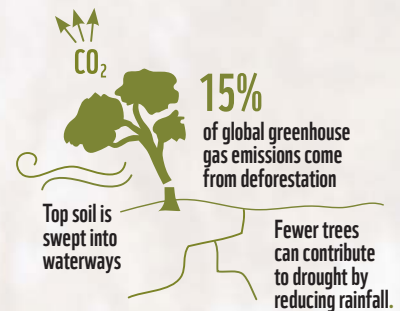
Carnaby's black cockatoo is under threat in Western Australia due to tree-clearing



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But tree-clearing also has wider reaching effects on the Australian environment. Trees play a key role in capturing and storing greenhouse gases, and become carbon sources when killed. Deforestation and forest degradation accounts for approximately 15% of total global greenhouse gas emissions.

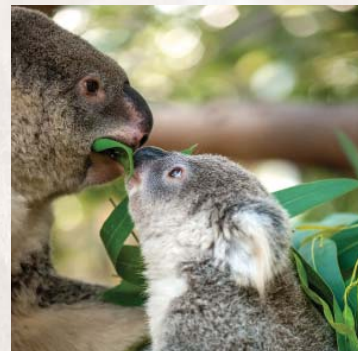
Tree-clearing also promotes soil erosion, allowing fertile top soil to be swept into waterways where it harms existing ecosystems. Fewer trees in a region can also contribute to drought by reducing the amount of local rainfall.



## Protecting forests

WWF-Australia recognises that forests and woodlands are essential to the production of sustainable food, the preservation of threatened species, and the creation of a low-carbon future. We're fighting in Queensland and New South Wales, in particular, for much stronger laws to stop excessive tree-clearing.

WWF advocates Zero Net Deforestation and forest Degradation (ZNDD) globally by 2020, which allows for some limited and carefully controlled clearing for agriculture and settlements across the developing world. In Australia, WWF advocates Net Forest cover positive by 2020 – which means increasing native forest cover (not including plantations, but including woodlands). This is because Australia is already well-developed, and has more than enough cleared land to work with already.



Koalas in south-east Queensland are facing localised extinction due to excessive tree-clearing

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