

Lake Eyre Basin

Information Sheet



Bioregions

Number LS01

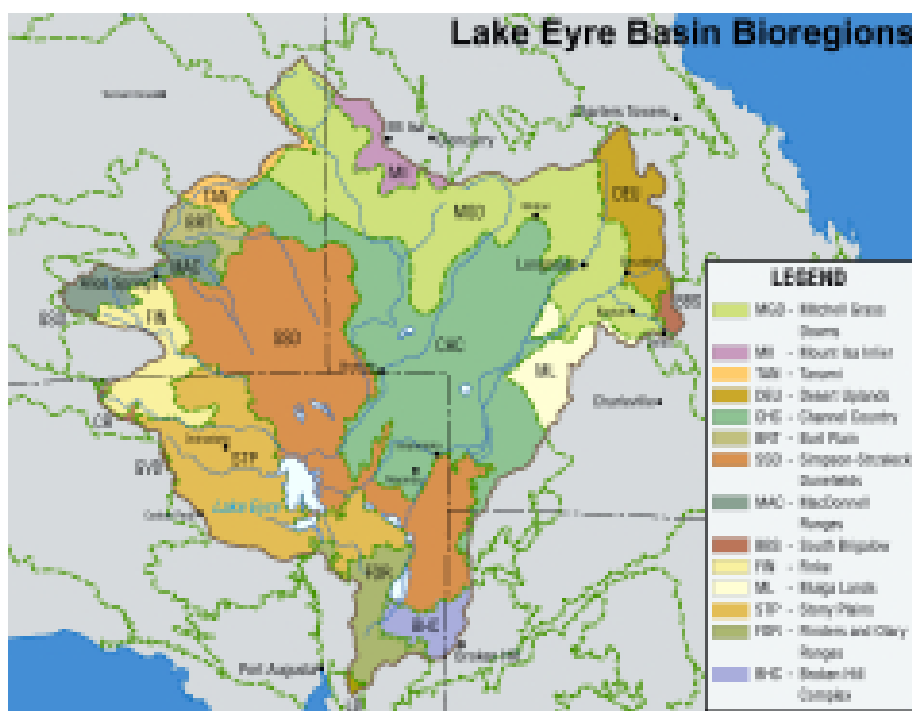
A biogeographic region or bioregion is defined by its geology, landscape patterns, climate, flora and fauna. Bioregions have natural boundaries created by their individual characteristics and are practical areas for sustainable land management and nature conservation.

Fifteen bioregions are represented in the Lake Eyre Basin. These include:

Mitchell Grass Downs

The deep, heavy, cracking, grey or brown clay soils of the Mitchell Grass Downs are self-mulching and often have a stony surface. As the name suggests, Mitchell grass (*Astrelba spp.*) tussock grasslands dominate these open rolling plains. Gidgea (*Acacia cambagei*) and other tree species occur, occasionally forming 'wooded downs', but most of this bioregion is naturally treeless. Crack-specialising reptiles such as the rare bearded dragon (*Pogona henrylawsoni*), Collett's snake (*Pseudechis colletti*), speckled brown snake (*Pseudonaja guttata*) and skink (*Ctenotus schevilli*) are among the many distinctive fauna species unique to the Mitchell Grass Downs. Rare and threatened species such as the Julia Creek dunnart (*Sminthopsis douglasi*) and the greater bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*) also occur.

Typical Mitchell grass downs.



Desert Uplands

The Desert Uplands is dominated by sandstone ranges (which are infiltration areas for the Great Artesian Basin) and sandplains supporting eucalypt woodlands, scattered acacia forests and areas of hummock and tussock grasslands. The soils generally have poor structure and low fertility. The woodlands of the Desert Uplands are known drought refuges for koalas (*Phascolarctus cinereus*) while other areas provide habitat for rare species such as the ground cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina maxima*), skink (*Ctenotus capricorni*) and the freckled duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*).

Channel Country

The Channel Country is more than just extensive floodplains and braided watercourses, or channels as the name suggests. There are equally vast gibber plains, dunefields and sandplains supporting grasses and herbs. The channels and floodplains support coolibah (*Eucalyptus coolabah*) woodlands, river red gums

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Bioregions of the Lake Eyre Basin

(*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), lignum (*Muehlenbeckia sp.*) swamps and saltbush (*Chenopodium sp.*) shrublands. The ephemeral wetlands of this bioregion provide vital breeding habitat for many of Australia's waterbirds. The Channel Country is home to the brolga (*Grus rubicundus*), along with the rare and threatened grey grasswren (*Amytornis barbatus*) and the kowari (*Dasyuroides byrnei*).

A scribble of sand dunes through braided channels.



Angus Emmott photo

Simpson-Strzelecki Dunefields

Dunefields and sandplains dominate this bioregion. Cane grass (*Zygochloa paradoxa*) grows along the dune crests while elsewhere sparse acacia shrublands with a spinifex (*Triodia spp.*) understorey occurs. Large salt lakes, notably Lake Eyre, have formed within this bioregion. The watercourses draining to these lakes are fringed with coolibahs (*Eucalyptus coolabah*) and river red gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). A number of rare and threatened species such as the Eyrean grasswren (*Amytornis goyderi*), the grey falcon (*Falco hypoleucos*) and the ampurta (*Dasyercus hillieri*) inhabit the Simpson-Strzelecki Dunefields.

Stony Plains

The Stony plains bioregion takes its name from the stony, gibber and gypsum plains which dominate the area. These plains support sparse chenopod shrublands and tussock grasslands. Other vegetation includes acacia forests and gidyea (*Acacia cambagei*) woodlands. Coolibahs (*Eucalyptus coolabah*) and river red gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) fringe creek lines. Fauna such as the square-tailed kite (*Lophoictinia isura*), mulgara (*Dasyercus cristicauda*), plains rat (*Pseudomys australis*) and the dusky hopping mouse (*Notomys fuscus*) inhabit the Stony Plains bioregion.

MacDonnell Ranges

The rugged MacDonnell Ranges of central Australia with its high ranges and foothills, dominate this bioregion which also includes areas of sand dunes. The vegetation is mainly open woodlands with a grassy or shrubby understorey. Eucalypts and acacias form low open woodlands often with a spinifex (*Triodia spp.*) understorey. Sandhill cane grass (*Zygochloa paradoxa*) forms open hummock grasslands on sand dune crests.

The painted snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*), desert mouse (*Pseudomys desertor*) and chocolate wattled bat (*Chalinolobus morio*) all call the MacDonnell Ranges home.

Finke

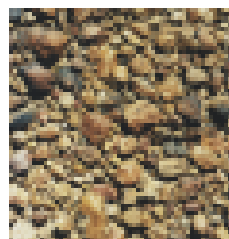
This bioregion takes its name from, arguably, the oldest river on earth. It is a region of arid sandplains, dissected uplands and valleys formed from ancient volcanic material. Soils of red earths and shallow sands support open woodlands of eucalypts, acacias and hakea. The woodland understorey is often a tussock grassland of spinifex (*Triodia spp.*). Other dominant flora species include cassia (*Senna spp.*), eremophilas, chenopods and grasses. The

Finke is habitat for black-footed rock-wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis*), kultarr (*Antechinomys laniger*), and the scarlet-chested parrot (*Neophema splendida*).

Upper Finke River near Mt Sonder in the MacDonnell Ranges.



Bruce Honeywill photo



Gibber pavement - Stony Plains

Other bioregions within the Lake Eyre Basin are the Mulga Lands, Tanami Desert, South Brigalow, Burt Plain, Flinders and Olary Ranges, Lofty Block and the Broken Hill Complex.