

# Geography

**Location:** Oceania, continent between the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean

**Map references:** Oceania

**Area:**

*total area:* 7,686,850 sq km

*land area:* 7,617,930 sq km

*comparative area:* slightly smaller than the US

*note:* includes Macquarie Island

**Land boundaries:** 0 km

**Coastline:** 25,760 km

**Maritime claims:**

*contiguous zone:* 24 nm

*continental shelf:* 200 nm or to the edge of the continental margin

*exclusive economic zone:* 200 nm

*territorial sea:* 12 nm

**International disputes:** territorial claim in Antarctica (Australian Antarctic Territory)

**Climate:** generally arid to semiarid; temperate in south and east; tropical in north

**Terrain:** mostly low plateau with deserts; fertile plain in southeast

**Natural resources:** bauxite, coal, iron ore, copper, tin, silver, uranium, nickel, tungsten, mineral sands, lead, zinc, diamonds, natural gas, petroleum

**Land use:**

*arable land:* 6%

*permanent crops:* 0%

*meadows and pastures:* 58%

*forest and woodland:* 14%

*other:* 22%

**Irrigated land:** 18,800 sq km (1989 est.)

**Environment:**

*current issues:* soil erosion from overgrazing, industrial development, urbanization, and poor farming practices; soil salinity rising due to the use of poor quality water; desertification; clearing for agricultural purposes threatens the natural habitat of many unique animal and plant species; the Great Barrier Reef off the northeast coast, the largest coral reef in the world, is threatened by increased shipping and its popularity as a tourist site; limited natural fresh water resources

*natural hazards:* cyclones along the coast; severe droughts

*international agreements:* party to - Antarctic-Environmental Protocol, Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Endangered

Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Marine Life Conservation, Nuclear Test Ban, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 83, Wetlands, Whaling; signed, but not ratified - Desertification

**Note:** world's smallest continent but sixth-largest country; population concentrated along the eastern and southeastern coasts; regular, tropical, invigorating, sea breeze known as "the Doctor" occurs along the west coast in the summer