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Australia's Position In Uranium

The earth's biggest dogs in the uranium industry are Australia and Canada. Australia has the largest reserves and resources and Canada has the largest installed production capacity. This Session would be incomplete without a review of Australia's position, so this talk is designed to fill that gap. This paper will review Australia's deposits, mining capacity, plans, and government policies. The world's largest high grade uranium deposits are those of the Alligator River Basin. At one time in the 1970's, the reserves attributed to one core hole in the Jabiluka deposit exceeded all the rest of the world's reserves combined. This preCambrian metamorphic-rock-hosted deposit presents unique attributes (an included gem and high grade gold ore body) and unusual mining challenges. The deposit is only now being developed. Australia's largest current uranium mine is the Ranger project. This open pit mine has been in production for 3 decades and is in the last phases of operations. The famed Olympic Dam multi-metal deposit is another significant uranium producer. These and other Australian deposits will be described in the talk. The Australian government has waxed and waned in its attitudes about uranium mining. Its fundamental concern has been nuclear proliferation, but environmental concerns rank high as well. Cultural issues have cast a long shadow over uranium mining too, as the Alligator River deposits lie beneath or near Aboriginal Sacred Lands. The current governmental views and plans will be described and discussed.