

→ ESA DIVERSITY II - DRYLAND PRODUCTS

Booklet for Test Site 20 | Southern Australia



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Acknowledgement

This booklet as one of 22 in total presents dryland results of the ESA DUE DiversityII project, where we thank ESA for the project initiative and funding. The providers of the global meteorological and biophysical data sets are acknowledged and thanked for making the data available free of charge: the University of Maryland; Department of Geography for the NOAA GIMMS NDVI data, NASA for the TRMM rainfall data, NOAA for the GPCP precipitation data, and the TU Vienna for the CCI soil moisture data. We are grateful to users and addressees for their feedback, valuable information, and their contributions to the user meetings. The project results and their presentation in the booklets owe their existence to many persons, whose affiliations are presented on the back cover of the booklet. A special thank is owed to Bob Scholes and Graham v. Maltitz, who kindly contributed “desertification narratives” about site 12, Southern Africa West, and respectively site 21, Southern Africa East.

About the Booklet

The booklets provide information about the vegetation condition of major dry regions of the world and how it developed during the first decade of this century as seen by ENVISAT MERIS. Focus is on vegetation productivity combined with detailed phenological analyses. The booklets present part of the developed indicators, which comprise status and trend/change information.

Chapter 1 gives a short introduction to the Diversity II project and the scope of the booklet.

Chapter 2 introduces the test site with a condensed biodiversity summary, and a regional “dryland” story, which users might relate to some of the map products provided. Further overview information is given such as LCC Land Cover and aridity maps, as well as climate diagrams.

Chapter 3 is a short overview of the data and methods applied.

Chapter 4 describes the developed indicators and presents selected indicator maps.

Chapter 5 discusses the indicators and their information content.

Chapter 6 contains a short outlook.

Annex 1 contains more detailed biodiversity descriptions for five dryland test sites: site 10 Southern Europe, site 12 Southern Africa West, Site 13 Western Sahel, site 15 Caatinga, Brazil, and site 20 Southern Australia.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction to Diversity II	4
1.1	Scope of the Booklet	4
2	The Test Site <i>Southern Australia</i>	5
2.1	Overview of Land Cover and Climate of the Test Site	7
2.2	Biodiversity Highlights	8
3	Materials and Methods	8
3.1	Generation of NPP-Proxies	8
4	Generated Indicators	10
4.1	From NPP Proxies to First Order Indicators	10
4.2	From First Order to Second Order Indicators	11
4.3	Selected Indicator Maps	13
5	Generic Interpretation of the Maps	26
6	Outlook	27
7	Description of Biodiversity	28
8	Faunal Species Richness Maps	30
	References	33

Figures

Figure 1: Distribution of global Diversity II dryland sites with internal numbering	4
Figure 2: Feral camel (<i>Camelus dromedarius</i>) on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (Photo: D Bardsley). Source: Bardsley and Wiseman (2012)	5
Figure 3: Indigenous land in Australia.	6
Figure 4: Location of the Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resources Management region.	6
Figure 5: Overview of test site 20.	7
Figure 6: Climographs of Alice Springs (Central Australia) and Woomera (Southern Australia)	8
Figure 7: Scheme of the extracted phenological parameters, and corresponding rainfall and soil moisture data. (Location: South Africa, X: 25.7373764, Y: -29.896337)	9
Figure 8: Modelled species richness of amphibians	31
Figure 9: Modelled species richness of mammals	31
Figure 10: Modelled species richness of reptiles	32
Figure 11: Modelled species richness total	32

Tables

Table 1: Overview of the Indicator Maps shown in the booklets	12
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1 Introduction to Diversity II

With the Diversity II project ESA aims at contributing with EO based methods to the strategic goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), especially the supportive goal E: Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building. Besides the CBD and other interested parties, also the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a major relevant and interested stakeholder. **The specific aim of this project is to set up an EO-based monitoring scheme for the assessment of status, changes and trends of biodiversity and ecosystem NPP (Net Primary Production) in global drylands using moderate resolution EO data.** The project is primarily based on ENVISAT MERIS data, which have been recorded from June 2002 to April 2012. Figure 1 gives an overview of the selected dryland sites, which constitute WWF (World Wildlife Fund) ecoregions.



Figure 1: Distribution of global Diversity II dryland sites with internal numbering

1.1 Scope of the Booklet

The booklet compiles and summarizes important outcomes per test site, and thus constitutes a regional complement to the project reports and the product user handbook (PUH). The PUH provides in depth and complete project documentation, though without highlighting every test site.

Interested users, for instance those who will not look at the map files themselves, will find some major results presented in the booklet, as well as a short description of the methodology and of the individual products shown.

The booklets and the PUH can be downloaded at <http://www.diversity2.info/products/>.

2 The Test Site Southern Australia

Dryland Story of Southern Australia

Ludwig and Tongway (1995) state: “Like all developed countries with extensive arid and semiarid lands, Australia has a desertification problem. In the “land down-under” this problem is national in scope. More than 70% of the continent, some 5 million km², is arid or semiarid.... About 42% of this area, some 2 million km², is estimated to be either in a severe (26%) or very severe (16%) state of desertification”.

According to the encyclopedia of Earth websites covering the two WWF ecoregions contained in the study site

“Chief threats to the **Central Ranges xeric scrublands ecoregion** are overgrazing by livestock, particularly cattle; however, human introduced equines and alien species rabbits are also threats due to herbivory and trampling” (<http://www.eoearth.org/view/article/177273/>). The **Tirari-Sturt stony desert ecoregion** is classified under the conservation status of Vulnerable; The fringe of this ecoregion has a certain amount of sheep livestock grazing (<http://www.eoearth.org/view/article/177278/>).

With proceeding climate change, Hughes (2003) envisages: “Elevated CO₂ will most likely mitigate some of the impacts of climate change by reducing water stress. Future impacts on particular ecosystems include increased forest growth, alterations in competitive regimes between C3 and C4 grasses, increasing encroachment of woody shrubs into arid and semiarid rangelands,...”.

Indigenous people have control of more than 20% of the Australian land, as shown in Figure 3. **Bardsley and Wiseman (2012)** provide a comprehensive assessment of the projected climate change impacts and adaptation options for Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resources Management region in the north-west of South Australia (Figure 4), and the Australian’s drylands in general. This region is situated in the larger test site rectangle, though largely outside the main study AOI, and includes to a larger part indigenously controlled land. One of the threads discussed in the report is about the feral camels, which are increasing and being reported to cause tremendous damage:



Figure 2: Feral camel (*Camelus dromedarius*) on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (Photo: D Bardsley). Source: Bardsley and Wiseman (2012)

“Camels and cats are the big problem, donkeys, rabbits, horses.... Camels eat anything, so all plants are vulnerable during the drought. Because they have soft, padded feet, camels don’t seem to have the same impact on the soil as cattle, which cut up the country with their hard hooves. There is a problem with camels all collecting in the clay pan areas, which are low lying and hold the water

and green feed longer. Large numbers come together when it is dry in areas where some water of green feed remains and they poison wetlands. The water table is rising in some of these areas and salt is coming up through the ground, because the camels walk all over these areas. Camels wallow and feed in large numbers down in the clay pans, which removes vegetation and brings the salt to the surface as groundwater levels are no longer drawn down by trees. These areas then become very

dusty. When they dry out there is a dust bowl as areas of the clay pans expand. Our country is blowing away from us. Our country is blowing across to Birdsville and the east of Australia is flying over to New Zealand! Camels have come into town in large numbers looking for water – torn off taps, knocked off air-conditioners, broke other water infrastructure such as tanks (Amata 21/3/2011)” Bardsley and Wiseman (2012).

One of the other threads discussed by Bardsley and Wiseman (2012) is the **invasion of the buffel grass**, although the portion of invasive species is rather low in the area. Once introduced (from northern Africa) as relatively drought tolerant fodder grass and for land rehabilitation, it is now crowding out native plants and seriously increasing fuel load and thus leading to more frequent, higher flames and hotter fires. After fire it will re-sprout again from a perennial rootstock before many of the native species get a chance to recover.

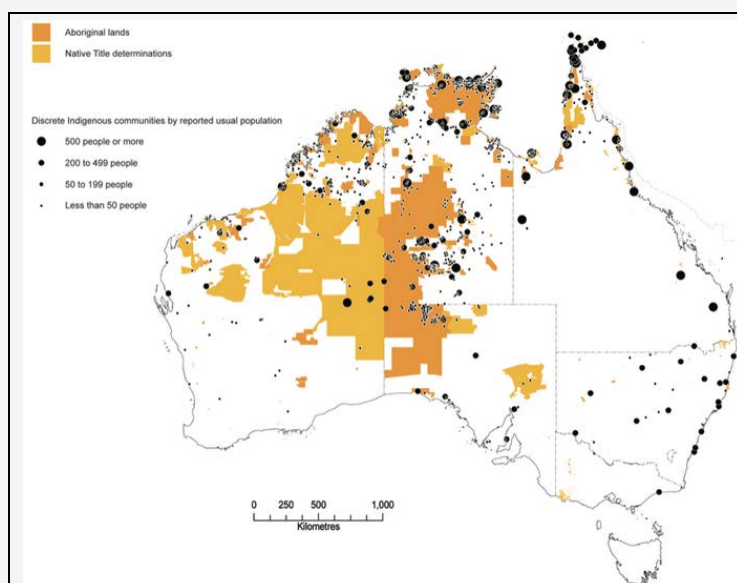


Figure 3: Indigenous land in Australia. Source: <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/land/aboriginal-homelands-outstations#axzz3mU4mcxO9>



Figure 4: Location of the Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resources Management region. Source: Bardsley and Wiseman (2012)

References

- Bardsley, K., Wiseman, N.D. (2012), *It Depends Which Way the Wind Blows: An integrated assessment of projected climate change impacts and adaptation options for the Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resources Management region*. Final Report June 2012. Government of South Australia, ISBN 978 1 921800 42 9.
- Creative Spirits: Aboriginal homelands & outstations, <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/land/aboriginal-homelands-outstations#axzz3mU4mcxO9>
- Ludwig, J.A., Tongway, D.J. (1995), *Desertification in Australia: An eye to grass roots and landscapes*. *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment*, 37, 1, 231-237.
- Hughes, L. (2003), *Climate change and Australia: Trends, projections and impacts*. *Austral Ecology*, 28, 423-443.

2.1 Overview of Land Cover and Climate of the Test Site

The study AOI is made up by the WWF ecoregions Tirari-Sturt stony desert (AA1309), and Central Ranges xeric scrub (AA1302).

For most of the ecoregions, information on geography, biodiversity, threats, etc. is found on <http://www.eoearth.org/view/article/51cbcd7a7896bb431f692731/?topic=51cbfc77f702fc2ba8129ab9>. Inserting the ID of the ecoregion (e.g. AA1309) or the name into the search window will lead to the respective ecoregion description site.

The maps in Figure 5 provide an overview of the study site. The left hand map presents the CCI Land Cover v1.4 2010 data, which were derived (<http://www.esa-landcover-cci.org/>) based on ENVISAT MERIS (300m) data. To the right, the CGIAR-CSI global aridity index map (Zomer et al. 2007, Zomer et al. 2008) is shown. The CGIAR-CSI global aridity index is computed as ratio of mean annual precipitation and mean annual potential evapotranspiration. Note that declining values indicate increasing aridity.

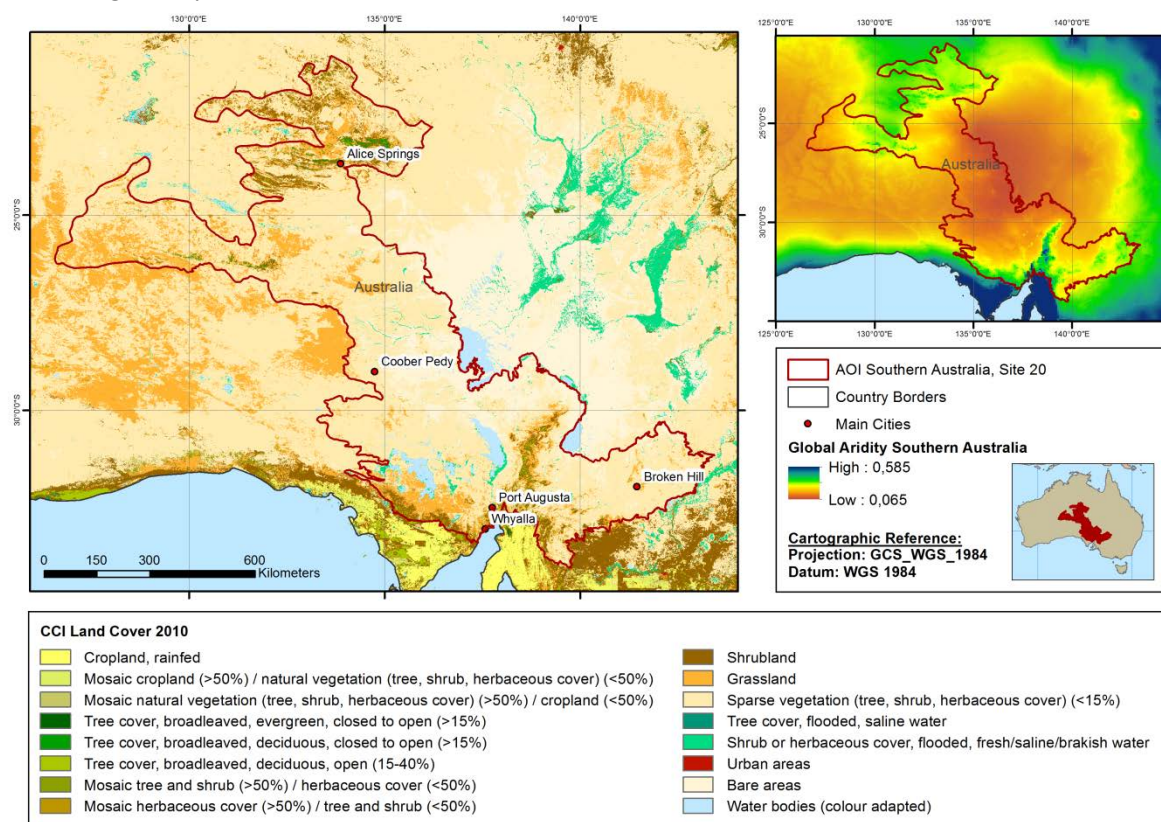


Figure 5: Overview of test site 20, Southern Australia, showing land cover from the CCI Land Cover data set on the left-hand side and an aridity index map on the right-hand side derived from the CGIAR-CSI global aridity data base.

While the larger test site within the rectangle spans a broad spectrum of climatic conditions ranging from arid to humid, the actual AOI contains nearly exclusively arid land. The overall land cover patterns reflect the aridity gradients, and range from sparse vegetation, shrubland and grassland to open tree cover and wetland vegetation.

Figure 6 shows two climographs of Central and Southern Australia, respectively. Both climographs exhibit a similar seasonal behavior. Note, however, that station Alice Springs exhibits a pronounced summer precipitation pattern while Woomera in the south is characterized by a rather equal distribution of rainfall throughout a year.

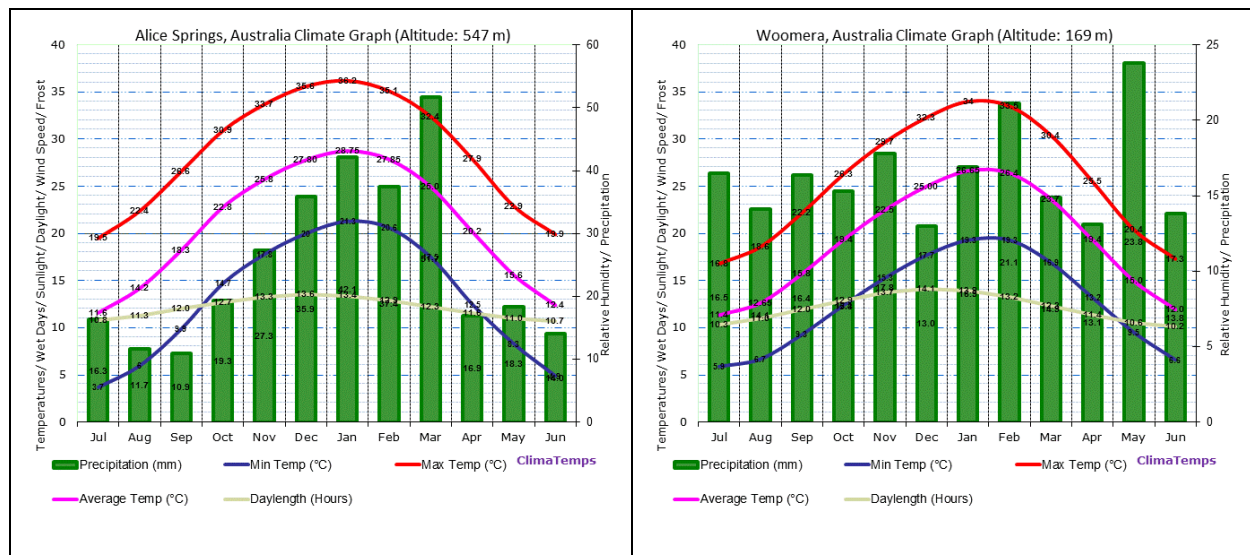


Figure 6: Climographs of Alice Springs (Central Australia) and Woomera (Southern Australia). Sources:
<http://www.alice-springs-amo.climatemps.com/graph.php>, <http://www.woomera.climatemps.com/graph.php>

2.2 Biodiversity Highlights

The study area holds an impressive biological diversity despite the harsh conditions of the Tirari-Sturt Stony Desert, including around 20 amphibians, over 100 reptiles, up to 50 mammals and over 200 birds. Representative species include streambank froglet (*Crinia riparia*), black-footed rock wallabies (*Petrogale lateralis*), red kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*), Australian bustard (*Ardeotis australis*) and Wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax*).

3 Materials and Methods

Based on ENVISAT MERIS FR and RR (Full and Reduced Resolution) data with a spatial resolution of 300m and respectively 1200m, all NPP proxies presented here and the indicators derived therefrom originate from the fraction of absorbed photosynthetically active radiation (fAPAR) computed according to Gobron et al. 2011. The fAPAR values are compiled on a bi-weekly basis, resulting in time series data with 24 halfmonthly values per calendar year. In addition, TRMM 3b42 rainfall data (<http://trmm.gsfc.nasa.gov/>) were used to relate the productivity data to precipitation, as well as CCI soil moisture data (<http://www.esa-soilmoisture-cci.org/>) as alternative data for water availability. Beyond 50° North and South, GPCP (<http://www.gewex.org/gpcpdata.htm>) rainfall data were taken, as TRMM data end at 50° N and S. For the period prior to the MERIS period, NOAA GIMMS NDVI data (<http://glcf.umd.edu/data/gimms/>) and GPCP rainfall data were confronted to show the “historical” development of vegetation and rainfall from 1982 to 2002 (map [P56](#)), i.e. prior to the MERIS period.

3.1 Generation of NPP-Proxies

In a first step, phenological parameters are derived individually for each year and pixel, shown in Figure 7. The diagram shows the temporal course of the MERIS fAPAR data during a 3-year period and the subdivision into different seasonal periods. The **vegetation year** includes the full yearly vegetation cycle starting at the turning of the preceding *dry or cold season* to the green season and ending after the following *dry/cold season* – or in case of several green seasons during a year – at the begin of the (statistically) dominant green season. The **vegetation year length** varies with possible shifts of the green season start time, which results from the high rainfall variability typical for drylands. The average (median) start time of the vegetation years starting in 2003 to 2010 is presented in map [P57](#).

The **vegetation year** can be subdivided into different periods, limited by defined starting and ending points in time. The **growing season** includes the major peak(s), i.e. ascending and descending parts of the time series and starts once a selected greenness threshold is surpassed on the way from the SoS to the green peak. The starting time of the growing season is shown in map [P59](#). The **dry season** (brown parts of the curve) starts once a defined lower fAPAR threshold is passed. The thresholds depend on the seasonal amplitude and especially on the average level of the dry season values.

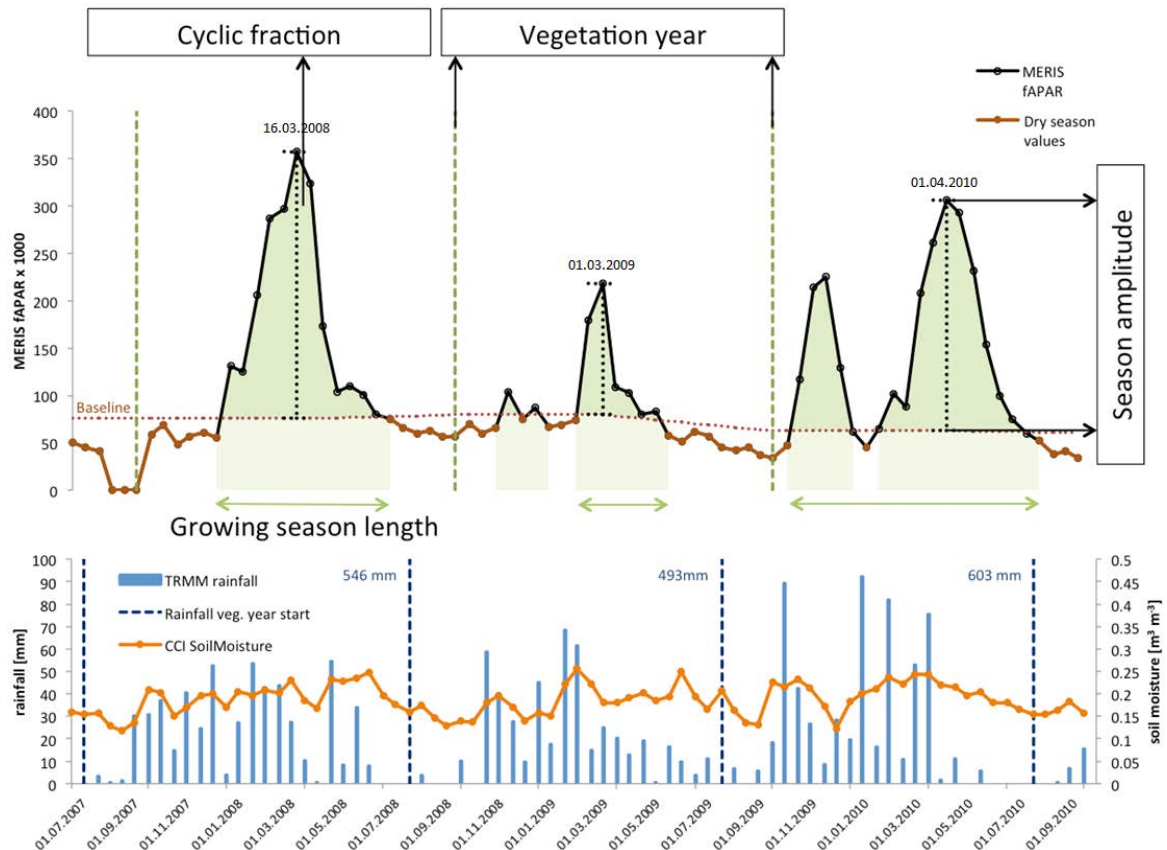


Figure 7: Scheme of the extracted phenological parameters, and corresponding rainfall and soil moisture data. (Location: South Africa, X: 25.7373764, Y: -29.896337)

The growing season length is shown in map [P58](#). For the above described phenological periods, the MERIS fAPAR values have been temporally integrated to either sum or average values. The results are called “**NPP proxies**”, and constitute yearly (one value per vegetation year) values. The developed indicator maps are primarily based on the following NPP proxies:

- **Average vegetation year fAPAR:** Mean value of all fAPAR values within one full vegetation cycle, constituting a proxy for the annual NPP (map [P01](#)) and/or standing green biomass.
- **Cyclic fraction fAPAR:** The cyclic fraction of the vegetation is comprised of summed fAPAR values of the green peak(s) during a vegetation year, subtracting the non-cyclic base levels. The cyclic fraction fAPAR can be interpreted as the amount of NPP that is directly related to the annual cycle of the climatic vegetation growth factors, especially rainfall (map [P02](#)).
- **Average dry season fAPAR:** For the dry season the low fAPAR values after the green peak are averaged. The dry season greenness values reflect the portion of plants that remain green after senescence of the annual vegetation or grow new green leaves during the dry period. High dry season levels indicate the presence of shrubs, bushes and trees (map [P03](#)).

- **Percent cyclic vegetation of vegetation year greenness:** The share of the cyclic vegetation of the entire vegetation year NPP is expected to decline with the increasing presence of evergreen vegetation. Shrublands and forests (with fully or partly green leaves in the dry period) thus tend to have lower values for this indicator than crops and grassland (this indicator is contained in two second order indicators, see map [P50](#) and [P51](#)).

Rain Use Efficiency and Soil Moisture Use Efficiency

In addition to the NPP proxies, Rain Use Efficiency (RUE) and Soil Moisture Use Efficiency (SMUE) indicators were derived, in order to relate vegetation productivity and its spatial patterns and temporal variability to rainfall. While RUE is based on a widely applied, tested, discussed, and partly modified approach of Le Houérou (1984), SMUE is an analogue concept based on soil moisture data instead of rainfall as water availability parameter. Le Houérou defined RUE as *quotient of annual primary production by annual rainfall*. RUE thus expresses the amount of biomass growing per unit rainfall water. Theoretically, soil moisture is more directly related to plant water availability than rainfall, so SMUE is offered as a potentially useful additional indicator. RUE (and assumedly also SMUE) depends heavily on climate, soil properties, and vegetation conditions. For instance, as Le Houérou states, it decreases with increasing aridity due to the decreasing rate of useful rainwater (increasing evaporation, heavy rains, soil crusting and consequently more runoff, etc.).

It further depends on the way it is derived, especially the input parameters/data sources used for vegetation and rainfall. Since RUE is known to not necessarily normalize vegetation productivity based on rainfall variability, as RUE can be found to be correlated with rainfall over the years at a given place, its actual usefulness as an indicator for vegetation degradation (where RUE is supposed to decrease) is therefore limited and widely disputed. Nevertheless, we have included RUE and SMUE status and trend products in our products and the users may decide about its usefulness. Respective RUE and SMUE trend products are shown in the maps [P37](#) and [P40](#).

The function of RUE (or SMUE) as status indicator of ecosystem productivity and its usefulness for the comparison of the productivity of different ecosystems as proposed by Le Houérou (1984) is obvious and demonstrated in the maps [P08](#), [P17](#).

4 Generated Indicators

4.1 From NPP Proxies to First Order Indicators

By analyzing the annual NPP proxies and RUE/SMUE indicators and rainfall and soil moisture through time, a set of indicators for vegetation/ecosystem condition and change was derived. These can be divided into status and trend type indicators. Given the MERIS data period from June 2002 to April 2012 and the globally varying vegetation cycles, NPP proxy and RUE/SMUE indicators for a total of eight vegetation years could be extracted, starting in 2003/(2002) and ending in 2011/(2012).

Hence, MERIS based status and trend indicators cover worldwide eight vegetation years. Status indicators for this period include 8-year averages (maps [P02](#), [P03](#)) and the coefficients of variation (maps [P04](#), [P26](#), [P30](#)P30). In addition, the 8-year period was subdivided into two epochs covering four vegetation years each. Epochal status maps and difference maps were generated for rainfall and soil moisture. The epochal difference map for rainfall is shown for rainfall in this booklet (map [P46](#)).

The trend slope maps were derived with the non parametric Theil Sen trend slope estimator (Theil 1950, Sen 1968) and constrained with the Mann Kendall significance test (Kendall 1962) to trends with a probability greater than 0.9 (maps [P37](#) [P40](#)P40).

All indicator maps have been classified into distinct ranges of the original continuous values, using the same class intervals and colour scheme worldwide. For this reason the maps are globally comparable, though in rare cases not locally optimized. However, users can apply their own colour

schemes to their individual downloaded maps, and in addition to the classified maps, also **the underlying continuous data sets are provided for further analyses on request.**

4.2 From First Order to Second Order Indicators

The first order status and trend indicators have been combined to derive more abstract and synoptic, second order indicators showing status, changes and trends of the most essential first order indicators in various relations to each other. Basically three types of such combinations were generated:

1. Relation between NPP proxies (vegetation year average greenness) and the percent of cyclic vegetation of vegetation year greenness

This indicator group highlights status, changes and trends of the relation between the two first order indicators. The status indicator (map [P50](#)) can be regarded as a functional classification of vegetation productivity and basic type: perennial versus annual/seasonal/ephemeral vegetation. The respective map is closely related to land use/cover patterns and also to soil type and terrain structures. The change indicator (map [P51](#)) displays epochal (2003-2006 versus 2007-2010) changes between the aggregated classes of the two underlying first order indicators.

2. Trend relation between vegetation year greenness and seasonal greenness

This indicator combines the vegetation year greenness trends with those of the cyclic vegetation and the dry season greenness. It has commonalities with [P51](#), but the trend patterns deviate partly from the change patterns. Essentially this indicator (map [P52](#)) shows the development of the perennial and seasonal green vegetation in relation to each other during the observation period. For example, a positive vegetation year or dry season trend without a positive cyclic vegetation trend may possibly exhibit the dominant growth of bushes/trees versus cyclic vegetation. Vice versa, a prevailing positive trend of the cyclic vegetation may potentially point to a dominant increase of crop areas or grasses.

3. Direct relation between Rainfall and Vegetation Productivity

As an alternative to RUE/SMUE trends contained in the first order products, as well as to the so called “RESTREND” approach (see for instance Wessels et al. 2012), which assume linearity or even proportionality (RUE) between rainfall and NPP, assumption-free relation indicators between rainfall and NPP trends were generated. Separate indicators were prepared for the relation between rainfall and vegetation year greenness, cyclic vegetation, and dry season greenness, respectively (see maps [P53](#), [P54](#), and [P55](#)). In addition, the same type of indicator was derived for a time span prior to the MERIS period (1981-2002), using GPCP rainfall data and NOAA GIMMS NDVI data (see map [P56](#)).

Table 1: Overview of the Indicator Maps shown in the booklets

Product number	Product name	Product description
1	Vegetation year average greenness 2003-2010	Vegetation year average greenness 2003-2010 26 greenness classes Mean of 8 vegetation years average values
2	Cyclic vegetation greenness 2003-2010	Cyclic vegetation greenness 2003-2010 26 greenness classes Mean of 8 cyclic fraction sum values
3	Dry season greenness 2003-2010	Dry season greenness 2003-2010 26 greenness classes Mean of 8 dry season average values
4	Variability of vegetation year greenness 2003-2010	Vegetation year greenness variability 2003-2010 26 greenness variability classes Variation coefficient of 8 vegetation year average values
8	Rain Use Efficiency of vegetation year average 2003-2010	Vegetation year RUE mean 2003-2010 26 RUE classes Mean of 8 vegetation year RUE values
17	Soil Moisture Use Efficiency of vegetation year average 2003-2010	Vegetation year SMUE 2003-2010 26 SMUE classes Mean of 8 vegetation year SMUE values
25	TRMM precipitation average of vegetation years 2003-2010	Vegetation year trmm rainfall mean 2003-2010 26 trmm rainfall classes Mean of 8 vegetation year rainfall sum values
26	TRMM precipitation variability of vegetation years 2003-2010	Vegetation year trmm rainfall variability 2003-2010 26 trmm rainfall variability classes Variation coefficient of 8 vegetation year rainfall sum values
29	Soil Moisture average of vegetation years 2003-2010	Vegetation year CCI Soil Moisture mean 2003-2010 26 SM classes Mean of 8 vegetation year SM average values
30	Soil Moisture variability of vegetation years 2003-2010	Vegetation year CCI Soil Moisture variability 2003-2010 26 SM variability classes Variation coefficient of 8 vegetation year SM average values
37	Rain Use Efficiency trend slopes of cyclic vegetation 2003-2010	Trendslope of cyclic fraction RUE 2003-2010 12 slope classes Theil-Sen median trend, masked at p 0.9
40	Soil Moisture Use Efficiency trend slopes of cyclic vegetation 2003-2010	Trendslope of cyclic fraction SMUE 2003-2010 12 slope classes Theil-Sen median trend, masked at p 0.9
46	Change in vegetation year precipitation between the epochs 2003-2006 and 2007-2010	Epochal difference of vegetation year TRMM rainfall 2003-2006 and 2007-2010 12 difference classes
50	Functional Classes	Relation between vegetation year greenness classes and the classified percentage of the cyclic vegetation of the yearly vegetation 2003-2010

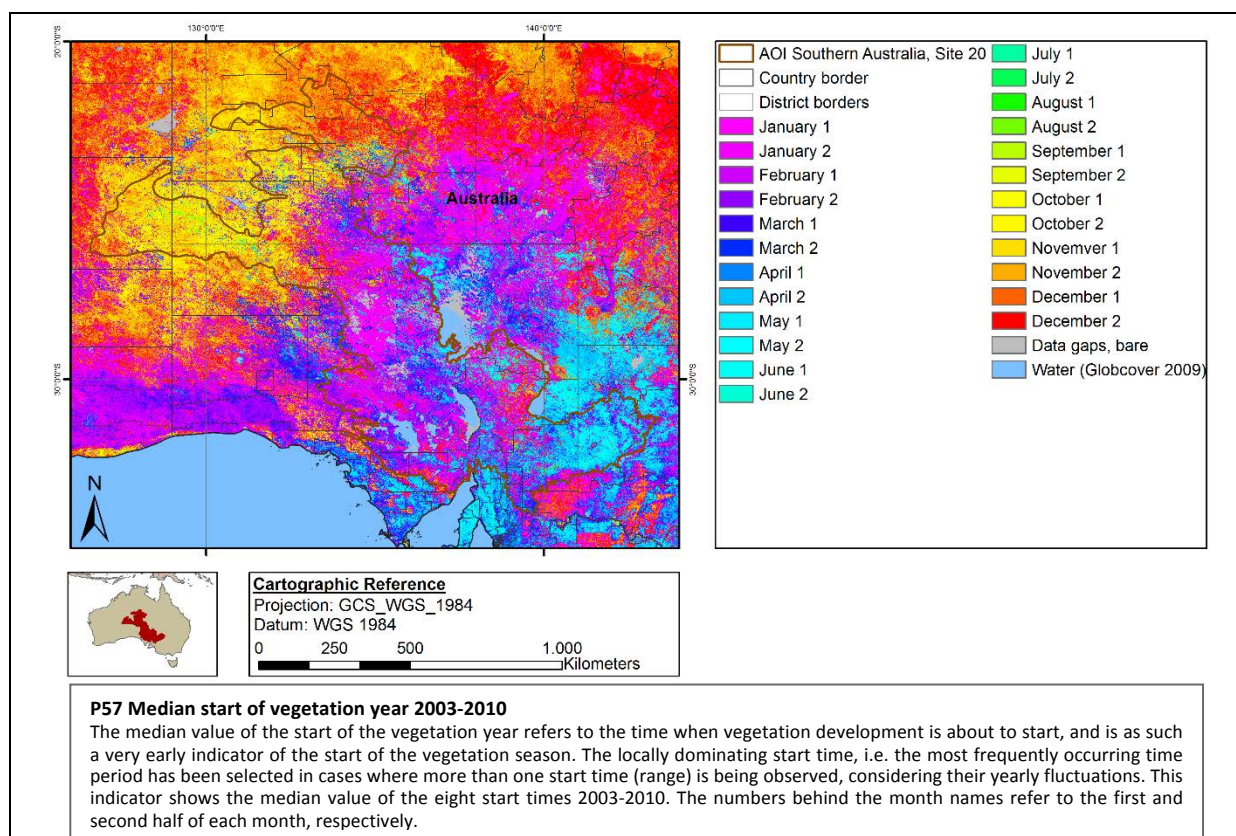
51	Functional Differences	Epochal (2003-2006/2007-2010) difference map of the relation between vegetation year greenness classes and the classified percentage of the cyclic vegetation of the yearly vegetation
52	Seasonal Trend Relations	Relation between vegetation year greenness trends and seasonal greenness trends 2003-2010
53	TRMM Rainfall versus MERIS fAPAR vegetation year greenness trend	Relation between vegetation year rainfall trends and vegetation year greenness trends 2003-2010
54	TRMM Rainfall versus MERIS fAPAR cyclic fraction greenness trend	Relation between cyclic fraction rainfall trends and cyclic fraction greenness trends 2003-2010
55	TRMM Rainfall versus MERIS fAPAR dry season greenness trend	Relation between vegetation year rainfall trends and dry season greenness trends 2003-2010
56	GPCP Rainfall versus GIMMS NDVI vegetation year greenness trend	Relation between vegetation year GPCP rainfall trends and vegetation year greenness (GIMMS NDVI) trends 1981-2002
57	Median start of vegetation year 2003-2010	Median of the start times (half month number in the calendar year) of the vegetation year 2003-2010
58	Mean length of vegetation season 2003-2010	Mean of the lengths of the vegetation seasons 2003-2010
59	Mean start time of vegetation season 2003-2010	Average start time (half month number in the calendar year) of the vegetation seasons 2003-2010

All map products shown in the booklet, and all other map products (which are of similar kind but with different seasonal and water parameter combinations) along with meta data, product lists and short descriptions can be downloaded at <http://www.diversity2.info/products/> .

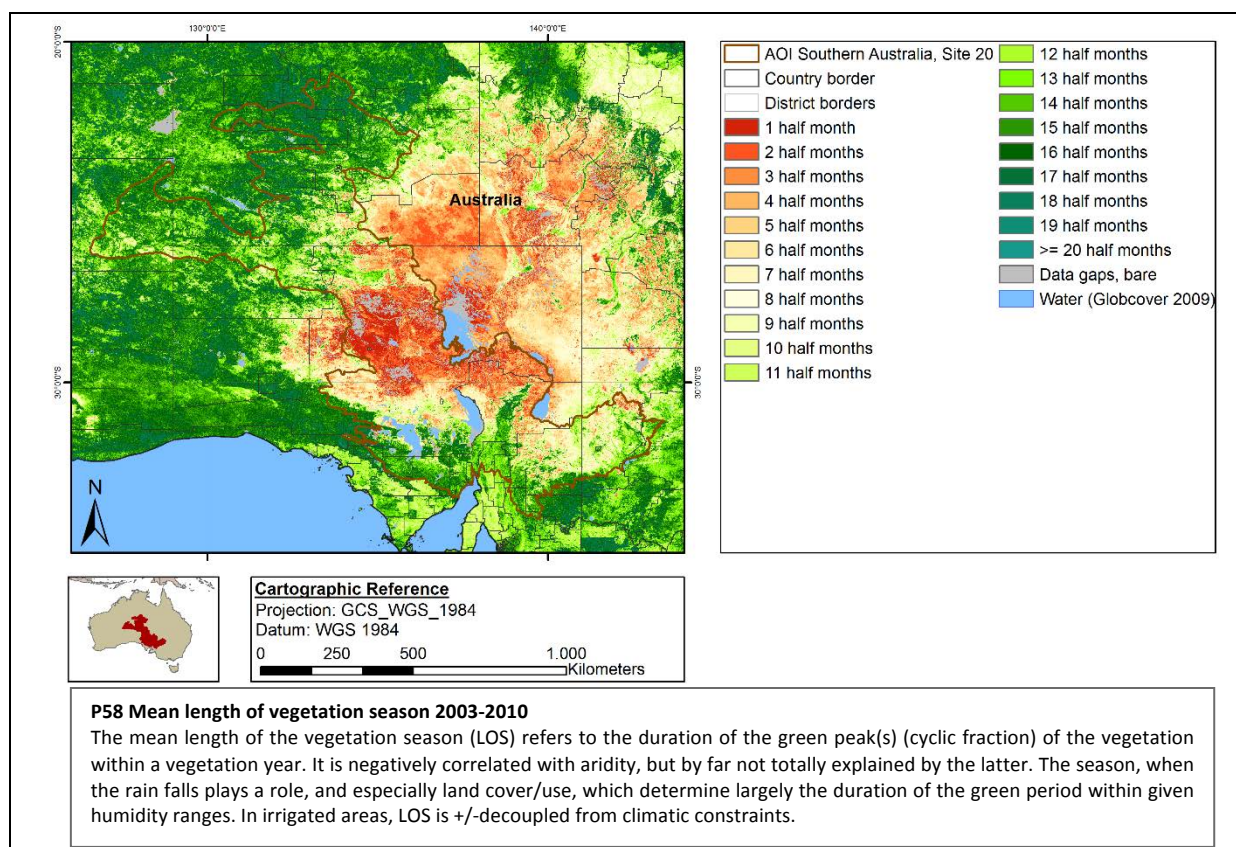
4.3 Selected Indicator Maps

In the next section, the listed indicator maps are shown with descriptions. First, the three phenological maps (P57 – P59) are displayed, followed by the second order indicator maps (P50 – P56, with P46 included). The last three pages contain representative first order indicator status and trend maps (P1 – P40).

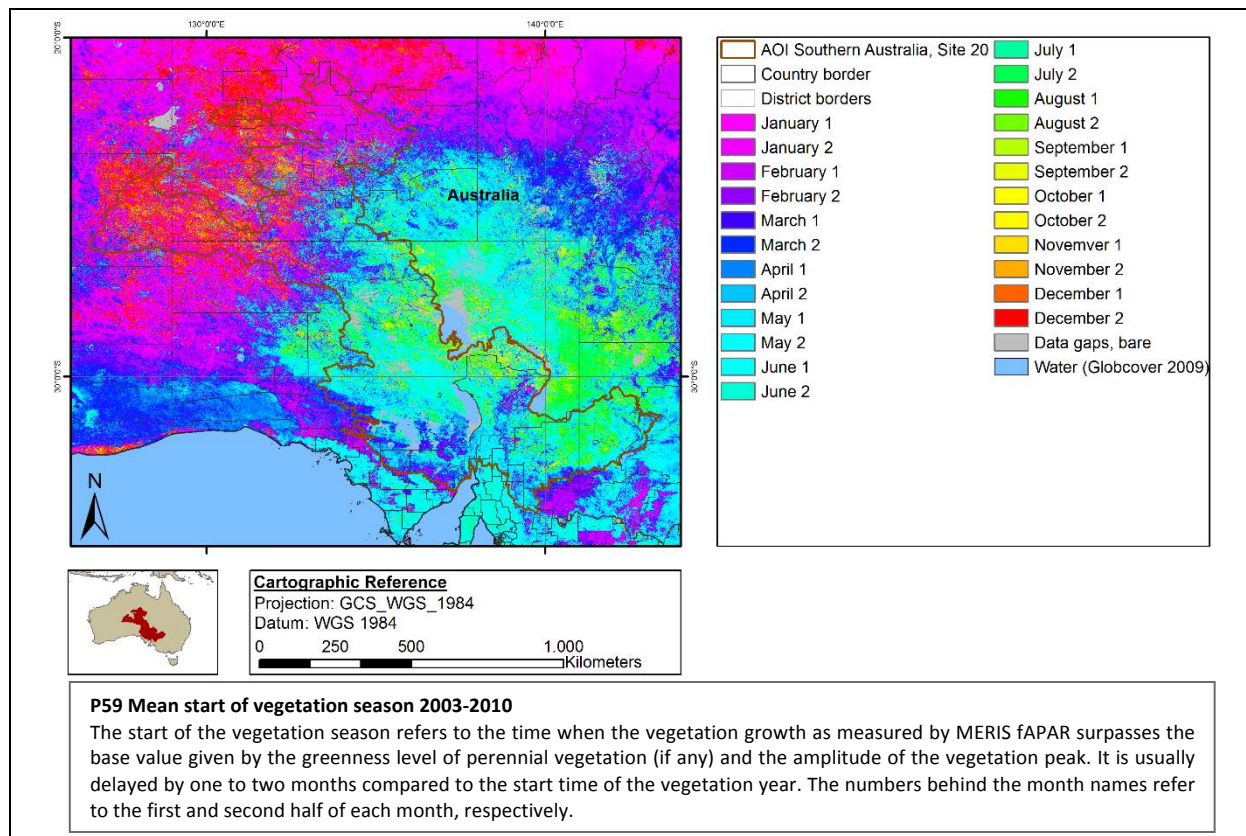
P57 Median start of vegetation year 2003-2010



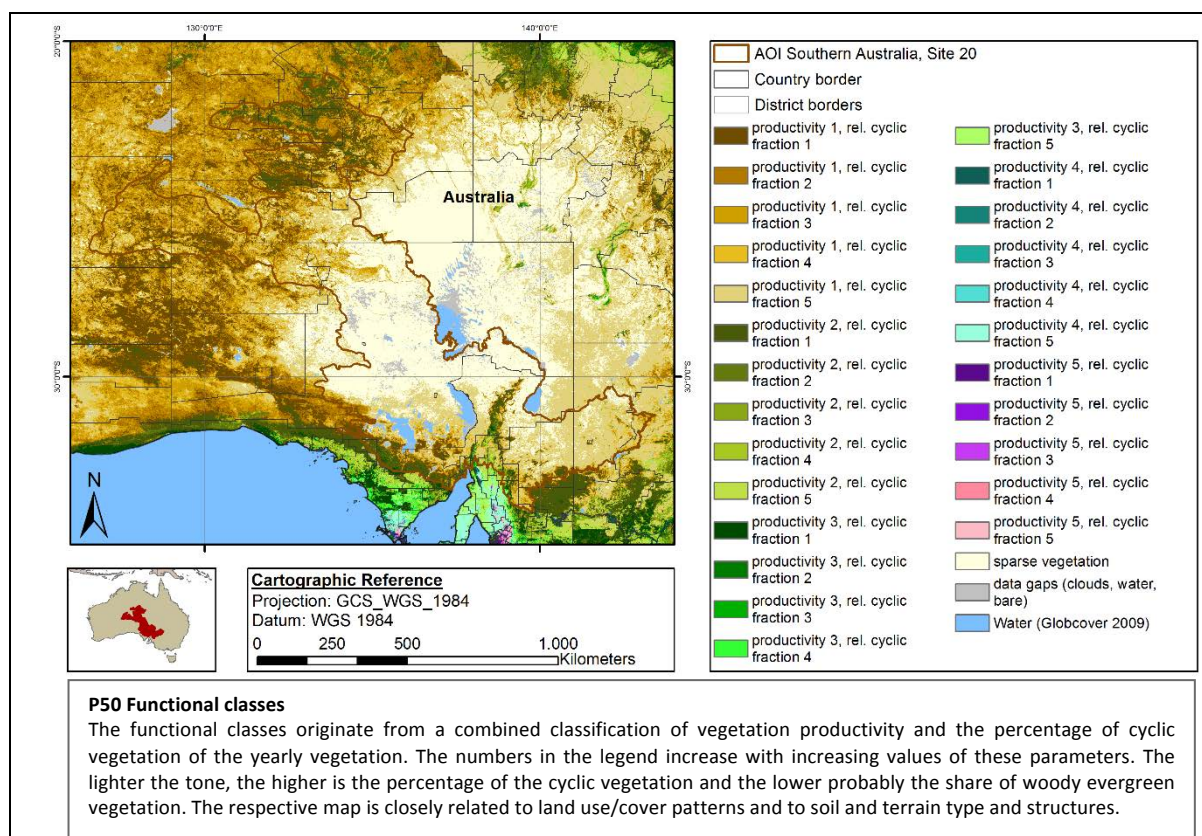
P58 Mean length of vegetation season 2003-2010



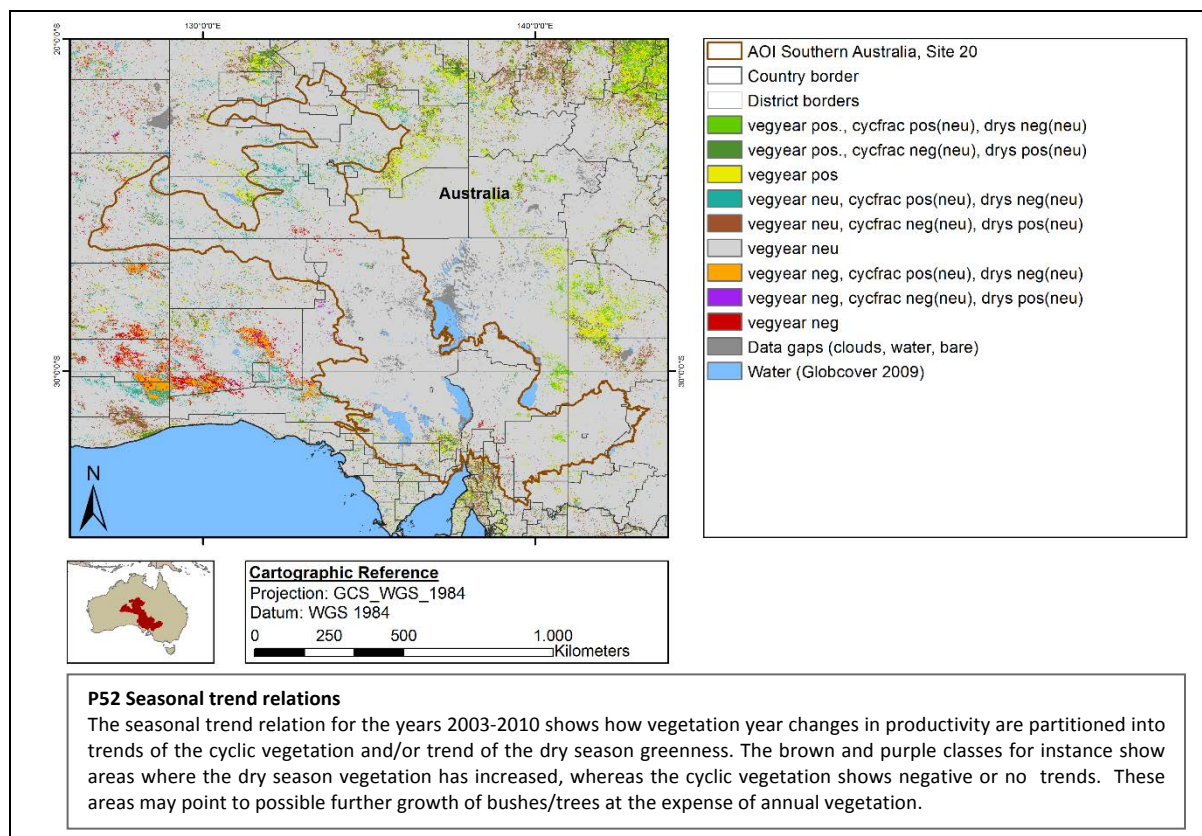
P59 Mean start of vegetation season 2003-2010



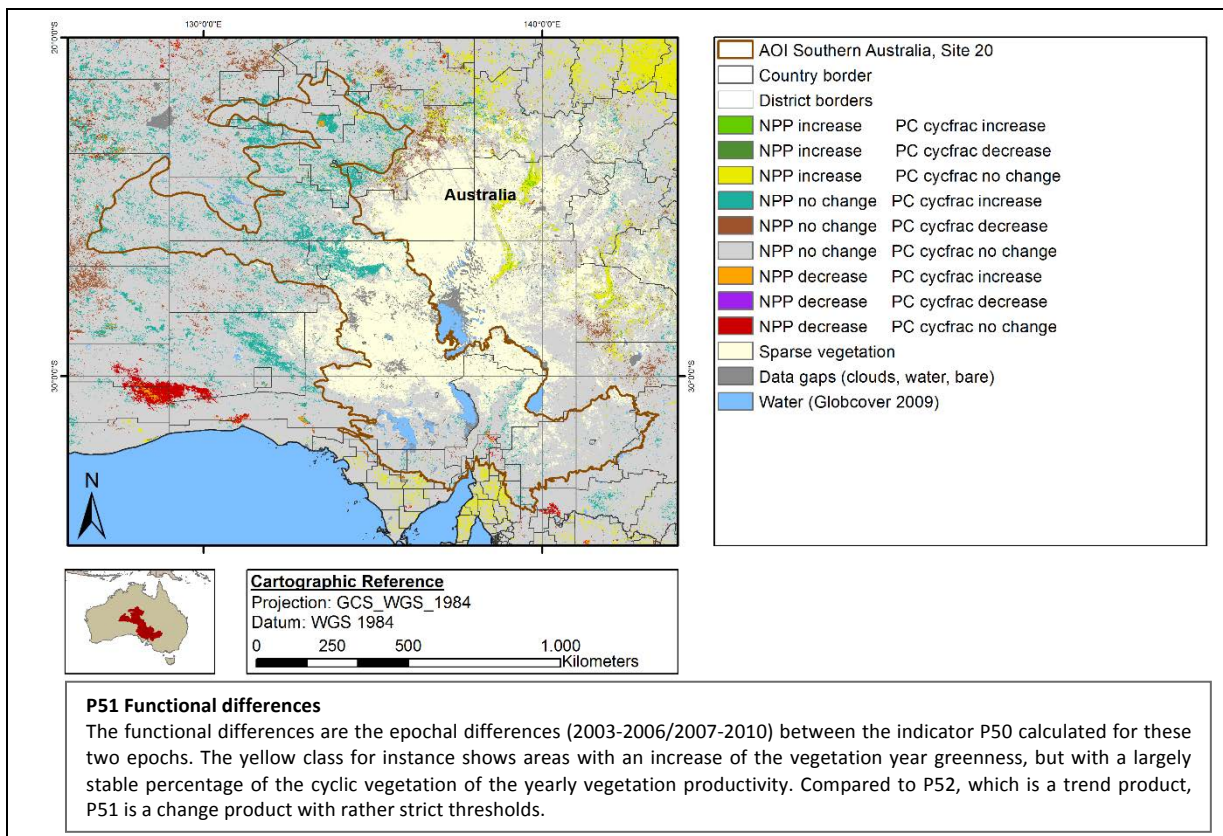
P50 Functional classes



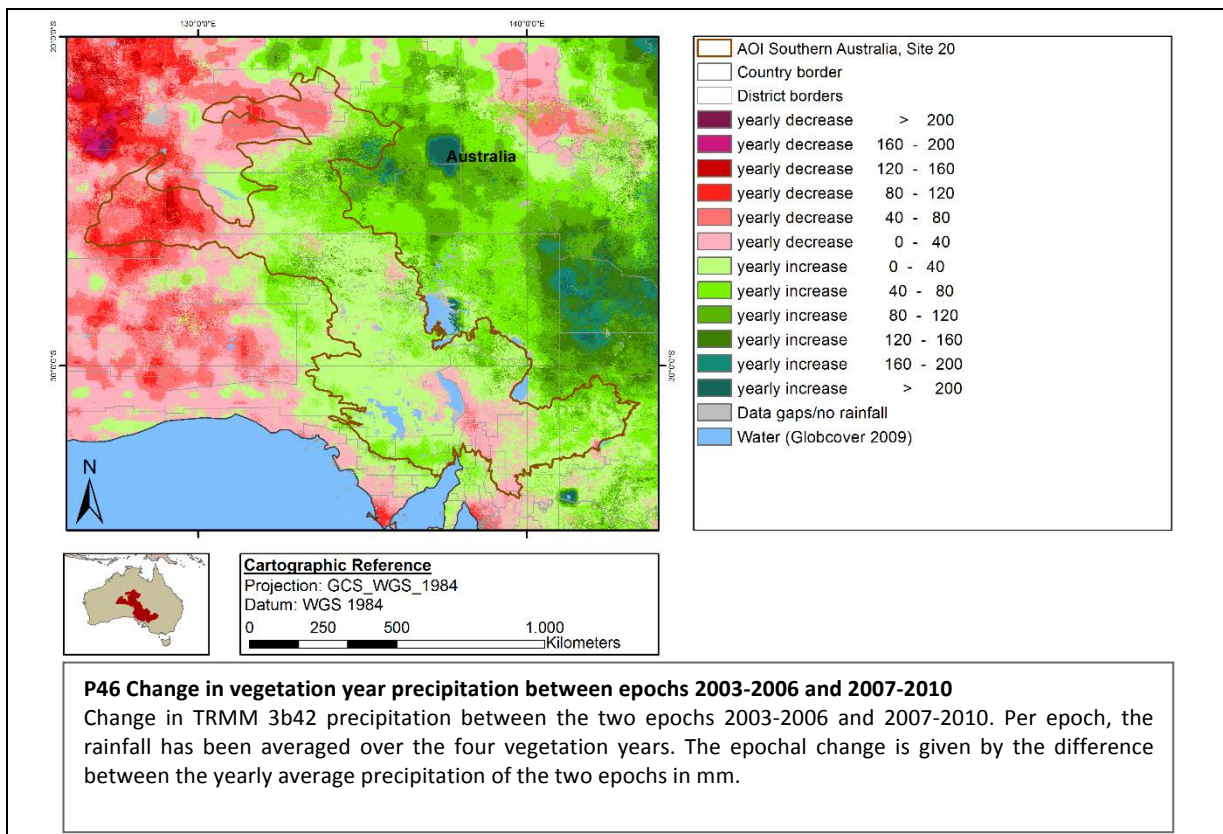
P52 Seasonal trend relations



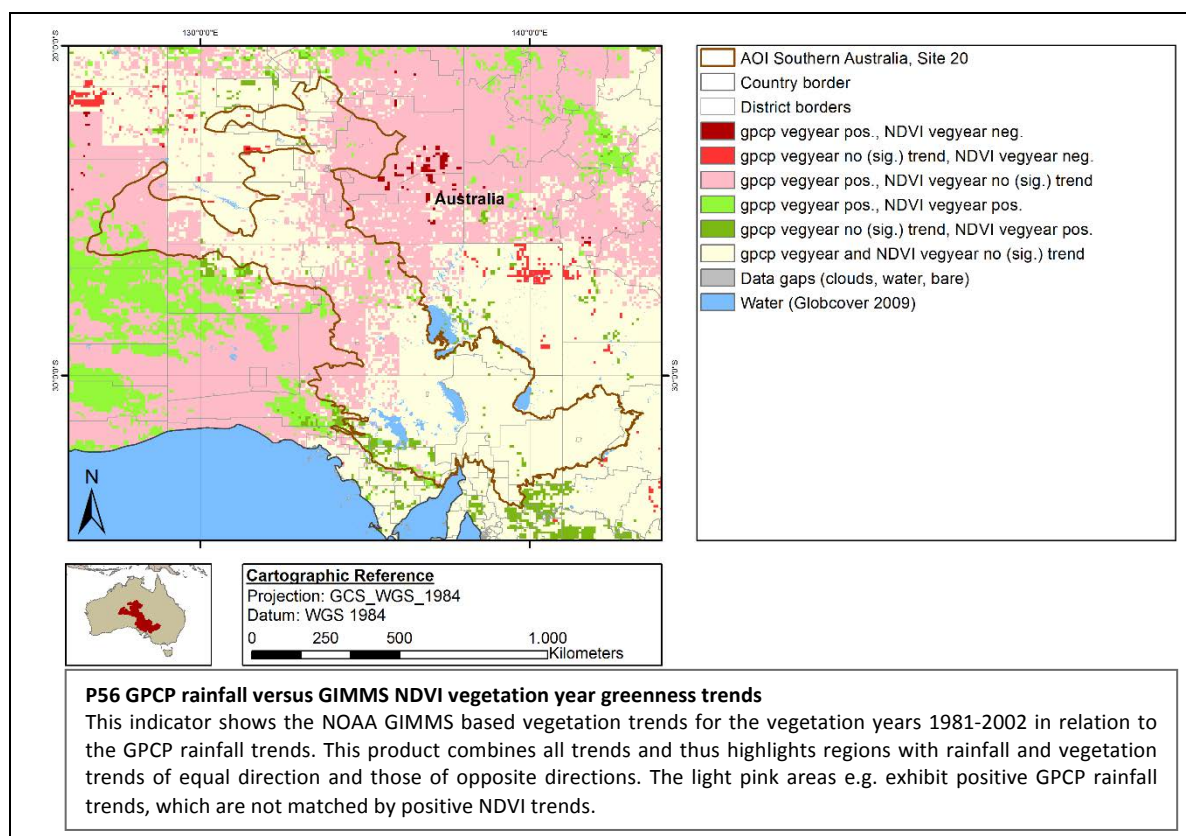
P51 Functional differences



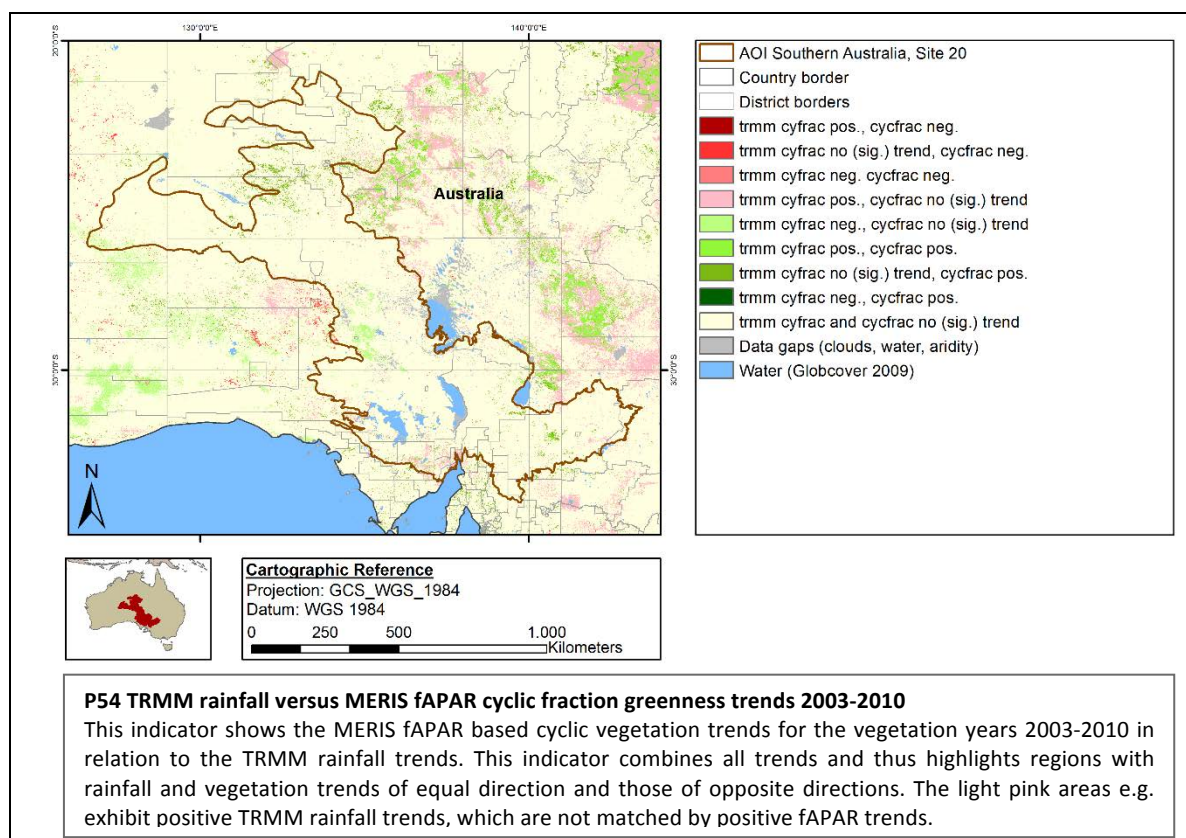
P46 Change in vegetation year precipitation between epochs 2003-2006 and 2007-2010



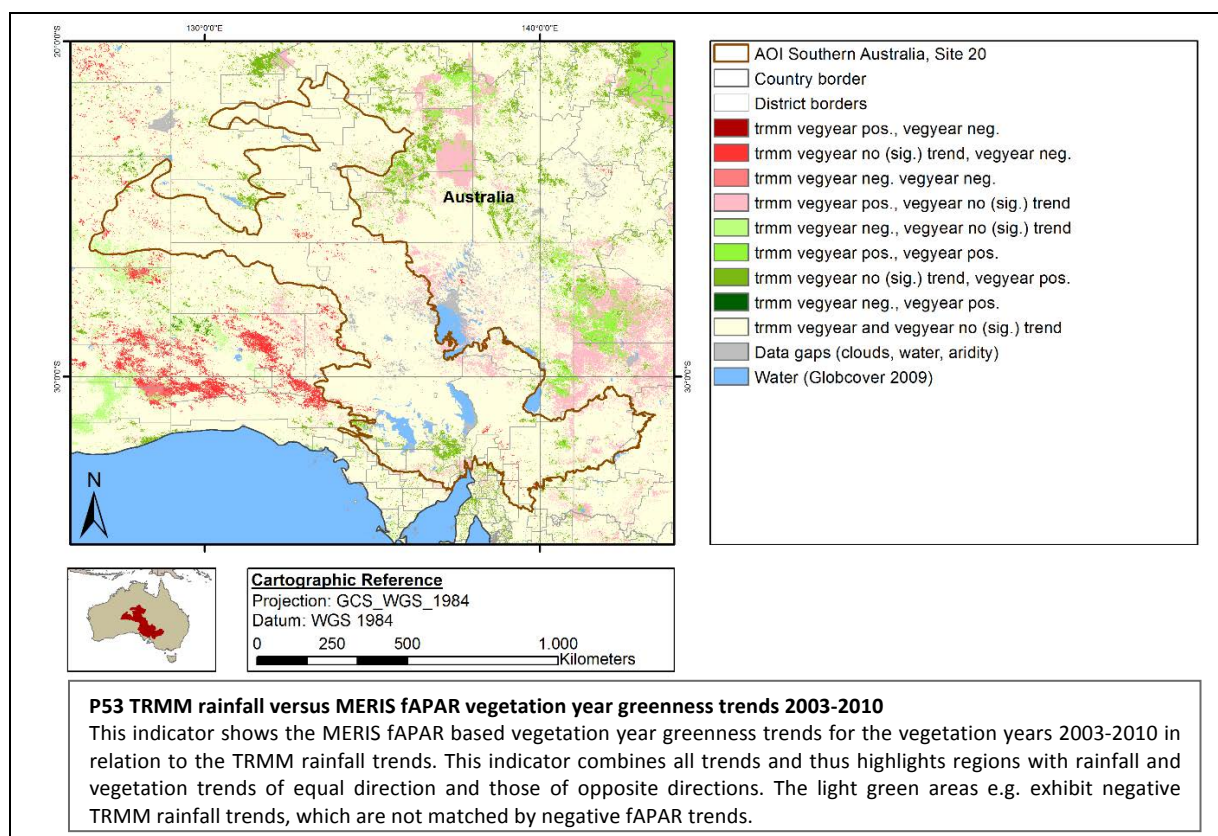
P56 GPCP rainfall versus GIMMS NDVI vegetation year greenness trends 1981-2002



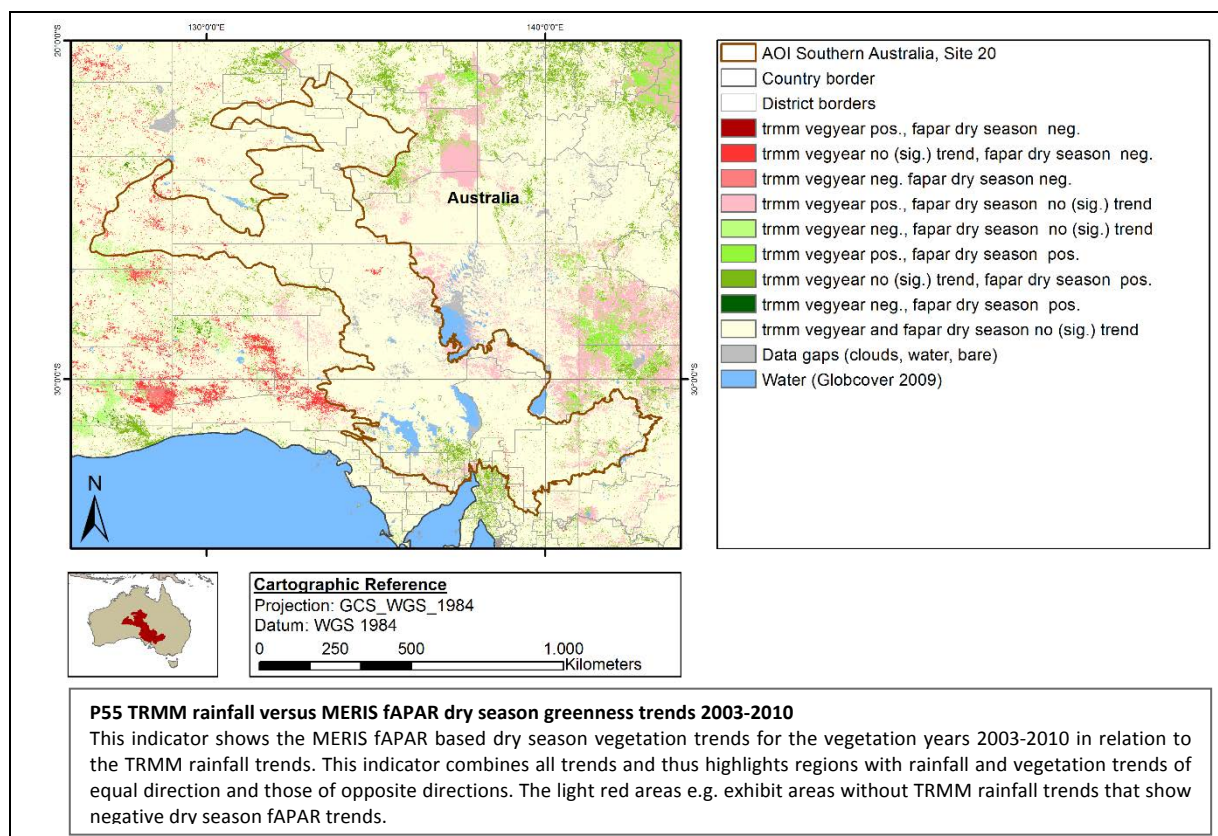
P54 TRMM rainfall versus MERIS fAPAR cyclic fraction greenness trends 2003-2010



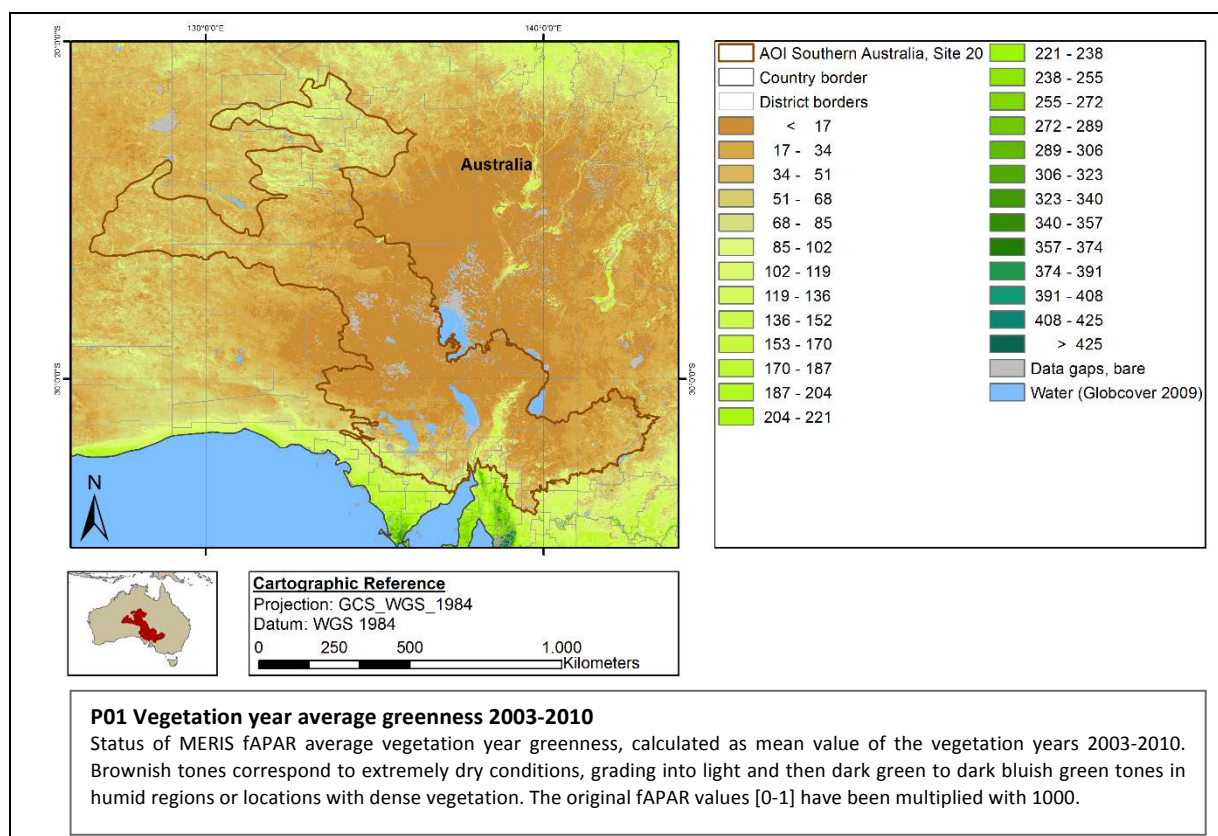
P53 TRMM rainfall versus MERIS fAPAR vegetation year greenness trends 2003-2010



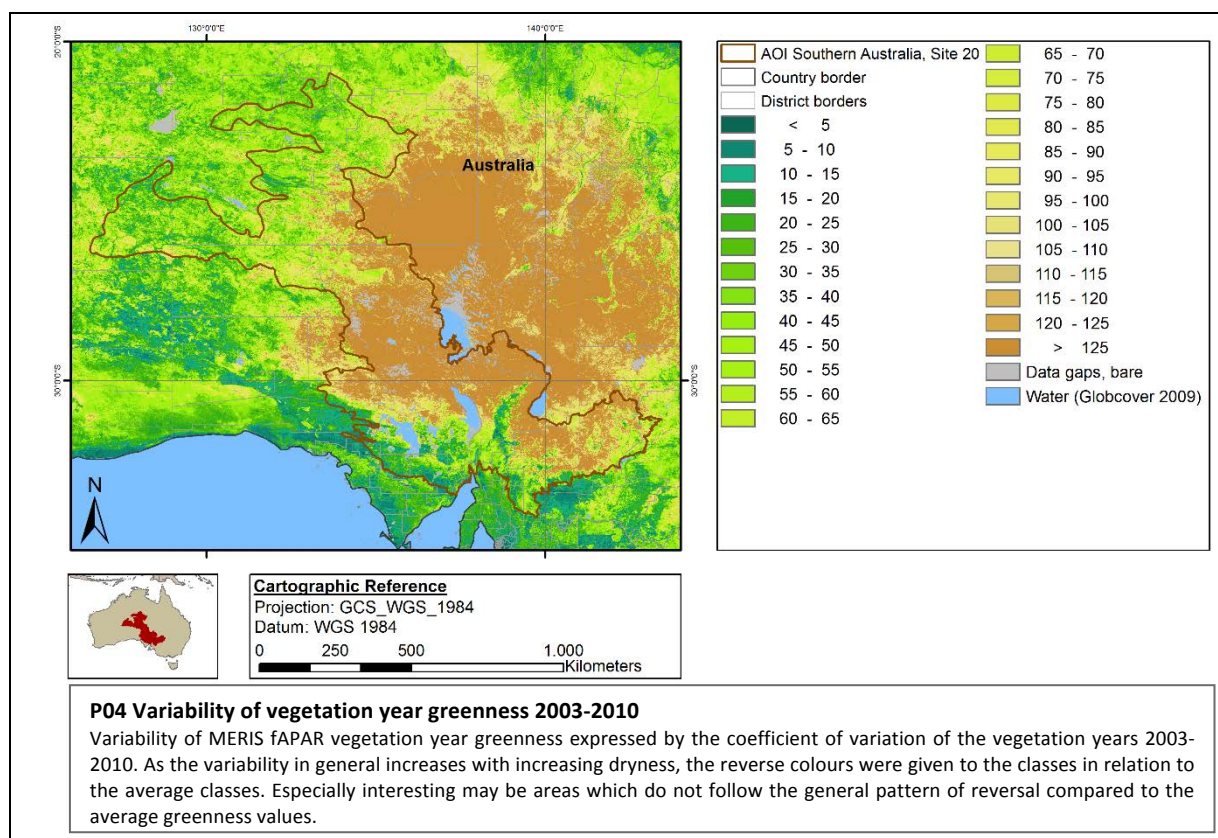
P55 TRMM rainfall versus MERIS fAPAR dry season greenness trends 2003-2010



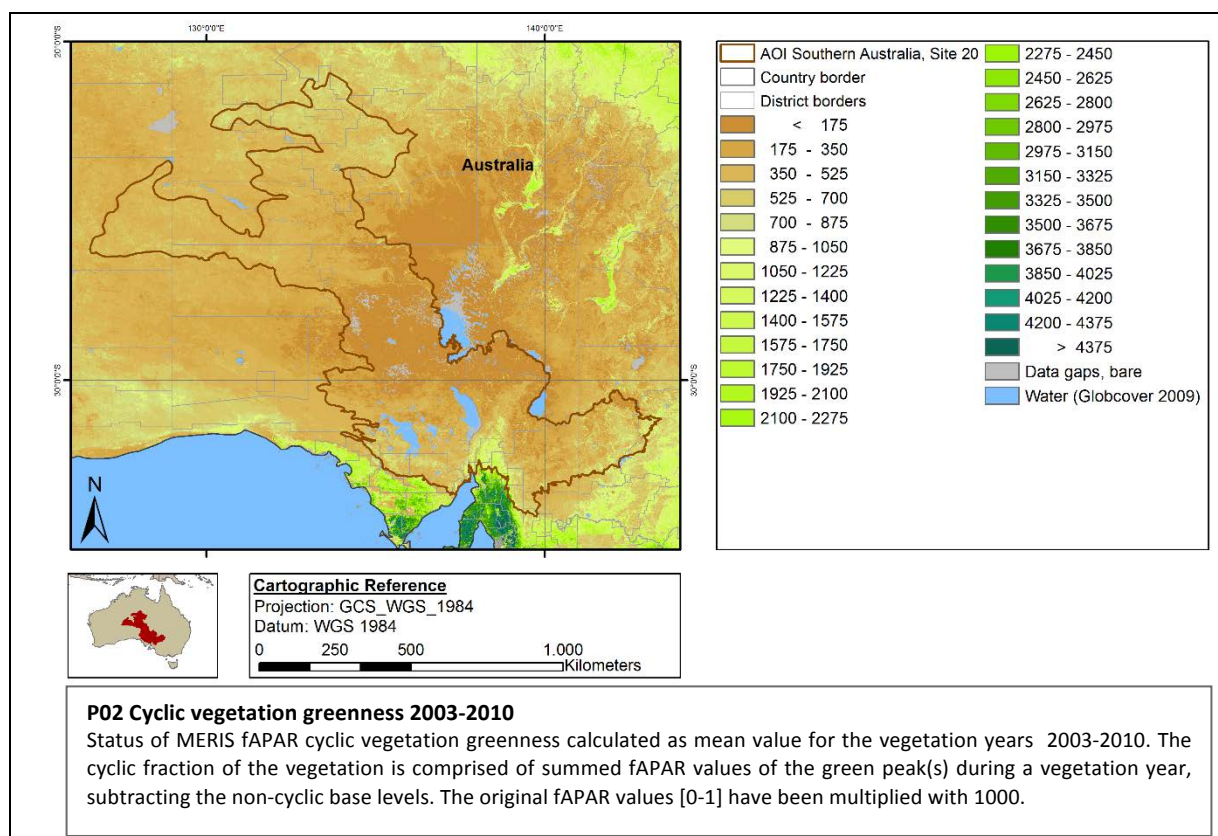
P01 Vegetation year average greenness 2003-2010



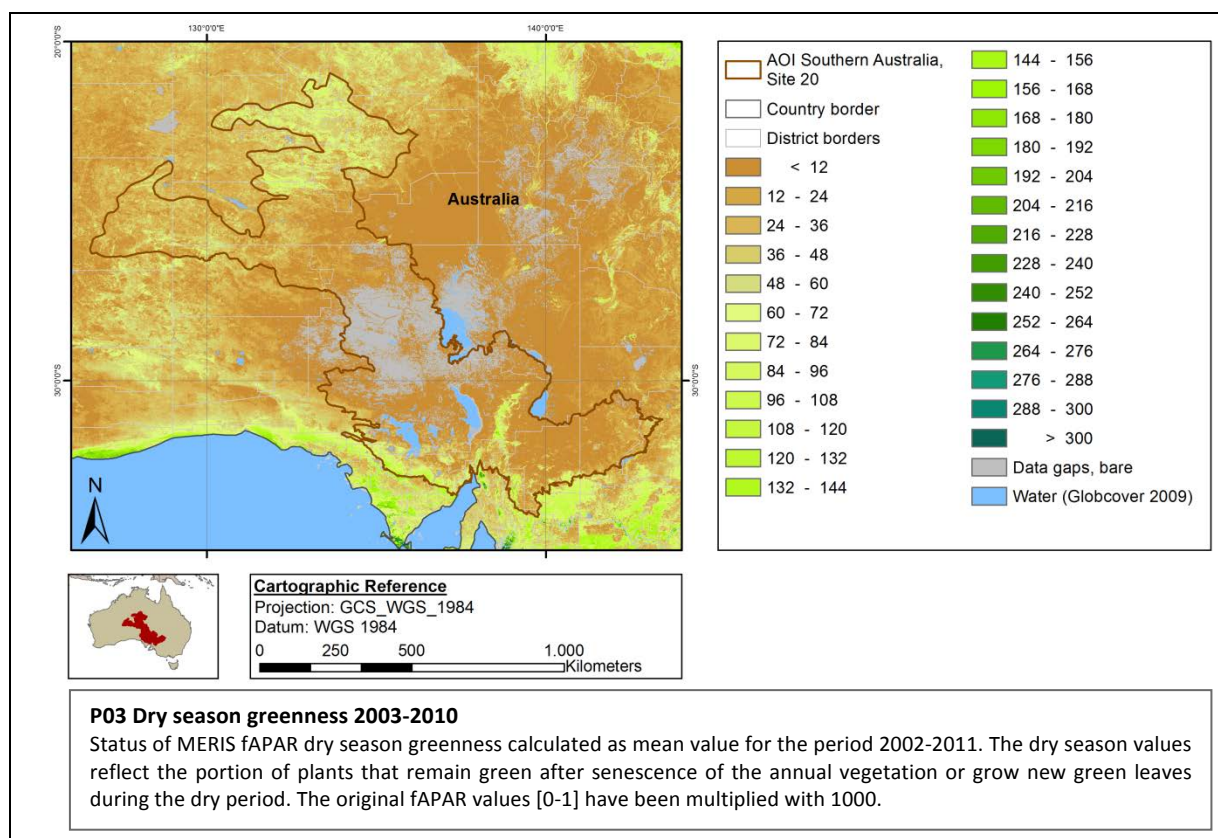
P04 Variability of vegetation year greenness 2003-2010



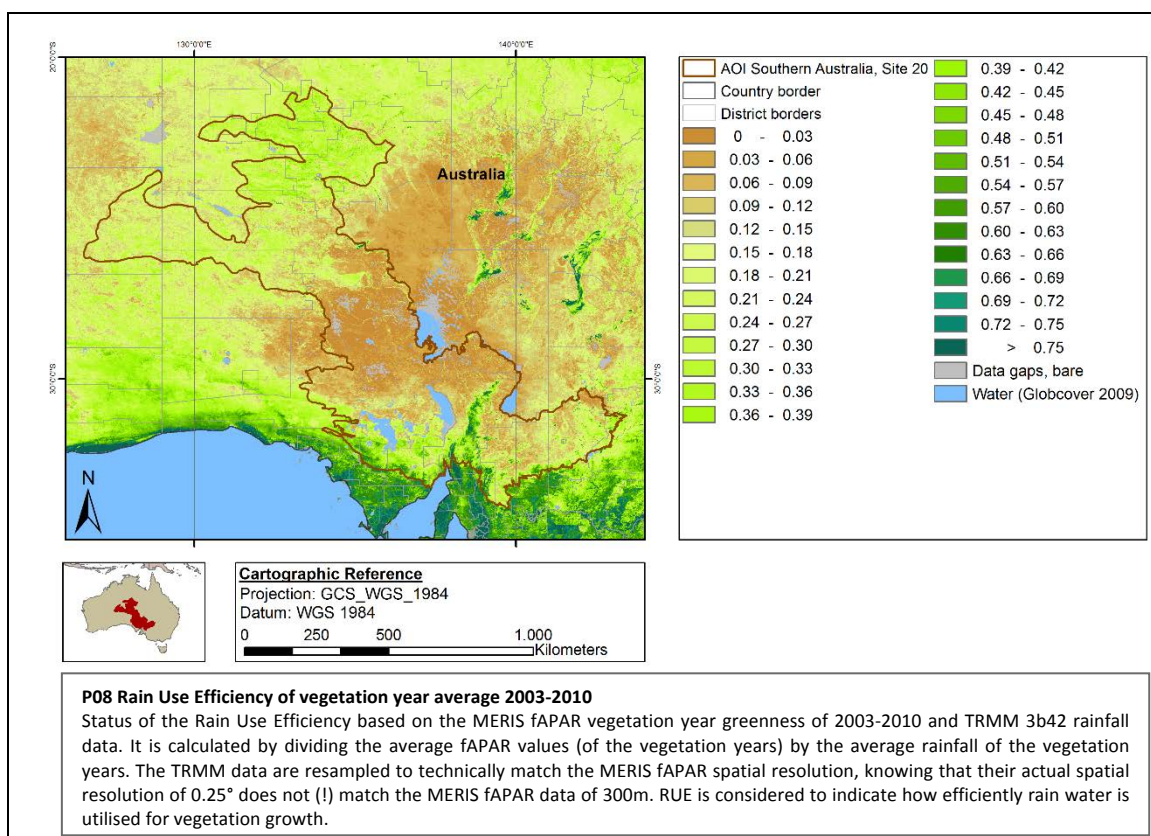
P02 Cyclic vegetation greenness 2003-2010



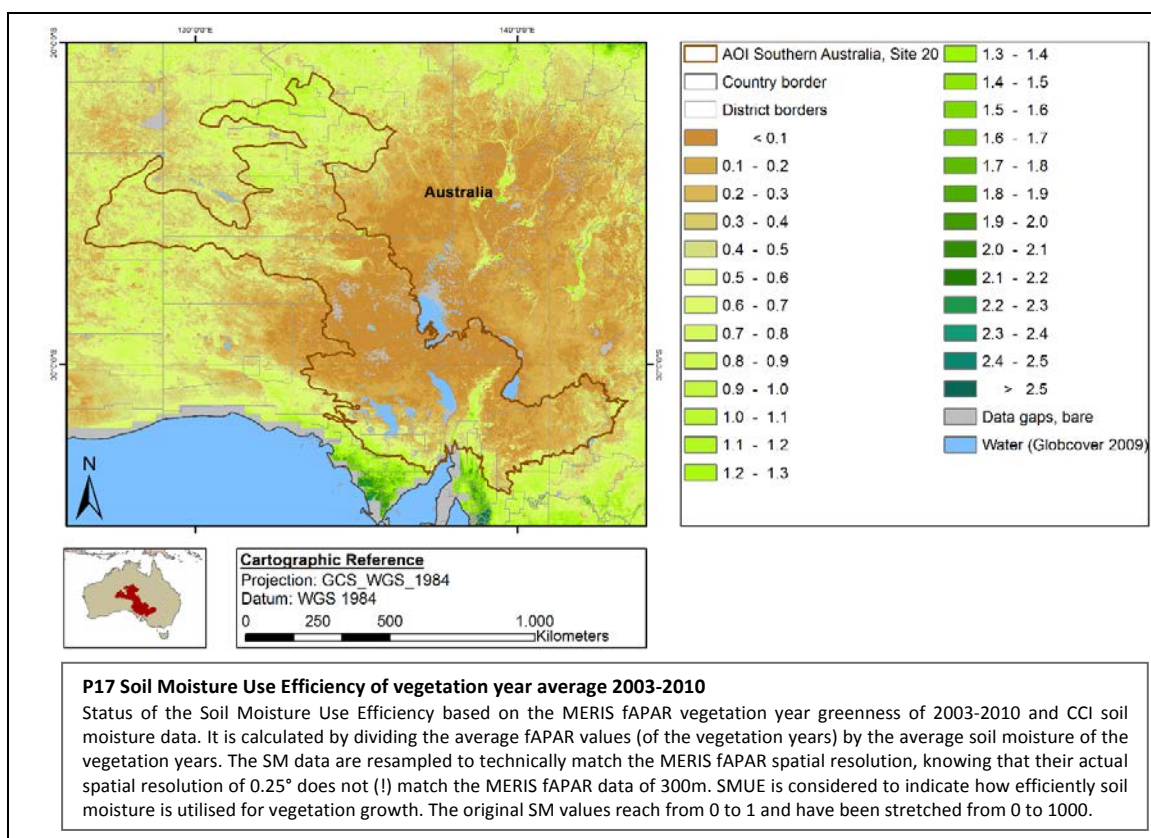
P03 Dry season greenness 2003-2010



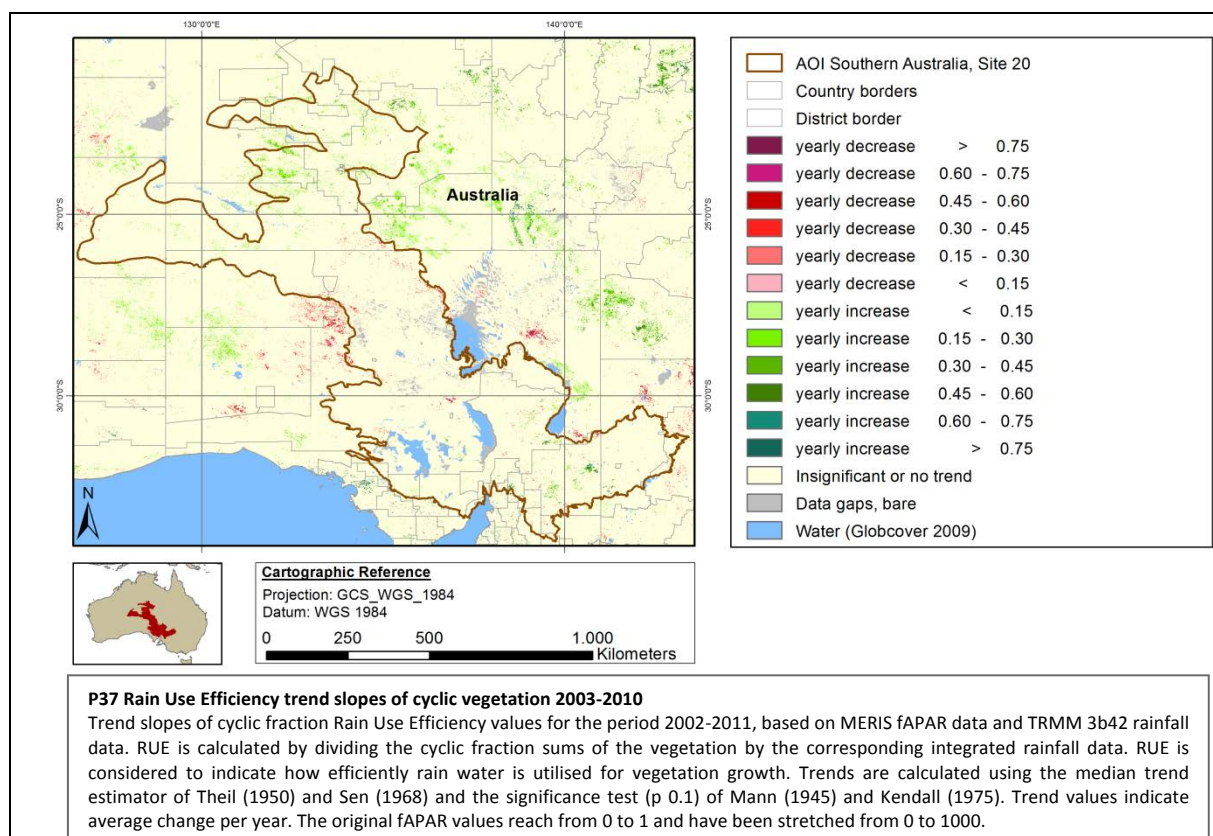
P08 Rain Use Efficiency of vegetation year average 2003-2010



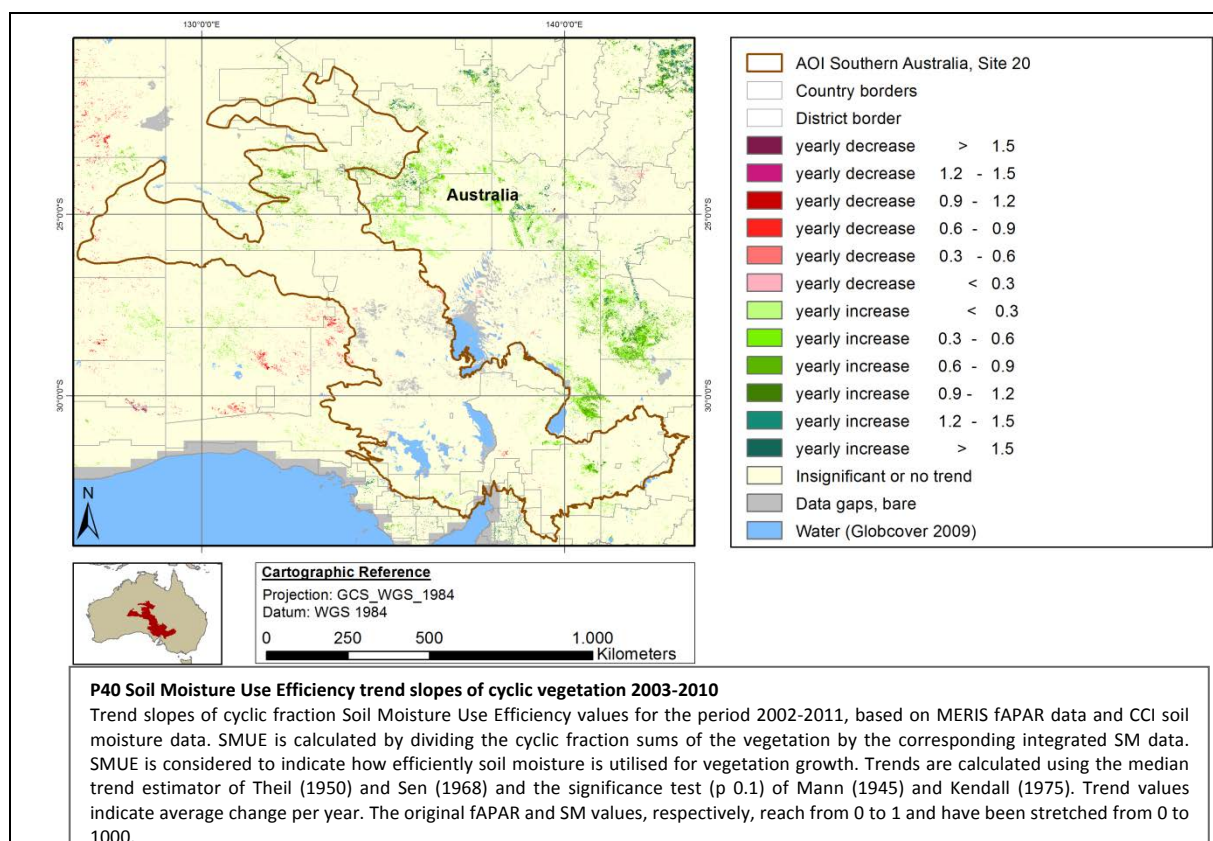
P17 Soil Moisture Use Efficiency of vegetation year average 2003-2010



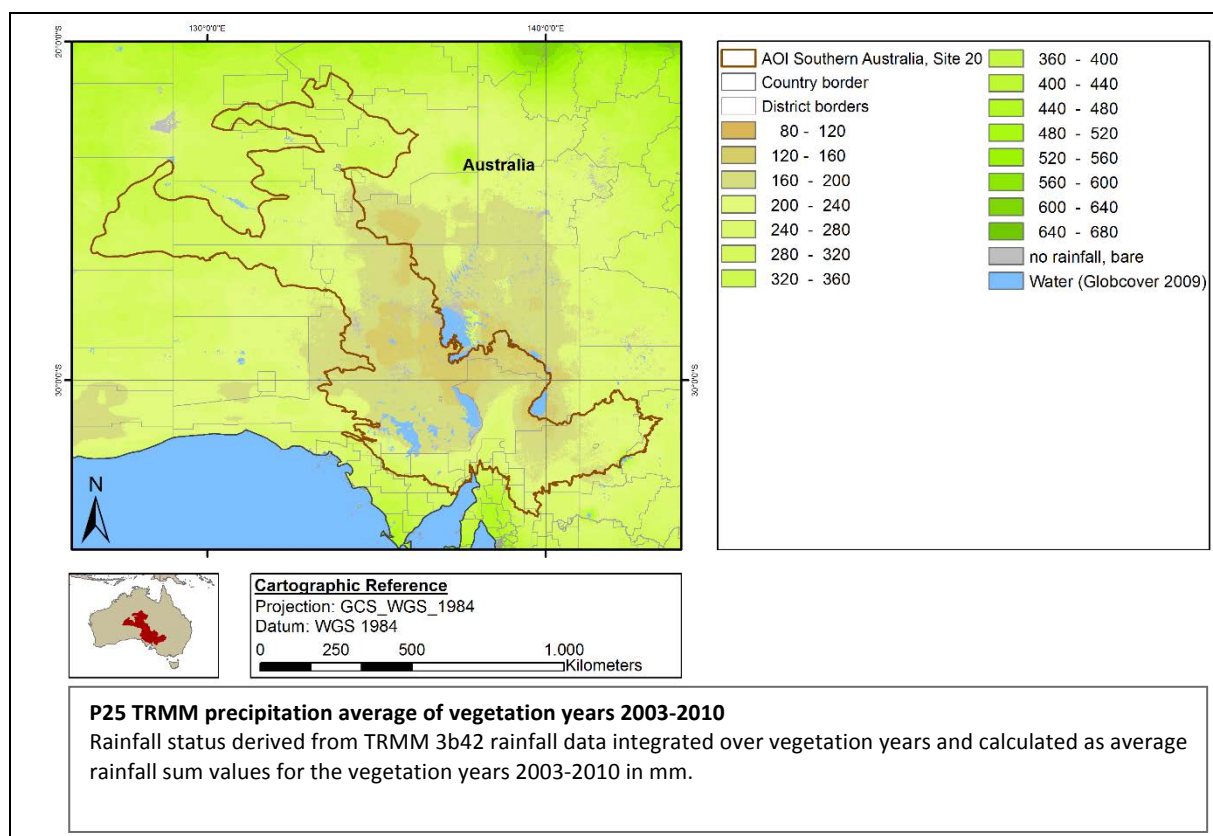
P37 Rain Use Efficiency trend slopes of cyclic vegetation 2003-2010



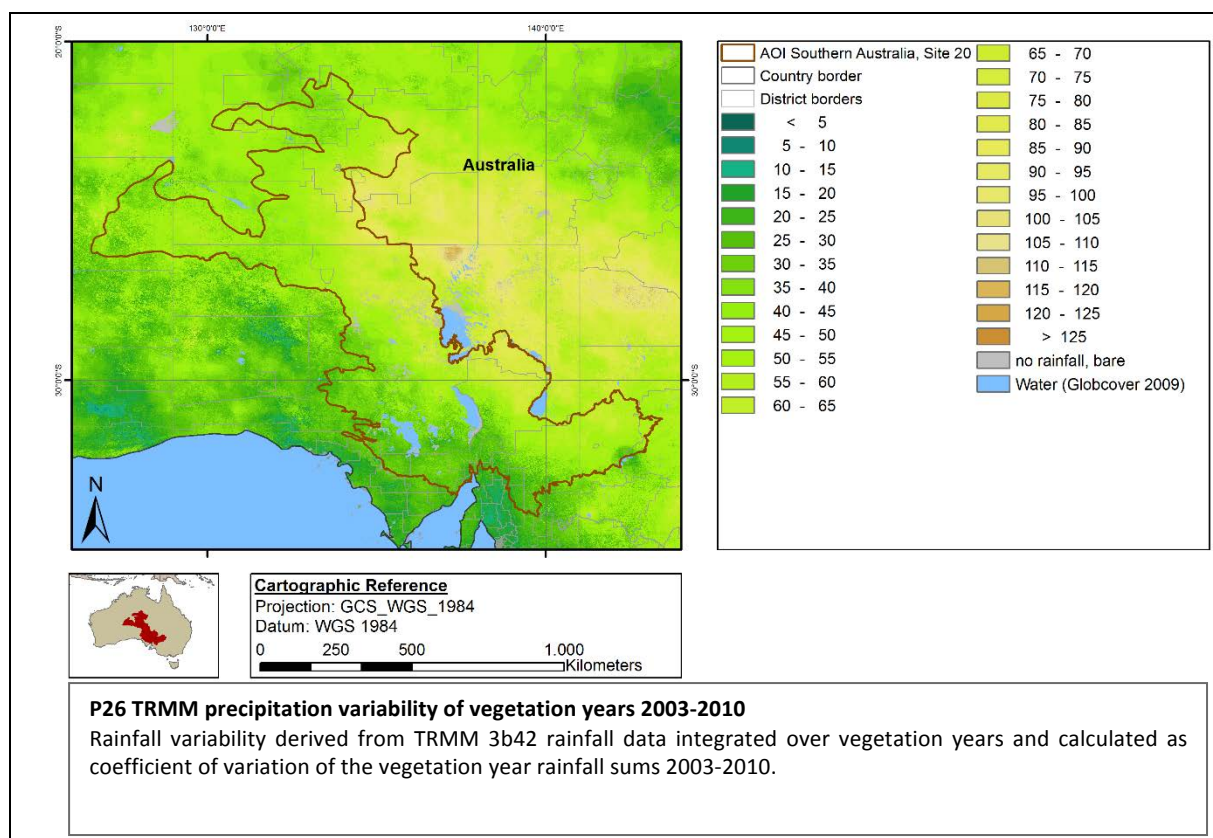
P40 Soil Moisture Use Efficiency trend slopes of cyclic vegetation 2003-2010



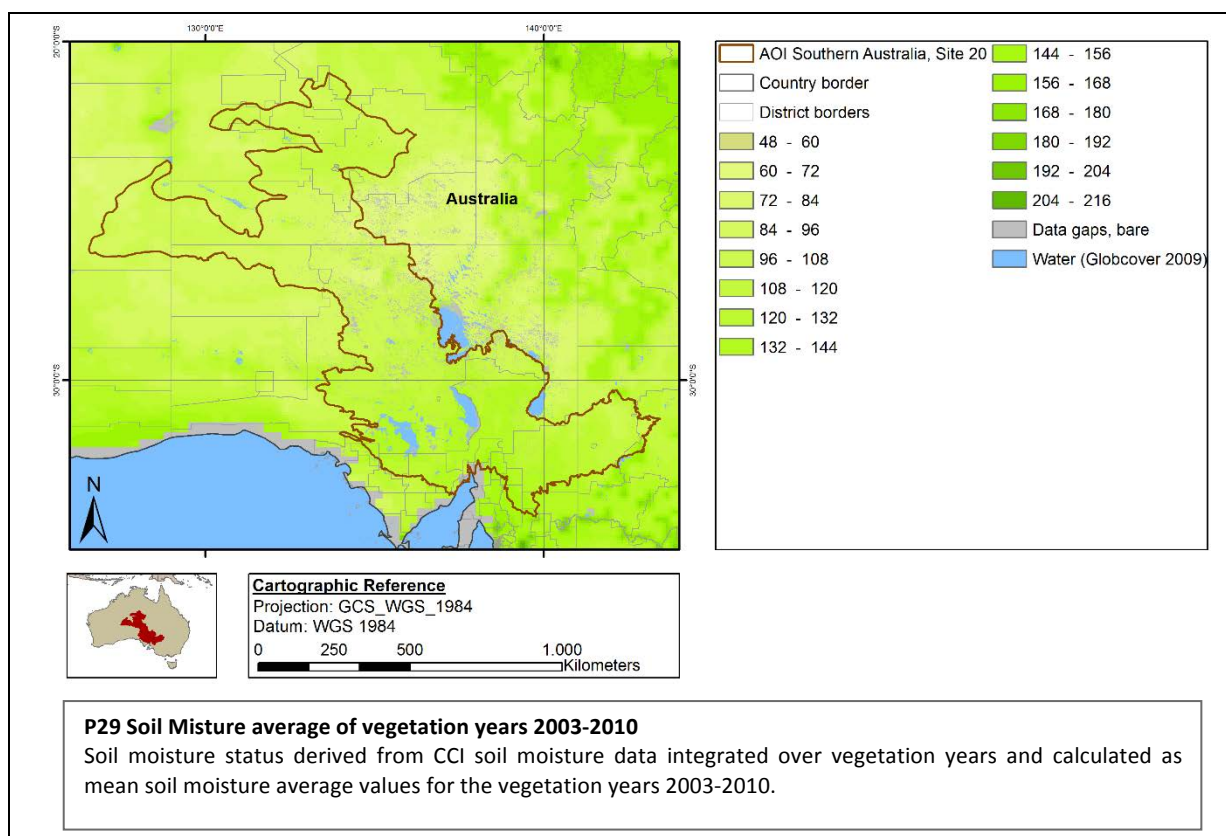
P25 TRMM precipitation average of vegetation years 2003-2010



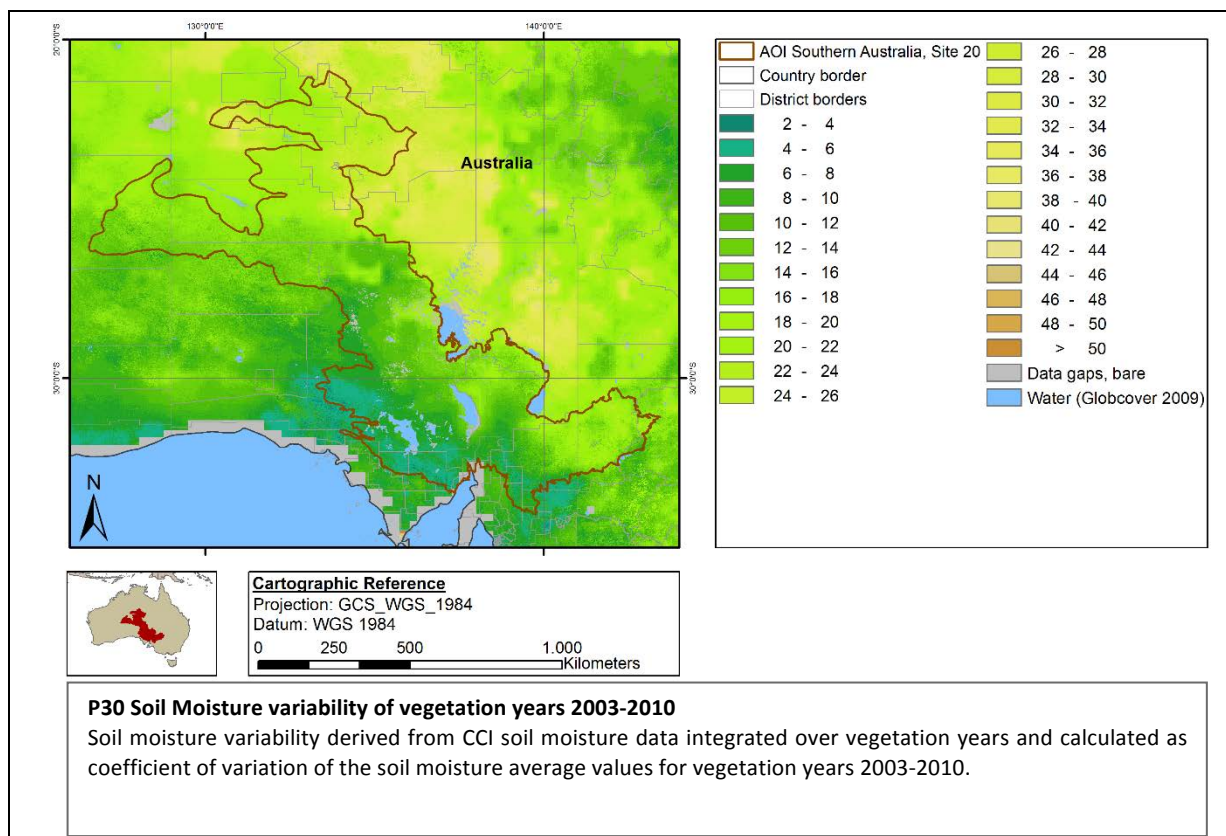
P26 TRMM precipitation variability of vegetation years 2003-2010



P29 Soil Moisture average of vegetation years 2003-2010



P30 Soil Moisture variability of vegetation years 2003-2010



5 Generic Interpretation of the Maps

While vegetation productivity obviously follows the rainfall gradients at the large scale (not considering temperature and radiation differences), the smaller scale differentiations exhibit the presence of further influences on vegetation growth at more local scales. These local and regional factors are especially land use, soil properties, topography, and hydrology and include also the protection status of areas. For instance many linear features with (mostly) higher NPP proxy and RUE values than their surroundings can be related to river valleys (often with only seasonal or ephemeral surface water).

Biomes with rich floristic biodiversity may be expected to exhibit higher NPP response to rainfall throughout the year as diverse plant communities may be characterised by a high phenological variability with optimised water exploitation. An example with an extended area of extraordinary high average RUE conditions is the Succulent Karoo biome in South Africa (*"The Succulent Karoo is notable for the world's richest flora of succulent plants, and harbours about one-third of the world's approximately 10,000 succulent species"* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Succulent_Karoo). The same area is also characterised by an extended length of the green season (compared to areas with similar yearly rainfall), and a winter rain regime. Thus, phenological maps reveal important ecosystem conditions and gradients.

The differentiation of the NPP and RUE indicators into phenological periods helps diagnose the seasonal behaviour of the vegetation and thus provides clues about the presence and dominance of evergreen perennial vegetation versus annual vegetation (e.g. annual grasses, most crops). Accordingly, changes and trends of the phenological vegetation behaviour can be used as indicators for developments such as land use change and land cover change. For instance the worldwide observed phenomenon of bush encroachment (woody encroachment, woody thickening) in drylands (Ratajczak et al. 2011) will lead to a shift of vegetation phenology, where especially an increase of dry season greenness, possibly, but not necessarily combined with a decrease of the cyclic greenness can be expected.

Bush encroachment in range lands is largely perceived as negative development, where the bushes lead to range land degradation by reducing grass cover and impeding the access of cattle to the remaining grass. Also impoverishment of biodiversity was frequently found as an effect of bush encroachment (Ratajczak et al. 2011). The greening trends especially in the dry season are indeed a widespread phenomenon in the derived NPP proxy maps, possibly pointing to continued bush encroachment or enhanced growth and greening of existing bushes, partly related to rainfall increases. Pronounced dry season greening may also be caused by the plantation of (especially evergreen) woody plants and forests. In case of greening trends related to commercial forest plantations, the trends can also be interpreted as a biodiversity loss.

Several indicators for the "classical" land degradation, i.e. the decrease of vegetation productivity in relation to available water have been derived in Diversity II. They include RUE and SMUE, where the latter is based on soil moisture, which is more directly reflecting available water in the root zone than rainfall. Often, RUE and SMUE exhibit different results, which is the logical consequence of the differences between the rainfall and the soil moisture data used. However, negative RUE trends are widely disputed as indicator for land degradation, mainly because RUE has been found to not consistently normalise for rainfall variability. Also the alternative RESTREND method has been challenged for this purpose (e.g. Wessels et al. 2012, Ratzmann 2014). In addition to their weaknesses related to invalid assumptions, they are lumped indicators, which do not detangle the individual developments of water availability and vegetation production. The proposed second order indicators, on the other hand (see maps P53 to [P56](#)), show both rainfall (or alternatively soil moisture) trends and NPP trends separately and synoptically.

RUE or SMUE changes and trends may be as well related to land cover/use/management changes, such as the conversion of rangeland into cropland, deforestation, etc. Especially processes such as

urbanisation or mining will lead to extreme NPP proxy and RUE decreases. Phenology helps to detangle some of the trends: for instance the clearing of shrubs, bushes and trees (e.g. for the conversion of rangeland into crop land) can be expected to lead especially to dry season NPP and RUE decreases. On the other hand, the frequently found greening trends in the dry season, at first glance positive trends, may even be primarily related to adverse processes such as bush encroachment. However, caution is also necessary in this respect, as also range land improvement and tree planting activities may lead to positive NPP and RUE or SMUE trends.

The derived indicators should not be directly interpreted in terms of land condition, degradation or respectively land improvement. They provide useful base information, especially when combined, but there is no single “all in one” indicator about land condition and trends. In situ knowledge about biophysical and socio-economic factors and systems (including past and present land tenure and land use practices, history of land degradation, population pressure, current policies and economic developments, etc.) is indispensable for an appropriate assessment of status, trends, and possible future developments.

Finally, the observation period is rather short, which basically hampers conclusions from derived trends. The variability of rainfalls and subsequently vegetation greenness from year to year is so significant in drylands that it certainly hides trends, which in such a short period may be rare and not very pronounced. Trends must pass certain statistical significance threshold (which has been set to 0.9 and thus relatively low in this project) to be recognised as significant trends. There may be more relevant and persistent changes going on than the trend maps for such a short period can show, and abrupt change events cannot be expected to exhibit gradual indicator developments and measurable trends. The rainfall trend maps for instance show hardly any significant trends, while the rainfall change map between the two epochs shows large positive and negative change regions with partly big epochal rainfall differences. Vice versa, due to the short observation period, measured significant trends may not really be part of persistent, longer term development but may already be reversed in the next epoch.

The meteorological and other environmental data used play also a significant role especially for the generation of the RUE and SMUE indicators. Compared to the MERIS data with 300m ground resolution, these datasets are extremely coarse and especially with regard to the soil moisture data by far not representative for the scale of local variability at the MERIS resolution.

For these reasons the eight vegetation years covered worldwide by MERIS are perhaps better suited for an overall assessment of the ecosystem structures and conditions, where the phenological characterisation of vegetation trends may provide hints about ecosystem functions and biodiversity. While many of the variations in vegetation production and productivity in drylands are short and medium term responses to varying water availability, the seasonal type of these responses may be taken as valuable information towards this aim.

6 Outlook

The provided indicators and – if requested – the underlying continuous data can be utilised to many more analyses than those performed in the Diversity II project. Interested users may contact us for further information what else besides the project downloads has been produced in the project, or which further possibilities may exist to deepen or extend the studies.

The applied methods for the extraction of phenological and vegetation productivity parameters can be used for other sensors, such as the upcoming Sentinel 2 and especially Sentinel 3 of the ESA Copernicus program, which will be the successor of the ENVISAT MERIS data. Also SPOT Vegetation, MODIS, or Proba-V data can serve to extend the analyses of this study by applying at least the same methodology, if the data are certainly not fully comparable. Bridging the data gap between MERIS and Sentinel 3 with its first planned launch in 2015 may be achieved this way.

7 Description of Biodiversity

Under the Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA) planning framework, an important part of the Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030, the country's landscape has been divided into 89 bioregions (NRMMC 2009; IBRA 2012). The study area spans through four states, mostly in South Australia and Northern Territory but also smaller parts of New South Wales and Western Australia. The study area encompasses nine bioregions (from south to north): Flinders Lofty Block (FLB), Gawler (GAW), Broken Hill Complex (BHC), Stony Plains (STP), Simpson-Strzelecki Dunefields (SSD), Finke (FIN), Central Ranges (CER), MacDonnell Ranges (MAC) and Burt Plain (BRT) (Bastin & ACRIS 2008a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i). All these bioregions can be considered parts of the Tirari-Sturt Stony Desert. The combined area of the nine bioregions (and thus of the study area approximately) is of 933,550 km², with the SSD being the largest (272,920 km²) and the MAC the smallest (39,290 km²) (Bastin & ACRIS 2008a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i). All the bioregions are within the desert and xeric shrubland ecoregion of Australia, with predominant vegetation types being grass and shrubland, mulga (acacia) woodland and eucalyptus trees on hills and areas with higher rainfall (Bastin & ACRIS 2008a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i). The study area is subjected to a semiarid to arid climate, with sparse and unreliable rainfalls that tend to follow a decreasing gradient from south to north, ranging from 217 mm in FLB to 118 mm in STP (spatially averaged medians from 1890-2005), and high evapotranspiration rates. However, the landscape can also influence this pattern and for example rainfall in the MAC and BRT bioregions are of 228 and 243 mm, respectively, due to mountain ranges. Precipitation in the southern regions occurs mainly during winter, while summer storms dominate in the more northern reaches. Mean maximum temperatures during the summer range from 18 to 38°C, but can reach up to 50°C in the more central and arid regions (SSD and CER for example), while during winter it's common for temperature to range from 5 to 20°C (Bastin & ACRIS 2008a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i; ANRA 2013 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i).

As one can imagine, the topography is very diverse, with successive mountain ranges, rocky hills, ridges, wide flat plains, sand dunes, salt lakes, watercourses, alluvial plains and springs. The geological background comprises mainly very old formations (Proterozoic and Palaeozoic) of metamorphosed sedimentary and igneous rock, among other later topographic features that span the entire geological time scale (ANRA 2013 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i).

The study area holds an impressive biological diversity despite the harsh conditions. In terms of flora, all bioregions combined may hold over 2000 taxa, including many endemics and threatened species. The vegetation follows closely the topographic and climatic diversity. Within the FLB region's relatively more humid hills is common to find many species of eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus* spp.). As we move to more arid and flat regions the dominant types of vegetation become the mulga, chenopod and mallee woodlands with many acacias (*Acacia* spp.), grasses (*Astrelba* spp., *Danthonia* spp., *Stipa* spp., among others) and shrubs (*Atriplex* spp., *Maireana* spp., *Senna* spp., etc.) (Bastin & ACRIS 2008a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i; ANRA 2013 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i).

The fauna in the region also presents a great species richness and endemism, with around 20 amphibians, over 100 reptiles, up to 50 mammals and over 200 birds. Relevant herpetofauna examples include the streambank froglet (*Crinia riparia*), two agamid lizards (*Ctenophorus rufescens* and *C. maculosus*), a skink (*Lerista speciosa*) and a dtella or web-toed gecko (*Gehyravarifata*). Important mammal species include the yellow-toed (*Petrogale xanthopus*) and black-footed rock wallabies (*P. lateralis*), ghost bat (*Macroderma gigas*), dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*) and red kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*), among others, but common species are also the introduced European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) and red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), besides feral domestic species like goats (*Capri hircus*), camels (*Camelus dromedarius*) and cats (*Felis cattus*). In relation to birds, key species include the Australian bustard (*Ardeotis australis*), the eyrean grasswren (*Amytornis goyderi*), scarlet-chested parrot (*Neophema splendida*), rufous-crowned emu-wren (*Stipiturus ruficeps*), grey falcon (*Falco hypoleucus*) and Wedge-tailed eagle (*Aquila audax*) (Bastin & ACRIS 2008a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i; ANRA 2013 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i).

The main concerns in the study area are related with overgrazing and pest species. The region has been affected by intense pastoralism, especially by sheep and cattle. Rabbits and goats are also responsible for overgrazing, which exposes soils to erosion, reduces the recruitment rate of native plants and reduces the quality of habitat for native animals (DEH 2009; ANRA 2013 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,l). Many exotic plants are also present, up to 150, such as buffel (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) and couch grasses (*Cynodon dactylon*), mimosa bush (*Acacia farnesiana*), Bathurst burr (*Xanthium spinosum*) and athel pine (*Tamarix aphylla*) (ANRA 2013 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,l). The region also harbours mining explorations that can seriously transform and degrade the land (ANRA 2013 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,l). If we take into account the already arid climate, future climatic changes and the intense overgrazing, alteration and increase of severity of fire regimes poses also a very significant threat (Russel-Smith et al. 2003; DEH 2009).

Besides pastoral, agricultural and mining leases, the region also holds many extents of Aboriginal land, which is under less human pressure (Russel-Smith et al. 2003). Some bioregions are better covered by conservation reserves than others, but still most of the important biodiversity (as well as topographic) features are well represented, and many National Parks (NP) and reserves have been established, like the Sturt NP, Flinders Ranges NP, Lake Gairdner NP, Mootwingee NP, Simpson Desert Conservation Park and Innamincka Regional Reserve (ANRA 2013 a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,l). Some IBAs are also located within the region (BirdLife International 2013).

8 Faunal Species Richness Maps

Figure 8 to Figure 11 show species richness maps of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and all three groups as derived by Cibio with the following procedure:

Individual species distribution models (SDM) were first built at a 10x10km resolution for entire continents, using a set of eco-geographical variables (EGV) that included topography, climate and land cover. The following data sources were used:

Species presence data: GBIF (www.gbif.org)

Topography: SRTM, (<http://srtm.usgs.gov/index.html>)

Climate variables: WorldClim (<http://www.worldclim.org/>)

Land cover: GlobCover 2009 (<http://due.esrin.esa.int/globcover/>)

The model results were projected to the dryland test sites and gridded with a resolution of 1x1km². All models were run with the Biomod2 package for R, based on four algorithms (GLM, ANN, GBM and MaxEnt). Probabilities of species occurrence were converted to binary values, in order for species richness to be estimated by adding the individual predictions of species presence/absence in each pixel.

By “convergence of evidence”, commonalities of the species richness maps with the derived vegetation productivity maps can be seen.

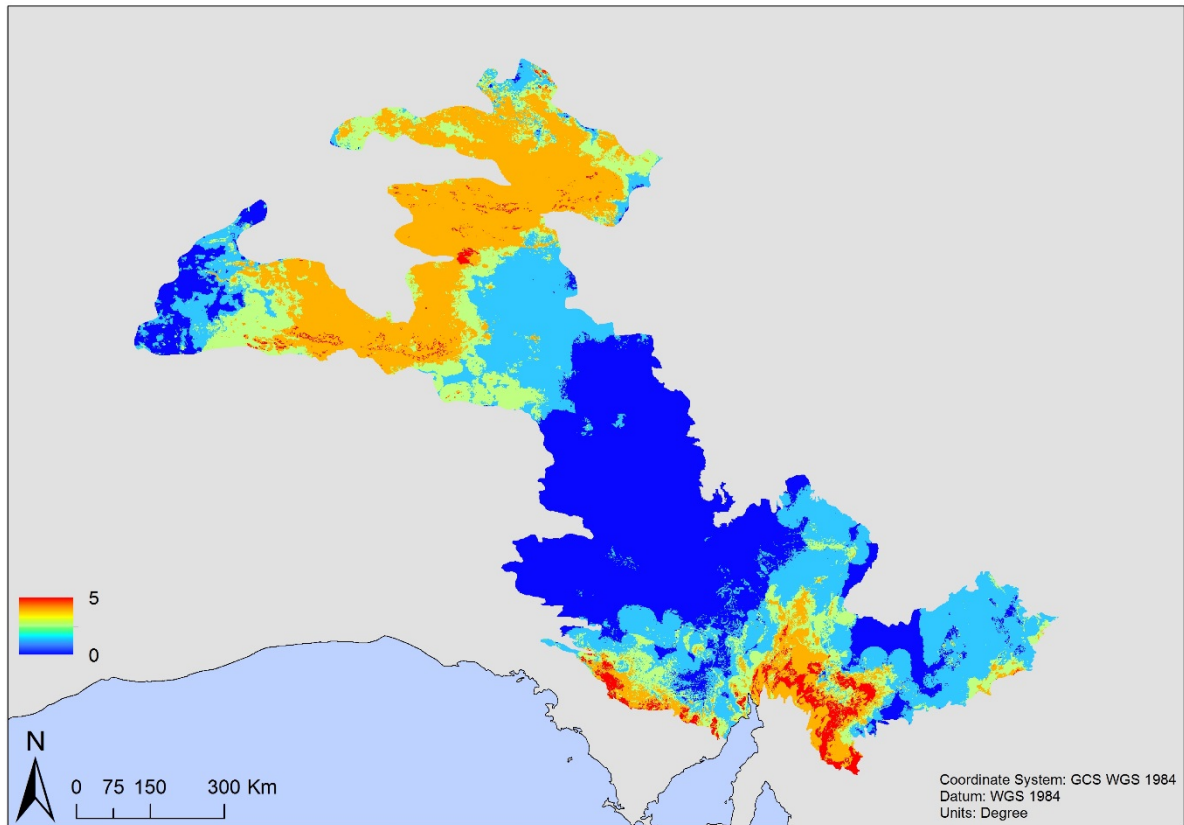


Figure 8: Modelled species richness of amphibians

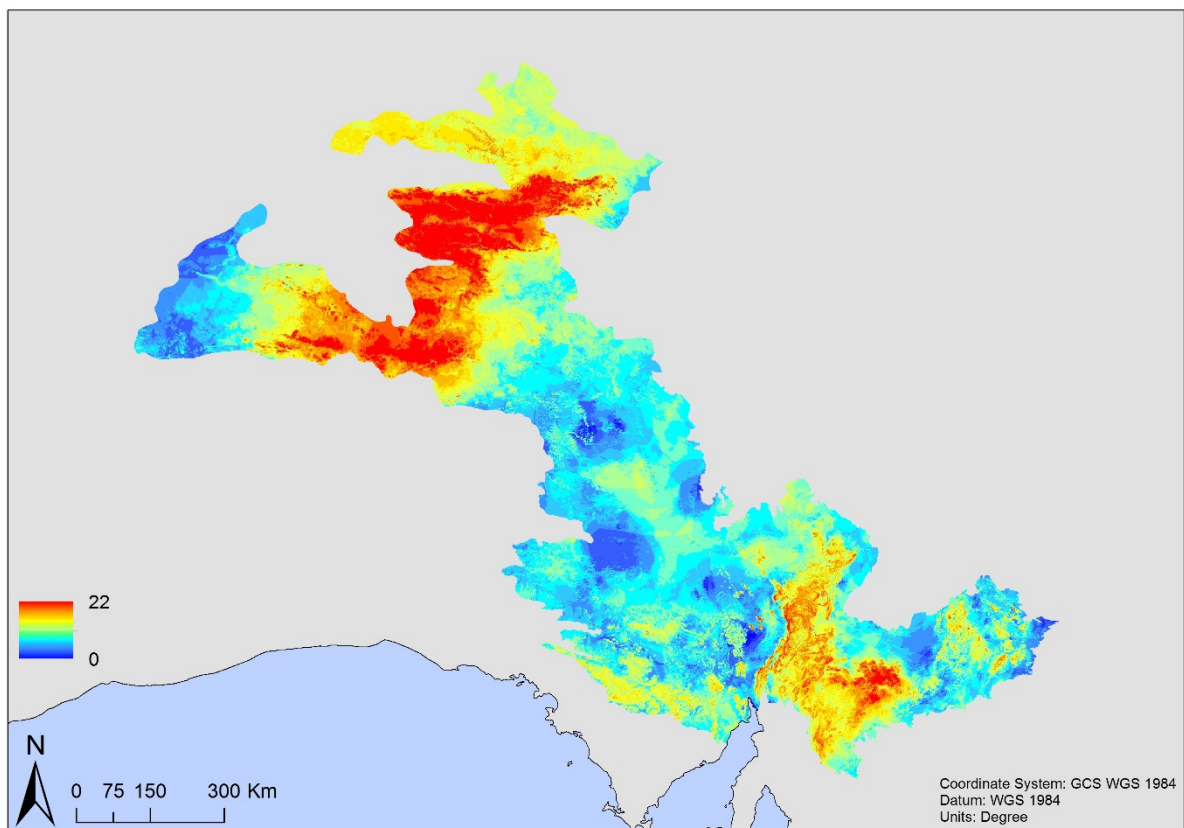


Figure 9: Modelled species richness of mammals

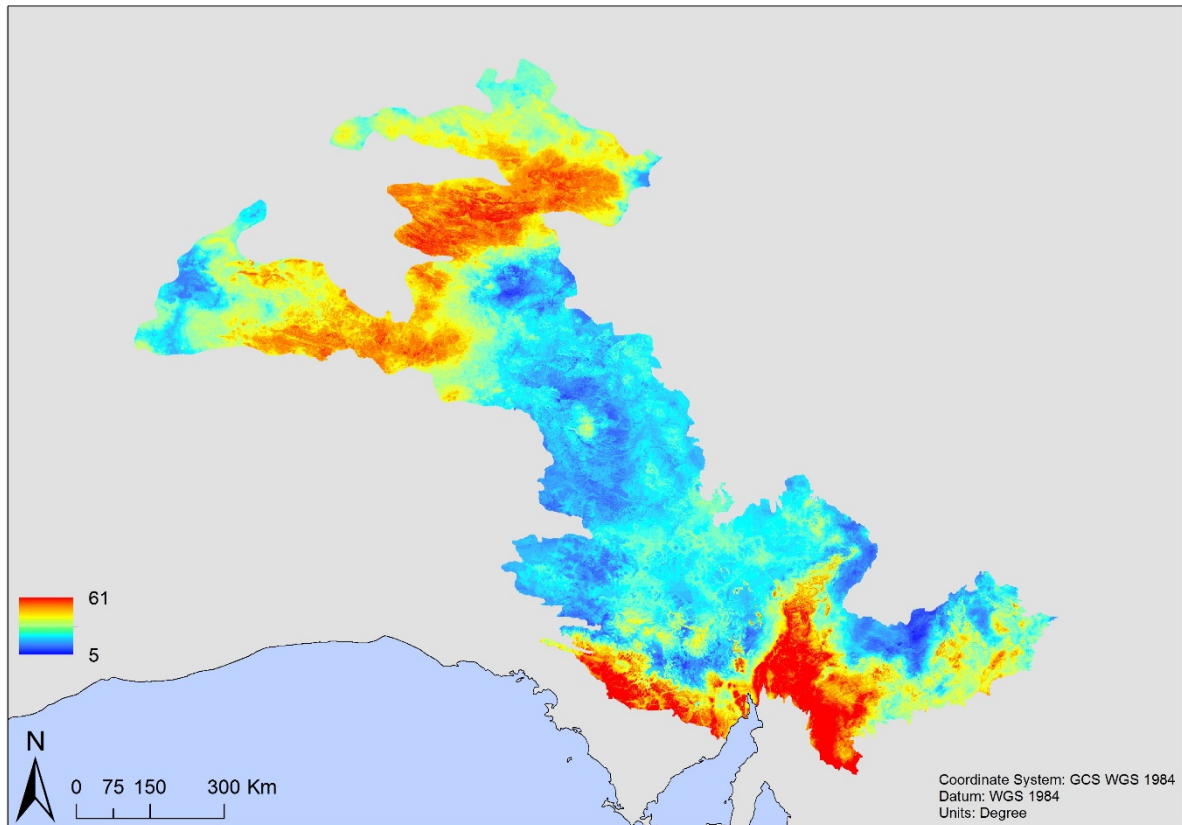


Figure 10: Modelled species richness of reptiles

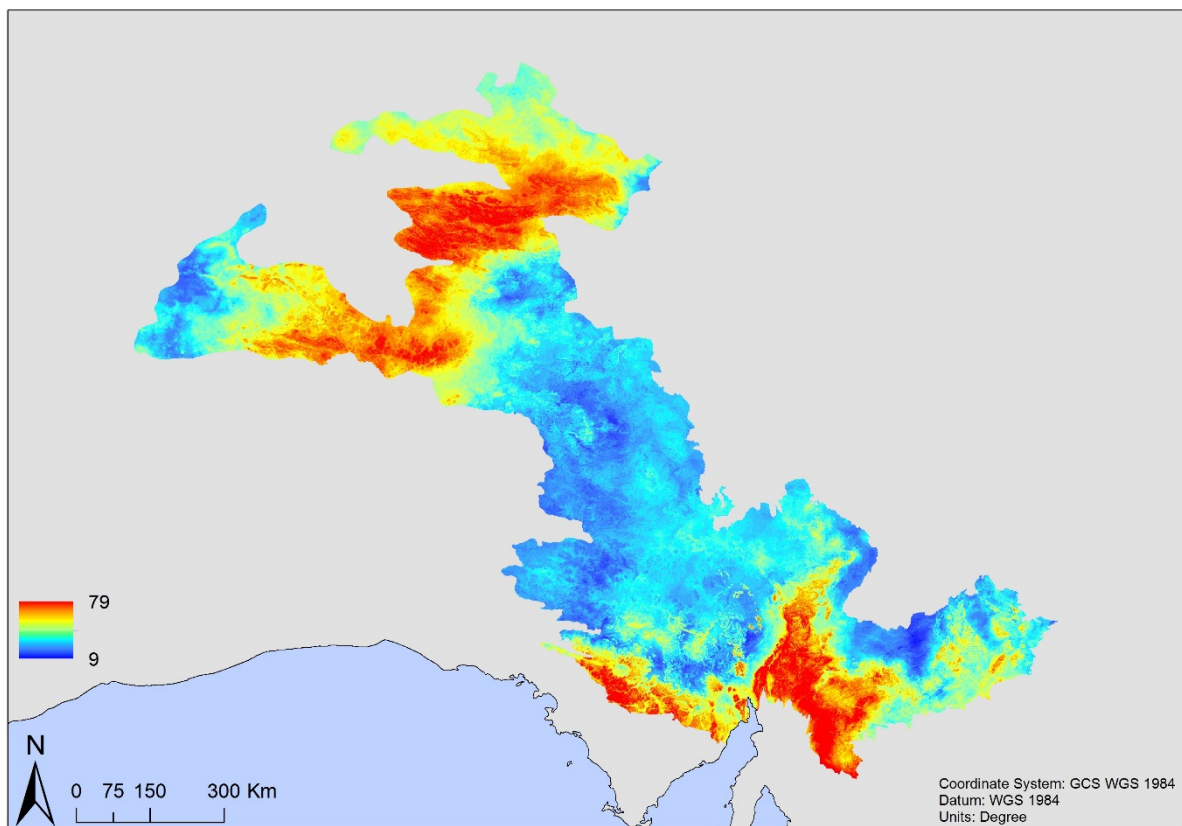


Figure 11: Modelled species richness total

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