

Australia's biggest landholder is Gina Rinehart, controlling 9.2m hectares

Others with substantial holdings include Andrew and Nicola Forrest in WA, SA's MacLachlan family and the Brook and McDonald families



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The mining magnate Gina Rinehart is Australia's biggest landholder, controlling more than 9.2m hectares, or 1.2% of the entire landmass of the country, according to data compiled by Guardian Australia.

Rinehart rockets to the top of the list when the land she controls through three different companies is combined. The area she controls is about 40% greater than the company that tops the list on a stand-alone basis, the Australian Securities Exchange-listed Australian Agricultural Co.

Another Western Australian miner, Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest, and his wife, Nicola, are also among Australia's biggest landholders, with 1.5m ha of pastoral leases. The couple also control their land through three companies – Harvest Road Group, Forrest & Forrest and Red Sky Stations.

Other individuals and families with substantial holdings include South Australia's MacLachlan family, who control an estimated 3.6m ha of pastoral land, Queensland's

Brook family (at least 3.27m ha) and Queensland's McDonald family (at least 2.78m ha).

The list of the largest pastoral landowners in Australia was compiled as part of Guardian Australia's Who Owns Australia? mapping project, and relies on a combination of state and territory titles data as well as publicly available information about the owners of pastoral leases.

The number of pastoral leases for which we have some idea of ownership is just over half of Australia's pastoral leases by area, which means there is still a large section of leases we don't know anything about in terms of ownership. As such, these estimates come with a degree of uncertainty.

A spokesperson for Rinehart declined to comment.

Company documents show that she controls her vast spread through three companies – her flagship, Hancock Prospecting, and two subsidiaries, Australian Outback Beef and S Kidman & Co.

She has an outside investor in Australia Outback Beef and S Kidman, the Chinese group Shanghai CRED, which owns about a third of each.

Hancock and Shanghai CRED bought S Kidman in 2016 for a price reported to be in excess of \$386m after a previous bid by a Chinese group was blocked by the then-treasurer, Scott Morrison.

Rinehart's vast land holding is set to shrink because she put eight cattle stations, totalling 1.9m ha, up for sale in March. The properties, which collectively run 108,000 head of cattle, are located in WA's Kimberley region and across the top of the Northern Territory.

Despite the large scale of the landholding, Hancock Prospecting's financial accounts show the cattle business is far less lucrative than the company's main source of income, iron ore.

In the 12 months to the end of June last year – the latest period for which accounts are available – Hancock Prospecting received \$10.4bn in revenue from mining and just \$140m from agriculture.

Rinehart remains Australia's richest individual, with an estimated net worth of \$36.38bn, according to the Australian. Her wealth reportedly increased by \$20bn in the last year, with Hancock Prospecting posting a record net profit of \$4bn in the 2020 financial year.