Native vegetation: percentage cover

Biodiversity | Terrestrial

South Australia's environmental trend and condition report cards 2023

Trend
Getting worse

Condition
Unknown

Reliability
Poor

STATE

Trend

The statewide trend in percentage cover of native vegetation is getting worse.

This assessment uses a statewide capture of landcover data from satellite imagery to determine the trend in the percentage of native vegetation cover. Over the period from 2015 to 2020, there was a reduction of approximately 29,400 hectares of native vegetation cover. DEW is developing new methods to determine changes at a state and regional scale.

Changes in cover are attributed to a combination of ongoing small-scale clearance in the agricultural zone and more substantial alterations in the arid zone. Vegetation in the arid zone is notably influenced by variable rainfall, with some areas experiencing significant increases in vegetation cover during wet years. However, when the influence of rainfall variability is factored out, a declining trend is evident.

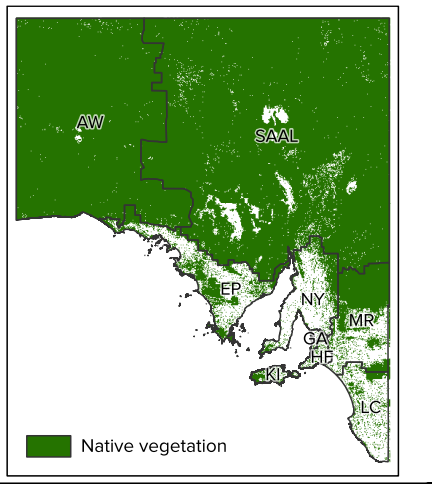
Evaluating vegetation trends via satellite imagery is complicated by sensor and method changes and the intricate differentiation of rainfall-induced and human-driven cover changes.

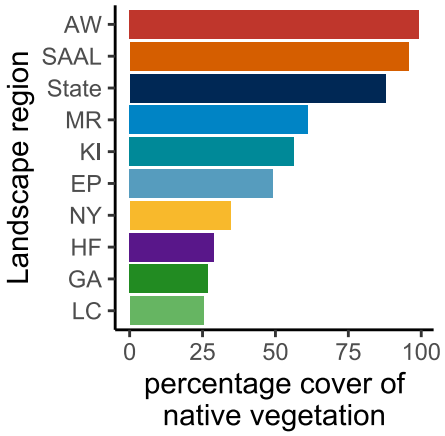
Condition

The condition of native vegetation percentage cover is unknown, as there are no agreed statewide benchmarks.

In 2020, the percentage cover of native vegetation was 87.8% statewide. This is based on an estimated extent of 86,085,000 hectares (ha). Regional estimates were: 99.3% cover in Alinytjara Wilurara (AW, 28,009,000 ha), 95.7% in South Australian Arid Lands (SAAL, 50,236,300 ha), 61.1% in Murraylands and Riverland (MR, 2,955,100 ha), 56.4% on Kangaroo Island (KI, 248,200 ha), 49.3% in Eyre Peninsula (EP, 2,475,900 ha), 34.6% in Northern and Yorke (NY, 1,313,000 ha), 29.0% in Hills and Fleurieu (HF, 134,000 ha), 26.8% in Green Adelaide (GA, 34,500 ha), and 25.4% in Limestone Coast (LC, 678,900 ha).

In 2020, native vegetation percentage cover was 87.8% statewide and continues to decline.





Why is native vegetation important?

Native vegetation provides habitat for South Australia's plants and animals, including those that are threatened. Native vegetation protects soils, coastlines and waterways from erosion and salinity, and stores carbon. It supports agricultural production through windbreaks, shelter for stock, and habitat for pollinators and predators of agricultural pests.

What are the pressures?

Native vegetation is under pressure from clearance for urban and agricultural development, grazing, invasive species, changed fire and water regimes, pollution and nutrification, and climate change. Ageing plant populations, limited regeneration and lack of successful recruitment are also having a negative impact.

What is being done?

Native vegetation in South Australia is protected under native vegetation, protected areas and pastoral legislation. Approval to clear native vegetation can include certain requirements to avoid impacts and offset impacts on biodiversity that would result from any clearance activity.

Native vegetation is actively managed for conservation in many areas, including activities such as revegetation, fencing, management of grazing, reinstatement of appropriate fire and water regimes, and controlling pest plants and animals.

For further information see: technical information

Government of South Australia