



# Australia



Australia is desert. The main mountain chain, the Great Dividing Range, runs down the east coast, rising to Australia's highest point at Mt Kosciuszko (2,230 metres). Consequently, many of the rivers draining to the east are short; those flowing to the west, of which the Murray–Darling river system is the most considerable, tend to flow only after heavy rains and end in lakes which are often dry with a salt-bed.

**Climate:** The Tropic of Capricorn almost bisects the continent, running just north of Alice Springs, Australia's central settlement. The subtropical areas north of this line have summer rainfall and dry winters. South of the Tropic, the rest of the continent and Tasmania are temperate. Continental considerations affect this basic pattern, most coastal areas having some rainfall, whereas a large tract of central Australia has annual rainfall of less than 300 mm. Drought and consequent bushfires are a serious problem.

This pattern of rainfall will be dramatically affected by occasional La Niña events which occur in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean causing the sea to cool and increasing the probability that strong cool onshore winds will bring heavy rains to the eastern regions of Australia, as occurred from November 2010, when there were devastating floods first in Queensland, then in Victoria.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are soil erosion and desertification; loss of the natural habitat of many unique animal and plant species due to increases in agricultural and industrial production; and damage to the Great Barrier Reef, the largest coral reef in the world, due to increased shipping and tourism.

**Vegetation:** A wide range, from the tropical jungle of Queensland to the sparse flowers of the desert, with many unique species which evolved in the continent's long geological isolation. Over 700 species of eucalyptus and close to 1,000 species of acacia (wattle). The main fertile areas are in the south and east in New South Wales and Victoria – arable land comprises six per cent of the total land area, while the north-east has tropical forest and bush – forest covers 16 per cent of the country.

**Wildlife:** Many indigenous animal species are unique to the continent. The most distinctive are the marsupials, of which there are 120

## KEY FACTS

**Joined Commonwealth:** 1931 (Statute of Westminster)

**Population:** 23,343,000 (2013)

**GDP p.c. growth:** 1.8% p.a. 1990–2013

**UN HDI 2014:** World ranking 2

**Official language:** English

**Time:** GMT plus 8–11 hrs

**Currency:** Australian dollar (A\$)

## Geography

**Area:** 7,682,395 sq km

**Coastline:** 25,800 km

**Capital:** Canberra

The term 'Australia' is derived from *Terra Australis*, the name given to a southern landmass whose existence geographers deduced before it was discovered. Papua New Guinea (to the north) and New Zealand (to the east) are Australia's closest neighbours. To the south lie the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. It is one of 28 island nations in the Commonwealth; the mainland of Australia is the largest island in the world.

The Commonwealth of Australia is a Federation with six states – New South Wales (state capital Sydney), Victoria (Melbourne), Queensland (Brisbane), South Australia (Adelaide), Western Australia (Perth) and Tasmania (Hobart) – and two territories, Northern Territory (capital Darwin) and the Australian Capital Territory, where the federal capital, Canberra, is situated. Australia also has external territories (described in the profiles following this one). These have small populations or are uninhabited and, apart from the vast Australian Antarctic Territory, are small islands.

**Time:** There are three time zones: western (GMT plus 8 hrs, and no change in summer); central (GMT plus 9.5 hrs, no change in summer in Northern Territory, and GMT plus 10.5 hrs October–March in South Australia); and north-east/south-east (GMT plus 10 hrs, and in all eastern states except Queensland, GMT plus 11 hrs October–March).

**Area:** 7,682,395 sq km including the State of Tasmania and some smaller island territories.

**Topography:** Australia is the largest link in the chain running between South-East Asia and the South Pacific. Much of central

species from the kangaroo to the tiny desert mouse, and the monotremes, the rare order of mammals which lay eggs, such as the duck-billed platypus and the echidna. There are also several species of flightless birds – the emu, second only to the African ostrich in size, and the cassowary. Some 55 mammal species and 47 bird species are thought to be endangered (2014).

**Main towns:** Canberra (capital, Australian Capital Territory, pop. 356,586 in 2011), Sydney (New South Wales, 3.9m), Melbourne (Victoria, 3.7m), Brisbane (Queensland, 1.87m), Perth (Western Australia, 1.62m), Adelaide (South Australia, 1.1m), Gold Coast – Tweed Heads (Queensland, 533,659), Newcastle (New South Wales, 308,307), Hobart (Tasmania, 204,951) and Darwin (Northern Territory, 78,467).

**Transport:** There are 825,500 km of roads, 44 per cent paved; Australian road design is known for the long, straight roads in rural areas. Some roads may be impassable after heavy rain.

Rail services link main towns across the country and the total system extends to 8,615 km. The 4,000 km Indian Pacific from Sydney to Perth takes three days. The 3,000 km north–south line, linking Adelaide in the south with Alice Springs in the centre and Darwin in the north was completed in 2003.

The country has 25,800 km of coastline and many deep-water harbours.

International airports are at Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth, Darwin, Brisbane, Hobart, Townsville and Cairns.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2013

**Population per sq km:** 3.0

**Life expectancy:** 82 years

**Net primary enrolment:** 97%

**Population:** 23,343,000 (2013); density is one of the lowest in the world; 89 per cent of people live in urban areas and 58 per cent in urban agglomerations of more than one million people; growth 1.4 per cent p.a. 1990–2013; birth rate 13 per 1,000 people (20 in 1970); life expectancy 82 years (71 in 1970); life expectancy in the Aboriginal population about 62 years.

People of Asian origin comprise 8.7 per cent of the population, and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island peoples 2.5 per cent. Some 70 per cent of people were born in Australia (2006 census).

**Language:** English, the official language, is spoken at home by 78.5 per cent of the population. The largest other home

languages are Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic and Mandarin (2006 census).

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Roman Catholics 26 per cent, Anglicans 19 per cent), small minorities of Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Jews (2006 census).

**Health:** Public spending on health was six per cent of GDP in 2012. Health facilities are a responsibility of the states, although the federal government administers the Medicare insurance scheme, introduced in 1984. There are 18 medical schools in Australia (2014). Infant mortality was three per 1,000 live births in 2013 (20 in 1960).

**Education:** Public spending on education was 5.1 per cent of GDP in 2011. Responsibility for education lies with the states and education systems vary. There are 11 years of compulsory education starting at the age of five. The school year starts in January.

There are 39 universities with more than one million students enrolled, 37 of which are public institutions (2013). The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 1.40:1 (2010). There is virtually no illiteracy among people aged 15–24.

In 1971 Australia hosted the Fifth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Canberra. Commonwealth Education Ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.

**Media:** Newspapers have a high circulation rate throughout the country. National dailies are *The Australian* and *Australian Financial Review*. Regional newspapers include *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), *The Age* (Melbourne), *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), *Herald-Sun* (Melbourne), *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The West Australian* (Perth).

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) operates national and regional public radio and TV stations. The Special Broadcasting Service is the other principal public broadcaster, running radio and TV networks that broadcast in many languages. Pay TV networks are widely used, and digital TV is available via satellite and cable.

Some 99 per cent of households have TV sets (2007). There are 820 personal computers per 1,000 people (2012).

**Communications:** Country code 61; internet domain '.au'. Payphones are red, green, gold or blue. Only local calls can be made from red phones; green, gold and blue phones also have international direct dialling. Mobile phone coverage is good in the more populous areas.

For every 1,000 people there are 443 landlines, 1,068 mobile phone subscriptions and 830 internet users (2013).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Australia Day (26 January), ANZAC Day (25 April), Queen's Official Birthday (Monday in early June), Labour Day (early October in most states, otherwise in March), Christmas Day and Boxing Day. States have additional public holidays.

Religious and other festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday and Easter Monday.

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2013

**GNI:** US\$1,524.3bn

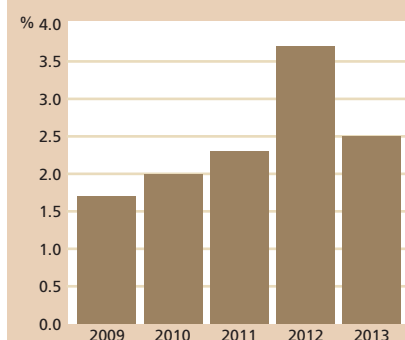
**GNI p.c.:** US\$65,520

**GDP growth:** 2.4% p.a. 2009–13

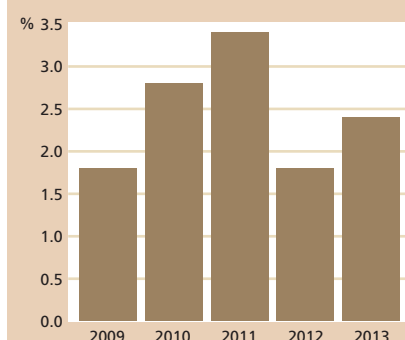
**Inflation:** 2.5% p.a. 2009–13

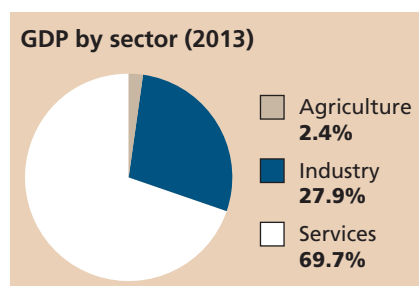
Australia has a high degree of prosperity, based on its wealth of natural resources, policies of redistribution and welfare, and stable democratic society. Its economy is among the largest in the world, ranking 19th in terms of GDP (PPP) in 2014 (IMF, April 2015). Significant minerals include aluminium, coal, copper, diamonds, gold, iron, nickel, oil and gas, silver, tin, titanium, uranium and zinc. Proven reserves of oil were estimated in January 2014 to be 4.0 billion barrels, and of gas, 3.7 trillion cubic metres.

### Real growth in GDP



### Inflation





The economy relied mainly on agriculture and mining until manufacturing boomed after World War II. Service industries have since led growth, rising from about 60 per cent of GDP in the 1960s to about 70 per cent in the 2000s.

However, the economy remained vulnerable to variations in agricultural output and fluctuations in world commodity prices. There has been a high level of foreign investment resulting in a serious current account deficit as interest and dividends leave the country; domestic investment has been relatively low.

From the 1980s major economic reforms were introduced, including liberalisation of trade and foreign investment, deregulation of the financial system and markets, privatisation of public enterprises and government services, and decentralisation of wage settlements.

During the 2000s the economy grew well, averaging three to four per cent p.a. until the last quarter of 2008 due to the global economic downturn and consequent falls in commodity prices. With slower growth of 1.7 per cent in 2009, unemployment rose, after reaching its lowest level since the 1970s in early 2008 (4.0 per cent), but the economy was stronger from 2010, growing by 3.7 per cent in 2012 and 2.5 per cent in 2013, and an estimated 2.8 per cent in 2014.

## History

Fifty million years ago the Australian continent broke away from the great southern landmass of Gondwanaland, which comprised South America, Africa, India, Australia and Antarctica. Apart from a period during the last Ice Age when the sea level was 100 metres lower than it is today, Australia existed in isolation. This resulted in the evolution of vegetation and wildlife which is substantially unique.

It was thought that the Aboriginal population may have lived in Australia for 50,000 years. However, recent evidence from the Kimberley region of Western Australia suggests much older human habitation. When European explorers arrived, the Aboriginal peoples lived by hunting and gathering and using stone tools. Estimates of the historical size of the

population range up to 750,000 people. Aboriginal society, though technologically undeveloped, had complex cultural and religious forms, and some 500 languages, in 31 basic groups. There was a rich oral tradition of songs and stories, and many different styles of rock art.

The first known Europeans to land were Dutch. In 1606, William Jansz landed on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, and thereafter various landings were made. The Dutch named this land New Holland, but showed no interest in further exploration.

In April 1770, Captain James Cook in HMS *Endeavour* with the botanist Sir Joseph Banks landed in Botany Bay (in what is now New South Wales) and claimed the east coast for the English Crown. Having just lost the American colonies, England needed new penal colonies, and the first shipload of Australian settlers were convicts, arriving with Governor Arthur Phillip in 1788. They moved to Port Jackson (now part of Sydney Harbour) on 26 January, now Australia Day. However, even before transportation to New South Wales was abolished in 1840, free settlers were arriving in increasing numbers. Further exploration, often dangerous, revealed that the land known as New Holland and the English colony were one and the same large island.

In 1831, Western Australia became the second colony, followed by South Australia in 1836, Victoria in 1851, Tasmania in 1856, and Queensland in 1859. The Northern Territory was, for some time, part of South Australia and later the responsibility of the federal government, achieving self-government in 1978.

The settler population in early years lived mostly in coastal areas, deploying large tracts of land for sheep and cattle. The annexation of land was often accompanied by brutal treatment of the Aboriginal population, who were forced into the interior. Gold was first discovered in Victoria in the 1850s and

prompted Australia's gold rush with a consequent opening up of the interior and more displacement of the Aboriginals. Wheat farming developed, and the country rapidly became a leading exporter. With the invention of refrigeration, export trade in mutton and dairy products began. An extensive railway system was built. Between 1860 and 1890, immigrants, and capital, mostly from Britain, contributed to a long economic boom. In 1891, the country had a population of three million, and was exporting wool, mutton, dairy products and wheat.

The colonies, all of which had Westminster-style representative institutions by 1890, became one nation on 1 January 1901. The Commonwealth of Australia, with a federal structure, was established. By the time of World War I, Australian politics emphasised social policy, industrial development, and protectionism to cushion local industries and maintain full employment. The development of the steel industry after 1915, and advances in mining, assisted development, so that by 1939, industry was responsible for 40 per cent of GDP. Sophisticated industries such as car manufacture developed in the 1950s. By the latter 1980s, Australians enjoyed one of the world's highest living standards.

Australia was a founder member of the Commonwealth in 1931 when its independence was recognised under the Statute of Westminster.

Australia's political party system traditionally consisted of the Liberal Party, National Party (originally known as the Country Party) and Labor Party (ALP). The Liberal and National parties were frequently in coalition. A new party, the Australian Democrats, was formed in the 1970s as a breakaway group from the Liberal–National coalition. The Liberal–National coalition was in office from 1949 until 1972, and again from 1975 to 1983, under Malcolm Fraser. The Labor Party, under Bob Hawke and then Paul Keating, was in

## Australia on the international stage

Of the many internationally acclaimed Australian writers, 11 have won overall Commonwealth Writers' Prizes, eight for Best Book and three for Best First Book. Australian authors have won the Man Booker Prize five times, with Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* taking the prize in 2014.

Swimmer Ian Thorpe has five Olympic gold medals and nine Commonwealth Games gold medals, while Australia has the best performing team in the world overall in the history of Test cricket.

In the world of entertainment, Australia can lay claim to the Oscar-award-winning actors Nicole Kidman, Cate Blanchett, New Zealand-born Russell Crowe, Heath Ledger, Peter Finch and Geoffrey Rush. On the musical front, Kylie Minogue, INXS, Midnight Oil, Men at Work and Olivia Newton-John have all won international acclaim.

Australia has hosted CHOGM three times: in 1981, 2002 and 2011.

office from 1983 to 1996, when the Liberal–National coalition led by John Howard returned to power. Howard’s conservative coalition’s majority was reduced in an early general election in October 1998, in the face of a strong showing by the Labor Party led by Kim Beazley.

In February 1998, the Constitutional Convention voted by 89 votes to 52 for Australia to become a republic by 2001, and by 73 votes to 57 to replace the British monarch with a President. It was agreed that there would be a referendum on the issue.

Despite evidence from opinion polls that most Australians were in favour of a republic, in the referendum of November 1999 – when asked if they supported ‘an act to alter the constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic, with the Queen and Governor-General being replaced by a President appointed by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Commonwealth Parliament’ – almost 55 per cent registered a ‘No’ vote. The result was widely attributed to widespread dissatisfaction about the right of parliamentarians to choose a President.

## Constitution

**Status:** Monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II

**Legislature:** Parliament of Australia

Under the Australian constitution, the legislative power of the Commonwealth of Australia is vested in the Parliament of the Commonwealth, which consists of the monarch, the Senate (the upper house) and the House of Representatives (the lower house). Queen Elizabeth II is represented by a Governor-General who holds the office for a five-year term. The Senate comprises 76 senators, 12 from each of the six states, and two from each of the two territories. Senators are directly elected for six years; half the Senate retires every three years. The House of Representatives comprises 150 members directly elected; elections – using the preferential voting system – for both houses are held simultaneously at a maximum of three-year intervals. There is compulsory universal suffrage for all Australians over the age of 18. All amendments to the constitution must be passed by absolute majority in both houses. There must then be a referendum in every state.

Each of the states also has its own government, with a Governor representing the Queen. Five states have bi-cameral legislatures, and Queensland has a single chamber. The federal government is responsible for administration of the Australian Federal Territory and, since 1978, Northern Territory has had a degree of self-government.

## Politics

**Last elections:** 7 September 2013

**Next elections:** September 2016

**Head of state:** Queen Elizabeth II, represented by Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove (2014–)

**Head of government:** Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull

**Ruling party:** Liberal–National coalition

**Women MPs:** 26%

Prime Minister John Howard’s Liberal–National coalition was comfortably returned for a third consecutive term in November 2001, winning 81 seats (Liberal Party 68, National Party 13) to Labor Party’s 65. In an election dominated by the issue of Asian immigration, the government’s firm action in August 2001 of denying a ship-load of Afghan asylum seekers entry into the country seemed to have proved decisive.

The October 2004 election which had been thought too close to predict was again won comfortably by the Liberal–National coalition and Howard was returned to government, winning 85 seats (Liberal Party 73, National Party 12) while the Labor Party took 57.

Kevin Rudd became the Labor Party leader in December 2006.

In the fiercely fought contest, in November 2007, the Labor Party took 84 seats, the Liberal–National coalition 64 and independent candidates two; Rudd became Prime Minister and immediately signalled a

significant shift in domestic and foreign policy by ratifying the Kyoto Protocol on climate change.

In September 2008, Quentin Bryce was sworn in as Australia’s 25th Governor-General; she was the first woman to hold the post.

In June 2010, after a dramatic fall in the popularity of Prime Minister Rudd, Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard successfully challenged Rudd for the Labor Party leadership and became Prime Minister, the first woman to hold the post.

In the early general election in August 2010 neither Labor (winning 72 out of 150 seats in the lower house) nor the Liberal–National coalition led by Tony Abbott (73 seats) was able to secure a parliamentary majority. The remaining seats were won by the Green Party (one) and independents (four). After several weeks of negotiations with these members, Gillard was successful in winning the support of the Green Party member and three of the independents, giving the Labor party a narrow overall majority.

In June 2013, when polls suggested the Labor Party would lose the election due in September, Rudd ousted Gillard in a Labor Party leadership election (57:45). On 27 June he was sworn in as Prime Minister.

The Labor government was ousted in the federal election of 7 September 2013. The Liberal–National coalition led by Tony Abbott secured 90 seats and the Labor Party 55. The

## Further information

Australian, state, territory and local governments:

Australian Electoral Commission:

Parliament of Australia:

Australian Bureau of Statistics:

Reserve Bank of Australia:

Tourism Australia:

Commonwealth Secretariat:

Commonwealth of Nations:

[www.gov.au](http://www.gov.au)

[www.aec.gov.au](http://www.aec.gov.au)

[www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au)

[www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

[www.rba.gov.au](http://www.rba.gov.au)

[www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com)

[www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

[www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Australia](http://www.commonwealthofnations.org/country/Australia)

## Media

*Financial Review:*

*Herald Sun:*

*The Advertiser:*

*The Age:*

*The Australian:*

*The Courier-Mail:*

*The Daily Telegraph:*

*The Sydney Morning Herald:*

*The West Australian:*

ABC:

ABC News 24:

Special Broadcasting Service:

Radio Australia:

Australian Associated Press:

[www.afr.com](http://www.afr.com)

[www.heraldsun.com.au](http://www.heraldsun.com.au)

[www.adelaidenow.com.au](http://www.adelaidenow.com.au)

[www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au)

[www.theaustralian.news.com.au](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au)

[www.couriermail.com.au](http://www.couriermail.com.au)

[www.dailytelegraph.com.au](http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au)

[www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au)

[au.news.yahoo.com/thewest](http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest)

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[www.abc.net.au/news/abcnews24/](http://www.abc.net.au/news/abcnews24/)

[www.sbs.com.au](http://www.sbs.com.au)

[www.radioaustralia.net.au](http://www.radioaustralia.net.au)

[aap.com.au](http://aap.com.au)



remaining seats were won by the Green Party (one), Katter's Australian Party (one), Palmer United Party (one) and independents (two). Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott was sworn in as Prime Minister.

On 28 March 2014, former Chief of the Australian Defence Force, Sir Peter Cosgrove, was sworn in as Australia's 26th Governor-General.

Malcolm Turnbull replaced Tony Abbott as Prime Minister on 15 September 2015, after defeating him in a Liberal Party leadership election (54:44) the previous evening.

## International relations

Australia is a member of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Indian Ocean Rim Association, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Pacific

Community, Pacific Islands Forum, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

## Traveller information

**Immigration and customs:** Visas are required by all Commonwealth nationals. Visitors must declare all food, plant material and animal products on arrival in Australia to ensure they are free of pests and diseases; any items that pose pest and disease risks will be destroyed.

**Travel within the country:** Driving is on the left. Visitors may drive on a national licence for a maximum of three months, although an international driving permit is needed by all those whose official language is not English. Drink-driving is illegal and the wearing of seat belts is mandatory.

There are good cross-country coach services,

although flying is the most common way of travelling around the country. Rail travel is slow and expensive. There is a twice-weekly train service that travels from Sydney to Perth and takes three days. Another service links Adelaide with Perth and runs weekly in each direction; the journey time is two nights. Reservations are essential on all long-distance train services.

Urban transport services are good and there are suburban rail networks in the state capitals; Melbourne and Adelaide also have tram systems. Taxis are widely available and are metered.

**Travel health:** Prevalent diseases where appropriate precautionary measures are recommended include dengue fever (Queensland), Japanese encephalitis and Ross River virus (Western Australia).

There were 6,381,000 tourist arrivals in 2013.



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# Australia: External territories



The external territories of Australia are: Australian Antarctic Territory; Ashmore and Cartier Islands, Christmas Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Heard Island and the McDonald Islands (Indian Ocean); Coral Sea Islands Territory, Norfolk Island (Pacific Ocean).

## Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT)

### Geography

The AAT consists of all islands and territories south of latitude 60°S and between longitudes 45° and 160°E except for the French sector of Terre Adélie, which comprises the islands and territories south of 60°S latitude and between longitudes 136° and 142°E. The AAT is the single largest sector of the continent and covers much of east Antarctica.

**Time:** GMT plus 4.5–10 hrs, depending on longitude

**Area:** 5,800,000 sq km

**Topography:** The icy landscapes of Antarctica, offering sweeping distant views, are of outstanding scenic beauty. The continent is the highest landmass in the world, thanks to its high ice cover, averaging over 2,000 metres. A broad mountain ridge (the Transantarctic Mountains) stretches into the AAT; the terrain is also high in Enderby Land and around the ice-packed bay of the Amery Ice Shelf, with Mt Menzies rising to 3,355 metres. The land area is fringed by a wide belt of ice up to hundreds of kilometres wide. Around the coast, icebergs continually 'calve' (break off) the glaciers into the sea. Over 95 per cent of the continent is permanently covered in ice.

**Climate:** Antarctic, with severe wind chill increasing the harshness of the climate. On the

central plateau, temperatures drop to minus 80°C. Local ('katabatic') winds of incredible ferocity develop on the plateau and sweep towards the coast. Around the French sector of Terre Adélie, full gales blow for 200 days a year. Precipitation is surprisingly light, with annual snowfall at 60 mm of water equivalent on the central plateau and 1.5 metres on the coastal belt. Within the Antarctic Circle, there are days of complete darkness during the Antarctic winter and conversely of midnight sun during the summer.

**Vegetation:** Plant life is primitive and sparse, but lichens and mosses can survive where the harsh climate permits it.

**Wildlife:** Plankton and krill (shrimp-like creatures) abound in the rich Antarctic

waters, supporting the marine food chain. The glaciers add nutrient minerals as they melt, diluting the saltiness of the sea and enabling marine life to thrive. Various species of penguins are found: Adélie and emperor penguins are especially resilient to the cold. Female emperor penguins settle their egg on the feet of the male parent because nesting on the ice is impossible. Other birdlife includes the Antarctic petrel and the South Polar skua, which breed exclusively on the continent. Whales, porpoises and seals visit Antarctic waters; the fur seal breeds furthest south. Huskies, imported to haul sledges and latterly for companionship, are now banned as a non-indigenous species.

### Society

**Population:** There are three stations (Mawson, Davis and Casey), plus various summer bases and temporary field camps. There is a temporary population of scientists, ranging from about 70 in winter to 200 in summer.

### Economy

There is no economic activity, and mining is not permitted. All activity relating to mineral resources, other than strictly for scientific research, is also prohibited. Additionally, Australian nationals are prohibited from mining elsewhere in Antarctica. Environmental protection is a priority. Scientific activities are concerned with global climate change and with studies of the Antarctic ecosystem. These studies include land and marine biology, cosmic-ray physics, upper atmosphere physics, meteorology, earth sciences and glaciology. Regular flights between Hobart, Australia, and the territory were introduced in the summer of 2007/08, following completion in December 2007 of a new runway at the Wilkins Aerodrome, situated 75 km from Casey.

### History

Sealing vessels from a number of countries, notably Britain but also including Australia, visited the Antarctic waters during the 19th century. From the early 20th century serious exploration took off, and Douglas Mawson reached the magnetic South Pole in 1909. Various territorial claims were later made and the AAT was transferred to Australian authority in 1933 by the British government through an imperial order in council. The Australian Antarctic Territory Acceptance Act was passed in the same year, and in 1936 the Governor-General put the order into force by proclamation. Mawson Station (named after the explorer) was set up in February 1954 by the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions. Davis Station (named after Mawson's second-in-command, Captain John King Davis) was set up in 1957; Casey Station

(named after a former Governor-General of Australia, Lord Casey) in 1969. An earlier station, Wilkes, was made inoperable by snow and ice inundation, and closed.

### Administration

The territory is administered by the Australian Antarctic Division on behalf of the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. Australia is a party to the Antarctic Treaty. A Protocol on Environmental Protection was added to the Antarctic Treaty in 1991, making Antarctica a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science.

## Ashmore and Cartier Islands

The Ashmore and Cartier Islands lie on the outer edge of the Australian continental shelf in the Indian Ocean, midway between north-western Australia and Timor and some 850 km to 790 km west of Darwin. The Ashmores consist of three islands: Middle, East and West Islands.

### Geography

**Area:** Ashmore Islands: 93 hectares (0.93 sq km); Cartier Islands: 0.4 hectares (0.004 sq km).

**Topography:** The islands are small and low-lying, rising to a maximum of 2.5 metres above sea level. They are formed of coral and sand, and are surrounded by shoals and reefs.

**Vegetation:** Grass and scrub.

**Wildlife:** The Ashmore Reef islands abound in birdlife. Bêche-de-mer (sea cucumbers) are abundant; so are turtles at certain times of the year.

### Society

**Population:** There are no permanent residents.

### Economy

Indonesian fishermen are permitted to fish in some of the territory's waters. During the fishing season (March–November) Australian observers, stationed on a vessel at Ashmore Reef, monitor activities. The Jabiru and Challis oilfields lie within the adjacent area of the territory. In 1983 Ashmore Reef was made a national nature reserve. It is visited regularly by officers of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

### History

The Ashmores became a British possession in 1878; Cartier Island in 1909. The islands were put under Australian authority in July 1931, by an imperial order in council, and accepted by Australia in 1933 under the Ashmore and Cartier Islands Acceptance Act, which was

amended in 1938 to make them part of the Northern Territory. In July 1978, when the Northern Territory was given self-government, the Ashmores and Cartier came under the administration of the government of the Commonwealth of Australia.

### Administration

Administration is the responsibility of the Department of Transport and Regional Services, at Canberra.

## Christmas Island

### Geography

Christmas Island lies in the Indian Ocean, south of Java and 2,600 km north-west of Perth.

**Area:** Approx. 135 sq km

**Topography:** The island consists of a central plateau rising to 250 metres in the east and 150 metres in the west, with several high points 360 metres above sea level. Much of the coast consists of sheer cliffs that rise 10–20 metres above the sea, with a few small sandy beaches. The main anchorage is at Flying Fish Cove. The ground is porous but there is ample fresh water from springs.

**Climate:** Tropical. South-easterly winds May–December; the wet season is December–April when the north-west monsoon blows. Average rainfall is about 2,000 mm p.a., and humidity averages 80–90 per cent.

**Vegetation:** Tropical rainforest covers much of the island; some 60 per cent of forest is in the National Park. There are 16 endemic plant species.

**Wildlife:** Most of the animal species are endemic. The Abbott's booby and Christmas Island frigate bird are endangered.

**Main settlement:** Flying Fish Cove

**Transport/Communications:** There are 140 km of roads, of which 30 km are paved. A ship operates between Singapore, Perth, Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and an air service from Perth to Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands, with extra flights to allow students to come home for holidays. The international dialling code is 61.

### Society

**Population:** 2,200 (2013); population density 16 per sq km; mostly of Chinese descent (70 per cent in 2001), with European and Malay minorities. There is no indigenous population.

**Language:** English is the official language; Mandarin, Cantonese and Malay are most commonly spoken at home.

**Religion:** Buddhists 30 per cent, Muslims, Christians (2006).

**Health:** Christmas Island has a modern hospital with a fully equipped operating theatre.

**Education:** Free and compulsory from age six to 15. The Christmas Island District High School follows the Western Australia curriculum. It caters for children from kindergarten to secondary school level. After Year 10, students attend schools on the mainland.

**Media:** *The Islander* is a fortnightly newsletter published by the Shire of Christmas Island.

Radio VLU2, a community station, broadcasts in English, Malay and Mandarin. Mainland Australian radio and TV stations are received via satellite.

### Economy

Mining and exporting some 600,000 tonnes p.a. of phosphate to South-East Asia and the Australian mainland is the main and stable economic activity. The mining company is 40 per cent-owned by Christmas Islanders. It pays royalties, based on exports, to the Commonwealth of Australia, and these are used for rehabilitation of the mined areas. Environmental controls are in force, and rainforest clearing is prohibited.

The island also offers specialist diving and fishing holidays and eco-tourism.

### History

Britain annexed Christmas Island (then uninhabited) in 1888. A 99-year lease was taken out in 1891 by John Murray and George Ross, who transferred it to the Christmas Island Phosphate Company in 1897. In 1900 Christmas Island was incorporated into the Straits Settlements and became subject to the laws of Singapore. It was occupied by the Japanese army from March 1942 until August 1945. In 1947 the Straits Settlements ceased to exist, and Singapore, together with Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island, became the Colony of Singapore. From 1 January to 30 September 1958, Christmas Island was a British Crown colony. Subsequently, it became an Australian territory, administered initially by the Minister for External Territories.

Under the Migration Act of 1981, Christmas Island residents were entitled to become residents and citizens of Australia. In 1984 the benefits of Australian social security, enfranchisement, health and education were extended to them; and progressively from 1985 to 1989, they became liable for income and other taxes. A proposal to secede from Australia was rejected in an unofficial referendum held in 1994.

### Administration

Christmas Island is an Australian territory, the administration of which is the responsibility of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government at Canberra. An administrator is appointed by the Governor-General of Australia. Local government services are provided by the Shire of Christmas Island, which is responsible to a council of nine elected representatives.

## Cocos (Keeling) Islands

### Geography

The territory lies in the Indian Ocean, 2,768 km north-west of Perth. It consists of two atolls made up of 27 small coral islands. Only two of them – West and Home – are inhabited. The largest island, West Island, is about 16 km by 0.5 km in area. North Keeling Island lies 24 km north of the main lagoon.

**Area:** 14 sq km

**Topography:** The islands are flat and low-lying. The northern part of the main atoll, which surrounds a lagoon, has anchorage, but navigation is difficult.

**Climate:** Generally equable (temperatures 22–32°C), with south-east trade winds for much of the year and occasional violent storms. Rainfall is high, averaging 2,000 mm a year.

**Vegetation:** The main atoll has extensive vegetation and coconut palms.

**Wildlife:** Birdlife is abundant, with both sea birds (terns, gannets and petrels) and land birds which have reached the islands from Indonesia.

**Transport/Communications:** A ship sails from Singapore and Perth, Australia, every few weeks. The airport is on West Island and there are regular flights from Perth. The international dialling code is 61.

### Society

**Population:** 570 (2013); population density 41 per sq km; comprising mainly of people of Australian (largely on West Island) and Malayan (Home Island) descent.

**Language:** English and Cocos Malay.

**Religion:** Muslims 75 per cent (2006 census).

**Education:** Free and compulsory from age six to 15. There is one primary school from kindergarten to Year 6 and one secondary from Years 7 to 12.

**Media:** Mainland Australian TV and radio programmes are relayed to the islands.

### Economy

There is local fishing and domestic cultivation of vegetables, bananas and pawpaws, but the islands are not self-sufficient in food.

Tropical reef fish are exported, and the islands offer specialist diving and fishing holidays and eco-tourism.

### History

The islands were all uninhabited in 1609 when Captain William Keeling (East India Company) visited them. In 1826 John Clunies-Ross (joined a year later by Alexander Hare) started to set up various small settlements on the main atoll and established the copra industry, bringing in Chinese, Malay and African workers. Annexed by Britain in 1857, the islands were placed under the Governors of Ceylon in 1878; in 1886 they became part of the Straits Settlements. Later they were part of the Colony of Singapore. In 1955 they were transferred to Australian sovereignty; in April 1984 the inhabitants voted by referendum (observed by UN observers) for integration with Australia, and became Australian citizens. In 1978 the government bought the greater part of the land owned by the Clunies-Ross family under a grant in perpetuity made in 1886; the rest of the family's property, which was on Home Island, was bought in 1993.

### Administration

The territory is managed by an administrator (appointed by Australia's Governor-General), who is responsible to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. The Cocos (Keeling) Islands Shire Council is responsible for local government. The territory is part of the Northern Territory electoral district; like all Australian citizens, the residents vote in parliamentary elections.

## Coral Sea Islands Territory (CSIT)

The CSIT lies east of Queensland. It consists of all the islands between the Great Barrier Reef and longitude 156°E, between latitudes 12° and 24°S.

### Geography

**Land and sea area:** About 780,000 sq km.

**Topography:** The islands are small, formed mostly of coral and sand. There is no permanent supply of fresh water on any of them.

**Climate:** Tropical; occasional cyclones.

**Vegetation:** Grass and shrubs grow on some of the islands.

**Wildlife:** Lihou Reef and Coringa-Herald are national nature reserves for the protection of wildlife. *Dermochelys coriacea*, the world's largest and most endangered species of sea-turtle, nests in the territory, as well as five other species of sea-turtle. There are more



than 24 species of bird, many of which are protected under agreements with Japan and China. Herbaria and museums in Australia contain many specimens of CSIT flora and fauna.

### Society

Uninhabited, except for a meteorological station with a small staff on Willis Island.

### Economy

There is no economic activity. There are automatic weather stations on Cato Island, Flinders Reef, Frederick Reef, Holmes Reef, Lihou Reef, Creal Reef, Marion Reef and Gannet Cay, relaying data to the mainland. Navigational aids are located on many of the islands and reefs.

### History

Until 1921, when the meteorological station was set up on Willis Island, the CSIT was totally uninhabited. Navigation in the territory is extremely difficult, and there were frequent shipwrecks during the 19th century. Many of the islands and reefs are named after ships wrecked on them. Since 1859, expeditions of botanists and zoologists have visited the territory.

### Administration

Under the Coral Sea Islands Act of 1969, the Coral Sea Islands are an Australian territory administered by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. The Governor-General of Australia can make ordinances relating to peace, order and the good government of the territory.

## Heard Island and the McDonald Islands

Heard Island (about 43 km by 20 km) is the biggest of a group of islands in the South Indian Ocean about 4,100 km south-west of Fremantle. The McDonald Islands are 43 km west of Heard Island.

### Geography

**Topography:** Heard Island is dominated by Big Ben, the only active volcano on Australian territory (2,745 metres). The McDonald Islands are small, steep and rocky.

**Climate:** Sub-Antarctic.

**Vegetation:** Heard Island is regarded as one of the last Antarctic habitats remaining free of introduced organisms, and is of considerable scientific interest. Vegetation is sparse, but cushion plants, tussock grass, mosses and lichens can survive.

**Wildlife:** Visited by elephant seals, leopard seals and penguins. Petrels, albatrosses and skuas breed on Heard Island.

### Society

No permanent inhabitants. Occasional visits by scientists for research.

### Economy

There is no economic activity. Zoological and geological expeditions are made to Heard Island from time to time. In 1985, research was conducted into the coastal zone's maritime resources and there have been a small number of expeditions since then. In 1991, international research on global warming was undertaken at Heard Island, which has direct paths to the world's five principal oceans.

### History

Heard Island was first sighted in 1833 and named in 1855 after an American captain. After 1855 the island's elephant seals and penguins were exploited for their oil. The territory was transferred by the UK to Australian control in 1947. Between 1947 and 1955, a research station was maintained on Heard Island, to conduct various scientific and meteorological investigations. The station was closed after 1954, when Mawson station was established on the Antarctic mainland.

The McDonald Islands were first visited in 1971 by an Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition. In December 1997 the territory was inscribed on the World Heritage List.

### Administration

The islands are administered by the Australian Antarctic Division on behalf of the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. The Environment Protection and Management Ordinance (January 1988) set up a framework for sustained conservation. A management plan under the ordinance came into force in 1996.

## Norfolk Island

### Geography

Norfolk Island lies in the South Pacific, about 1,676 km east of Sydney. The territory includes the uninhabited islands of Phillip and Nepean (7 km and 1 km south of the main island).

**Area:** 34.5 sq km

**Topography:** Norfolk Island is steep and rocky, with sheer cliffs rising out of the sea; access is impossible, except at Kingston on the south side and at Cascade in the north.

**Climate:** Subtropical, with sea-breezes; equable. Average rainfall: 1,350 mm a year.

**Vegetation:** Most of the island has been cleared for crops or pasture, but a national park was established in 1985–86 to protect the remaining native forest. Phillip Island

forms part of the national park. The Norfolk Island pine remains a notable feature. There is a wide variety of native and introduced plants.

**Wildlife:** There is abundant birdlife, geckos, bats and turtles. The Norfolk green parrot, guavabird and boobook are unique to the territory.

**Main town:** Kingston

**Transport/Communications:** There is about 80 km of road, 53 km sealed. There are ship services from Australia and New Zealand every few weeks, and regular air services from Brisbane and Sydney in Australia and Auckland, New Zealand. The international dialling code is 672.

### Society

**Population:** 1,750 (2013); population density 51 per sq km; consists of islanders (that is, Pitcairn/Bounty descendants) and mainlanders (originally from Australia, New Zealand and the UK). The right of residence on Norfolk Island is strictly controlled.

**Language:** English and Norfolk, a Creole which – like Pitkern (the language of the Pitcairn Islanders) – is based on 18th century English and Tahitian.

**Religion:** Mainly Christians (Anglicans 32 per cent, 2006 census).

**Education:** Free and compulsory between age six and 15. There is a school – Norfolk Island Central School – under the authority of the New South Wales Education Department, taking pupils from kindergarten to Higher School Certificate level (Year 12). In 1997 there were 318 pupils. Some bursaries are available, and there are some scholarships for vocational training outside the island. Greenwich University, a private distance-learning enterprise, opened in Norfolk Island in 1999.

**Media:** There are two weeklies: the independent *Norfolk Islander* and the official *Norfolk Island Government Gazette*.

The administration runs a local radio service (VL2NI – Norfolk Island Radio) and the television service is privately owned (TVN). Television programmes are relayed via the AUSSAT satellite.

### Economy

Norfolk Island is a self-governing territory and exercises control over most of its economic activities and developments. The main economic activity is tourism. The territory offers the attractions of remoteness, conservation sites and the poignant remains of the old penal settlement. There are some 20,000 visitors each year, having fallen from some 40,000 p.a. before the world economic

downturn of 2008–09. External revenue is also gained through philatelic sales. No income tax is payable on income earned within the island.

There is agriculture for domestic consumption. The soil is fertile and there is also some commercial cultivation of plants and flowers. A programme to increase planting of Norfolk Island pine and to introduce eucalyptus trees has been established. Seed and seedlings of the Norfolk Island pine are exported. There is also fishing for local consumption. Fish are plentiful, but so far efforts to establish a commercial industry have been hampered by the lack of a sheltered harbour. There is the potential for exploitable offshore hydrocarbon deposits.

### History

The island was uninhabited in 1774, when Captain James Cook visited it and was impressed by the commercial potential of the native pines for ship's masts. In the periods 1788 to 1814, and 1825 to 1855, the island was a penal settlement of notable severity. In 1855 the penal settlement was closed and the following year 194 people living on Pitcairn Island, which had become overpopulated, accepted an invitation from Queen Victoria to transfer to Norfolk Island. However, two small parties returned to Pitcairn. These Pitcairn Islanders were descended from the mutineers from *The Bounty* who had sailed from Tahiti to Pitcairn Island in 1790 together with their Tahitian wives.

### Administration

Initially, Norfolk Island was a separate settlement but became a dependency of New South Wales in 1897 and was finally transferred to Australian administration in 1913.

There is an administrator, appointed by the Governor-General of Australia and responsible to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. A Legislative Assembly with nine members elected for three years, established in 1979, has internal self-governing powers. An executive council is made up of members of the assembly who have ministerial-type responsibility. Proposed laws passed by the assembly go to the administrator for consent (or otherwise).



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