**Western Australia** from *Collins English Dictionary*

1. a state of W Australia: mostly an arid undulating plateau, with the Great Sandy Desert, Gibson Desert, and Great Victoria Desert in the interior; settlement concentrated in the southwest; rich mineral resources. Capital: Perth. Pop: 2,517,200 (2013 est). Area: 2,527,636 sq km (975,920 sq miles)

**Summary Article: Western Australia**

State of Australia, bounded on the north and west by the Indian Ocean, on the east by Northern Territory and South Australia, on the south by the Southern Ocean; area 2,525,500 sq km/975,100 sq mi; population (2001 est) 1,906,100. The state is thus sparsely populated, with very large almost empty areas and most of the people living in the coastal areas, especially in the southwest in the area known as Swanland, near Perth and Fremantle. The capital is Perth. Products include wheat, fresh and dried fruit, beef, dairy products, wool, wine, natural gas, oil, iron, gold, nickel, diamonds, bauxite, cultured and freshwater pearls, timber, and fish. Tourism is important to the state.

**Geography**

Western Australia is the largest state in Australia, occupying nearly one-third of the continent. Its territory includes the Monte Bello Islands, Cocos Islands, Christmas Island, Ningaloo Reef, Purnululu National Park, Shark Bay World Heritage Area, and there is unusual flora and fauna (karri, jarrah, and tingle trees; more than 8,000 species of wild flowers; black swan). Western Australia has a coastline of about 7,000 km/4,350 mi. The south and west coasts are generally flat and sandy, with comparatively few natural harbours. The coast of the Kimberley region in the northeast of the state is broken and fringed with numerous islands. Most of the interior is an immense arid plateau, with an altitude of 300–600 m/1,300–1,970 ft above sea-level, its surface consisting in many parts of sand dunes. The Great Sandy Desert lies in the north of the state, the Gibson Desert in the centre, and the western parts of the Great Victoria Desert and Nullarbor Plain in the south.

In the Kimberley district in the far northeast of the state the main range of hills is the King Leopold Range, the highest point of which is Mount Broome (926 m/3,038 ft). In the Pilbara region of the northwest, about 1,000 km/621 mi north of Perth, between the Fortescue and Ashburton rivers, the highest range is the Hamersley, with Mount Meharry (1,245 m/4,085 ft, the highest peak in Western Australia), and Mount Bruce (1,226 m/4,022 ft). The Darling Range, which runs parallel with the southwest coast for 483 km/300 mi from Moora, 72 km/45 mi north of Perth, to Point d'Entrecasteaux on the southwest coast, reaches its highest point, 582 m/1,909 ft above sea-level, at Mount Cooke in the Cockburn Sound district. In the south of the state the highest range is the Stirling Range, which extends north of Albany on the southwest coast; its highest peak is Bluff Knoll (1,109 m/3,638 ft).

The principal rivers are: in the north, the Ord, Durack, Drysdale, King Edward, and Fitzroy; in the northwest, the De Gray, Yule, Fortescue, and Ashburton. Flowing to the west coast are the Gascoyne, Wooramel, Murchison, Greenough, and Swan (on which stands Perth), the Murray, and the Collie; and to

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the south coast, the Blackwood, Deep, Frankland, Gairdner, Fitzgerald, and Phillips rivers.

Lake Argyle, in the Kimberley region in the northeast of the state, with an area of 900 sq km/347 sq mi, is the largest man-made expanse of water in Australia. It was created in 1971–2 as part of the Ord River Irrigation Project. The project was established in 1961, when Lake Kununurra was created by damming the River Ord. The lakes of the interior are, except after the occasional heavy rains, merely immense salt marshes.

The Kimberley region in the northeast of the state has small patches of tropical rainforest along the coast between Broome and the border with Northern Territory. There are about 2,450,000 ha/6,000,000 acres of forest (particularly jarrah and karri) in Western Australia, mostly in the southwest of the state. The forested area includes national parks, nature reserves, and conservation parks.

In 1999 palaeontologists discovered evidence of one of the world's oldest ecosystems, near the town of Marble Bar, 1,200 km/745 mi north of Perth. The evidence consists of fossilized stromatolites that have been dated at 3.46 billion years old.

Towns and cities include Fremantle (the main port), Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Albany, and Broome.

**Climate** There are marked climatic differences within the state. The southwest region, where Perth is located, has a Mediterranean climate, with four distinct seasons, including hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters. The northwest of the state has a tropical climate, with two seasons, the wet and the dry (warm, dry winters and monsoonal, humid summers). Occasionally this area is subject to tropical cyclones. There are also large desert and semi-desert areas: most of the state is very arid with less than 250 mm/10 in of rain per year. This rainfall is unreliable and ineffective because of a high evaporation rate. The average annual rainfall in Perth is 865.8 mm/34 in. Mean summer temperatures in most of Western Australia are over 23°C/73°F, and Western Australia has an average of 7.9 hours of sunshine daily, the most in Australia. The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) found, in 1999, that the annual rainfall in Western Australia in winter had decreased by 25% over the past 85 years.

**Economy** In the late 20th century Western Australia, with its rich natural resources of minerals (including, for example, a tenth of the world production of iron ore) and of power supplies in the form of coal, oil, and natural gas, became the most rapidly developing economy among the Australian states. The economy is based on the production and export of minerals and, to a much lesser extent, of agricultural products. Agriculture is limited by the arid climate, and most development has taken place in the southwest of the state (Swanland), which has the most favourable climate for farming. The principal crops are wheat, barley, and oats. Apples, soft fruits, and dried fruit are also grown. Wine is an increasingly important product in Western Australia. There are two main wine-growing areas in the state: the Swan Valley and the Margaret River region, south of Perth. The state has 3,800 ha/9,400 acres of vines, producing 20,000 tonnes of grapes for wine production; the state accounts of 2% to Australia's total wine production, yet is has an estimated 20% of the Australian market share. It is estimated that production will have doubled by 2010. In the tropical north of the state grain sorghums, cotton, sugar cane, chick peas, maize, sunflowers, melons, pumpkins, and bananas are grown on land irrigated by the rivers Ord and Keep. There are large cattle runs in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and cattle, lamb, and goat meat is exported. The state produces 25% of Australia's fine merino wool.
There are also more than 125,000 ha/309,000 acres of soft- and hard-wood plantations, and more hard-wood plantations (to be used for paper products) are planned. The soft-wood plantations (about 72,000 ha/180,000 acres) are mostly state-owned and are used to produce a variety of products, including furniture, structural grade timber, chipboard, and medium density fibre board.

Cultured and freshwater South Sea pearls are important: pearls are found at Shark's Bay, north of Broome, and further north towards Darwin. The aquaculture industry is increasingly important; it includes crayfish, barramundi, marron, prawns, snapper, perch, and trout.

Western Australia accounts for 4% of Australia's dairy industry, 45% of the dairy products of the state being consumed as milk, 15% being processed for export, and the rest being used in products for local sale.

Manufacturing is concentrated in Perth and Kwinana, 29 km/18 mi south on Cockburn Sound, but still in the Perth metropolitan area. Kwinana has shipyards, oil refining, an alumina refinery, a nickel refinery, a fertilizer factory, and a number of smaller industries. Perth is the main manufacturing centre and has a wide range of industries including metalworking, food processing, electronics, and the manufacture of household equipment, building materials, machinery, and wood products. Other recent industries include the manufacture of electronic equipment and pharmaceuticals.

**Mining and natural resources** Western Australia has enormous mineral resources, and about 50 different minerals are mined. The chief minerals produced in the state are gold, iron ore, alumina, and nickel.

Western Australia produced 230 tonnes of gold in 1996–97, 75% of the total Australian production. Gold is also mined at Kalgoorlie, Telfer, Leanora, Southern Cross, and Bodington. Iron ore is the leading export commodity of Western Australia and the state produces 95% of the iron ore produced in Australia; reserves of high grade iron ore are found in the Homersley Ranges in the Pilbara District, in the northwest of the state. Western Australia produces 60% of the bauxite produced in Australia; it is mined in the Darling Ranges near Perth where there are very substantial, though low-grade, deposits. The state mined 99% of the total Australian nickel production in 1996; there are nickel mines at Kambalda near Kalgoorlie-Boulder, 545 km/340 mi northeast of Perth), Leinster, Mount Keith, and Forrestania, and there is a nickel smelter near Kalgoorlie.

All of the diamonds mined in Australia come from Western Australia, and the state accounts for 40% of the world's diamonds (by weight). The world's largest diamond mine is just south of Kununurra in the Kimberley region in the far northeast of the state, near the border with Northern Territory.

Mineral sands are found in the area which stretches from the southern tip of Western Australia to Geraldton, and are located either on the coastline or as deposits up to 35 km/22 mi inland. The state produced 86% of Australia's total salt production in 1996–97; it is produced in Port Hedland. Tin is mined near Collie.

Coal, another mineral worked near Collie, is used for generating electricity and the state also has deposits of oil and natural gas. As well as supplying domestic markets, Western Australia exports liquefied natural gas to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. Barrow Island has a commercial oilfield and there is a natural gas field at Dongara, which supplies Perth and the nearby industrial centre of Kwinana. The seabed off the northwest coast near the Pilbara (Northwestern Shelf area) has enormous deposits of oil and gas, which began to be exploited in the early 1980s. The Northwest Shelf Natural Gas Project
collects gas from an offshore platform 135 km/84 mi northwest of Dampier, and it is then piped 1,500 km/932 mi to Perth or liquefied and exported to Japan. Western Australia is expected to be Australia's largest oil-producing state by 2005.

**Tourism** Tourism makes a major contribution to Western Australia's economy. Visitors are attracted particularly to the national parks and wilderness areas. Principal attractions include: the Coral Coast, including Ningaloo Reef and Ningaloo Marine Park, on Northwest Cape on the northwest coast of the state, one of the few places in the world where whalesharks (the largest of the sharks) can be seen, as well as manta rays, humpback whales, and nesting turtles; Purnululu National Park in the northeast of the state near the border with Northern Territory, with the Purnululu (formerly Bungle Bungles) massif, a plateau surrounded by 350 million year old rock domes, striped orange (silica) and dark green (lichen); Shark Bay World Heritage Area on the west coast, which has dolphins at Monkey Mia and a wealth of animals and plants; the forests of the southwest with their jarrah, karri, marri, and tingle trees. Other tourist attractions include the Margaret River region (popular for its wineries, surfing, and caves), the Kalgoorlie goldfields region (for its gold rush and mining heritage), Broome (for its fishing, sailing, and surfing), and the Pinnacles, unusual rock formations north of Perth.

**Government** Responsible government was granted to Western Australia in 1890. Power resides with the premier and the legislature consisting of two houses: the Legislative Council has 34 members, and the Legislative Assembly has 57 members. Both houses are elected by universal suffrage of persons over the age of 18 who have resided in the country for six months and in the state for three. Enrolment is compulsory for all citizens and voting is compulsory for all enrolled persons. Western Australia elects 13 members to the Federal House of Representatives and 12 to the Senate. In the 1920s Western Australia elected the first woman to sit on the Australian Legislature (Edith Cowan).

**Early history** Most parts of Western Australia had been inhabited for thousands of years by the Aborigines before the arrival of the first Europeans. The area was probably visited by the Portuguese in the 16th century. The first European known to land in Western Australia was Dirck Hartog, commander of the Dutch vessel *Eendracht*. A pewter plate, inscribed and dated 25 October 1616, was nailed to a post erected on Point Inscription on what is now Dirk Hartog Island, off Shark Bay on the central west coast. The plate is now in the state museum in Amsterdam. In 1644 the Dutch navigator Abel Tasman surveyed the north coast. The first Englishman to visit Western Australia was William Dampier, who landed at King Sound on the northwest coast in 1688.

**18th–20th-century history** In 1791 the British navigator George Vancouver, in the *Discovery*, took formal possession of the territory above King George Sound on the south coast for Britain. French navigators followed during the late 18th and early 19th century, notably Antoine Raymond d'Entrecasteaux in *La Recherche* in 1792, Louis de Freycinet in 1818, and Hyacinthe de Bougainville in 1825. In 1801 the British navigator Matthew Flinders in the *Investigator* explored the south coast, which, at his suggestion, was subsequently named Australia. Between 1818 and 1822 Philip Parker King charted the north coast. In 1826 there was a short-lived convict settlement on King George Sound. In 1827 the Scottish naval officer Captain James Stirling surveyed the coast from King George Sound to Swan River and in 1829 Captain Charles Fremantle in HMS *Challenge* took possession of the territory, and founded the Swan River Settlement and the towns of Perth and Fremantle. Among the early settlers were convicts from Sydney. In 1839 George Grey walked from Shark Bay to Perth, and Edward John Eyre travelled from South Australia to Albany in 1841. In 1861 Frank T Gregory made the journey from Nickol Bay, near Karratha, along the River Fortescue to the Fortescue Range. In 1870 the explorer John
Forrest and four companions went from Perth to Adelaide along the south coast route. Five years later, in 1875–6 Alexander and Ernest Giles crossed the continent from South Australia to Perth. Exploration led to improved communications. In 1877 Perth was connected to the Overland Telegraph Line, making it possible to communicate with Adelaide and London.

At first the territory was governed by New South Wales, but became a separate colony in 1890. In 1901 Western Australia became one of the federated states of the Commonwealth of Australia. In 1946 a strike by Aboriginal stockmen took pace which was to affect 20 out of the 22 cattle stations in the Pilbara region. The United States was given permission to build a communication base at Exmouth in 1961 (this was closed in 1993). Perth hosted the Commonwealth Games in 1962, and the America’s Cup Yachting race was won by Australia in 1983 and staged at the Royal Perth Yachting Club, Fremantle, in 1987.

**Population distribution** Western Australia is the most sparsely populated of the Australian states. The population is concentrated in the southwest of the state, where conditions are most suitable for farming. In addition, there are towns dotted along the coastline and scattered mining settlements in the interior. There are a number of Aboriginal lands in the state.

**Environmental issues** There has been opposition to logging in the southwest since the 1970s, especially in relation to the clearing of forest areas for woodchips and charcoal. Environmental issues are debated by those who seek total protection of the forests and those whose livelihood depends on the logging industry. The state’s Department of Conservation and Land Management is conducting research with the aim of protecting the forests while at the same time achieving a sustainable timber industry. Non-producing mines have undertaken the rehabilitation of the environment by planting native trees and refilling land to encourage native animals and other plants to return (this action combats soil erosion, desertification, and salinity); most mining companies also now conduct environmental impact studies before a new mining operation is undertaken.

**Flora and fauna** Certain trees, flowers, and animals are found only in Western Australia. Trees unique to the area are the jarrah, karri, marri, wandoo, tuart (rare), and tingle. Walpole-Nornalup National Park, in the southwest, has four species of rare eucalyptus that grow nowhere else (three kinds of tingle and the red flowering gum). More than 8,000 wild flowers grow in the state, many of them unique. The numbat and honey possum are mammals that have been recorded only in Western Australia. Quokkas (small wallabies found only on Rottnest Island) and black swans are also found. At Monkey Mia, 800 km/500 mi north of Perth, dolphins swim to shore.