

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Introduction

The state of Western Australia is Australia's face on the Indian Ocean. Its capital Perth is closer to Singapore and Jakarta than it is to Canberra. The total population of Western Australia is almost 1.5 million. The majority of people live in and around Perth (population more than 1,193,000).

Western Australia is the largest Australian State. With an area of more than 2,500,000 sq km, a 12,500 km coastline and spanning 2,400km from north to south, it occupies a third of the continent.

Only the narrow Timor Sea separates its northern coastline from equatorial islands of the Indonesian Archipelago and to the south is the Southern Ocean and Antarctica.

Climate

From its tropical north, to temperate areas in its south-west corner, Western Australia experiences a variety of climatic conditions.

With distance from the coast, rainfall decreases and temperature variations are more pronounced.

Perth averages eight hours sunshine per day and 118 clear days per year. Mean monthly maximum temperatures range from 17 C in July to 30 C in February. Even in the coldest months, minimum temperatures rarely fall below 5 C. Most of its 802mm annual rainfall occurs in the winter months.

Primary industries

Agriculture, Western Australia's second major export industry, is experiencing change and renewal. Despite lower prices on world commodity markets, agricultural exports earned almost \$2.9 billion in 1993/94.

The State's vast area provides soils and climates suited to a variety of agricultural production from open range grazing and broad acre cereal cropping to irrigated pastures and horticulture, orchards and vineyards.

Wheat, wool, beef and lamb are its main products. Tropical and temperate horticultural products and stockfeed are also important.

Farmers and investors are identifying new specialised markets in Asia and taking advantage of seasonal differences with the northern hemisphere.

A diverse and efficient agriculture sector provides the raw material for a rapidly growing range of processed exports. These include wine, ice cream, barley malt, noodles and fine leather.

Western Australia's fisheries are major world suppliers of lobsters, prawns and pearls with exports exceeding \$450 million in 1993/94. A steadily growing aquaculture industry is successfully providing high value products to specialist markets.

A well-managed forestry industry generates more than \$400 million annually. It produces hardwood and softwood timbers and woodchips from natural forests and plantations. Sufficient sustainable resources have been identified to support a paper pulp mill.

Mineral and energy resources

In 1993/94 mining production had a gross value of more than \$12 billion dollars. Extensive natural gas reserves ensure Western Australia will be an important source of energy well into the next century. The State supplies liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Japan, and is developing markets in Taiwan and Korea.

Western Australia is expected to become Australia's largest source of oil and condensate by the end of the decade.

With more than 270 operating mines, Western Australia is a leading supplier of many commodities including alumina, diamonds, iron ore and mineral sands, - monazite; ilmenite; rutile/synrute and zircon.

The State also produces 70 per cent of Australia's gold and significant exports of salt, nickel, tantalum and numerous other metals.

New projects established in recent years include a silicon smelter, titanium dioxide plants and a fused alumina plant. The State is poised to supply an important share of the world market for new materials such as rare earth chemicals, fused alumina, zirconium compounds and specialty alloys.

Manufacturing

Processed mineral and agricultural products are the State's major manufacturing exports, worth more than \$1.8 billion in 1993/94.

Local firms have also achieved success with more elaborately transformed

products. The value of manufactured exports grew from \$207 million in 1985-86 to \$1.4 billion in 1993-94.

Recent major investments have established facilities producing chemicals, mining and electronic equipment and pharmaceuticals.

Western Australia's shipbuilding industry has built more than 60 per cent of the nation's civil craft. It has also supplied 10 per cent of the world's light-weight passenger ferries. Local firms have adopted new designs, materials and technology to capture an important share of a growing market with exports exceeding \$290 million in 1993/94.

Research and development activities by local and international companies have produced internationally competitive innovations in engine technology, building products, reagents for bio-technology and electronics.

Transport

Sealed highways link regional centres to Perth and two national highways, one in the north and one in the south, provide for interstate traffic.

A major east-west rail line carries freight and passengers between Western Australia and other Australian States. An extensive public rail network services agriculture and industry in the State's south-west. In the north-west, private rail lines carry ore from inland mines to coastal ports.

Perth's new international airport handles flights servicing Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. Numerous daily air services carry passengers and freight between Perth, the State's regional centres and other state capitals,

especially Sydney and Melbourne.

International shipping can be accessed at Fremantle, the State's main port and eight regional ports linked to major agricultural and mineral producing areas.

Government

Western Australia has two houses of parliament. The Legislative Assembly where the State Government is formed has members elected from 57 single member electoral districts (34 metro/23 country) every four years. The 34 member Legislative Council has six multi-member regions, electing either 5 or 7 members, every four years.

There are 144 local governments and Western Australia elects 13 of the 147 members of the Federal House of Representatives and 12 of 82 Senators.

Education

Five universities, a state-wide technical and further education system, private vocational colleges and dual public and private school systems cater for more than 500 000 students each year. There are 9 500 students from overseas.

In addition to formal courses, post-secondary and tertiary institutions provide management and workforce training tailored to meet the needs of individual employers or industry organisations. Universities regularly participate in collaborative research activities with private sector and government bodies, shar-

ing staff, equipment and information.

Tourism

A range of experiences, from wilderness adventures in the arid outback or diving on coral reefs, to fine dining in world-class restaurants or a night at a casino, attract a wide variety of visitors to Western Australia. Many of these visitors come from Asia, the balance from Australia.

In 1993/94, more than 400,000 overseas visitors and about 5 million interstate and domestic tourists were estimated to have spent \$2.1 billion on accommodation, food, travel and pleasure shopping.

The numbers of international and interstate visitors, as tourists, students, conference delegates or business people, are projected to grow by 120 per cent in the 1990s. A sound domestic tourism market underpins this growth.

As much of this growth reflects the State's strengthening links with Asia, there is considerable room for specialised new services and facilities such as resorts, golf courses, hotels and conference facilities. The State encourages investment in the tourism sector.

Source: DFAT

