






# Australia

**Australia**, officially the **Commonwealth of Australia**,<sup>[17]</sup> is a country comprising the mainland of the Australian continent, the island of Tasmania and numerous smaller islands.<sup>[18]</sup> Australia has a total area of 7,688,287 km<sup>2</sup> (2,968,464 sq mi), making it the sixth-largest country in the world and the largest in Oceania. It is the world's oldest,<sup>[19]</sup> flattest,<sup>[20]</sup> and driest inhabited continent,<sup>[21][22]</sup> with some of the least fertile soils.<sup>[23][24]</sup> It is a megadiverse country, and its size gives it a wide variety of landscapes and climates including deserts in the interior and tropical rainforests along the coast.

The ancestors of Aboriginal Australians began arriving from south-east Asia 50,000 to 65,000 years ago, during the last glacial period.<sup>[25][26][27]</sup> By the time of British settlement, Aboriginal Australians spoke 250 distinct languages and had the oldest living culture in the world.<sup>[28]</sup> Australia's written history commenced with Dutch exploration of most of the coastline in the 17th-century. British colonisation began in 1788 with the establishment of the penal colony of New South Wales. By the mid-19th century, most of the continent had been explored by European settlers and five additional self-governing British colonies were established, each gaining responsible government by 1890. The colonies federated in 1901, forming the Commonwealth of Australia. This continued a process of increasing autonomy from the United Kingdom, highlighted by the *Statute of Westminster Adoption Act 1942*, and culminating in the Australia Acts of 1986.<sup>[29]</sup>

Australia is a federal parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy comprising six states and ten territories. Its population of more than 28 million is highly urbanised and heavily concentrated on the eastern seaboard.<sup>[11][30]</sup> Canberra is the nation's capital, while its most populous cities are Sydney and Melbourne, both with a population of more than 5 million.<sup>[31]</sup> Australia's culture is diverse,<sup>[32]</sup> and the

Commonwealth of Australia	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
Anthem: "Advance Australia Fair" <sup>[N 1]</sup>	
<div><div></div><div>▶ 0:00 / 0:00</div><div>— 🔊 ⋮</div></div>	
 <div><div></div> Commonwealth of Australia</div> <div><div></div> Australian territorial claim in Antarctica</div>	
Capital	Canberra 35°18′29″S 149°07′28″E
Largest city	Sydney (metropolitan) Melbourne (urban) <sup>[N 2]</sup>
Official language and national language	English ( <i>de facto</i> ) None ( <i>de jure</i> )
Religion (2021) <sup>[4]</sup>	43.9% Christianity 38.9% no religion 3.2% Islam 2.7% Hinduism 2.4% Buddhism 1.7% other 7.2% unanswered <sup>[N 3]</sup>
Demonym(s)	Australian Aussie

country has one of the highest foreign-born populations in the world.<sup>[33]</sup> It has a highly developed economy and one of the highest per capita incomes globally.<sup>[34][35][36]</sup> Its abundant natural resources and well-developed international trade relations are crucial to the country's economy. It ranks highly for quality of life, health, education, economic freedom, civil liberties and political rights.<sup>[37]</sup>

Australia is a middle power, and has the world's thirteenth-highest military expenditure. It is a member of international groups including the United Nations; the G20; the OECD; the World Trade Organization; Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation; the Pacific Islands Forum; the Pacific Community; the Commonwealth of Nations; and the defence and security organisations ANZUS, AUKUS, and the Five Eyes. It is also a major non-NATO ally of the United States.<sup>[38]</sup>

## Etymology

The name *Australia* (pronounced /əˈstreɪliə/ in Australian English)<sup>[39]</sup> is derived from the Latin *Terra Australis* ('southern land'), a name used for a hypothetical continent in the Southern Hemisphere since ancient times.<sup>[40]</sup> Several 16th-century cartographers used the word Australia on maps, but not to identify modern Australia.<sup>[41]</sup> When Europeans began visiting and mapping Australia in the 17th century, the name *Terra Australis* was applied to the new territories.<sup>[N 5]</sup>

Until the early 19th century, Australia was best known as *New Holland*, a name first applied by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman in 1644 (as *Nieuw-Holland*) and subsequently anglicised. *Terra Australis* still saw occasional usage, such as in scientific texts.<sup>[N 6]</sup> The name *Australia* was popularised by the explorer Matthew Flinders, who said it was "more agreeable to the ear, and an assimilation to the names of the other great portions of the Earth".<sup>[47]</sup> The first time that *Australia* appears to have been officially used was in April 1817, when Governor Lachlan Macquarie acknowledged the receipt of Flinders' charts of Australia from Lord Bathurst.<sup>[48]</sup> In December 1817,

	(colloquial) <sup>[5][6][7]</sup>
<b>Government</b>	Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><u>Monarch</u></li><li><u>Governor-General</u></li><li><u>Prime Minister</u></li></ul></div>	<div>Charles III<div>Sam Mostyn</div><div>Anthony Albanese</div></div>
<b>Legislature</b>	Parliament
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><u>Upper house</u></li><li><u>Lower house</u></li></ul></div>	<div>Senate<div>House of Representatives</div></div>
<b>Independence</b> from the <u>United Kingdom</u>	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><u>Federation and creation of the Constitution</u></li><li><u>Balfour Declaration</u></li><li><u>Statute of Westminster Adoption Act</u></li><li><u>Australia Acts</u></li></ul></div>	<div>1 January 1901<div>15 November 1926</div><div>9 October 1942</div><div>3 March 1986</div></div>
<b>Area</b>	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Total</li><li>Water (%)</li></ul></div>	<div>7,688,287<sup>[8][9][10]</sup> km<sup>2</sup> (2,968,464 sq mi) (6th)<div>1.79 (2015)<sup>[10]</sup></div></div>
<b>Population</b>	
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>2024 estimate</li><li>2021 census</li><li>Density</li></ul></div>	<div><div><div>▲</div>27,575,700<sup>[11]</sup> (54th)</div><div><div>▲</div>25,890,773<sup>[12]</sup></div><div>3.6/km<sup>2</sup> (9.3/sq mi) (244th)</div></div>
<b>GDP (PPP)</b>	2024 estimate
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Total</li><li>Per capita</li></ul></div>	<div><div><div>▲</div>\$1.898 trillion<sup>[13]</sup> (19th)</div><div><div>▲</div>\$69,475<sup>[13]</sup> (23rd)</div></div>
<b>GDP (nominal)</b>	2024 estimate
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Total</li><li>Per capita</li></ul></div>	<div><div><div>▲</div>\$1.802 trillion<sup>[13]</sup> (14th)</div><div><div>▲</div>\$65,966<sup>[13]</sup> (12th)</div></div>
<b>Gini</b> (2020)	<div><div>▼</div>32.4<sup>[14]</sup><div>medium inequality</div></div>
<b>HDI</b> (2022)	<div><div>▲</div>0.946<sup>[15]</sup><div>very high (10th)</div></div>
<b>Currency</b>	<u>Australian dollar</u> (\$) (AUD)
<b>Time zone</b>	UTC+8; +9.5; +10 (AWST, ACST, AEST <sup>[N 4]</sup> )

Macquarie recommended to the Colonial Office that it be formally adopted.<sup>[49]</sup> In 1824, the Admiralty agreed that the continent should be known officially by that name.<sup>[50]</sup> The first official published use of the new name came with the publication in 1830 of *The Australia Directory* by the Hydrographic Office.<sup>[51]</sup>

Colloquial names for Australia include "Oz", "Straya" and "Down Under".<sup>[52]</sup> Other epithets include "the Great Southern Land", "the Lucky Country" (from the 1964 book of the same name), "the Sunburnt Country", and "the Wide Brown Land". The latter two both derive from Dorothea Mackellar's 1908 poem "My Country".<sup>[53]</sup>

• Summer ( <u>DST</u> )	<u>UTC+10.5</u> ; +11 ( <u>ACDT</u> , <u>AEDT</u> <sup>[N 4]</sup> ) <u>DST</u> not observed in <u>Qld</u> , <u>WA</u> and <u>NT</u>
<b>Date format</b>	<u>dd/mm/yyyy</u> <sup>[16]</sup>
<b>Drives on</b>	Left
<b>Calling code</b>	+61
<b>ISO 3166 code</b>	<u>AU</u>
<b>Internet TLD</b>	<u>.au</u>

# History

## Indigenous prehistory

Indigenous Australians comprise two broad groups:

- Aboriginal Australians, who are the various Indigenous peoples of the Australian mainland and many of its islands, including Tasmania
- Torres Strait Islanders, who are a distinct Melanesian people of Torres Strait Islands

Human habitation of the Australian continent is estimated to have begun 50,000 to 65,000 years ago,<sup>[25][54][55][26]</sup> with the migration of people by land bridges and short sea crossings from what is now Southeast Asia.<sup>[56]</sup> It is uncertain how many waves of immigration may have contributed to these ancestors of modern Aboriginal Australians.<sup>[57][58]</sup> The Madjedbebe rock shelter in Arnhem Land is possibly the oldest site showing the presence of humans in Australia.<sup>[59][27]</sup> The oldest human remains found are the Lake Mungo remains, which have been dated to around 41,000 years ago.<sup>[60][61]</sup>



Aboriginal rock art in the Kimberley region of Western Australia

Aboriginal Australian culture is one of the oldest continuous cultures on Earth.<sup>[28][62][63][57]</sup> At the time of first European contact, Aboriginal Australians belonged to wide range of societies, with diverse economies spread across at least 250 different language groups.<sup>[64][65]</sup> Estimates of the Aboriginal population before British settlement range from 300,000 to 3 million.<sup>[66][67][68]</sup> Aboriginal Australians cultures were (and remain) deeply connected with the land and the environment, with stories of The Dreaming maintained through oral tradition, songs, dance and paintings.<sup>[69]</sup> Certain groups engaged in fire-stick farming,<sup>[70][71]</sup> fish farming,<sup>[72][73]</sup> and built semi-permanent shelters.<sup>[74][75]</sup> These practices have variously been characterised as "hunter-gatherer", "agricultural", "natural cultivation" and "intensification".<sup>[76][77][78][79][80]</sup>

Torres Strait Islander people first settled their islands at least 2,500 years ago.<sup>[81][82]</sup> Culturally and linguistically distinct from mainland Aboriginal peoples, they were seafarers and obtained their livelihood from seasonal horticulture and the resources of their reefs and seas.<sup>[83]</sup> Agriculture also developed on some islands and villages appeared by the 1300s.<sup>[84]</sup> By the mid-18th century in northern Australia, contact, trade and cross-cultural engagement had been established between local Aboriginal groups and Makassan trepangers, visiting from present-day Indonesia.<sup>[85][86][87]</sup>

## European exploration and colonisation



Landing of James Cook at Botany Bay on 29 April 1770 to claim Australia's east coast for Great Britain

The Dutch are the first Europeans that recorded sighting and making landfall on the Australian mainland.<sup>[88]</sup> The first ship and crew to chart the Australian coast and meet with Aboriginal people was the Duyfken, captained by Dutch navigator Willem Janszoon.<sup>[89]</sup> He sighted the coast of Cape York Peninsula in early 1606, and made landfall on 26 February 1606 at the Pennefather River near the modern town of Weipa on Cape York.<sup>[90]</sup> Later that year, Spanish explorer Luís Vaz de Torres sailed through and navigated the Torres Strait Islands.<sup>[91]</sup> The Dutch charted the whole of the western and northern coastlines and named the island continent "New Holland" during the 17th century, and although no attempt at settlement was made,<sup>[90]</sup> a number of shipwrecks left men either stranded or, as in the case of the Batavia in 1629,

marooned for mutiny and murder, thus becoming the first Europeans to permanently inhabit the continent.<sup>[92]</sup> In 1770, Captain James Cook sailed along and mapped the east coast, which he named "New South Wales" and claimed for Great Britain.<sup>[93]</sup>

Following the loss of its American colonies in 1783, the British Government sent a fleet of ships, the First Fleet, under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip, to establish a new penal colony in New South Wales. A camp was set up and the Union Flag raised at Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, on 26 January 1788,<sup>[94][95]</sup> a date which later became Australia's national day.

Most early settlers were convicts, transported for petty crimes and assigned as labourers or servants to "free settlers" (willing immigrants). Once emancipated, convicts tended to integrate into colonial society. Convict rebellions and uprisings were suppressed under martial law,<sup>[96]</sup> which lasted for two years following the 1808 Rum Rebellion, Australia's only successful coup d'état.<sup>[97]</sup> During the next two decades, social and economic reforms, together with the establishment of a Legislative Council and Supreme Court, saw the penal colony transition to a civil society.<sup>[98][99]</sup>

The indigenous population declined for 150 years following European settlement, mainly due to infectious disease.<sup>[100][101]</sup> British colonial authorities did not sign any treaties with Aboriginal groups.<sup>[101][102]</sup> As settlement expanded, tens of thousands of Indigenous people and thousands of settlers were killed in frontier conflicts while settlers dispossessed surviving Indigenous peoples of most of their land.<sup>[103]</sup>

## Colonial expansion



In 1803, a settlement was established in Van Diemen's Land (present-day Tasmania),<sup>[104]</sup> and in 1813, Gregory Blaxland, William Lawson and William Wentworth crossed the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, opening the interior to European settlement.<sup>[105]</sup> The British claim extended to the whole Australian continent in 1827 when Major Edmund Lockyer established a settlement on King George Sound (modern-day Albany).<sup>[106]</sup> The Swan River Colony (present-day Perth) was established in 1829, evolving into the largest Australian colony by area, Western Australia.<sup>[107]</sup> In accordance with population growth, separate colonies were carved from New South Wales: Tasmania in 1825, South Australia in 1836, New Zealand in 1841, Victoria in 1851, and Queensland in 1859.<sup>[108]</sup> South Australia was founded as a free colony—it never accepted transported convicts.<sup>[109]</sup> Growing opposition to the convict system culminated in its abolition in the eastern colonies by the 1850s. Initially a free colony, Western Australia practised penal transportation from 1850 to 1868.<sup>[110]</sup>



Tasmania's Port Arthur penal settlement is one of eleven UNESCO World Heritage-listed Australian Convict Sites.

The six colonies individually gained responsible government between 1855 and 1890, thus becoming elective democracies managing most of their own affairs while remaining part of the British Empire.<sup>[111]</sup> The Colonial Office in London retained control of some matters, notably foreign affairs.<sup>[112]</sup>

In the mid-19th century, explorers such as Burke and Wills charted Australia's interior.<sup>[113]</sup> A series of gold rushes beginning in the early 1850s led to an influx of new migrants from China, North America and continental Europe,<sup>[114]</sup> as well as outbreaks of bushranging and civil unrest; the latter peaked in 1854 when Ballarat miners launched the Eureka Rebellion against gold licence fees.<sup>[115]</sup> The 1860s saw the rise of blackbirding, where South Sea Islanders were coerced or abducted into indentured labour, mainly by Queensland colonists.<sup>[116][117]</sup>

From 1886, Australian colonial governments began removing many Aboriginal children from their families and communities, justified on the grounds of child protection and forced assimilation policies.<sup>[118][119][120]</sup> The Second Boer War (1899–1902) marked the largest overseas deployment of Australia's colonial forces.<sup>[121][122]</sup>

## Federation to the World Wars

On 1 January 1901, federation of the colonies was achieved after a decade of planning, constitutional conventions and referendums, resulting in the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia as a nation under the new Australian Constitution.<sup>[123]</sup>

After the 1907 Imperial Conference, Australia and several other self-governing British settler colonies were given the status of self-governing dominions within the British Empire.<sup>[124]</sup> Australia was one of the founding members of the League of Nations in 1920,<sup>[125]</sup> and the United Nations in 1945.<sup>[126]</sup> The Statute of



*The Big Picture*, a painting by Tom Roberts, depicts the opening of the first Australian Parliament in 1901.

Westminster 1931 formally ended the ability of the UK to pass federal laws without Australia's consent. Australia adopted it in 1942, but it was backdated to 1939 to confirm the validity of legislation passed during World War II.<sup>[127][128][129]</sup>

The Australian Capital Territory was formed in 1911 as the location for the future federal capital of Canberra.<sup>[130]</sup> While it was being constructed, Melbourne served as the temporary capital from 1901 to 1927.<sup>[131]</sup> The Northern Territory was transferred from the control of South Australia to the Commonwealth in 1911.<sup>[132]</sup> Australia became the colonial ruler of the Territory of Papua (which had initially been annexed by Queensland in 1883) in 1902 and of the Territory of New Guinea (formerly German New Guinea) in 1920.<sup>[133][134]</sup> The two were unified as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea in 1949 and gained independence from Australia in 1975.<sup>[133][135]</sup>

In 1914, Australia joined the Allies in fighting the First World War, and took part in many of the major battles fought on the Western Front.<sup>[136]</sup> Of about 416,000 who served, about 60,000 were killed and another 152,000 were wounded.<sup>[137]</sup> Many Australians regard the defeat of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) at Gallipoli in 1915 as the "baptism of fire" that forged the new nation's identity.<sup>[138][139][140]</sup> The beginning of the campaign is commemorated annually on Anzac Day, a date which rivals Australia Day as the nation's most important.<sup>[141][142]</sup>



The 1942 Bombing of Darwin, the first of more than 100 Japanese air raids on Australia during World War II

From 1939 to 1945, Australia joined the Allies in fighting the Second World War. Australia's armed forces fought in the Pacific, European and Mediterranean and Middle East theatres.<sup>[143][144]</sup>

The shock of Britain's defeat in Singapore in 1942, followed soon after by the bombing of Darwin and other Japanese attacks on Australian soil, led to a widespread belief in Australia that a Japanese invasion was imminent, and a shift from the United Kingdom to the United States as Australia's principal ally and security partner.<sup>[145]</sup> Since 1951, Australia has been allied with the United States under the ANZUS treaty.<sup>[146]</sup>

## Post-war and contemporary eras



Postwar migrants from Europe arriving in Australia in 1954

In the decades following World War II, Australia enjoyed significant increases in living standards, leisure time and suburban development.<sup>[147][148]</sup> Governments encouraged a large wave of immigration from across Europe, with such immigrants referred to as "New Australians".<sup>[149]</sup> This required a relaxation of the white Australia policy, which was justified to Australians using the slogan "populate or perish".<sup>[150]</sup>

A member of the Western Bloc during the Cold War, Australia participated in the Korean War and the Malayan Emergency during the 1950s and the Vietnam War from 1962 to 1972.<sup>[151]</sup>

During this time, tensions over communist influence in society led to unsuccessful attempts by the Menzies Government to ban the Communist Party of Australia,<sup>[152]</sup> and a bitter split in the Labor Party in 1955.<sup>[153]</sup>

As a result of a 1967 referendum, the federal government gained the power to legislate with regard to Indigenous Australians, and Indigenous Australians were fully included in the census.<sup>[154]</sup> Pre-colonial land interests (referred to as native title in Australia) was recognised in law for the first time when the High Court of Australia held in Mabo v Queensland (No 2) that Australia was neither terra nullius ('land belonging to no one') or "desert and uncultivated land" at the time of European settlement.<sup>[155][156]</sup>

Following the abolition of the last vestiges of the White Australia policy in 1973,<sup>[157]</sup> Australia's demography and culture transformed as a result of a large and ongoing wave of non-European immigration, mostly from Asia.<sup>[158][159]</sup> The late 20th century also saw an increasing focus on foreign policy ties with other Pacific Rim nations.<sup>[160]</sup> The Australia Acts severed the remaining constitutional ties between Australia and the United Kingdom while maintaining the monarch in her independent capacity as Queen of Australia.<sup>[161][162]</sup> In a 1999 constitutional referendum, 55% of voters rejected abolishing the monarchy and becoming a republic.<sup>[163]</sup>

Following the September 11 attacks on the United States, Australia joined the United States in fighting the Afghanistan War from 2001 to 2021 and the Iraq War from 2003 to 2009.<sup>[164]</sup> The nation's trade relations also became increasingly oriented towards East Asia in the 21st century, with China becoming the nation's largest trading partner by a large margin.<sup>[165]</sup>

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, several of Australia's largest cities were locked down for extended periods and free movement across the national and state borders was restricted in an attempt to slow the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.<sup>[166]</sup>

## Geography

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### General characteristics

Surrounded by the Indian and Pacific oceans,<sup>[N 7]</sup> Australia is separated from Asia by the Arafura and Timor seas, with the Coral Sea lying off the Queensland coast, and the Tasman Sea lying between Australia and New Zealand. The world's smallest continent<sup>[168]</sup> and sixth-largest country by total area,<sup>[169]</sup> Australia—owing to its size and isolation—is often dubbed the "island continent"<sup>[170]</sup> and is sometimes considered the world's largest island.<sup>[171]</sup> Australia has 34,218 km (21,262 mi) of coastline (excluding all offshore islands),<sup>[172]</sup> and claims an extensive exclusive economic zone of 8,148,250 square kilometres (3,146,060 sq mi). This exclusive economic zone does not include the Australian Antarctic Territory.<sup>[173]</sup>



Topographic map of Australia (dark green represents the lowest elevation and dark brown the highest)

Mainland Australia lies between latitudes 9° and 44° south, and longitudes 112° and 154° east.<sup>[8]</sup> Australia's size gives it a wide variety of landscapes, with tropical rainforests in the north-east, mountain ranges in

the south-east, south-west and east, and desert in the centre.<sup>[174]</sup> The desert or semi-arid land commonly known as the outback makes up by far the largest portion of land.<sup>[175]</sup> Australia is the driest inhabited continent; its annual rainfall averaged over continental area is less than 500 mm.<sup>[176]</sup> The population density is 3.4 inhabitants per square kilometre, although the large majority of the population lives along the temperate south-eastern coastline. The population density exceeds 19,500 inhabitants per square kilometre in central Melbourne.<sup>[177]</sup> In 2021 Australia had 10% of the global permanent meadows and pastureland.<sup>[178]</sup> Forest cover is around 17% of Australia's total land area.<sup>[179][180]</sup>



Fitzroy Island, one of the 600 islands within the main archipelago of the Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest coral reef,<sup>[181]</sup> lies a short distance off the north-east coast and extends for more than 2,000 km (1,200 mi). Mount Augustus, claimed to be the world's largest monolith,<sup>[182]</sup> is located in Western Australia. At 2,228 m (7,310 ft), Mount Kosciuszko is the highest mountain on the Australian mainland. Even taller are Mawson Peak, at 2,745 m (9,006 ft), on the remote Australian external territory of Heard Island, and, in the Australian Antarctic Territory, Mount McClintock and Mount Menzies, at 3,492 m (11,457 ft) and 3,355 m (11,007 ft) respectively.<sup>[183]</sup>

Eastern Australia is marked by the Great Dividing Range, which runs parallel to the coast of Queensland, New South Wales and much of Victoria. The name is not strictly accurate, because parts of the range consist of low hills, and the highlands are typically no more than 1,600 m (5,200 ft) in height.<sup>[184]</sup> The coastal uplands and a belt of Brigalow grasslands lie between the coast and the mountains, while inland of the dividing range are large areas of grassland and shrubland.<sup>[184][185]</sup> These include the western plains of New South Wales, and the Mitchell Grass Downs and Mulga Lands of inland Queensland.<sup>[186][187][188][189]</sup> The northernmost point of the mainland is the tropical Cape York Peninsula.<sup>[8]</sup>

The landscapes of the Top End and the Gulf Country—with their tropical climate—include forest, woodland, wetland, grassland, rainforest and desert.<sup>[190][191][192]</sup> At the north-west corner of the continent are the sandstone cliffs and gorges of The Kimberley, and below that the Pilbara. The Victoria Plains tropical savanna lies south of the Kimberley and Arnhem Land savannas, forming a transition between the coastal savannas and the interior deserts.<sup>[193][194][195]</sup> At the heart of the country are the uplands of central Australia. Prominent features of the centre and south include Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock), the famous sandstone monolith, and the inland Simpson, Tirari and Sturt Stony, Gibson, Great Sandy, Tanami, and Great Victoria deserts, with the famous Nullarbor Plain on the southern coast.<sup>[196][197][198][199]</sup> The Western Australian mulga shrublands lie between the interior deserts and Mediterranean-climate Southwest Australia.<sup>[198][200]</sup>



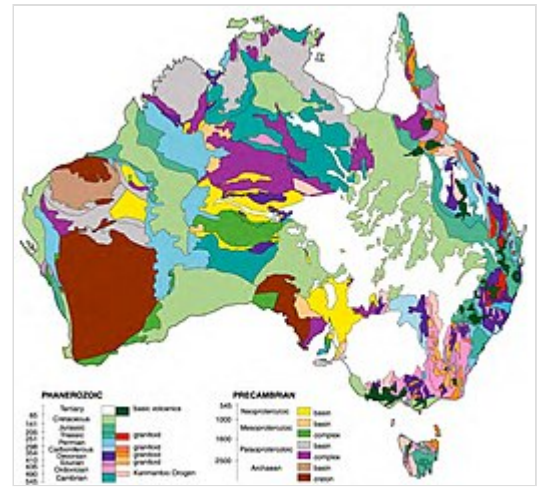
Uluru in the semi-arid region of Central Australia

## Geology



Lying on the Indo-Australian Plate, the mainland of Australia is the lowest and most primordial landmass on Earth with a relatively stable geological history.<sup>[201][202]</sup> The landmass includes virtually all known rock types and from all geological time periods spanning more than 3.8 billion years of the Earth's history. The Pilbara Craton is one of only two pristine Archaean 3.6–2.7 Ga (billion years ago) crusts identified on the Earth.<sup>[203]</sup>

Having been part of all major supercontinents, the Australian continent began to form after the break-up of Gondwana in the Permian, with the separation of the continental landmass from the African continent and Indian subcontinent. It separated from Antarctica over a prolonged period beginning in the Permian and continuing through to the Cretaceous.<sup>[204]</sup> When the last glacial period ended in about 10,000 BC, rising sea levels formed Bass Strait, separating Tasmania from the mainland. Then between about 8,000 and 6,500 BC, the lowlands in the north were flooded by the sea, separating New Guinea, the Aru Islands, and the mainland of Australia.<sup>[205]</sup> The Australian continent is moving toward Eurasia at the rate of 6 to 7 centimetres a year.<sup>[206]</sup>



Basic geological regions of Australia (by age)

The Australian mainland's continental crust, excluding the thinned margins, has an average thickness of 38 km, with a range in thickness from 24 km to 59 km.<sup>[207]</sup> Australia's geology can be divided into several main sections, showcasing that the continent grew from west to east: the Archaean cratonic shields found mostly in the west, Proterozoic fold belts in the centre and Phanerozoic sedimentary basins, metamorphic and igneous rocks in the east.<sup>[208]</sup>

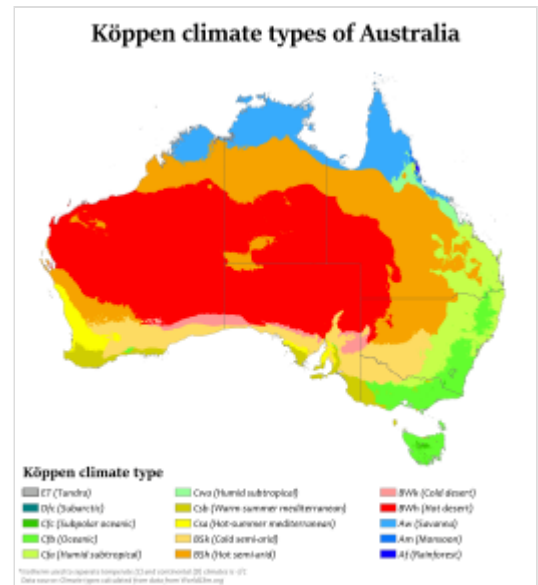
The Australian mainland and Tasmania are situated in the middle of the tectonic plate and have no active volcanoes,<sup>[209]</sup> but due to passing over the East Australia hotspot, recent volcanism has occurred during the Holocene, in the Newer Volcanics Province of western Victoria and south-eastern South Australia. Volcanism also occurs in the island of New Guinea (considered geologically as part of the Australian continent), and in the Australian external territory of Heard Island and McDonald Islands.<sup>[210]</sup> Seismic activity in the Australian mainland and Tasmania is also low, with the greatest number of fatalities having occurred in the 1989 Newcastle earthquake.<sup>[211]</sup>

## Climate

The climate of Australia is significantly influenced by ocean currents, including the Indian Ocean Dipole and the El Niño–Southern Oscillation, which is correlated with periodic drought, and the seasonal tropical low-pressure system that produces cyclones in northern Australia.<sup>[213][214]</sup> These factors cause rainfall to vary markedly from year to year. Much of the northern part of the country has a tropical, predominantly summer-rainfall (monsoon).<sup>[176]</sup> The south-west corner of the country has a Mediterranean climate.<sup>[215]</sup> The south-east ranges from oceanic (Tasmania and coastal Victoria) to humid subtropical (upper half of New South Wales), with the highlands featuring alpine and subpolar oceanic climates. The interior is arid to semi-arid.<sup>[176]</sup>

Driven by climate change, average temperatures have risen more than 1°C since 1960. Associated changes in rainfall patterns and climate extremes exacerbate existing issues such as drought and bushfires. 2019 was Australia's warmest recorded year,<sup>[216]</sup> and the 2019–2020 bushfire season was the country's worst on record.<sup>[217]</sup> Australia's greenhouse gas emissions per capita are among the highest in the world.<sup>[218]</sup>

Water restrictions are frequently in place in many regions and cities of Australia in response to chronic shortages due to urban population increases and localised drought.<sup>[219][220]</sup> Throughout much of the continent, major flooding regularly follows extended periods of drought, flushing out inland river systems, overflowing dams and inundating large inland flood plains, as occurred throughout Eastern Australia in the early 2010s after the 2000s Australian drought.<sup>[221]</sup>



Köppen climate types of Australia<sup>[212]</sup>

## Biodiversity



The koala and the Eucalyptus

Although most of Australia is semi-arid or desert, the continent includes a diverse range of habitats from alpine heaths to tropical rainforests. Fungi typify that diversity—an estimated 250,000 species—of which only 5% have been described—occur in Australia.<sup>[222]</sup> Because of the continent's great age, extremely variable weather patterns, and long-term geographic isolation, much of Australia's biota is unique. About 85% of flowering plants, 84% of mammals, more than 45% of birds, and 89% of in-shore, temperate-zone fish are endemic.<sup>[223]</sup> Australia has at least 755 species of reptile, more than any other country in the world.<sup>[224]</sup> Besides Antarctica, Australia is the only continent that developed without feline species. Feral cats may have been introduced in the 17th century by Dutch shipwrecks, and later in

the 18th century by European settlers. They are now considered a major factor in the decline and extinction of many vulnerable and endangered native species.<sup>[225]</sup> Seafaring immigrants from Asia are believed to have brought the dingo to Australia sometime after the end of the last ice age—perhaps 4000 years ago—and Aboriginal people helped disperse them across the continent as pets, contributing to the demise of thylacines on the mainland.<sup>[226]</sup> Australia is also one of 17 megadiverse countries.<sup>[227]</sup>

Australian forests are mostly made up of evergreen species, particularly eucalyptus trees in the less arid regions; wattles replace them as the dominant species in drier regions and deserts.<sup>[228]</sup> Among well-known Australian animals are the monotremes (the platypus and echidna); a host of marsupials, including the kangaroo, koala, and wombat, and birds such as the emu and the kookaburra.<sup>[228]</sup> Australia is home to many dangerous animals including some of the most venomous snakes in the world.<sup>[229]</sup> The dingo was

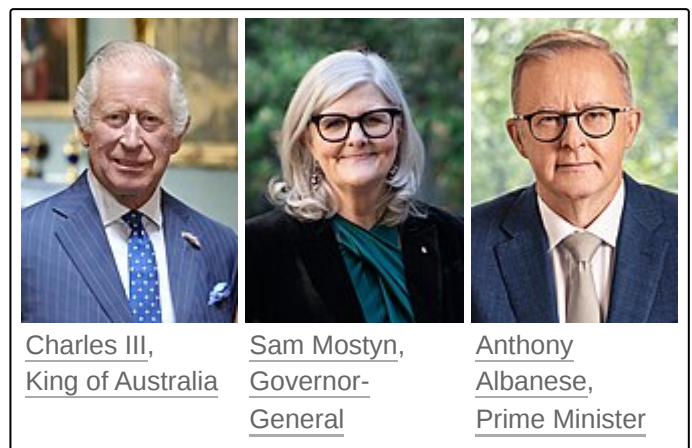
introduced by Austronesian people who traded with Indigenous Australians around 3000 BCE.<sup>[230]</sup> Many animal and plant species became extinct soon after first human settlement,<sup>[231]</sup> including the Australian megafauna; others have disappeared since European settlement, among them the thylacine.<sup>[232][233]</sup>

Many of Australia's ecoregions, and the species within those regions, are threatened by human activities and introduced animal, chromistan, fungal and plant species.<sup>[234]</sup> All these factors have led to Australia's having the highest mammal extinction rate of any country in the world.<sup>[235]</sup> The federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* is the legal framework for the protection of threatened species.<sup>[236]</sup> Numerous protected areas have been created under the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity to protect and preserve unique ecosystems;<sup>[237][238]</sup> 65 wetlands are listed under the Ramsar Convention,<sup>[239]</sup> and 16 natural World Heritage Sites have been established.<sup>[240]</sup> Australia was ranked 21st out of 178 countries in the world on the 2018 Environmental Performance Index.<sup>[241]</sup> There are more than 1,800 animals and plants on Australia's threatened species list, including more than 500 animals.<sup>[242]</sup> Paleontologists discovered a fossil site of a prehistoric rainforest in McGraths Flat, in South Australia, that presents evidence that this now arid desert and dry shrubland/grassland was once home to an abundance of life.<sup>[243][244]</sup>

## Government and politics

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Australia is a constitutional monarchy, a parliamentary democracy and a federation.<sup>[245]</sup> The country has maintained its mostly unchanged constitution alongside a stable liberal democratic political system since Federation in 1901. It is one of the world's oldest federations, in which power is divided between the federal and state governments. The Australian system of government combines elements derived from the political systems of the United Kingdom (a fused executive, constitutional monarchy and strong party discipline) and the United States (federalism, a written constitution and strong bicameralism with an elected upper house), resulting in a distinct hybrid.<sup>[246][247]</sup>



Federal government power is partially separated between three groups.<sup>[248]</sup>

- Legislature: the bicameral Parliament, comprising the monarch, the Senate, and the House of Representatives
- Executive: the Australian Government, led by the prime minister (the leader of the party or coalition with a majority in the House of Representatives), their chosen Cabinet and other ministers; formally appointed by the governor-general<sup>[249]</sup>
- Judiciary: the High Court and other federal courts

Charles III reigns as King of Australia and is represented in Australia by the governor-general at the federal level and by the governors at the state level, who by section 63 of the Constitution and convention act on the advice of their ministers.<sup>[250][251]</sup> Thus, in practice the governor-general acts as a legal figurehead for the actions of the prime minister and the Cabinet. The governor-general may in some

situations exercise reserve powers: powers exercisable in the absence or contrary to ministerial advice. When these powers may be exercised is governed by convention and their precise scope is unclear. The most notable exercise of these powers was the dismissal of the Whitlam government in the constitutional crisis of 1975.<sup>[252]</sup>



Parliament House, Canberra

In the Senate (the upper house), there are 76 senators: twelve each from the states and two each from the mainland territories (the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory).<sup>[253]</sup> The House of Representatives (the lower house) has 151 members elected from single-member electoral divisions, commonly known as "electorates" or "seats", allocated to states on the basis of population, with each of the current states guaranteed a minimum of five seats.<sup>[254]</sup> The lower house has a maximum term of three years, but this is not fixed and governments usually dissolve the house early for an election at some point in the 6 months before

the maximum.<sup>[255]</sup> Elections for both chambers are generally held simultaneously with senators having overlapping six-year terms except for those from the territories, whose terms are not fixed but are tied to the electoral cycle for the lower house. Thus only 40 of the 76 places in the Senate are put to each election unless the cycle is interrupted by a double dissolution.<sup>[253]</sup>

Australia's electoral system uses preferential voting for the House of Representatives and all state and territory lower house elections (with the exception of Tasmania and the ACT which use the Hare-Clark system). The Senate and most state upper houses use the proportional system which combines preferential voting with proportional representation for each state. Voting and enrolment is compulsory for all enrolled citizens 18 years and older in every jurisdiction.<sup>[256][257][258]</sup> The party with majority support in the House of Representatives forms the government and its leader becomes Prime Minister. In cases where no party has majority support, the governor-general has the constitutional power to appoint the prime minister and, if necessary, dismiss one that has lost the confidence of Parliament.<sup>[259]</sup> Due to the relatively unique position of Australia operating as a Westminster parliamentary democracy with a powerful and elected upper house, the system has sometimes been referred to as having a "Washminster mutation",<sup>[246]</sup> or as a semi-parliamentary system.<sup>[260]</sup>

There are two major political groups that usually form government federally: the Australian Labor Party and the Coalition, which is a formal grouping of the Liberal Party and its minor partner, the National Party.<sup>[261][262]</sup> At the state level of government, the relationship between the Nationals and the Liberal Party differs, with the parties merged in Queensland and the Northern Territory (federal parliamentarians sit in either the Liberal or National partyroom however); in coalition in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia; and in competition with the Liberals in South Australia and Tasmania.<sup>[263]</sup> Within Australian political culture, the Coalition is considered centre-right and the Labor Party is considered centre-left.<sup>[264]</sup> Independent members and several minor parties have achieved representation in Australian parliaments, mostly in upper houses. The Australian Greens are the third largest party by both vote and membership and the fourth largest by parliamentary representation.<sup>[265][266]</sup> The most recent federal election was held on 21 May 2022 and resulted in the Australian Labor Party, led by Anthony Albanese, being elected to government.<sup>[267]</sup>

## States and territories



Australia has six states—New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (Vic), Queensland (Qld), Western Australia (WA), South Australia (SA) and Tasmania (Tas)—and two mainland self-governing territories—the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory (NT).<sup>[268]</sup>

The states have the general power to make laws except in the few areas where the constitution grants the Commonwealth exclusive powers.<sup>[269][270]</sup> The Commonwealth can only make laws on topics listed in the constitution but its laws prevail over those of the states to the extent of any inconsistency.<sup>[271][272]</sup> Since Federation, the Commonwealth's power relative to the states has significantly increased due to the increasingly wide interpretation given to listed Commonwealth powers – and because of the states' heavy financial reliance on Commonwealth grants.<sup>[273][274]</sup>



Australia's states and territories

Each state and major mainland territory has its own parliament—unicameral in the Northern Territory, the ACT and Queensland, and bicameral in the other states. The lower houses are known as the Legislative Assembly (the House of Assembly in South Australia and Tasmania); the upper houses are known as the Legislative Council. The head of the government in each state is the Premier and in each territory the Chief Minister. The King is represented in each state by a governor. At the Commonwealth level, the King's representative is the governor-general.<sup>[251]</sup>

The Commonwealth government directly administers the internal Jervis Bay Territory and the external territories: the Ashmore and Cartier Islands, the Coral Sea Islands, the Heard Island and McDonald Islands, the Indian Ocean territories (Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands), Norfolk Island,<sup>[277]</sup> and the Australian Antarctic Territory.<sup>[278][279][249]</sup> The remote Macquarie Island and Lord Howe Island are part of Tasmania and New South Wales respectively.<sup>[280][281]</sup>

## Foreign relations



Diplomatic missions of Australia

Australia is a middle power,<sup>[282]</sup> whose foreign relations has three core bi-partisan pillars: commitment to the US alliance, engagement with the Indo-Pacific and support for international institutions, rules and co-operation.<sup>[283][284][285]</sup> Through the ANZUS pact and its status as a major non-NATO ally, Australia maintains a close relationship with the US, which encompasses strong defence, security and trade ties.<sup>[286][287]</sup> In the Indo-Pacific, the country seeks to

increase its trade ties through the open flow of trade and capital, while managing the rise of Chinese power by supporting the existing rules based order.<sup>[284]</sup> Regionally, the country is a member of the

Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community, the ASEAN+6 mechanism and the East Asia Summit. Internationally, the country is a member of the United Nations (of which it was a founding member), the Commonwealth of Nations, the OECD and the G20. This reflects the country's generally strong commitment to multilateralism.<sup>[288][289]</sup>

Australia is a member of several defence, intelligence and security groupings including the Five Eyes intelligence alliance with the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand; the ANZUS alliance with the United States and New Zealand; the AUKUS security treaty with the United States and United Kingdom; the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with the United States, India and Japan; the Five Power Defence Arrangements with New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Malaysia and Singapore; and the Reciprocal Access defence and security agreement with Japan.

Australia has pursued the cause of international trade liberalisation.<sup>[290]</sup> It led the formation of the Cairns Group and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation,<sup>[291][292]</sup> and is a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).<sup>[293][294]</sup> Beginning in the 2000s, Australia entered into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership multilateral free trade agreements as well as bilateral free trade agreements with the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, with the most recent deal signed in 2023 with the UK.<sup>[295]</sup>



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese with American President Joe Biden in 2022

Australia maintains a deeply integrated relationship with neighbouring New Zealand, with free mobility of citizens between the two countries under the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement and free trade under the Closer Economic Relations agreement.<sup>[296]</sup> The most favourably viewed countries by the Australian people in 2021 include New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States and South Korea.<sup>[297]</sup> It also maintains an international aid program under which some 75 countries receive assistance.<sup>[298]</sup> Australia ranked fourth in the Center for Global Development's 2021 Commitment to Development Index.<sup>[299]</sup>

The power over foreign policy is highly concentrated in the prime minister and the national security committee, with major decision such as joining the 2003 invasion of Iraq made with without prior Cabinet approval.<sup>[300][301]</sup> Similarly, the Parliament does not play a formal role in foreign policy and the power to declare war lies solely with the executive government.<sup>[302]</sup> The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade supports the executive in its policy decisions.<sup>[303]</sup>

## Military

The two main institutions involved in the management of Australia's armed forces are the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Department of Defence, together known as "Defence".<sup>[304]</sup> The Australian Defence Force is the military wing, headed by the chief of the defence force, and contains three branches: the Royal Australian Navy, the Australian Army and the Royal Australian Air Force. In 2021, it had 84,865 currently serving personnel (including 60,286 regulars and 24,581 reservists).<sup>[305]</sup> The Department of Defence is the civilian wing and is headed by the secretary of defence. These two leaders

collective manage Defence as a diarchy, with shared and joint responsibilities.<sup>[306]</sup> The titular role of commander-in-chief is held by the governor-general; however, actual command is vested in the chief of the Defence Force.<sup>[307]</sup> The executive branch of the Commonwealth government has overall control of the military through the minister of defence, who is subject to the decisions of Cabinet and its National Security Committee.<sup>[308]</sup> Major Australian intelligence agencies include the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (foreign intelligence), the Australian Signals Directorate (signals intelligence) and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (domestic security).



HMAS *Canberra*, a *Canberra*-class landing helicopter dock, and HMAS *Arunta*, an *Anzac*-class frigate, sailing in formation

In 2022, defence spending was 1.9% of GDP, representing the world's 13th-largest defence budget.<sup>[309]</sup> In 2024, the ADF had active operations in the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific (including security and aid provisions); was contributing to UN forces in relation to South Sudan, Syria–Israel peacekeeping, and North Korea; and domestically was assisting to prevent asylum-seekers enter the country and assisting in natural disaster relief.<sup>[310]</sup>

## Human rights

Australia has generally strong protections for civil and political rights, and the country has signed up to a wide range of international rights treaties.<sup>[311]</sup> Important documents protecting human rights include the Constitution, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, and the Age Discrimination Act 2004.<sup>[312]</sup> Same-sex marriage has been legal in the nation since 2017.<sup>[313][314]</sup> Unlike other comparable Western democracies, Australia does not have a single federal charter of rights in the Constitution or under legislation; however, the ACT, Victoria, and Queensland have state-based ones.

International organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have expressed concerns in areas including asylum-seeker policy, Indigenous deaths in custody, the lack of entrenched rights protection, and laws restricting protesting.<sup>[315][316]</sup>

## Economy

Australia's high-income mixed-market economy is rich in natural resources.<sup>[317]</sup> It is the world's fourteenth-largest by nominal terms, and the 18th-largest by PPP. As of 2021, it has the second-highest amount of wealth per adult, after Luxembourg,<sup>[318]</sup> and has the thirteenth-highest financial assets per capita.<sup>[319]</sup> Australia has a labour force of some 13.5 million, with an unemployment rate of 3.5% as of June 2022.<sup>[320]</sup> According to the Australian Council of Social Service, the poverty rate of Australia exceeds 13.6% of the population, encompassing 3.2 million. It also estimated that there were 774,000 (17.7%) children under the age



The central business district of Sydney is the financial centre of Australia.

of 15 living in relative poverty.<sup>[321][322]</sup> The Australian dollar is the national currency, which is also used by three island states in the Pacific: Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu.<sup>[323]</sup>

Australian government debt, about \$963 billion in June 2022, exceeds 45.1% of the country's total GDP, and is the world's eighth-highest.<sup>[324]</sup> Australia had the second-highest level of household debt in the world in 2020, after Switzerland.<sup>[325]</sup> Its house prices are among the highest in the world, especially in the large urban areas.<sup>[326]</sup> The large service sector accounts for about 71.2% of total GDP, followed by the industrial sector (25.3%), while its agriculture sector is by far the smallest, making up only 3.6% of total GDP.<sup>[327]</sup> Australia is the world's 21st-largest exporter and 24th-largest importer.<sup>[328][329]</sup> China is Australia's largest trading partner by a wide margin, accounting for roughly 40% of the country's exports and 17.6% of its imports.<sup>[330]</sup> Other major export markets include Japan, the United States, and South Korea.<sup>[331]</sup>

Australia has high levels of competitiveness and economic freedom, and was ranked tenth in the Human Development Index in 2022.<sup>[332]</sup> As of 2022, it is ranked twelfth in the Index of Economic Freedom and nineteenth in the Global Competitiveness Report.<sup>[333][334]</sup> It attracted 9.5 million international tourists in 2019,<sup>[335]</sup> and was ranked thirteenth among the countries of Asia-Pacific in 2019 for inbound tourism.<sup>[336]</sup> The 2021 *Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report* ranked Australia seventh-highest in the world out of 117 countries.<sup>[337]</sup> Its international tourism receipts in 2019 amounted to \$45.7 billion.<sup>[336]</sup>

## Energy

In 2021–22, Australia's generation of electricity was sourced from black coal (37.2%), brown coal (12%), natural gas (18.8%), hydro (6.5%), wind (11.1%), solar (13.3%), bio-energy (1.2%) and others (1.7%).<sup>[338][339]</sup> Total consumption of energy in this period was sourced from coal (28.4%), oil (37.3%), gas (27.4%) and renewables (7%).<sup>[340]</sup> From 2012 to 2022, the energy sourced from renewables has increased 5.7%, while energy sourced from coal has decreased 2.6%. The use of gas also increased by 1.5% and the use of oil stayed relatively stable with a reduction of only 0.2%.<sup>[341]</sup>

In 2020, Australia produced 27.7% of its electricity from renewable sources, exceeding the target set by the Commonwealth government in 2009 of 20% renewable energy by 2020.<sup>[342][343]</sup> A new target of 82% per cent renewable energy by 2030 was set in 2022<sup>[344]</sup> and a target for net zero emissions by 2050 was set in 2021.<sup>[345]</sup>

## Science and technology

In 2019, Australia spent \$35.6 billion on research and development, allocating about 1.79% of GDP.<sup>[346]</sup> A recent study by Accenture for the Tech Council shows that the Australian tech sector combined contributes \$167 billion a year to the economy and employs 861,000 people.<sup>[347]</sup> In addition, recent startup ecosystems in Sydney and Melbourne are already valued at \$34 billion combined.<sup>[348]</sup> Australia ranked 23rd in the Global Innovation Index 2024.<sup>[349]</sup>

With only 0.3% of the world's population, Australia contributed 4.1% of the world's published research in 2020, making it one of the top 10 research contributors in the world.<sup>[350][351]</sup> CSIRO, Australia's national science agency, contributes 10% of all research in the country, while the rest is carried out by universities.<sup>[351]</sup> Its most notable contributions include the invention of atomic absorption



spectroscopy,<sup>[352]</sup> the essential components of Wi-Fi technology,<sup>[353]</sup> and the development of the first commercially successful polymer banknote.<sup>[354]</sup> As of 2024, 13 Australian scientists have been awarded the Nobel Prize in physics, chemistry or medicine,<sup>[355]</sup> and two have been awarded the Fields Medal.<sup>[356]</sup>

Australia is a key player in supporting space exploration. Facilities such as the Square Kilometre Array and Australia Telescope Compact Array radio telescopes, telescopes such as the Siding Spring Observatory, and ground stations such as the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex are of great assistance in deep space exploration missions, primarily by NASA.<sup>[357]</sup>

## Demographics

Australia has a population density of 3.4 persons per square kilometre of total land area, which makes it one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. The population is heavily concentrated on the east coast, and in particular in the south-eastern region between South East Queensland to the north-east and Adelaide to the south-west.<sup>[31]</sup>

Australia is also highly urbanised, with 67% of the population living in the Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (metropolitan areas of the state and mainland territorial capital cities) in 2018.<sup>[358]</sup> Metropolitan areas with more than one million inhabitants are Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide.<sup>[31]</sup>

In common with many other developed countries, Australia is experiencing a demographic shift towards an older population, with more retirees and fewer people of working age. In 2021, the average age of the population was 39 years.<sup>[359]</sup> In 2015, 2.15% of the Australian population lived overseas, one of the lowest proportions worldwide.<sup>[360]</sup>

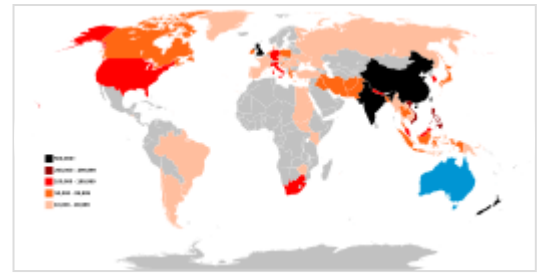
## Cities

Australia contains five cities (including their suburbs) that consist of more than one million people. Most of Australia's population live close to coastlines.<sup>[361]</sup>

Largest populated areas in Australia							
2021 data from <u>Australian Bureau of Statistics</u> <sup>[362]</sup>							
Rank	Name	State	Pop.	Rank	Name	State	Pop.
1	<u>Sydney</u>	<u>NSW</u>	5,259,764	11	<u>Geelong</u>	<u>Vic</u>	289,400
2	<u>Melbourne</u>	<u>Vic</u>	4,976,157	12	<u>Hobart</u>	<u>Tas</u>	251,047
3	<u>Brisbane</u>	<u>Qld</u>	2,568,927	13	<u>Townsville</u>	<u>Qld</u>	181,665
4	<u>Perth</u>	<u>WA</u>	2,192,229	14	<u>Cairns</u>	<u>Qld</u>	155,638
5	<u>Adelaide</u>	<u>SA</u>	1,402,393	15	<u>Darwin</u>	<u>NT</u>	148,801
6	<u>Gold Coast–Tweed Heads</u>	<u>Qld/NSW</u>	706,673	16	<u>Toowoomba</u>	<u>Qld</u>	143,994
7	<u>Newcastle–Maitland</u>	<u>NSW</u>	509,894	17	<u>Ballarat</u>	<u>Vic</u>	111,702
8	<u>Canberra–Queanbeyan</u>	<u>ACT/NSW</u>	482,250	18	<u>Bendigo</u>	<u>Vic</u>	102,899
9	<u>Sunshine Coast</u>	<u>Qld</u>	355,631	19	<u>Albury-Wodonga</u>	<u>NSW/Vic</u>	97,676
10	<u>Wollongong</u>	<u>NSW</u>	305,880	20	<u>Launceston</u>	<u>Tas</u>	93,332

## Ancestry and immigration

Between 1788 and the Second World War, the vast majority of settlers and immigrants came from the British Isles (principally England, Ireland and Scotland), although there was significant immigration from China and Germany during the 19th century. Following Federation in 1901, the white Australia policy was strengthened, restricting further migration from these areas. However, this policy was relaxed following WW2 and in the decades following, Australia received a large wave of immigration from across Europe, with many more immigrants arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe than in previous decades. All overt racial discrimination ended in 1973, with multiculturalism becoming official policy.<sup>[363]</sup> Subsequently, there has been a large and continuing wave of immigration from across the world, with Asia being the largest source of immigrants in the 21st century.<sup>[364]</sup>



Australian residents by country of birth (2021 census)

Today, Australia has the world's eighth-largest immigrant population, with immigrants accounting for 30% of the population, the highest proportion among major Western nations.<sup>[365][366]</sup> In 2022–23, 212,789 permanent migrants were admitted to Australia, with a net migration population gain of 518,000 people inclusive of non-permanent residents.<sup>[367][368]</sup> Most entered on skilled visas,<sup>[364]</sup> however the immigration program also offers visas for family members and refugees.<sup>[369]</sup>

The Australian Bureau of Statistics asks each Australian resident to nominate up to two ancestries each census and the responses are classified into broad ancestry groups.<sup>[370][371]</sup> At the 2021 census, the most commonly nominated ancestry groups as a proportion of the total population were:<sup>[372]</sup> 57.2% European (including 46% North-West European and 11.2% Southern and Eastern European), 33.8% Oceanian,<sup>[N 8]</sup> 17.4% Asian (including 6.5% Southern and Central Asian, 6.4% North-East Asian, and 4.5% South-East Asian), 3.2% North African and Middle Eastern, 1.4% Peoples of the Americas, and 1.3% Sub-Saharan African. At the 2021 census, the most commonly nominated individual ancestries as a proportion of the total population were:<sup>[N 9][4]</sup>

- |   |  |                            |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| ▪ <u>English</u> (33%)                        | ▪ <u>Italian</u> (4.4%)                      | ▪ <u>Filipino</u> (1.6%)   |
| ▪ <u>Australian</u> (29.9%) <sup>[N 10]</sup> | ▪ <u>German</u> (4%)                         | ▪ <u>Dutch</u> (1.5%)      |
| ▪ <u>Irish</u> (9.5%)                         | ▪ <u>Indian</u> (3.1%)                       | ▪ <u>Vietnamese</u> (1.3%) |
| ▪ <u>Scottish</u> (8.6%)                      | ▪ <u>Aboriginal</u> (2.9%) <sup>[N 11]</sup> | ▪ <u>Lebanese</u> (1%)     |
| ▪ <u>Chinese</u> (5.5%)                       | ▪ <u>Greek</u> (1.7%)                        |                            |

At the 2021 census, 3.8% of the Australian population identified as being Indigenous—Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>[N 12][371]</sup>

## Language

Although English is not the official language of Australia in law, it is the *de facto* official and national language.<sup>[375][376]</sup> Australian English is a major variety of the language with a distinctive accent and lexicon,<sup>[377]</sup> and differs slightly from other varieties of English in grammar and spelling.<sup>[378]</sup> General Australian serves as the standard dialect.<sup>[379]</sup> The Australian sign language known as Auslan was used at home by 16,242 people at the time of the 2021 census.<sup>[380]</sup>

At the 2021 census, English was the only language spoken in the home for 72% of the population. The next most common languages spoken at home were Mandarin (2.7%), Arabic (1.4%), Vietnamese (1.3%), Cantonese (1.2%) and Punjabi (0.9%).<sup>[381]</sup>

More than 250 Australian Aboriginal languages are thought to have existed at the time of first European contact.<sup>[382]</sup> The National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) for 2018–19 found that more than 120 Indigenous language varieties were in use or being revived, although 70 of those in use were endangered.<sup>[383]</sup> The 2021 census found that 167 Indigenous languages were spoken at home by 76,978 Indigenous Australians — Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole), Djambarrpuyngu (a Yolŋu language) and Pitjantjatjara (a Western Desert language) were among the most widely spoken.<sup>[384]</sup> NILS and the Australian Bureau of Statistics use different classifications for Indigenous Australian languages.<sup>[385]</sup>

## Religion

Australia has no state religion; section 116 of the Australian Constitution prohibits federal legislation that would establish any religion, impose any religious observance, or prohibit the free exercise of any religion.<sup>[386]</sup> However, the states still retain the power to pass religiously discriminatory laws.<sup>[387]</sup>

At the 2021 census, 38.9% of the population identified as having "no religion",<sup>[4]</sup> up from 15.5% in 2001.<sup>[388]</sup> The largest religion is Christianity (43.9% of the population).<sup>[4]</sup> The largest Christian denominations are the Roman Catholic Church (20% of the population) and the Anglican Church of Australia (9.8%). Non-British immigration since the Second World War has led to the growth of non-Christian religions, the largest of which are Islam (3.2%), Hinduism (2.7%), Buddhism (2.4%), Sikhism (0.8%), and Judaism (0.4%).<sup>[389][4]</sup>



St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney belongs to the Roman Catholic Church, Australia's largest religious denomination.

In 2021, just under 8,000 people declared an affiliation with traditional Aboriginal religions.<sup>[4]</sup> In Australian Aboriginal mythology and the animist framework developed in Aboriginal Australia, the Dreaming is a sacred era in which ancestral totemic spirit beings formed The Creation. The Dreaming established the laws and structures of society and the ceremonies performed to ensure continuity of life and land.<sup>[390]</sup>

## Health

Australia's life expectancy of 83 years (81 years for males and 85 years for females)<sup>[391]</sup> is the fifth-highest in the world. It has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world,<sup>[392]</sup> while cigarette smoking is the largest preventable cause of death and disease, responsible for 7.8% of the total mortality and disease. Ranked second in preventable causes is hypertension at 7.6%, with obesity third at 7.5%.<sup>[393][394]</sup> Australia ranked 35th in the world in 2012 for its proportion of obese women<sup>[395]</sup> and near the top of developed nations for its proportion of obese adults;<sup>[396]</sup> 63% of its adult population is either overweight or obese.<sup>[397]</sup>

Australia spent around 9.91% of its total GDP to health care in 2021.<sup>[398]</sup> It introduced a national insurance scheme in 1975.<sup>[399]</sup> Following a period in which access to the scheme was restricted, the scheme became universal once more in 1981 under the name of Medicare.<sup>[400]</sup> The program is nominally funded by an income tax surcharge known as the Medicare levy, currently at 2%.<sup>[401]</sup> The states manage hospitals and attached outpatient services, while the Commonwealth funds the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (subsidising the costs of medicines) and general practice.<sup>[399]</sup>

## Education

School attendance, or registration for home schooling,<sup>[402]</sup> is compulsory throughout Australia. Education is primarily the responsibility of the individual states and territories; however, the Commonwealth has significant influence through funding agreements.<sup>[403]</sup> Since 2014, a national curriculum developed by the Commonwealth has been implemented by the states and territories.<sup>[404]</sup> Attendance rules vary between states, but in general children are required to attend school from the age of about 5 until about 16.<sup>[405][406]</sup> In some states (Western Australia, Northern Territory and New South Wales), children aged 16–17 are required to either attend school or participate in vocational training, such as an apprenticeship.<sup>[407][408][409][410]</sup> According to the 2022 PISA evaluations, Australian 15-year-olds ranked ninth in the OECD for reading and science and tenth for maths. However, less than 60% of Australian students achieved the National Proficiency Standard – 51% in maths, 58% in science and 57% in reading.<sup>[411][412]</sup>

Australia has an adult literacy rate that was estimated to be 99% in 2003.<sup>[413]</sup> However, a 2011–2012 report for the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 44% of the population does not have high literary and numeracy competence levels, interpreted by others as suggesting that they do not have the "skills needed for everyday life".<sup>[414][415][416]</sup>

Australia has 37 government-funded universities and three private universities, as well as a number of other specialist institutions that provide approved courses at the higher education level.<sup>[417]</sup> The OECD places Australia among the most expensive nations to attend university.<sup>[418]</sup> There is a state-based system of vocational training, known as TAFE, and many trades conduct apprenticeships for training new tradespeople.<sup>[419]</sup> About 58% of Australians aged from 25 to 64 have vocational or tertiary qualifications<sup>[420]</sup> and the tertiary graduation rate of 49% is the highest among OECD countries. 30.9% of Australia's population has attained a higher education qualification, which is among the highest percentages in the world.<sup>[421][422][423]</sup>

Australia has the highest ratio of international students per head of population in the world by a large margin, with 812,000 international students enrolled in the nation's universities and vocational institutions in 2019.<sup>[424][425]</sup> Accordingly, in 2019, international students represented on average 26.7% of the student bodies of Australian universities. International education therefore represents one of the country's largest exports and has a pronounced influence on the country's demographics, with a significant



Australia has the highest ratio of international students per capita in the world, with Melbourne ranking fifth among the 2023 QS Best Student Cities (University of Melbourne pictured).



proportion of international students remaining in Australia after graduation on various skill and employment visas.<sup>[426]</sup> Education is Australia's third-largest export, after iron ore and coal, and contributed more than \$28 billion to the economy in the 2016–17 financial year.<sup>[N 13][351]</sup>

## Culture

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Contemporary Australian culture reflects the country's Indigenous traditions, Anglo-Celtic heritage, and post-1945 history of multicultural immigration.<sup>[428][429][430]</sup> The culture of the United States has also been influential.<sup>[431]</sup> The evolution of Australian culture since British colonisation has given rise to distinctive cultural traits.<sup>[432][433]</sup>

Many Australians identify egalitarianism, mateship, irreverence and a lack of formality as part of their national identity.<sup>[434][435][436]</sup> These find expression in Australian slang, as well as Australian humour, which is often characterised as dry, irreverent and ironic.<sup>[437][438]</sup> New citizens and visa holders are required to commit to "Australian values", which are identified by the Department of Home Affairs as including: a respect for the freedom of the individual; recognition of the rule of law; opposition to racial, gender and religious discrimination; and an understanding of the "fair go", which is said to encompass the equality of opportunity for all and compassion for those in need.<sup>[439]</sup> What these values mean, and whether or not Australians uphold them, has been debated since before Federation.<sup>[440][441][442][443]</sup>

## Arts

Australia has more than 100,000 Aboriginal rock art sites,<sup>[445]</sup> and traditional designs, patterns and stories infuse contemporary Indigenous Australian art, "the last great art movement of the 20th century" according to critic Robert Hughes,<sup>[446]</sup> its exponents include Emily Kame Kngwarreye.<sup>[447]</sup> Early colonial artists showed a fascination with the unfamiliar land.<sup>[448]</sup> The impressionistic works of Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts and other members of the 19th-century Heidelberg School—the first "distinctively Australian" movement in Western art—gave expression to nationalist sentiments in the lead-up to Federation.<sup>[448]</sup> While the school remained influential into the 1900s, modernists such as Margaret Preston and Clarice Beckett, and, later, Sidney Nolan, explored new artistic trends.<sup>[448]</sup> The landscape remained central to the work of Aboriginal watercolourist Albert Namatjira,<sup>[449]</sup> as well as Fred Williams, Brett Whiteley and other post-war artists whose works, eclectic in style yet uniquely Australian, moved between the figurative and the abstract.<sup>[448][450]</sup>



The Sydney Opera House was completed in 1973 and declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007, making it the youngest building to have received the designation.<sup>[427]</sup>



Held at the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart, Tasmania, Sidney Nolan's *Snake* mural (1970) is inspired by the Aboriginal creation myth of the Rainbow Serpent, as well as desert flowers in bloom after a drought.<sup>[444]</sup>

Australian literature grew slowly in the decades following European settlement though Indigenous oral traditions, many of which have since been recorded in writing, are much older.<sup>[451]</sup> In the 19th century, Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson captured the experience of the bush using a distinctive Australian vocabulary.<sup>[452]</sup> Their works are still popular; Paterson's bush poem "Waltzing Matilda" (1895) is regarded as Australia's unofficial national anthem.<sup>[453]</sup> Miles Franklin is the namesake of Australia's most prestigious literary prize, awarded annually to the best novel about Australian life.<sup>[454]</sup> Its first recipient, Patrick White, went on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973.<sup>[455]</sup> Australian Booker Prize winners include Peter Carey, Thomas Keneally and Richard Flanagan.<sup>[456]</sup> Australian public intellectuals have also written seminal works in their respective fields, including feminist Germaine Greer and philosopher Peter Singer.<sup>[457]</sup>

In the performing arts, Aboriginal peoples have traditions of religious and secular song, dance and rhythmic music often performed in corroborees.<sup>[458]</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, Nellie Melba was one of the world's leading opera singers,<sup>[459]</sup> and later popular music acts such as the Bee Gees, AC/DC, INXS and Kylie Minogue achieved international recognition.<sup>[460]</sup> Many of Australia's performing arts companies receive funding through the Australian government's Australia Council.<sup>[461]</sup> There is a symphony orchestra in each state,<sup>[462]</sup> and a national opera company, Opera Australia,<sup>[463]</sup> well known for its famous soprano Joan Sutherland.<sup>[464]</sup> Ballet and dance are represented by The Australian Ballet and various state companies. Each state has a publicly funded theatre company.<sup>[465]</sup>



Arising from the Australian pub rock scene, AC/DC ranks among the world's best-selling music acts.

## Media



Actor playing the bushranger and outlaw Ned Kelly in The Story of the Kelly Gang (1906), the world's first feature-length narrative film

### The Story of the Kelly Gang

(1906), the world's first feature-length narrative film, spurred a boom in Australian cinema during the silent film era.<sup>[466]</sup> After World War I, Hollywood monopolised the industry,<sup>[467]</sup> and by the 1960s Australian film production had effectively ceased.<sup>[468]</sup> With the benefit of government support, the Australian New Wave of the 1970s brought provocative and successful films, many exploring themes of national identity, such as Picnic at Hanging Rock, Wake in Fright and Gallipoli,<sup>[469]</sup> while Crocodile Dundee and the Ozploitation movement's Mad Max series became international blockbusters.<sup>[470]</sup> In a film market flooded with foreign content, Australian films delivered a 7.7% share of the local box office in 2015.<sup>[471]</sup> The AACTAs are Australia's premier

film and television awards, and notable Academy Award winners from Australia include Geoffrey Rush, Nicole Kidman, Cate Blanchett and Heath Ledger.<sup>[472]</sup>

Australia has two public broadcasters (the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the multicultural Special Broadcasting Service), three commercial television networks, several pay-TV services,<sup>[473]</sup> and numerous public, non-profit television and radio stations. Each major city has at least one daily newspaper,<sup>[473]</sup> and there are two national daily newspapers, The Australian and The Australian Financial Review.<sup>[473]</sup> In 2024, Reporters Without Borders placed Australia 39th on a list of 180

countries ranked by press freedom, behind New Zealand (19th) and the United Kingdom (23rd), but ahead of the United States (55th).<sup>[474]</sup> This relatively low ranking is primarily because of the limited diversity of commercial media ownership in Australia;<sup>[475]</sup> most print media are under the control of News Corporation (59%) and Nine Entertainment Co (23%).<sup>[476]</sup>

## Cuisine

Most Indigenous Australian groups subsisted on a diet of native fauna and flora, otherwise called bush tucker.<sup>[477]</sup> It has increased in popularity among non-Indigenous Australians since the 1970s, with examples such as lemon myrtle, the macadamia nut and kangaroo meat now widely available.<sup>[478][479]</sup>

The first colonists introduced British and Irish cuisine to the continent.<sup>[480][481]</sup> This influence is seen in dishes such as fish and chips, and in the Australian meat pie, which is related to the British steak pie. Also during the colonial period, Chinese migrants paved the way for a distinctive Australian Chinese cuisine.<sup>[482]</sup>

Post-war migrants transformed Australian cuisine, bringing with them their culinary traditions and contributing to new fusion dishes.<sup>[483]</sup> Italians introduced espresso coffee and, along with Greeks, helped develop Australia's café culture, of which the flat white and avocado toast are now considered Australian staples.<sup>[484][485]</sup> Pavlovas, lamingtons, Vegemite and Anzac biscuits are also often called iconic Australian foods.<sup>[486]</sup>

Australia is a leading exporter and consumer of wine.<sup>[487]</sup> Australian wine is produced mainly in the southern, cooler parts of the country.<sup>[488]</sup> The nation also ranks highly in beer consumption,<sup>[489]</sup> with each state and territory hosting numerous breweries.

## Sport and recreation

The most popular sports in Australia by adult participation are: swimming, athletics, cycling, soccer, golf, tennis, basketball, surfing, netball and cricket.<sup>[491]</sup>

Australia is one of five nations to have participated in every Summer Olympics of the modern era,<sup>[492]</sup> and has hosted the Games twice: 1956 in Melbourne and 2000 in Sydney.<sup>[493]</sup> It is also set to host the 2032 Games in Brisbane.<sup>[494]</sup> Australia has also participated in every Commonwealth Games,<sup>[495]</sup> hosting the event in 1938, 1962, 1982, 2006 and 2018.<sup>[496]</sup>

Cricket is a major national sport.<sup>[497]</sup> The Australian national cricket team competed against England in the first Test match (1877) and the first One Day International (1971), and against New Zealand in the first Twenty20 International (2004), winning all three games.<sup>[498]</sup> It has also won the men's Cricket World Cup a record six times.<sup>[499]</sup>



South Australian wines



The Melbourne Cricket Ground is strongly associated with the history and development of cricket and Australian rules football, Australia's two most popular spectator sports.<sup>[490]</sup>

Australia has professional leagues for four football codes, whose relative popularity is divided geographically.<sup>[500]</sup> Originating in Melbourne in the 1850s, Australian rules football attracts the most television viewers in all states except New South Wales and Queensland, where rugby league holds sway, followed by rugby union.<sup>[501]</sup> Soccer, while ranked fourth in television viewers and resources, has the highest overall participation rates.<sup>[502]</sup>

The surf lifesaving movement originated in Australia in the early 20th century, following the relaxation of laws prohibiting daylight bathing on Australian beaches. The volunteer lifesaver is one of the country's icons.<sup>[503][504]</sup>

## See also

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- Outline of Australia
- Index of Australia-related articles

## Notes

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1. Australia also has a royal anthem, "God Save the King", which may be played in place of or alongside the national anthem when members of the royal family are present. If not played alongside the royal anthem, the national anthem is instead played at the end of an official event.<sup>[1]</sup>
2. Sydney is the largest city based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Greater Capital City Statistical Areas (GCCSAs). These represent labour markets and the functional area of Australian capital cities.<sup>[2]</sup> Melbourne is larger based on ABS Significant Urban Areas (SUAs). These represent Urban Centres, or groups of contiguous Urban Centres, that contain a population of 10,000 people or more.<sup>[3]</sup>
3. The religion question is optional in the Australian census.
4. There are minor variations from three basic time zones; see Time in Australia.
5. The earliest recorded use of the word *Australia* in English was in 1625 in "A note of Australia del Espíritu Santo, written by Sir Richard Hakluyt", published by Samuel Purchas in *Hakluytus Posthumus*, a corruption of the original Spanish name "Austrialia del Espíritu Santo" (Southern Land of the Holy Spirit)<sup>[42][43][44]</sup> for an island in Vanuatu.<sup>[45]</sup> The Dutch adjectival form *australische* was used in a Dutch book in Batavia (Jakarta) in 1638, to refer to the newly discovered lands to the south.<sup>[46]</sup>
6. For instance, the 1814 work *A Voyage to Terra Australis*.
7. Australia describes the body of water south of its mainland as the Southern Ocean, rather than the Indian Ocean as defined by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). In 2000, a vote of IHO member nations defined the term "Southern Ocean" as applying only to the waters between Antarctica and 60° south latitude.<sup>[167]</sup>
8. Includes those who nominate "Australian" as their ancestry.<sup>[4]</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics has stated that most who nominate "Australian" as their ancestry have at least partial Anglo-Celtic European ancestry.<sup>[373]</sup>
9. Each person may nominate more than one ancestry, so the total may exceed 100%.<sup>[374]</sup>



10. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has stated that most who nominate "Australian" as their ancestry have at least partial Anglo-Celtic European ancestry.<sup>[373]</sup>
11. Those who nominated their ancestry as "Australian Aboriginal". Does not include Torres Strait Islanders. This relates to nomination of ancestry and is distinct from persons who identify as Indigenous (Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) which is a separate question.
12. Indigenous identification is separate to the ancestry question on the Australian Census and persons identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander may identify any ancestry.
13. That is, 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017.

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## External links

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-  *Wikimedia Atlas of Australia*
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### Government

- *Parliament of Australia* (<https://www.aph.gov.au/>)
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## **Travel**

- [Official website \(https://www.australia.com/\)](https://www.australia.com/) of Tourism Australia

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