

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF IRELAND

By Harold R. Newman

Ireland remained a major European Union producer of zinc and an important producer of alumina, lead, and peat in 1999. Although the range of minerals exploited in the country has been limited, exploration activity for new mineral resources continued to increase, mainly emphasizing gold, lead, and zinc. The country's mineral processing industry was small, as was the demand and consumption of mineral products.

Interest in gold, lead, and zinc exploration has provided the impetus for the revitalization of the exploration sector within the past few years. The upswing in activity in the lead and zinc sector has resulted in the development of new mines and the investigation of several other potential projects. Ireland's geology includes several lithological units and tectonic features that are favorable for the occurrence of several types of mineral resources from base metals to industrial minerals.

Glencore International AG of Switzerland bought Alcan Aluminium Ltd.'s Aughinish alumina refinery in Limerick County in early 1999, but the terms of the purchase remained confidential. Ireland's base metals production was centered mainly on Outokumpu Oyj's Tara zinc-lead mine and Arcon

International Resources Plc.'s Galmoy zinc-lead mine. Industrial mineral production, which included barite and gypsum, remained relatively constant. Several metals and industrial minerals projects were awaiting the granting of planning permission and mining leases before moving into development and production.

Natural gas production continued off the southern coast of Ireland near Cork. Reserves were not disclosed, and the production from the fields was being carefully managed to extend the life of the fields (table 1).

The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) was responsible for the development of mineral information and for technical management of the state mineral licensing and leasing system. The GSI also provided technical assistance to the exploration and mining industry. The structure of the mineral industry is provided in table 2.

For more extensive coverage of the mineral industry of Ireland, see the 1996 Minerals Yearbook, volume III, Mineral Industries of Europe and Central Eurasia.

TABLE 1
IRELAND: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES 1/

(Thousand metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
METALS					
Alumina	1,186	1,234	1,273	1,200	1,200 e/
Iron and steel, crude steel	309	340	337	358	314
Lead:					
Mine output, Pb content	69,067	45,344	45,149	36,528 r/	43,831
Metal, refined, secondary e/	11,000	10,400	12,000 r/	12,000 r/	12,996 2/
Silver, mine output, Ag content	13,700	14,706	13,284	10,800 r/	15,300
Zinc, mine output, Zn content	184,100	164,168	194,796	182,000	226,100
INDUSTRIAL MINERALS 3/					
Cement, hydraulic	1,730 r/	1,933 r/	2,100 r/ e/	2,400 r/ e/	2,000 e/
Gypsum	406	422	477	450	450 e/
Lime e/	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
Nitrogen, N content of ammonia	408	377	465	458	401
Sand and gravel e/ 4/	10,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000
Stone and other quarry products: e/					
Limestone	1	1	1	1	1
Other 5/	30,000	40,000	35,000	36,000	35,000
MINERAL FUELS AND RELATED MATERIALS					
Gas, natural, marketed	2,826	2,737	2,417	2,400	2,500 e/
Peat:					
For horticultural use e/	300	300	300	300	300
For fuel use:					
Sod peat e/ 6/	1,142 2/	1,702 2/	1,500	1,500	1,600
Milled peat 7/	4,788 r/	4,876	2,851	3,000 e/	4,000 e/
Total	5,930	6,578	4,351	4,500	5,600 e/
Peat briquets e/	365	285	253	300	300
Petroleum refinery products: e/ 8/					
Liquefied petroleum gas	350	350	350	498 r/ 2/	522 2/
Naphtha	350	350	350	799 r/ 2/	1,037 2/
Gasoline, motor	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,868 r/ 2/	3,987 2/
Distillate fuel oil	5,000	5,000	5,000	7,443 r/ 2/	8,385 2/
Residual fuel oil	5,500	5,000	5,000	6,693 r/ 2/	7,206 2/
Refinery fuel and losses	400	400	400	147 r/ 2/	210 2/
Total	14,600	14,100	14,100	19,448 r/ 2/	21,347 2/

e/ Estimated. r/ Revised.

1/ Table includes data available through September 2000.

2/ Reported figure.

3/ Ireland also produces significant quantities of synthetic diamond and is the major supplier to the United States. Output, however, is not quantitatively reported, and general information is inadequate to make reliable estimates of output levels.

4/ Excludes output by local authorities and road contractors.

5/ Includes clays for cement production, fire clay, granite, marble, rock sand, silica rock, and slate.

6/ Includes production by farmers and by Bord Na Mona (Government Peat Board).

7/ Includes milled peat used for briquet production.

8/ From imported crude oil.

TABLE 2
IRELAND: STRUCTURE OF THE MINERAL INDUSTRY IN 1999

(Thousand metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	Major operating companies and major equity owners	Location of main facility	Annual capacity
Alumina	Glencore International AG	Aughinish Island, County Limerick	1,000
Barite	Magobar Ireland Ltd.	Silvermines, County Tipperary	240
Cement	Irish Cement Ltd.	Plants in Limerick and Platin	2,000
Lead-zinc	Arcon International Resources plc	Galmoy Mine, County Kilkenny	135
Do.	Outokumpu Oyj	Tara Mine, Navan, County Meath	215
Natural gas	Marathon Oil Co.	Kinsale Head Field, Celtic Sea	75,000
Peat	Bord Na Mona (Government Peat Board)	Production mainly in midlands	4,200
Petroleum, refined	Irish Refining Co.	Whitegate, near Cork	56,000
Steel	Irish Ispat (Ispat International Group)	Haulbowline, near Cork	500