

NSW: a world-class exploration jurisdiction

NSW is a politically stable and supportive mineral and coal exploration jurisdiction with immense resource potential and a robust regulatory environment. NSW has exceptional gold and copper deposits and substantial, high-quality coal resources, among many other commodities. NSW also has a high-quality geoscientific database supporting its considerable untapped resource potential in conventional metals and emerging critical and technology minerals.

Quality pre-competitive geoscientific data

The NSW geoscientific database is designed to support explorers in generating exploration targets across the state. Much of this pre-competitive geoscientific data is freely available and accessible online through the interactive mapping application [MinView](#). This includes:

- geological mapping
- mineral systems studies
- geophysical surveys and interpretations
- basin studies
- energy resource assessment
- geochronology
- palaeostratigraphy
- database development and 3D mapping.

We have also developed the [NSW Statewide Seamless Geology map](#), one of the most complex geodata sets ever compiled and released worldwide and a [DiGS publication archive](#) that is fully searchable, with free download of more than 140,000 maps, publications and reports.

The NSW Government is committed to the ongoing development of its geoscientific database and is currently working to deliver the following priority projects:

- The [NSW Seamless Geology Project](#) - the first of its kind in Australia, which provides a state-wide compilation of the best available mapping data in an internally consistent format. This is delivering a single, dynamic state-wide geological model that can be interrogated at the best resolution available, improving access to the wealth of historical geoscientific data for NSW.
- A 'critical minerals' map layer in [MinView](#), offering unprecedented access to data on prospective resources such as cobalt, scandium and rare earths.
- An annual report release policy to facilitate the release of exploration data obtained from exploration licence holders into the public domain.
- The Geological Survey of New South Wales' participation in the MinEx Cooperative Research Centre's [National Drilling Initiative](#) program, committing \$16 million to the program over 10 years to undertake [geological mapping](#), [airborne electromagnetic](#) and other geophysical surveys, [hydrogeochemistry](#), [biogeochemistry](#), and drilling in the Central West and Far West of the state.
- Rare Earth Resource Potential ARC Linkage Project, examining the potential for new styles of rare earth element (REE) mineralisation, with a focus on alkaline volcanism in the eastern half of NSW and potential REE-phosphate bearing systems in the Curnamona Province.

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- Geological mapping, including [generation of 3D models](#) of lithological and structural aspects of basin and orogenic provinces, at scales ranging from broad to site specific.

A supportive, stable investment environment

In addition to providing high-quality geoscientific data, the NSW Government is committed to reducing red tape and streamlining elements of its regulatory framework to help unlock the state's untapped resource potential. These initiatives will reduce friction, improve exploration regulation and encourage and facilitate the next round of major resource discoveries across the state.

NSW: open for business, open for explorers

NSW is open for business for mineral and coal exploration investment. Exploration activity is fundamental to realising the full economic benefit of our state's resources and assisting the government in achieving its economic vision and priorities. The NSW Government aspires to be the number one investment destination for exploration and mining in Australia. It is a NSW Government priority to continue to encourage and facilitate the ongoing development of the state's resources for the public benefit.

Supporting the state's strategic economic priorities

The NSW Government has clearly set out its plan to become the number one investment destination for exploration and mining in the [2018 NSW Minerals Strategy](#). The Government has also clearly signalled its position on coal resource development as a long-term global transition toward low carbon energy takes place. The [2020 Strategic Statement on the Future of Coal Mining and Exploration](#) identified areas where new coal exploration cannot occur, as well as committing to streamlining the process for allocating exploration licences in areas adjacent to current mines.

The NSW Government's strategic priorities extend to the development of an integrated local critical minerals supply chain. This will leverage the state's resource potential and offer greater supply chain diversity and security to local and global customers. Developing this industrial capability presents an opportunity to capitalise on the forecast growth in demand for minerals used in advanced manufacturing (such as electric vehicles, batteries and mobile phones), renewable energy, defence applications. NSW is well placed to meet this demand and holds significant resource potential, particularly for copper, zirconium, rare earths, cobalt and scandium, with further unexplored potential. Mineral exploration is crucial to realising this strategic priority.

Mineral exploration is also critical to supporting the refreshed [20 Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW](#). The Economic Vision highlights the importance of mining and exploration to the regional and state economy and identifies renewable energy and advanced manufacturing as emerging industries in NSW.

We encourage exploration activity in greenfields areas that will test new geological ideas and models and exploration in regions covered by significant cover of ground. As little as five per cent of all drilling for minerals in NSW has been deeper than 150 metres and almost all exploration has focused on areas where the rocks hosting metal deposits are near the surface. This means as much as 80 per cent of the state's rugged landscape remains unexplored.

The NSW Government is also committed to giving assistance to explorers. The [New Frontiers Cooperative Drilling Program](#) is designed to promote investment in NSW by providing grants to applicants for exploration drilling programs for certain minerals that demonstrate strong prospectivity, sound financial planning and a proven technical base.

Facilitating effective and sustainable mineral and coal exploration in NSW

NSW is open for business for explorers that are committed to active and responsible exploration activity. The resources project lifecycle starts with exploration and junior and mid-tier companies are the engine room of the sector. Exploration is an iterative and dynamic process, as are the variables that influence resource development such as commodity prices, investment capital flows and technologies.

The NSW Government's approach to mineral and coal exploration directly supports the objects of the state's mining legislation by facilitating the discovery and development of the state's mineral and coal resources in a timely and effective manner. It also provides confidence to the community and stakeholders, landholders and the government in the way in which resources are discovered and developed occurs across the state, and that the rights of landowners and the interests of the community will be protected.

The general rule for exploration for minerals is 'first in time'. Explorers utilise the NSW geoscientific database and their own information to generate exploration targets across the state and apply for an exploration licence for land when it becomes available for exploration.

Exploration for [group 1 minerals](#) in five declared [Mineral Allocation Areas](#) – Dubbo, Mundi, Forbes, North Cobar and South Cobar - is only allowed with the consent of the Minister. The MAAs encompass covered (or partially covered) extensions to known mineralised terranes. The areas have seen limited historical exploration activity.

The [Strategic Release Framework for Coal and Petroleum Exploration](#) has been developed by the NSW Government to deliver greater transparency and control over the release of exploration areas and the granting of prospecting titles for coal and petroleum resources. The framework recognises there are competing uses for land and seeks to balance these interests. Areas will be released for exploration only after environmental, social and economic factors have been considered and the community has had an opportunity to identify its values and issues. This will facilitate the safe and sustainable development of resources under a process that balances the needs of the community, the economy and the environment.

Driving high performance and providing greater certainty for landholders

While only a small number of exploration areas progress to mining operations, the Government recognises that exploration activity can generate uncertainty for landholders and communities. Supporting the exploration mission while reducing community and landholder uncertainty requires confidence in the regulatory framework and government policies and procedures that facilitate responsible exploration activity. This includes ensuring that exploration licence holders are appropriately skilled and resourced and demonstrate a genuine intent to discover and develop the states resources. It also requires explorers to progressively relinquish non-prospective areas to provide certainty as to where resource projects may progress to mines in the future.

The NSW Government does this via a framework of exploration-focused policies and procedures. This includes an outcomes-based approach to exploration work programs and performance management, which underpins the Government's [Mineral prospecting minimum standards](#), *Policy on the renewal of mineral and coal exploration licences*, and *Policy on the granting and renewal of assessment leases*.

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Explorers are also held to high standards of exploration activity including fulfilling community consultation requirements, exploring in an environmentally responsible and safe manner, managing produced water management and rehabilitating disturbed ground.

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