

The Nunavut Mining Industry, 1999

Nunavut, with its large area and the wealth of its geological provinces, has major potential for mining. Traces of base metals (such as copper, iron, nickel, silver, lead, zinc) precious materials (for example, gold, and diamonds), hydrocarbons (oil and gas) and radioactive elements (uranium) have been detected in various locations of the territory in recent years. At present there are two operational mines in Nunavut, with zinc having the highest value of all the metals produced.

In 1999 there are two operational mines in Nunavut, the Polaris and Nanisivik mines. Zinc has the highest value of all the metals produced totalling \$267.8 million in 1998. Canada's total zinc production was \$1.5 billion in the same year.

Nunavut's mineral potential is substantial, which is why large and small companies have invested \$112 million for prospecting and exploration in the whole of the Northwest Territories in 1998 including \$57 million in Nunavut. Gold, and more particularly diamonds, are promising minerals. Over the past five years more than 15 potentially economic diamond-bearing deposits have been discovered in Canada, of which a few are in Nunavut.

However, the economic importance of the surface and underground resources is already very significant, since in most Nunavut communities artisans utilize certain types of rocks for traditional Inuit sculpture. In fact, there are now a number of open quarries being exploited near villages. Modern tools today allow Inuit artisans to use a greater variety of rocks than before. Traditional rock types which are easier to sculpt and polish, such as serpentinite, steatite, argillite and calcareous alabaster, and other materials with a much higher hardness number, such as marble and gabbro, are now regularly carved.

Through these two contributions, the mining industry will continue to occupy an important place in the daily lives of a number of Nunavut communities.