

Knowledge box 1

Geography Plus: Australia Here We Come!

These knowledge boxes provide background information for teachers to help develop knowledge for teaching **Australia Here We Come!**



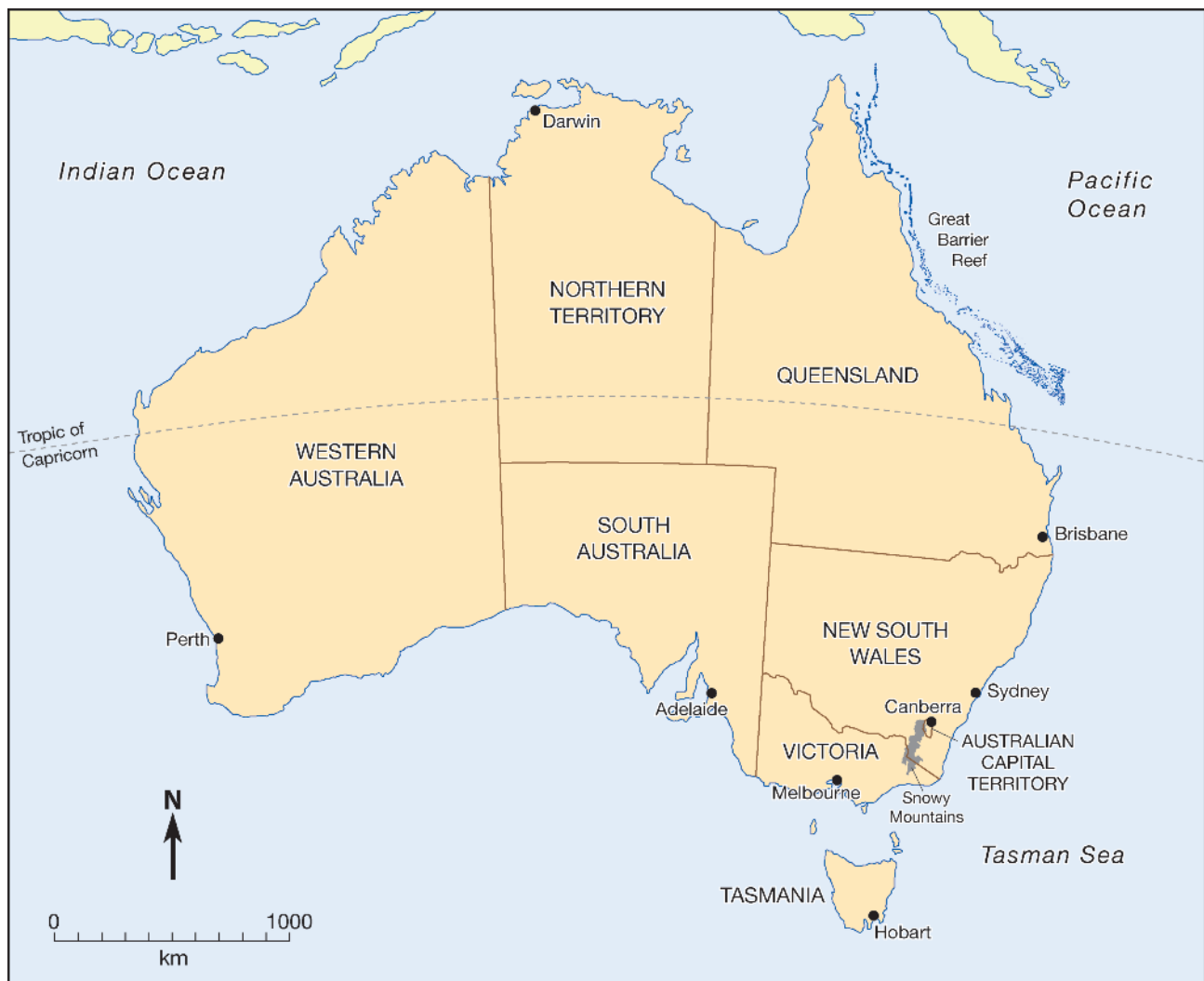
The geography of Australia

Australia's landmass is 7,617,930 square kilometres. It is the world's sixth-largest country. As it comprises a large land mass Australia can be considered a continent in its own right, but it is generally grouped with those islands of the Pacific Ocean which are not part of Asia, and referred to as Oceania.

The Tropic of Capricorn runs through the north of Australia. Its position in the southern hemisphere means that its seasons are opposite to those in the UK. The school summer holidays are from

Christmas to the end of January and Christmas dinner is often a barbecue! Its longitude means that it is 'ahead' of the UK in time: this time difference can be 11 hours. Sydney's latitude is 34° South and its longitude is 151° East.

Australia has six states: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. It has two major mainland territories: the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Each state has its own capital city and parliament. The nation's capital city is Canberra, in the ACT.



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The people



Photo: © electricnerve

The population of Australia is approximately 22.6 million and its population density, 2.8 inhabitants per square kilometre, is among the lowest in the world. Approximately 60% of the population is concentrated in and around the mainland state capitals of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. Very few people live in the desert outback which covers large areas of the country.

For at least 40,000 years before European settlement Australia was inhabited by indigenous Australians. The British founded the first European settlement in 1788 and named it Sydney. The indigenous population, estimated at 350,000 at the time of European settlement, declined steeply over the next 150 years, mainly due to infectious diseases. Many of the first settlers were convicts, but free settlers started to arrive in increasing numbers, particularly after the discovery of gold in the mid-19th century.

In 1907 Australia became a Dominion of the British Empire, and today it is part of the Commonwealth. It is a constitutional monarchy: the head of state is Queen Elizabeth II, represented in Australia by the Governor-General. The states and territories send representatives to the Australian Parliament in Canberra, which is responsible for taxation, defence, foreign affairs and post and telecommunications; individual states, and the larger territories, retain power over police, hospitals, education and public transport within their borders. The Australian flag is made up of the

Union Flag, the Commonwealth Star and the Southern Cross constellation. The distinct pattern of the Southern Cross is easily visible in the night sky in the southern hemisphere.

Today, just over 90% of the population is of European descent, and less than 3% is descended from the indigenous, or aboriginal, population. Two out of every seven Australians were born overseas. To increase the population of Australia after the Second World War, adult migrants from the UK were offered passage to Australia for only £10; their children travelled free. These migrants became known as the 'Ten Pound Poms'. The scheme ended in 1972 and today there are strict immigration quotas: most migrants need to be skilled workers but there are also categories for family members and refugees.



Photo: © dicktay2000

The economy

Australia is the world's thirteenth largest economy. Before the 1970s Australia's economy was dominated by trade with the European and North American markets, but since then the emphasis has focused on trade within the Asia Pacific region. This has turned Australia into one of the fastest growing advanced economies in the world. Australia's largest export markets are Japan, China, the US, South Korea and New Zealand. The mining industry is very important; Australia has the world's largest resources of recoverable brown coal, lead, zircon, nickel, tantalum, uranium and zinc, and ranks second in the world for bauxite, copper, gold and silver. Iron ore is another

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Photo: Wendy North

Photo: Ruth Totterdell



extremely valuable raw material, with high demand from China. Australia is the world's fourth largest exporter of wine.

The environment

Photo: © Rennett Stowe



Australia is the flattest continent, with the oldest and least fertile soils; by far the largest proportion of land is made up of desert or semi-arid land commonly known as the outback. It is also the



Photo: Rachel Finnigan

driest inhabited continent; only in the south-east and south-west is the climate temperate.

Australia is highly biodiverse. The Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest coral reef, lies a short distance off the north-east coast and extends for over 2000 kilometres. Australian forests are mostly made up of evergreen species, particularly eucalyptus trees in the less arid regions and wattles in drier areas. About 85% of flowering plants, 84% of mammals, more than 45% of birds, and 89% of in-shore fish are endemic (i.e. they are only found in Australia). This is because of the continent's great age, extremely variable weather patterns, and long-term geographic isolation. 70% of all marsupials (mammals that give birth to undeveloped young, which then develop fully in a pouch) are found in Australia, including the famous kangaroo, koala and wombat. Australia is also home to many dangerous animals, including some of the most venomous snakes in the world.

Photo: Wendy North



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