



Australian Government

IT'S AN HONOUR

Australia Celebrating Australians

National Gemstone

Australia's national gemstone is the opal.

Opals are famous across the world for their brilliant colours. Australia is home to the world's highest quality, precious opal. The best known is black opal from Lightning Ridge in New South Wales.

About the gemstone

There are common and precious opals. Most of Australia's opals are precious.

The black opal is found mainly in Australia. It has a colour play of red, green, blue, violet, magenta or yellow flecks against a dark background of black, blue or grey. The world's supply of quality black opal comes from Lightning Ridge in New South Wales.

The brilliant colours of white or light opal stand out from an opaque background. These opals come from White Cliffs in New South Wales and Cober Pedy and Andamooka in South Australia. White opal is the most common of the precious opals.

The colours of *fire* opal are against a translucent red or orange background. Boulder opal is usually a variety of white opal.

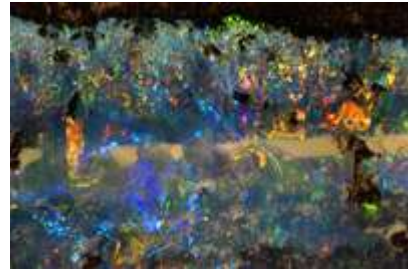
Most opals in Australia are formed in deeply weathered rocks in arid areas.

Opal is a member of the silica group of minerals. It is a unique gemstone because it has little or no true colour of its own. Opals are made up of regular planes of microscopic spheres. The spectacular colours are created when light rays hit these planes of spheres.

Australian opals are renowned for their stability as well as their brilliance. Opals from other parts of the world are associated with volcanic rock and have high water content. These opals tend to crack or craze during cutting or polishing and during dry or hot conditions.

Australia's opal fields eclipse deposits in the rest of the world. They provide more than 95-97 per cent of the world's supplies of opal and almost all the highest quality, precious opal.

Opal production was worth \$57 million, coming from three states, to Australia in 2005/06 and supports many communities in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland.



Governor-General Bill Hayden proclaimed the opal the national gemstone on 27 July 1993.

History

In Indigenous storytelling a rainbow created the colours of the opal. Opals are also known as the *fire of the desert*.

Proclamation

The then Governor-General, The Hon Bill Hayden AC proclaimed the opal the national gemstone on 27 July 1993.

Use of the national gemstone

Permission is not required to reproduce images or illustrations of the national gemstone.

Fast facts

THE NATIONAL GEMSTONE:

The opal

PROCLAIMED THE NATIONAL GEMSTONE:

27 July 1993

DESCRIPTION:

A gemstone with brilliant colour play against a dark or opaque background.

KNOWN AS:

Fire of the desert

USE OF THE NATIONAL GEMSTONE:

Unrestricted

More information

IT'S AN HONOUR WEBSITE: www.itsanhonour.gov.au