

MVG 18—HEATHLANDS

- Open, closed or mixed heathlands dominated by plant genera typical of infertile or waterlogged sites, generally within the coastal and/or montane landscapes with sandy or laterite soils. Plants belonging to the family Epacridaceae, such as the common heath *Epacris impressa* (the floral emblem of Victoria), are perhaps the most widely recognised group as being typical of heaths.
- Typical areas include the coastal sand masses of north-east New South Wales and south-east Queensland such as Fraser Island and Cooloola, headlands (Victorian and New South Wales coastlines, Kwongan areas of Western Australia and southern coastal areas of Western Australia).
- Many Heathlands are dominated by endemic Australian plants. Dominant species include *Allocasuarina*, *Baeckea*, *Banksia*, *Calytrix*, *Hakea*, *Kunzea*, *Epacris*, *Grevillea*, *Leptospermum*, *Melaleuca*, *Leucopogon*, *Prostanthera*, *Richea* and *Xanthorrhoea*.



Photo: M. Flegg

Coastal heath on clifftops, North Head, Sydney Harbour, NSW

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Facts and figures

Major Vegetation Group	MVG 18—Heathlands
Major Vegetation Subgroups (number of NVIS descriptions)	Heath (173)
Typical NVIS structural formations	Closed heathland (mid, low) Heathland (Mid, low) Open heathland (mid, low) Mid closed shrubland Shrubland (tall, mid)
Number of IBRA regions	33
Most extensive in IBRA region	Est. pre-1750 and present: Coolgardie (WA)
Estimated pre-1750 extent (km²)	9 256
Present extent (km²)	8 071
Area protected (km²)	3 562



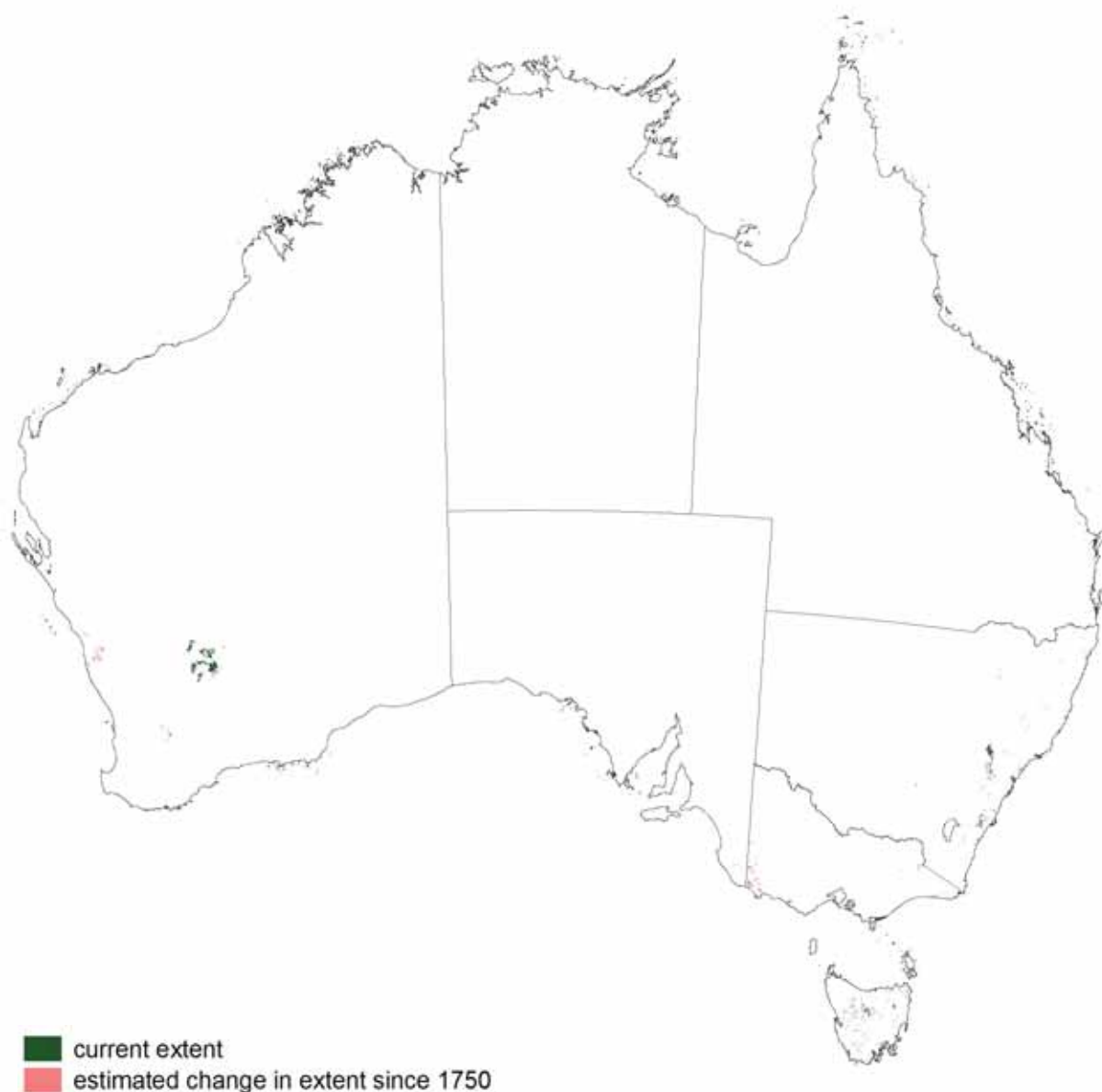
Photo: M. Flegg

Kalbarri National Park, WA

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Geography

- Located on either infertile, drainage impeded or waterlogged sites or sandy soils, generally on the coastal sand masses or plains from Cape York Peninsula, southwards to Victoria and Tasmania, across southern Australia and northwards again to Geraldton.
- The major distribution is found in Western Australia (3 627 km²).
- Also found in certain montane environments.



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Change

- Approximately 13% of the estimated pre-1750 extent cleared accounting for 0.1% of total clearing in Australia.
- Approximately 1 185 km² cleared since European settlement.
- Extent in Western Australia most affected by clearing with 20% of heath lost in the south-west.
- Near major population centres and along the eastern seaboard heath communities have been modified extensively by clearing for urban areas, recreation and by heavy mineral sand mining.
- Some heathland communities are acknowledged as being amongst the most species rich vascular plant communities in the world.
- Land clearing for urban development persists as a major threat to these communities.
- Heathlands tend to attract more interest from the wider community and tourists, possibly as a result of the species diversity, flowering display and proximity to the residential areas.
- Threats include the increasing residential/urban expansion in and along coastal areas and regular or intense fires used as part of hazard reduction management near urban areas.

Tenure

Heathlands occur on a range of land tenures.

New South Wales:	protected areas, some on reserved crown land, small areas scattered on freehold land and state forests
Queensland:	protected areas, state forests, little on freehold land
South Australia:	protected areas, little on freehold land
Tasmania:	protected areas, other crown land, freehold land and small areas on state forests
Victoria:	protected areas, some state forests
Western Australia:	freehold land, protected areas, other crown land

Key values

- Biodiversity including a variety of species and communities.
- Ecotourism, including bushwalking and landscape features.
- Cultural and heritage values.
- Tourist/visitor management (e.g. access to beaches).
- Clearing and control of clearing for urban development.
- Fire regimes need to be carefully managed to address biodiversity and hazard reduction issues.

Management considerations

- Restoring connectivity between remnants and removing barriers to the movement of fauna between remnants.
- Weed control (e.g. aggressive weeds such as boneseed, veldt grass, South African love grass).
- Feral animal eradication and/or control to reduce their impact on native flora and fauna.

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References

Australian Surveying and Land Information Group (1990), *Atlas of Australian Resources. Volume 6 Vegetation*, AUSMAP, Department of Administrative Services, Canberra, 64pp. & 2 maps.

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National Land and Water Resources Audit (2001) *Australian Native Vegetation Assessment 2001*. National Land and Water Resources Audit, Canberra, 332pp.

Specht R.L. (1979) Ecosystems of the World, vol 9A. *Heathlands and Related Shrublands, Descriptive studies*. Elsevier Sci. Publ. Co, Amsterdam.

Specht R.L. (1994) Heathlands. In: *Australian Vegetation* (ed. R.H. Groves) pp. 321–344. Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge.

Data sources

Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA), Version 6.1.

National Vegetation Information System, Version 3.0.

1996/97 Land Use of Australia, Version 2.

Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database —CAPAD 2004—Terrestrial.

Notes

- Detailed structural data for many vegetation types in NVIS 3.0 has led to fewer assignments of vegetation descriptions to this group.
- See the [Introduction to the MVG fact sheets](#) for further background on this series.



Photo: M. Fagg

Alpine community, summit of Mt Wellington, Tas