

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

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From 1897 until mining ceased in 1987, guano-based phosphate rock was the mainstay of the economy of the Territory of Christmas Island, an island territory of Australia in the Indian Ocean. The mining operation, owned by the Phosphate Mining Co. of Christmas Island, a wholly Australian Government-owned firm headquartered in Perth, was closed primarily because of the exhaustion of high-grade phosphate reserves. The area where high-grade phosphate reserves remain has been classified as a national park to preserve the few remaining tall trees in the rain forest and, therefore, the natural habitat for the rare bird species on the island. Resources of lower-grade phosphate rock containing 74% to 76% bone phosphate of lime are minable in less sensitive parts of the island.

The Australian Government has been planning to reopen the mine since 1991, but no mining has occurred since December 1987. Phosphate rock has been shipped sporadically from stocks since 1990.

There is one permanent-surface airport on the island and one shipping port, Flying Fish Cove. Christmas Island had an electric power generating capacity of 11 megawatts and produced power at the approximate level of 17,800 kilowatt hours per capita.²

¹Text prepared July 1995.

²U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, DC: The World Factbook 1994, p. 86.