

A Major Upgrade to the Australian Soil Classification

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The Australian Soil Classification (ASC) was first published in 1996, and is the nationally endorsed classification for Australia. When the classification was first drafted by Ray Isbell from CSIRO, Queensland, there was a dearth of detailed soil data from a number of states. Western Australia, despite representing 33% of the country by area, only made up 9% of the soil profiles in the database comprising CSIRO and state/territory data. It didn't reflect the abundance and importance of many of the soils specific to WA, including the deep sands and ironstone gravels, and has consequently been poorly adopted in this state. Since its 1996 publication the number of soil profiles in government databases for WA and the country as a whole has grown by more than 10 times, making the basis for any proposed changes to the ASC more robust and justifiable. An upgraded 3rd Edition of the ASC will be published in 2020. The most significant change will be the incorporation of a new soil Order - the Arenosols (deep sandy soils) improving its relevance to Western Australian soils. Another planned improvement is providing the classification for free in a number of formats – including the web, a downloadable print-ready pdf and an e-publication – all available on the Soil Science Australia website. Presently it must be purchased at a significant cost which is a barrier to adoption. A revision of another important soil description standard, the Australian Field Soil Survey Handbook (often known as the “Yellow Book”) is also underway, with greater links and standardisation between the two publications.