

OUTBACK AUSTRALIA - THE RANGELANDS

Introduction to Australia's Rangelands

About 81% of Australia is broadly defined as rangelands. This part of the country is known to most Australians as the Outback. The rangelands are home to many of Australia's Indigenous people and are culturally important for most Australians.

Rangelands extend across low rainfall and variable climates, including arid, semi-arid, and north of the Tropic of Capricorn, some seasonally high rainfall areas. They include a diverse group of relatively undisturbed ecosystems such as tropical savannas, woodlands, shrublands and grasslands. From an ecological perspective, 53 of Australia's 85 bioregions include rangeland ecosystems and 12 are located entirely within the Rangelands. Together, they cover a huge diversity of habitats and ecological communities.

The Rangelands are also economically important. Annual revenue generated through mining (in excess of \$12 billion), tourism (greater than \$2 billion) and pastoralism and agriculture combined (\$2.4 billion in 2001) contribute significantly to Australia's economy.

The rangelands of arid and semi-arid Australia

Australia is the driest inhabited continent in the world; 70% of it is either arid or semi arid land. The arid zone is defined as areas which receive an average rainfall of 250mm or less. The semi arid zone is defined as areas which receive an average rainfall between 250-350mm.

The rangelands of northern Australia

The dry tropical rangelands of northern Australia are characterised by vast tracts of eucalypt savanna and native grasslands, small areas of cleared land and scattered settlements, and the rivers and wetlands that sustain ecosystems. The area covers almost a quarter of continental Australia, and stretches in a broad sweep from the westernmost edges of the wet tropics of far North Queensland to the west coast in the vicinity of Broome. Around the world these ecosystems are more commonly known as tropical savanna, a term that is also used to describe the rangelands landscape of monsoonal northern Australia.

Source: <https://www.environment.gov.au/land/rangelands>