The Western Australian Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (DMIRS) regulates the mining, oil and gas industries in WA.

DMIRS regulates access to land for resource exploration and production and enforces compliance with environmental, health and safety standards in the resources industry, including dangerous goods (transport and storage of fuel, explosives and fireworks, etc.) in the community.

The department’s Geological Survey of Western Australia (GSWA) gathers new geological and resource information across the State to gain greater geological knowledge about areas such as the Kimberley. GSWA field scientists interpret the geology and produce maps and information for use by industry and the community including special geotourism products for tourists and others with an interest in geology and landscape development.

Resource companies produce minerals, petroleum and construction materials (rock, gravel, and sand) which are used in products that the community needs, such as metals, energy and fuel, electronics equipment (screens, batteries, motors), healthcare (artificial joints, sunscreen), construction (metals, paint, rock, sand), agricultural goods (fertiliser, gypsum) and a host of personal items like cosmetics and ceramics.

In 2017–18:

- Despite changing commodity prices, the value of WA’s mineral and petroleum sales was $115 billion, or 56 per cent of Australia’s total resource sales. WA’s minerals and energy exports make up 85 per cent of all WA merchandise exports.
- 77 per cent of this production value was from minerals and 23 per cent from oil and gas.
- Iron ore accounted for 70 per cent of mineral sales.
- Mineral and petroleum resources are owned by the community and royalties are the “purchase price” the State Government charges companies for the resources they extract. In 2017-18, $5.8 billion was collected in royalties for WA.
- Mining and petroleum companies directly employ 112,000 people in WA and up to three times this number are employed in service companies that support resource companies.
- Mineral leases and licences cover 17 per cent of the State.
- WA produces more than 50 different minerals, and has 127 ‘Principal Mining Projects’ (defined as producing more than $5 million in production value per year).
- There are 7 operating oil and gas fields both onshore and offshore WA, with a considerable number more offshore WA in Commonwealth waters.
VALUE OF RESOURCE PRODUCTION BY
SHIRE IN THE KIMBERLEY IN 2017–18 WAS
$364 MILLION (The Pilbara was $62 billion):

- Wyndham-East Kimberley: $252 million
- Halls Creek: $85 million
- Derby-West Kimberley: $22 million
- Broome: $5 million

VALUE OF RESOURCE PRODUCTION
BY COMMODITY IN THE
KIMBERLEY IN 2017–18:

- Diamonds and gem and semi-precious stones: $250 million
- Gold and silver: $85 million
- Crude oil and sandstone: $22 million
- Construction materials: $7 million

KIMBERLEY RESOURCE PROJECTS

EXISTING PROJECTS:

- **Ungani oilfield (halfway between Broome and Derby, south east of the Great Northern Highway):**
  - Operated by Buru Energy. Commercial oil production started in July 2015 and is currently being produced and transported out of Wyndham Port.

- **Koolan Island, about 130km north of Derby in Yampi Sound:**
  - Mining of high-grade iron ore was undertaken by BHP from the mid 1960s and more recently by other companies. Work is currently being undertaken to recommence operations, which is anticipated to be in the first half of 2019.

- **Cockatoo Island, about 130km north of Derby in Yampi Sound:**
  - Cockatoo Island produced high-grade iron ore for BHP in the early 1950s and more recently by other companies. It is currently under care and maintenance.

- **Nicholson’s Find project, on Lamboo Station, about 40km south west of Halls Creek:**
  - Operated by Halls Creek Mining Pty Ltd, Nicholson’s Find produces gold. Workers commute daily from Halls Creek.

- **Savannah project, about 110km north of Halls Creek on the Great Northern Highway:**
  - A nickel/copper/cobalt-producing mine operated by Panoramic Resources Ltd, with product trucked to Wyndham Port.

- **Argyle Diamond Mine, south west of Lake Argyle, and about 120km south west of Kununurra:**
  - Operated by Rio Tinto, the mine has been operating since 1983 and produces mainly industrial diamonds but also a small percentage of high quality gem diamonds that include the well-known “Argyle pink” diamond.

- **Ridges Mine, just off the Great Northern Highway, and about 110km south west of Kununurra:**
  - Operated by Kimberley Metals Group, Ridges produced iron ore, which was trucked to Wyndham Port and loaded by barge onto ships. The Ridges mine is currently under care and maintenance.

NEW PROJECTS:

- **Thunderbird mineral sands project (halfway between Broome and Derby, north west of the Great Northern Highway):**
  - Sheffield Resources has completed preliminary construction works and minesite construction has commenced. First production is planned for the second half of 2020 with a mine life of more than 40 years;
  - Mineral sands are used for paints and plastics, ceramics, sunscreen, toothpaste, artificial joints and welding rods.

- **Brown’s Range project, about 170km south east of Halls Creek:**
  - Being developed by Northern Minerals, the initial pilot plant is operational and producing, which will allow assessment of the feasibility of a larger full-scale development. The project aims to produce the heavy rare earth dysprosium, which is used in hybrid and electric vehicles, as well as other renewable energy and high-end technology applications.

Exploration is an essential part of the resource industry and in 2017–18, 61 per cent (worth $1.2 billion) of Australia’s total mineral exploration was undertaken in Western Australia. Travellers around the State may see evidence of exploration, such as fresh sample bags or capped drill holes. DMIRS regulates the activities of resource explorers, so if you see something on your travels that doesn’t look right, get in contact with the department and we will investigate.

Prospecting for gold can be a great pastime and for a one-off fee of $25 you can get a Miner’s Right. Guidelines about how to conduct prospecting can be obtained from the department’s website.

However, old mine workings, while part of the heritage of Western Australia, can be dangerous. In particular, people who enter abandoned mines may expose themselves to serious injury or death. Be safe and stay well away from old mine sites. Also, be sure to always take a Personal Locator Beacon when prospecting.