



MEDIA RELEASE

Largest earthquake in 50 years

For immediate release: 16 February 2007

A magnitude 5.2 earthquake occurred in Western Australia's Shark Bay this morning at 12:39 WA time (2:39am AEDST).

"While people would have felt this earthquake up to 150km away from the epicentre, it was not a structurally damaging earthquake," said Duty Seismologist Dr Mark Leonard.

"This size earthquake is quite large for this region, and is the biggest recorded in 50 years. On average, Australia has an earthquake of this size or larger every two years and they can occur anywhere in Australia. The largest earthquake in Australia is estimated at a magnitude of 7.2 in 1941 in Meeberrie, which is 250km SE of Shark Bay," he said.

"This type of event, called an intraplate earthquake, happens when stresses in the crust overcome the strength of the crustal rocks. The earthquake is caused when the rocks 'break'. This is part of the Earth's natural dynamic processes. The Australian continent is part of the Indian-Australian plate which is being pushed slowly north-east at approximately 7cm per year, resulting in collisions with the Eurasian, Philippine and Pacific plates. The stress from these collisions is released during an earthquake," said Dr Leonard.

A location map and seismogram of this event can be found at www.ga.gov.au/bin/listQuakes. People are encouraged to fill out the earthquake report on this page if they have felt an earthquake.

For more information or to arrange interviews, please contact:
Geoscience Australia 24 hour Media Hotline 1800 882 035