

Australia's Uranium

(updated February 2

- **Uranium is part of Australia's mining heritage, though only three mines are currently operating. More are planned.**
- **Australia's uranium reserves are the world's largest, with 23% of the total. Production and exports averaged 9600 tonnes of uranium oxide (8140 tU) per year since 2004.**
- **In 2009 Australia exported over 9700 tonnes of uranium oxide concentrate with a value of over A\$ 1.1 billion. It is the world's third-ranking producer, behind Kazakhstan and Canada.**
- **Australia uses no nuclear power, but with carbon constraints on electricity generation likely, it remains a strong possibility.**

In the 1930s ores were mined at Radium Hill and Mount Painter in SA to recover radium for medical purposes. As a result a few hundred kilograms of uranium were also produced.

Uranium ores as such were mined and treated in Australia from the 1950s until 1971. [Radium Hill](#), SA, [Rum Jungle](#), NT, and [Mary Kathleen](#), Queensland, were the largest producers of uranium (as yellowcake). Production ceased either when ore reserves were exhausted or contracts were filled. Sales were to supply material primarily intended for USA and UK weapons programs at that time. However, much of it was used for electricity production.

The development of civil nuclear power stimulated a second wave of exploration activity in the late 1960s. A total of some 60 uranium deposits were identified from the 1950s through to the late 1970s, many by big companies with big budgets. (Since then only two significant new ones have been found: Kintyre and Beverley Four Mile. The minor exploration boom 2002-07 was driven by small companies focused on proving up known deposits.)

Mary Kathleen began recommissioning its mine and mill in 1974. Other developments were deferred pending the findings of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry, and its decision in the light of these. Mary Kathleen's second production phase was 1976 to the end of 1982.

The Commonwealth Government announced in 1977 that new uranium mining was to proceed, commencing with the Ranger project in the Northern Territory. This mine opened in 1981.

In 1979, Queensland Mines opened [Nabarlek](#) in the same region of Northern Territory. The orebody was mined out in one dry season and the ore stockpiled for treatment from 1980. The mine site is now rehabilitated.

A brief history of Australian uranium mining is appended.