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Record September quarter for Australian mineral exploration

The September 2023 quarterly statistics on mineral and petroleum exploration expenditure released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) today, shows that Australian mineral exploration expenditure continues to rise, with a record-high September quarter, according to the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (AMEC).

Using original terms, Australian mineral exploration expenditure increased by 6.15% (\$67m) to \$1157m quarter on quarter. Expenditure on greenfield exploration to discover new deposits increased by 11.56% (\$38.1m) to \$367.6m, while brownfield exploration rose 3.79% (\$28.8m) to \$789.4m.

“Following June’s record quarter, a new September record demonstrates a 5.25% (\$57.7m) year-on-year growth. This shows the sustained, concerted efforts to discover Australian minerals, as well as reflecting rising costs with the exploration sector,” said AMEC Chief Executive Officer Mr Warren Pearce.

The largest increase was experienced in the Northern Territory, with a 44% increase in expenditure this quarter to \$74.4m, their highest expenditure quarter on record. Western Australia also recorded a high, with a 7% increase to \$709.8m.

Queensland recorded an 8% increase to \$161.1m, and South Australia’s expenditure increased 4% to 76.7m. Expenditure fell in Victoria this quarter by 24%, Tasmania by 7%, and New South Wales by 6%.

“Gold recorded the largest increase, up \$23.8m quarter on quarter to \$334.3m, its highest national investment since the December 2022 quarter.”

“Nationally, Copper (\$182.7m), Selected Base Metal (\$298.9m), and ‘other’ (\$205.3m) (including critical minerals) commodities recorded their highest ever expenditure. There was also notable quarter-on-quarter growth in expenditure to discover diamond, uranium, silver, lead and zinc deposits.”

Queensland recorded an 88% increase in the ‘other’ category, including critical minerals. The Northern Territory also growing strongly in the other category, with a \$15.2m increase, while Western Australia recorded a 14% increase in gold exploration. South Australia recorded a 290% increase in Copper exploration year-on-year.

However, it must be noted that while expenditure is up, metres drilled has fallen. Quarter on quarter there was a 4.13% (121.3km) decrease in metres drilled for total deposits to 2,813.4km. Metres drilled for greenfield exploration this quarter rose by 0.39%, but brownfield metres drilled decreased by 5.88%.

“The substantial increases to discover critical and base metals, highlights the importance of Government co-funded investment programs that have been released during the reporting period, and the diversity of investor demands.”

“Mineral exploration remains extremely strong, with a record September quarter on the back of a record June quarter,” said Mr Pearce.

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