

Christmas Island

The Territory of Christmas Island

Christmas Island is located in the Indian Ocean 2623 kilometres north-west of Perth. It is 19 kilometres long and 14 kilometres wide and has an area of 135,000 hectares.

The island became an Australian Territory on 1 October 1958 with the proclamation of the *Christmas Island Act 1958–59*. Prior to this it had been administered as a British possession by the Colony of Singapore, and had, from the middle of nineteenth century, been administered by British Governors in Ceylon or Singapore under the Straits Settlements.

The first European settlement on the island was established at Flying Fish Cove in 1888 by George Clunies-Ross, who together with Sir John Murray, a British naturalist, was granted the first land lease. Murray had analysed specimens of rock and soil taken from the island and found them to be composed of nearly pure phosphate of lime. Phosphate mining on the island commenced in 1897 with the formation of the Christmas Island Phosphate Co. Ltd.

From March 1942 until the end of World War II in 1945, Japanese forces occupied the island. In 1948 the Australian and New Zealand governments and the British Phosphate Commissioners who carried out mining operations on behalf of both governments acquired the Christmas Island Phosphate Company's interests. The Australian Phosphate Corporation, a government company, replaced the previous operators in 1981. This arrangement continued until December 1987 when the Corporation ceased operating and the mining operation was taken over by a company owned by the Union of Christmas Island Workers.

From 1958 Australian administration of the territory was the responsibility of an Official Representative of the Australian Government. This arrangement was altered in 1968 with the appointment of an Administrator reporting to the Minister for Territories.

In 1980 a national park of some 1600 hectares composed mainly of rainforest was established. The park is managed by the Biodiversity Group.

Records relating to Christmas Island held in Perth

The National Archives office in Perth holds a range of records about the administration of the island, especially for the period after 1958. Selected series are listed in the table below.

Records are also held of other government agencies with roles in providing services to or on Christmas Island, including the Shire of Christmas Island, Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Construction Services, Department of Employment, Education and Training and the Civil Aviation Authority.

Administration of Christmas Island

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Christmas Island harbour master diaries	1950–58	K1088
Correspondence files with 'DOXI' prefix	1945–57	N1
Correspondence files with 'ACI' prefix	1958–59	N2
Correspondence files, Christmas Island Administration	1958–ongoing	N7
Correspondence files, Christmas Island Philatelic Bureau	1967–90	N16
Artwork for Christmas Island postage stamp issues	1969–93	N18
Correspondence files, Christmas Island Philatelic Bureau	1971–92	N19

Phosphate mining

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Photograph albums of mining activities on Christmas Island*	1905–69	K733
Photograph albums of mining activities on Christmas, Nauru and Ocean Islands	1951–72	PT2069/11

* Some fragile photographic material in series K733 is located in our Sydney office. Further information can be obtained from our [National Reference Service](#).

Records held in other offices

Records about Christmas Island, including records of the British Phosphate Commissioners, are also held by the National Archives in Canberra and Melbourne. Samples of these records are listed below.

Canberra – Prime Minister's Department (CA 12)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Copies of general correspondence re British Phosphate Commission	1924–26	CP368/1
Papers for Board meetings of British Phosphate Commission	1926–26	CP368/4

Canberra – Department of Territories [I] (CA 60)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Correspondence files</u>	1928–1956	A518

Melbourne – Christmas Island Phosphate Company (CA 6799)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Index of plans for Christmas Island</u>	1903–46	R209
<u>Records of Christmas Island Phosphate Commission</u>	1922–36	MP1174/1