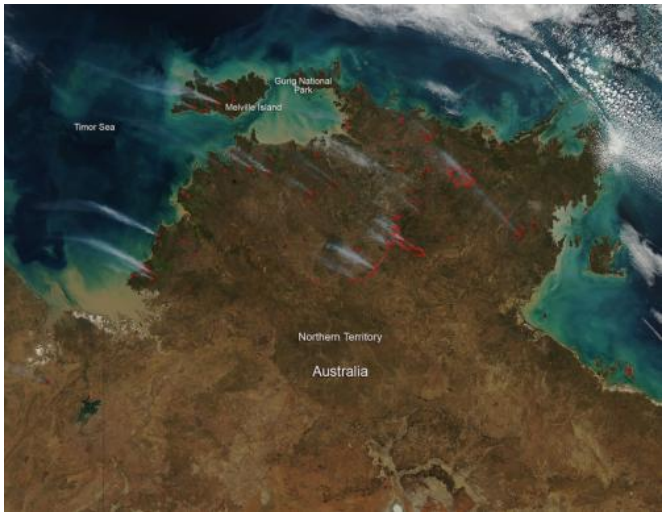
Fires in Northern Territory Australia

25 July 2013



Northern Australia's bushfire season was well underway by the beginning of July, 2013. On July 23 the Aqua satellite flew over the region, allowing the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) instrument flying aboard to capture this true-color image of the winter's fires.

Most of the hotspots, especially the large ones, are found in the Northern Territory, where long plumes of gray smoke are blown strongly to the northwest by heavy winds. The northern tip of Western Australia is also speckled with red hotspots and some thinner plumes of smoke. The red spots mark areas where the thermal sensors on the MODIS instrument have detected temperatures higher than background. When accompanied by smoke, these hotspots are strongly suggestive of actively burning fires.

Most of Australia suffers from bushfire at one season or another. However, the highest risk of wildfires varies along with the climatology of the regions. In the northern section, the winter and spring are the sunniest times of the year, the hottest times of the year, and the time when the lush growth of summer and fall has dried to tinder. In addition, intense high pressure systems often settle over the region, driving strong southeastern winds which can fan a spark into an inferno in a matter of minutes. In contrast, risk of bushfire in highest in southern Western Australia in the spring and summer, when fuels have dried after winter rains and surges of hot air from the interior raise the risk of fire.

Provided by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center