

# ***Inland Rural Towns: are they sustainable?***

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## **Inland Rural Towns: are they sustainable?**

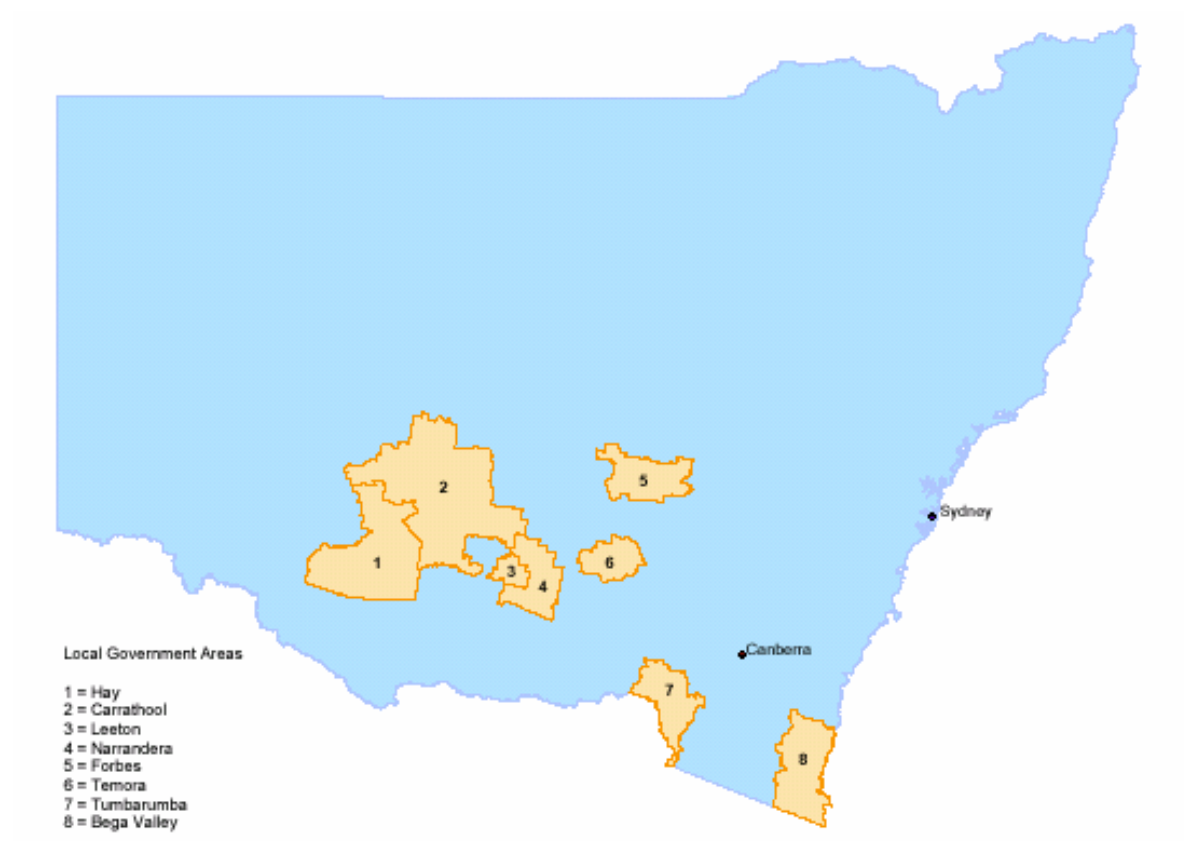
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The effects of globalisation and the changes in the fortunes of agriculture coupled with the pursuit of neoliberal policies by successive Australian governments have resulted in major social changes in inland Australia. Salt (1992, 2001) has documented the population shifts occurring across Australia noting the sharp exodus of population from inland towns to regional sponge cities and to the coast. In the 12 months to June 2000 ABS reports 270 shires mostly in rural areas lost population (<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/sa/stories/s249661.htm>). Small towns that are reliant on broad acre farming are the ones more likely to be in decline (ABARE, 2000). The resulting decline in small country towns is creating controversy between rationalists such as Forth (2000) who argue that country towns will inevitably decline and those, mostly rural dwellers, who argue that preserving and supporting rural communities is essential to our national development.

Is the decline of inland rural towns inevitable or are country towns the victims of inept policy and a lack of effective support? The issue is complex but the future of country towns is not totally reliant on market conditions and globalisation. For country towns to have a future a reliance on market forces is a poor substitute for good policy. Economic prosperity is but one factor, equally important is attention to human, institutional and social capital in rural communities.

In order to assess the future viability of inland rural communities this paper will present work from a number of studies undertaken through the Centre for Rural Social Research during the past two years. Limited time necessitates a sharp focus on a few issues – in this case human capital issues relating to young people, employment and educational access, institutional capital in the form of service access and social capital.

The following table presents population statistics for the eight Local Government Areas used as the basis for this paper for the period from 1986 to 1996. These areas show several important aspects of rural town population shifts. The Bega Valley being a coastal area is growing at a significant rate. This demonstrates what Salt (2001) refers to as the third cultural shift – the drift of population to the coast. The most significant decline is in the isolated inland areas of Carrathool, Temora and Tumbarumba – these areas are 80 - 120 kms from their nearest regional centre. The remaining areas are largely recording a steady population rate and it could be argued that they are sustaining themselves.



**Table 1 – population statistics for eight local government areas (1986 – 1996)**

	<b>1986</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1996</b>
<b>Bega Valley</b>	23758	27380	28845
<b>Carrathool</b>	3309	3239	3164
<b>Forbes</b>	10736	10343	10138
<b>Hay</b>	3896	3808	3822
<b>Leeton</b>	10989	10795	11031
<b>Narrandera</b>	7386	7138	7141
<b>Temora</b>	6241	6200	5914
<b>Tumbarumba</b>	3893	3686	3613

Source ABS census statistics 1986, 1991 and 1996

## **Human Capital**

### ***1. Young People in Inland Communities***

However of far more significance to the viability of small inland communities is the number of young people leaving these areas. Tables 2 and 3 reveal two quite significant trends – the loss of young people from these communities and, perhaps a far more insidious trend and one that as yet to be given attention, the far greater loss of young women from inland rural communities.

**Table 2 – population statistics for eight local government areas (1986 – 96)  
15-19 year age group**

	<b>1986</b>			<b>1991</b>			<b>1996</b>	
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female
<b>Bega Valley</b>	809	778		745	713		775	755
<b>Carrathool</b>	149	96		108	71		108	65
<b>Forbes</b>	567	468		484	425		465	358
<b>Hay</b>	174	155		134	107		107	107
<b>Leeton</b>	621	443		635	383		602	431
<b>Narrandera</b>	247	239		242	233		222	191
<b>Temora</b>	228	216		211	195		181	198
<b>Tumbarumba</b>	144	133		132	114		98	84

Source ABS census statistics 1986, 1991 and 1996

**Table 3 – population statistics for eight local government areas (1986 – 96)  
20-24 year age group**

	<b>1986</b>			<b>1991</b>			<b>1996</b>	
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female
<b>Bega Valley</b>	728	627		660	608		563	489
<b>Carrathool</b>	151	123		158	87		95	73
<b>Forbes</b>	319	360		308	291		269	291
<b>Hay</b>	165	169		134	130		128	117
<b>Leeton</b>	426	374		329	318		364	329
<b>Narrandera</b>	245	258		189	186		203	179
<b>Temora</b>	205	214		162	158		142	125
<b>Tumbarumba</b>	146	129		115	75		129	67

Source ABS census statistics 1986, 1991 and 1996

A careful scrutiny of these tables reveals that even in the Bega Valley and Leeton despite population growth there is a loss of young people over time and therefore the aging of the rural population is evident. As well the greater loss of young women from many areas signifies an emerging problem of gender imbalance in rural towns.

This becomes more evident if we look at young people as a percentage of the entire local government area population.

**Table 4 – population statistics for eight local government areas (1986 – 96)  
15-19 year age group as percentage of total LGA population**

	<b>1986</b>			<b>1991</b>			<b>1996</b>	
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female
<b>Bega Valley</b>	3.4%	3.3%		2.7%	2.6%		2.7%	2.6%
<b>Carrathool</b>	4.5%	2.9%		3.3%	2.2%		3.4%	2.1%
<b>Forbes</b>	5.2%	4.4%		4.7%	4.1%		4.6%	3.5%
<b>Hay</b>	4.4%	4%		3.4%	2.9%		2.7%	2.7%
<b>Leeton</b>	5.7%	4%		5.9%	3.5%		5.5%	3.9%
<b>Narrandera</b>	3.4%	3.2%		3.4%	3.3%		3.1%	2.7%
<b>Temora</b>	3.6%	3.4%		3.4%	3.3%		3.1%	3.2%
<b>Tumbarumba</b>	3.8%	3.4%		3.7%	3%		2.7%	2.4%

Source ABS census statistics 1986, 1991 and 1996

**Table 5 – population statistics for eight local government areas (1986 – 96)  
20-24 year age group as percentage of total LGA population**

	1986			1991			1996	
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female
<b>Bega Valley</b>	3.1%	2.6%		2.4%	2.2%		2%	1.7%
<b>Carrathool</b>	4.6%	3.7%		4.9%	2.7%		3%	2.3%
<b>Forbes</b>	2.9%	3.3%		3%	2.8%		2.7%	2.8%
<b>Hay</b>	4.2%	4.3%		3.5%	3.4%		3.2%	3.1%
<b>Leeton</b>	3.9%	3.4%		3%	2.8%		3.3%	3%
<b>Narrandera</b>	3.3%	3.5%		2.6%	2.6%		2.8%	2.5%
<b>Temora</b>	3.3%	3.4%		2.6%	2.5%		2.4%	2.1%
<b>Tumbarumba</b>	3.8%	3.2%		3.1%	2%		3.5%	1.9%

Source ABS census statistics 1986, 1991 and 1996

In isolated areas such as the Carrathool not only is the percentage of young people low, but the gender imbalance is extreme. This suggests that the future viability of such communities is at risk not only as a result of the continuing loss of population but also because of a growing gender imbalance. The inability of young rural men to find marriage partners in their own communities is not a situation unique to Australia. Evidence of male farmers finding difficulty finding partners has been found in Europe, Greece, the United States and Japan (Pfeffer, 1989; Matsuda, 1992; Sachs, 1996; Teather, 1994). Yet this remains a largely unexplored issue in Australia.

However in our work in small rural communities the reasons for young women leaving in larger numbers are not hard to find. One of the most obvious is the lack of employment targeted at young women.

If rural communities are to be sustainable, ways of retaining and supporting young people to return are essential. The loss of young people signals the loss of future leaders, small business owners, entrepreneurs and community drivers. A lack of employment options for young people is a significant reason for their departure.

## **2. Employment**

The lack of meaningful full-time work in rural areas is one of the main reasons given for young people leaving rural communities (Alston and Kent, 2001). Changes in employment conditions since the 1970s have been significant and the impact of these in addition to changing fortunes in agriculture have had a major impact particularly in small rural communities. Between 1973 and 1998 full-time employment as a proportion of all work fell by 20%. At the same time the rise in part-time work trebled (Sheehan and Tegart, 1998). Employment has become 'precarious' (Murtough and Waite, 2000) with a rise in casualisation and less secure working conditions. By 1997 a quarter of all employees and nearly 30% of female workers were in casual positions (Sheehan and Tegart, 1998).

By comparison with urban employment conditions, rural unemployment is higher and more prolonged, job opportunities are limited, often poorly paid and, in many cases, seasonal (Cheers, 1998). At the same time the national unemployment level for young people hovers around 24% with regional variations (Coventry and Bertone,

1998). Secure full-time jobs for young people have virtually disappeared with teenage employment accounting for only 7% of total employment and much of this is casual or part-time (Daly, Nguyen-Hong, Eldridge, Gabbittas and McCalman, 1998). It could be argued that many more young people are now taking up education as an option. While this is the case for many young people, it overlooks the 14.5% of young people in the 15-19 year age group who are not in full-time work or education (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1999).

A survey of 283 young people in four of the LGAs used as the basis for this paper reveals that two thirds feel it is easier to get a job in the city and only a quarter feel they could forge a career in their town. Of equal concern is that only 18% feel that there is support for young people to remain in their town (Alston and Kent, 2001).

If we examine employment statistics for young people in the eight local government areas we find two things: a) that full-time job opportunities for the 15-24 year cohort have continued to decline for the ten year period and b) that full-time job opportunities for young women are significantly more scarce. This goes some of the way to explaining why young women choose to leave town in greater numbers.

**Table 6 Full-time Employment – 15-19 year age group (1986-96)**

	Male Full-Time Employment				Female Full-Time Employment		
	1986	1991	1996		1986	1991	1996
<b>Bega Valley</b>	294	170	145		163	117	64
<b>Carrathool</b>	55	46	32		9	5	3
<b>Forbes</b>	122	74	84		65	30	23
<b>Hay</b>	51	34	24		25	16	8
<b>Leeton</b>	149	118	116		99	46	48
<b>Narrandera</b>	77	44	51		46	24	21
<b>Temora</b>	61	44	30		43	26	18
<b>Tumbarumba</b>	53	38	35		19	11	9

Source ABS census statistics 1986, 1991 and 1996

**Table 7 Total Full-Time Employment – 20-24 year age group (1986-96)**

	Male Full-Time Employment				Female Full-Time Employment		
	1986	1991	1996		1986	1991	1996
<b>Bega Valley</b>	465	381	280		222	223	158
<b>Carrathool</b>	113	101	59		37	28	21
<b>Forbes</b>	193	183	166		134	115	106
<b>Hay</b>	111	83	71		68	41	53
<b>Leeton</b>	290	224	260		159	138	153
<b>Narrandera</b>	154	92	125		88	66	57
<b>Temora</b>	142	95	82		100	73	49
<b>Tumbarumba</b>	97	87	65		42	22	24

Source ABS census statistics 1986, 1991 and 1996

### **3. Education**

To further explain the exodus of young people an examination of educational access is in order. With increasing technological advances the need for a more highly skilled workforce is evident. For the most part young rural people from small towns must relocate to access such education. Making education accessible, skilling young people and providing incentives for rural young people to return to their areas are critical factors in rural revitalisation. Yet rural young people are facing significant barriers in accessing education to equip them for the modern workforce.

Between one quarter and one third of Australian school students are attending schools in rural and remote locations. In NSW it is 34.6% (HREOC, 2000). Rural students are a significant slice of Australia's young people. Yet they are more likely to have problems accessing education than those in metropolitan areas. This is the case at both high school and tertiary levels with lower school retention rates and fewer young people going on to tertiary education.

Higher numbers of rural children drop out before they finish high school. For example, in Western Australia, drop out rates vary from 25% in the capital city to between 50% and 75% in rural schools with much higher rates among Aboriginal students (HREOC, 1999).

Table 8 shows high school retention rates for the years 1994 – 1998. This indicates the lower levels of retention for rural and remote students and, within these groups, the lower levels of aspiration of boys compared with girls.

**Table 8 – Year 12 completion rates by location and sex for the years 1994-8 (%)**

Year	Urban			Rural			Remote		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1994	66	76	71	57	71	64	51	65	58
1995	64	75	69	54	70	62	46	59	52
1996	62	72	67	55	72	63	46	65	55
1997	61	71	66	54	70	62	43	62	51
1998	62	73	67	55	71	63	48	61	54

Source HREOC, 2000, page 8.

These figures reveal that more rural girls than boys complete high school and girls aspire to university education in greater numbers. In a survey of 746 senior high school students in the Western Riverina area of NSW conducted in 2001 78% of girls compared to 52% of boys aspired to a university education (Alston et al., 2001). Boys are more likely to aspire to apprenticeship training (20% of boys as opposed to 7% of girls) and girls are more likely to want to leave town for social reasons (29% as opposed to 21% of boys) or to experience life in the city (35% as opposed to 20% of boys) (Alston et al., 2001). Girls interviewed in a study of employment in country towns noted that their decision to aspire to university study and to leave town is motivated by a lack of options and by the macho culture of their town (Alston and Kent, 2001). There are more supports in country towns for boys in the form of sporting and employment options.

Actually achieving their ambition to enter university is harder for rural young people. Despite constituting approximately one-third of school students, they make up only 17% of tertiary students (HREOC, 2000). Between 1989 and 1996, the proportion of



rural people going on to higher education declined from 25% to approximately 17% during a period when the number of young people going on to tertiary education increased by 25% (HREOC, 1999). In the agricultural sector, only 31% of the workforce has tertiary qualifications compared to 52% of the Australian workforce (Ferguson and Simpson, 1995).

One of the serious barriers for rural young people in their quest for greater access to the benefits of education and training is their reduced access to Youth Allowance/ Austudy as a result of such benefits being means tested against parental income until the young person reaches 25 years. The threshold for restriction of benefits is quite low and takes little account of geographic location or numbers of young people in the family in education. In a survey of 134 parents of high school students in small towns in NSW, 48% felt their children would not be eligible for Austudy and 52% felt that financial pressures would restrict their children's access to higher education (Alston and Kent, 2001). This was corroborated in focus groups with parents in the Western Riverina where parents stated that their children's access to education is shaped by their own financial circumstances. Summing up the feelings of many parents, one parent reported:

*It is really sad if your kids are bright enough to go to university to have to say well Mum and Dad just can't afford it. (Alston et al., 2001).*

If education is the key to success in a globalised world economy, then rural people must be given greater opportunities to access education. If rural communities are to thrive in the future urgent attention to the educational access of rural people is needed. Rural young people express a strong desire to access tertiary education and yet many are unable to achieve their ambitions. Access to financial resources for tertiary education for rural young people is one of the keys to rural revitalisation. An educated rural population and a skilled population base are significant factors in the future development of rural Australia. Attention to the human capital issues of retaining and attracting back young people and providing ready access to tertiary education for rural people are critical factors in sustaining rural communities.

### **Institutional Capital**

In addition to a greater investment in human capital, rural revitalisation is also dependent on institutional capital. Changes in government policy to favour user pays principles and market driven service allocation have seriously restricted service access for rural people. The centralisation of services into regional centres and capital cities has resulted in the loss of many government and non-government services to rural communities. The result of this withdrawal of services is multifaceted. Not only do aging communities lose vital service access, they are also losing valuable jobs and training sites for rural young people. In many areas transport and communications infrastructure has been downgraded and community infrastructure is inadequate. The resulting loss of institutional thickness (Copus et al., 2000) has seriously impacted on the viability of rural communities. It is difficult to rationalise the preferred message of the neoliberals, that community self-help is the key to rural survival, when government commitment to rural community infrastructure is not strongly evident and policies of cross subsidisation between city and country areas are being withdrawn.

The conscious advocacy of minimal government has led to a wholesale withdrawal of services from the bush. For example, in the decade to 1996, 30 000 jobs were lost to NSW rural areas, and 19 500 of these were state government jobs resulting in the loss of \$1 billion in salaries (Wahlquist, *The Land*, August 8, 1996). With 50% of farm families reliant on off-farm income generating activity for survival (Duff, 1997 quoted in Society of St Vincent de Paul, 1998), not only are rural communities threatened by this withdrawal of services and jobs from the bush but also is agricultural production. A strong viable institutional capital base is essential to rural community sustainability.

To illustrate the issue of service withdrawal, personal interviews with key informants in the 8 LGAs were conducted in January 2002. Informants were asked to comment on services since 1990. The following table indicates the results of those interviews. It should be noted that they are not comprehensive but give some indication of service withdrawal.

**Table 9 – service withdrawal in 6 rural LGAs**

	<b>Banks</b>	<b>Government and NGO Services</b>	<b>Some nominated gains</b>
<b>Bega Valley</b>	Merimbula – lost 3 of 6 banks Bermagui – lost only bank Eden – lost 2	Bermagui – 1 PO closed, no RTA, Centrelink or health services Eden – TAFE downsized, loss of legal aid, Heinz cannery, forestry mill, State Forests and National Parks Offices, medicare	New community Health Centre Some business development
<b>Forbes</b>	Banks retained but staff numbers cut	Loss of railway depot, medicare, health services	
<b>Hay</b>	Loss of 1 bank	No medicare office	New hospital, new museum – Shear Outback
<b>Leeton</b>	Banks retained	Department of Health positions Yanco – lost PO and police	Industry growth
<b>Narrandera</b>	Barellan – 4 banks lost	Railway (50 jobs lost) Telecom (80 jobs lost) Grain Handling State and Regional Development offices	Feedlot Aged Care services
<b>Temora</b>	Ariah Park – lost bank	Department of Ag, soil conservation, railways, grain elevators scaled back. Hospital kitchen and pathology services regionalised Amalgamation of electricity (100 jobs lost)	

Note: figures for Carrathool and Tumbarumba not available at time of printing

Informants also noted that obstetrics services were being withdrawn because of insurance problems. In addition they noted an increase in welfare dependent people as a result of increased unemployment, and an in-migration of people for cheaper housing. The withdrawal of government services had led to a heavy reliance on non-government services such as Anglicare and St Vincent de Paul.

The table, although not definitive, shows the large-scale withdrawal of government services from these areas. It is evident that service access for many residents can be problematic, for example in one town medicare claim forms can be faxed from the chemists but cheques take about three weeks to return. A lack of public transport between towns and regional centres compounds the issue of access. Loss of institutional capital diminishes a community's ability to adapt to changing conditions. Many of these services are being withdrawn by federal and state governments.

## **Social Capital**

As well as human and institutional capital, social capital is a key ingredient for a thriving rural community. Social capital is the raw material that holds communities together through participation of members in community networks, reciprocity, trust, social norms and proactivity (Cox, 1995; Bullen and Onyx 1998; Falk and Kilpatrick, 1999). In rural communities networks of trust are strong and complex. This is most evident in times of crisis such as natural disasters or when a community member is faced with the tragic loss of a family member or loss of property. Other demonstrations of social capital are evident in local clubs, sporting groups and community organisations such as the Country Womens' Association and Lions Club etc. Formal networks of power exist in male dominated Local Government Organisations. Equally effective in generating social capital are the informal networks of power in female dominated organisations such as Landcare groups and Citizens' Action groups.

It is in the social capital of a community that the seeds of a successful future can be found. However the loss of population has impacted on community groups with many unable sustain sporting teams and community groups leading to the loss of community social capital and social support networks. Weaker networks and a loss of trust seriously erodes a community's viability.

With a loss of community social capital there is evidence of a decline in faith in macro level political systems in rural areas. This was perhaps most evident in state election results in Western Australia and Victoria in the late 1990s and in growing support for independents evidenced in the 2001 federal election. This loss of faith is built on the perceived lack of attention at state and federal levels for the plight of rural communities.

## **Conclusion**

If rural communities are to thrive economic capital development is but one ingredient. Equally important are human, institutional and social capital. Key stakeholders such as rural community dwellers, governments and businesses should abandon their commitment to pure economic theory and address the support structures needed for rural revitalisation. Not all Australian communities will survive as viable entities and not all will remain dependent on agricultural industries as they are today. However a message that community self-help is the key to a community's future is simplistic and ignores the real need for government and non-government investment in human, institutional and social capital in rural areas.

Attention by governments to 'community capacity building' activities risks locating the problem of rural decline at the feet of rural people themselves. This is in keeping with neoliberal policies of individualism but overlooks the importance of collective community strategies (Gray and Lawrence, 2001). Rural communities cannot provide the macro level infrastructure such as efficient transport and communications that will allow them to have development options and they cannot create greater access to education and training, health and welfare services without supportive policies. If small towns are to survive into the future they require investment in human capital in the form of easier access to education and training and the provision of meaningful

employment to retain and attract back young people. They require levels of institutional thickness that only governments and large non-government organisations can supply and they require strengthened multilayered local networks of trust.

In forging a new agenda for rural revitalisation governments have to move away from economic rationalist policies and develop people focused policies relevant to rural people. Providing real options for rural young people is one of the most effective areas in which to start this support. Changes to Austudy, job training and labour market programs are areas of real neglect.

As Gray and Lawrence (2001) note

*The challenge for regional Australia at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not just to fix its social and economic policies, but rather to build socially, economically and environmentally strong communities which have the necessary linkages with global capital, but which have a prospect beyond this season's price for traditional products like coal, beef or wheat.*

There is a future for rural towns but this is dependent on the support of governments, on attention to rural people and their communities, on careful regional planning and development, on the provision of advanced infrastructure support and on the skills, energy and enthusiasm of rural people. Not all small inland towns will survive, but we can act to ensure that not all inland rural towns die.

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# Profiling rural Australia

Impact of changes in the agriculture sector on rural towns

Lisa Chapman and Jared Greenville



*The agriculture sector remains important to a number of regional and rural towns across Australia.*



*Structural changes in the agriculture sector — that have driven changes in employment, educational opportunities and the provision of rural services — have affected some towns quite significantly.*



*The combined analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics census data and ABARE farm survey data provides insight into the state of rural economies and the resulting changing shape of regional society in Australia's wheat-sheep and pastoral zones.*



## Introduction

Traditionally, many of Australia's rural communities have been heavily dependent on the agriculture sector for their economic prosperity. Changes in the structure of agriculture have driven changes in the levels and patterns of employment, educational opportunities and the level and location of rural services. All of these factors have contributed to the changing shape of regional society.

In addition to the decline in the number of agricultural establishments, the increase in average farm size and a decline in the importance of the agriculture sector to the national economy, a number of other changes occurred in the Australian broad-acre agriculture sector in the early 1990s. The impacts of these changes have differed across regions of Australia — and the towns therein.

Depending on the suitability of the climate and natural resource base, some regions of Australia responded to changes in relative commodity prices by adjusting their agricultural production mix. Other regions were less able to respond and their net economic returns fell. The extent to which towns and regional centres have been affected by these and other changes in the agriculture sector has been determined largely by their reliance on agriculture relative to other industries.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data from the 1991 and 1996 collections are used in this analysis to profile the economies of a number of case study towns and regional centres across the eastern mainland states of Australia, providing insight into the state of rural economies at a time of significant change in the agriculture sector (box 1). Where possible this is linked with ABARE's farm survey data to provide a

more detailed analysis of the role of the agriculture sector, specifically the dependence of rural towns on income from various agricultural activities such as wool, beef, cropping and sheep meat production.

The objective in the study was to establish a set of dynamic benchmarks that can be used to track important changes in the rural economy. Application of the approaches explored here to 2001 census data, when available, will provide a more current picture of the forces driving social change in rural Australia.

## Changing role of the agriculture sector

Historically, the agriculture sector has played an important role in the Australian economy. While the importance of the sector at the national level has declined over time, it remains a significant component of the economy of many rural towns.

While the agriculture sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) in Australia remained relatively stable throughout the 1990s a number of changes occurred that have important consequences for rural communities (Collits 2000).

A number of towns, particularly those heavily reliant on the agriculture sector, have been influenced by the declining trend in the number of agricultural establishments that has resulted from amalgamations required for farms to remain competitive and achieve productivity gains from economies of scale. At the same time, increasing mechanisation has reduced the demand for farm labor (Collits 2000).

## Changes in agricultural land use

In addition to these general trends across the agriculture sector as a whole, a number of other changes occurred during the 1990s. In particular, there were significant changes in the relative importance of different activities in the production mix.

Notwithstanding the role that climatic conditions and biophysical factors play in determining agricultural land use patterns across Australia, economic factors — such as commodity prices and input costs — that affect net returns to agricultural activities led to significant changes in production mixes across broadacre farms in Australia over the decade.

Sheep numbers declined by around a third from a peak of more than 173 million in 1989-90. In contrast beef cattle numbers

# 1

## Use of Australian Bureau of Statistics census data

Data from the ABS census of population and housing form the basis of the economic profile for each case study town. The towns have been defined using the ABS definition of an urban centre or locality. These represent bounded population clusters that are defined for each census collection (ABS 2001b). The boundaries are an attempt to capture all urban growth (including noncontiguous development that is regarded as part of the urban centre). While quite subjective, the boundaries of the smaller towns are set around occupied nonfarm dwellings with a discernable urban street pattern.

Key variables from census collections have been chosen to profile the economies of the case study towns. Changes between collections are likely to provide insight into how different towns in different agricultural regions have been affected by the changes in the agriculture

sector. The variables analysed include basic demographic information such as the size and age profile of the town, as well as income, labor force characteristics, industry composition and indicators of the cost of living.

Despite every attempt being made to keep the collections consistent for comparative purposes, over time there have been some changes to the categories used to report individual income. These changes are further compounded by being recorded in nominal terms, thus ignoring the effect of inflation. Therefore some caution needs to be taken in interpreting changes in income distribution between census collections.

This study uses data from the 1991 and 1996 census collections.

Data from the 2001 census will be available in July 2002, allowing the analysis in this paper to be extended further.



increased by more than 5 per cent over the decade. Despite being more volatile, crop areas also increased over the period by around 26 per cent.

### **Changes in relative commodity prices**

The decline in sheep numbers and rise in crop areas and cattle numbers reflect large movements in the relative prices that farmers received for different agricultural outputs during the 1990s. A significant decline in wool prices at the beginning of the decade resulted in a relative increase in the price of all other major broadacre activities.

The ratio of crop prices to wool prices (using the gross unit value of wheat as a proxy for an index of broadacre cropping prices) increased in the early 1990s. This reflects a fall of almost 35 per cent in the wool price between 1989-90 and 1992-93 as well as a 9 per cent increase in real wheat prices in 1995-96. Despite some decline in crop prices relative to wool in recent years the ratio at the end of the decade remained considerably higher than in 1989-90. The ratio of beef prices to wool prices followed a similar pattern to relative crop prices (although somewhat less favorable) over the same period.

### **Differences between regions**

The suitability of land for broadacre agriculture varies significantly across the country. In the wheat-sheep zone the climate and topography allow for regular cropping of grains on a more intensive basis than in other regions of Australia. In contrast, the high rainfall zone, located along the coastal regions and adjacent tablelands, is more suitable for grazing and nongrain crops because of factors including higher rainfall, steeper topography and greater humidity than the other zones. The pastoral zone includes most of the northern tropical areas as well as the arid and semiarid regions of Australia. This land and climate is almost exclusively suited to extensive grazing of native pastures.

Changes to relative prices have therefore affected these agricultural regions in different ways. With very little land capable of supporting cropping activities, land use change in the pastoral zone throughout the 1990s was characterised by a move out of

wool production and into beef cattle. Minor increases in both cropping and sheep meat production were also observed, reflecting changes in land use that occurred close to the border of the wheat-sheep zone where these activities are more feasible.

With a wider range of production alternatives, farms in the wheat-sheep zone experienced the greatest changes in land use. The contribution of wool to the production mix declined significantly, while the importance of cropping activities, beef cattle and sheep meat production all increased.

With more limited broadacre agricultural land use alternatives, the land use change observed in the high rainfall zone was less dramatic than that observed in the wheat-sheep zone. However, there was a decline in the importance of wool in the production mix and some increase in the importance of each of the other broadacre activities over the period.

Changes to the broadacre production mix across farms in the pastoral and high rainfall zones are likely to have been limited to changes in the mix of livestock activities. With grain prices generally outperforming beef and sheep meat prices during the 1990s it is likely that farms in these zones were under greater financial pressure than those in the wheat-sheep zone.

The changes that have occurred across the agriculture sector are likely to have had some impact on the towns located in the region. The extent of these impacts is likely to have been influenced by both the ability of the agriculture sector in the surrounding areas to adjust to the changes in commodity prices in the 1990s as well as each town's reliance on agriculture relative to other sectors of the economy.

### **Case study towns**

Eleven case study towns were chosen to demonstrate how data from a range of sources could be used to investigate reliance on the agriculture sector and the impact that changes within the agriculture sector had on various economies. They were deliberately selected from regions that responded differently to changes in broadacre agriculture throughout the 1990s. All the towns are located in the eastern mainland states of

Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and are situated in the pastoral and wheat-sheep agricultural zones (box 2).

A number of towns — including Mount Isa, Griffith and Swan Hill — are located in areas that moved out of wool production and into either beef cattle or cropping activities in response to declining wool prices in the early 1990s (map 1). Other towns, such as Bourke and Wilcannia, were selected from regions with fewer production alternatives that were forced to stay in wool production throughout the period.

Several of the towns, such as Wee Waa and Griffith, are quite dependent on the agriculture sector for employment opportunities. Others, including Mount Isa and Emerald, are dominated by the mining industry and still others have a more diversified industrial base across a number of different sectors of the economy. As a consequence there is considerable variation in the changes in population that have occurred in these towns (table 1).

## 2

### Location of case study towns

**Mount Isa** is surrounded by the Selwyn Ranges and is considered the mining, industrial and commercial capital of north west Queensland.

**Boulia** is a small town situated on the Bourke River, located in the channel country in Queensland. Boulia is the administrative centre for an area covering over 60 000 square kilometres with a total shire population of less than 600 people.

**Emerald** is situated on the tropic of Capricorn in Queensland's central highlands region. It is one of the fastest growing towns in inland Australia.

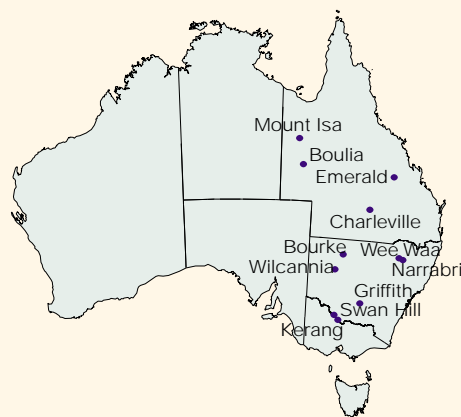
**Charleville** is the largest town in the south west Queensland region. It is located on the banks of the Warrego River in the mulga country. A third of all residents in south west Queensland live in Charleville.

**Bourke** is located on the Darling River in New South Wales. Highly variable rainfall makes this region marginal for agricultural production. While it averages around 340 millimetres of rain a year it can vary from 150 millimetres one year to 800 millimetres the next.

**Wee Waa** is located less than 50 kilometres to the north west of Narrabri. Wee Waa is an important town to the cotton industry, with both the Namoi Cotton Cooperative and Cotton Seed Distributors based there.

**Narrabri** is located on the north west slopes of New South Wales. It is the administrative centre for the Namoi Valley.

**Wilcannia** is a small town situated on the Darling River in New South Wales. The sur-



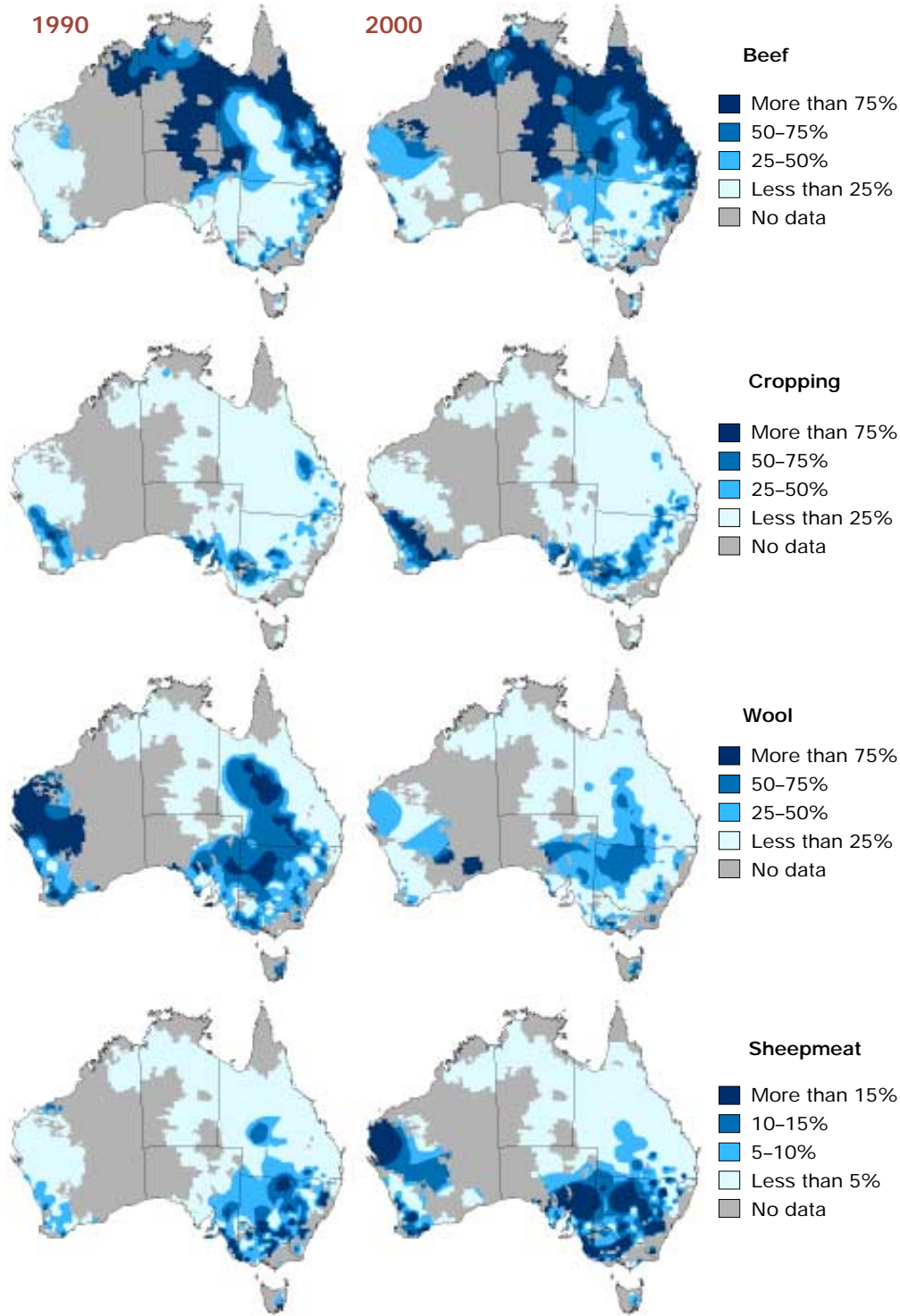
rounding land is considered marginal for agriculture, with an average annual rainfall of around 250 millimetres a year.

**Griffith** is the third largest population centre in the Riverina. It is a service centre for the surrounding irrigation area.

**Swan Hill** is situated on the Murray River at the eastern edge of the Victorian mallee. While originally important to inland river trade, the clearing of the mallee for agricultural purposes has made Swan Hill a service centre for livestock and cropping activities, including irrigated horticulture.

**Kerang** is a rural service centre located on the Loddon River in Victoria. It is the commercial centre for an irrigation district that specialises in dairy, horticulture, lucerne and grain production.

**Broadacre land use proportions**  
Australian broadacre agriculture



## 1 Size of case study towns

	Population		Change
	1991	1996	1991-96
	no.	no.	%
<b>Wheat-sheep zone</b>			
<b>New South Wales</b>			
Griffith	13 291	14 155	6.50
Narrabri	6 676	6 425	-3.76
Wee Waa	2 039	1 855	-9.02
<b>Victoria</b>			
Kerang	4 018	3 879	-3.46
Swan Hill	9 358	9 366	0.09
<b>Queensland</b>			
Emerald	6 564	9 266	41.16
<b>Pastoral zone</b>			
<b>New South Wales</b>			
Bourke	2 984	2 782	-6.77
Wilcannia	942	688	-26.96
<b>Queensland</b>			
Boulia	281	243	-13.52
Charleville	3 505	3 321	-5.25
Mount Isa	23 665	21 643	-8.54

## Population, size of labor force and employment

The interaction of changes in population, the size of the labor force and the number of persons employed are an important indicator of the state of the economy over time. It is these interactions rather than changes in specific variables that provide insight into

changes that have occurred across the case study towns.

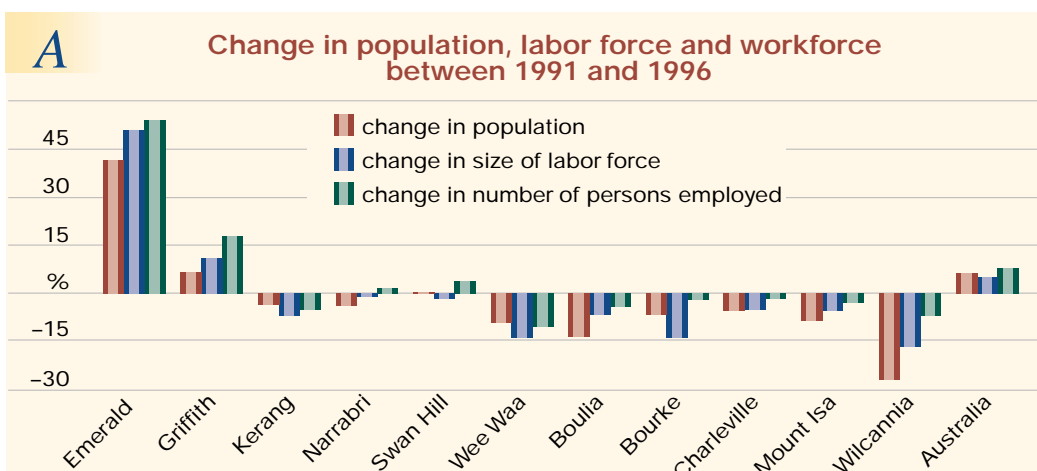
### Population

At the national level, Australia's population increased by around 6 per cent between the 1991 and 1996 ABS census of population and housing, to a total of around 17.9 million people (figure A). In contrast, the population declined in all but three of the case study towns. The towns that recorded an increase in population over the intercensal period were the largest of the towns in the wheat-sheep zone — Emerald, Griffith and Swan Hill. The more than 40 per cent increase in the population of Emerald between 1991 and 1996 largely reflects a significant increase in coal mining that occurred in the region during the first half of the 1990s.

The population of the five case study towns in the pastoral zone fell during the intercensal period. While the smallest of the towns experienced the greatest decline, the largest — Mount Isa — also experienced a decline. This indicates that migration between regions, towns and cities is a complex issue and highlights the importance of looking beyond basic demographic trends for other indicators of economic performance.

### Size of the labor force and employment rate

At the national level the size of the labor force — the number of people employed and the number of people actively looking for



work — increased between 1991 and 1996. Over the same period the size of the workforce (those actually employed) grew at an even faster rate than the labor force, hence the unemployment rate decreased.

All of the case study towns located in the pastoral zone experienced declines in labor force, population and employment in the intercensal period (including Mount Isa, the largest of all case study towns). In comparison, the larger towns in the wheat-sheep zone had strong growth in employment, labor force and population, indicating that the economic base of these towns increased over the period while it decreased for towns in the pastoral zone.

Declining unemployment in the intercensal period was a feature of all the case study towns. However, the reasons behind the decline varied across the towns. The declining unemployment rate in both Emerald and Griffith was a result of a greater increase in the size of the workforce relative to the increase in the labor force at the time. Between the two census collections these two economies increased total employment of individuals outside the labor force from within the town and from inward migration.

The decline in unemployment rate observed in Narrabri and Swan Hill between 1991 and 1996 resulted from the combined effect of increases in the number of people employed in the two towns as well as small declines in the actual size of the labor force. This decline in the labor force implies that unemployed people may have

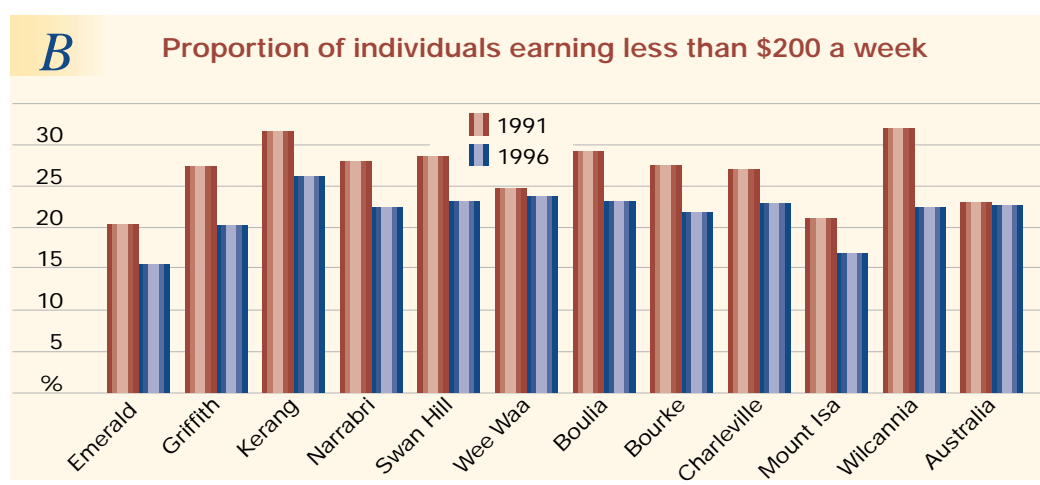
moved away from these towns during the intercensal period in search of better job prospects elsewhere, or that individuals retired but remained residents. Further detailed analysis of migration data collected for the 1996 census is likely to provide clarification of this issue.

In all the other case study towns the rate of unemployment declined because the decline in the size of the labor force exceeded the decline in the number of people employed in the town during the same period. These towns also reported declining population, suggesting that unemployed persons left these towns during the intercensal period.

## Income distribution

Changes in the population, labor force and employment rates of the case study towns provide some indication of how the economic base of these towns changed between 1991 and 1996. While it appears that the economic base across many of the case study towns — particularly those located in the pastoral zone — contracted during the period, it is also important to consider the changes that occurred in income distribution over the same period.

In 1996 the majority of the case study towns reported similar proportions of people earning less than \$200 a week (figure B; note that the data for 1996 are for less than \$10 400 a year, while for 1991 they are for less than \$12 000 a year). However, Emerald and Mount Isa were notable exceptions, both





with considerably lower proportions in that category. There was considerably more variability in the proportion of individuals earning more than \$1000 a week in 1996 across the case study towns, with many of them reporting below average proportions of individuals in this category (figure C; note that the data for 1996 are for \$52 000 a year, while for 1991 they are for \$50 000 a year).

It is difficult to make comparisons between income categories over the 1991–96 period owing to changes in the definitions of the categories and the collection of nominal income data in the census that fails to take account of the effects of inflation. Notwithstanding this, between 1991 and 1996 the number of people earning income in the lowest category appears to have declined, while the proportion earning in the highest income category appears to have increased. With the exception of Wee Waa, this trend is consistent across all the case study towns.

Incomes increased across almost all of the case study towns between the 1991 and 1996 census collections. This is significant for Emerald and Griffith, the two towns reporting increases in population, labor force and workforce over the period.

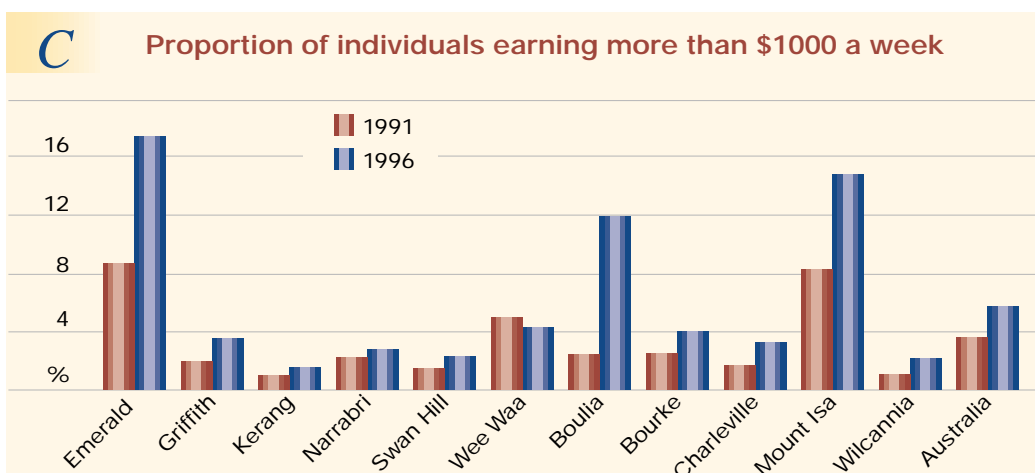
For the other case study towns, this increase could indicate that high incomes were achieved in spite of the observed declining economic base. However, it is also possible that this was caused by unemployed persons leaving these towns in search of work elsewhere. This would cause the proportion of people reporting income

in the lowest category to fall while increasing proportions in all other categories and is consistent with data showing that almost 13 per cent of all people reporting income in the less than \$12 001 a year (roughly \$230 a week) category in 1991 were not employed but actively seeking work. In contrast, less than 10 per cent of all persons in the labor force indicated that they were unemployed in the 1996 census (ABS 1996).

## Cost of living

The living standards of people in rural and regional communities are affected not only by the incomes they earn, but by the cost of living. Lower housing costs in rural and regional Australia may help offset lower median incomes, while higher transport costs — particularly in the more remote areas of Australia — may drive up the price of other goods and services.

While no comprehensive index for cost of living exists for regional Australia, rental and mortgage data collected in the census provide an insight into one of the major costs of living — housing. Notwithstanding the proportion of people who own their homes outright, data on rental and mortgage repayments can give some indication of differences in the costs of living that exist between different regions. In 1996, on average around 28 per cent of the population were making mortgage repayments and around 25 per cent were paying rent. In general, the proportion of the population paying rent was higher in the case study towns



compared with the national average and the proportion repaying mortgages lower.

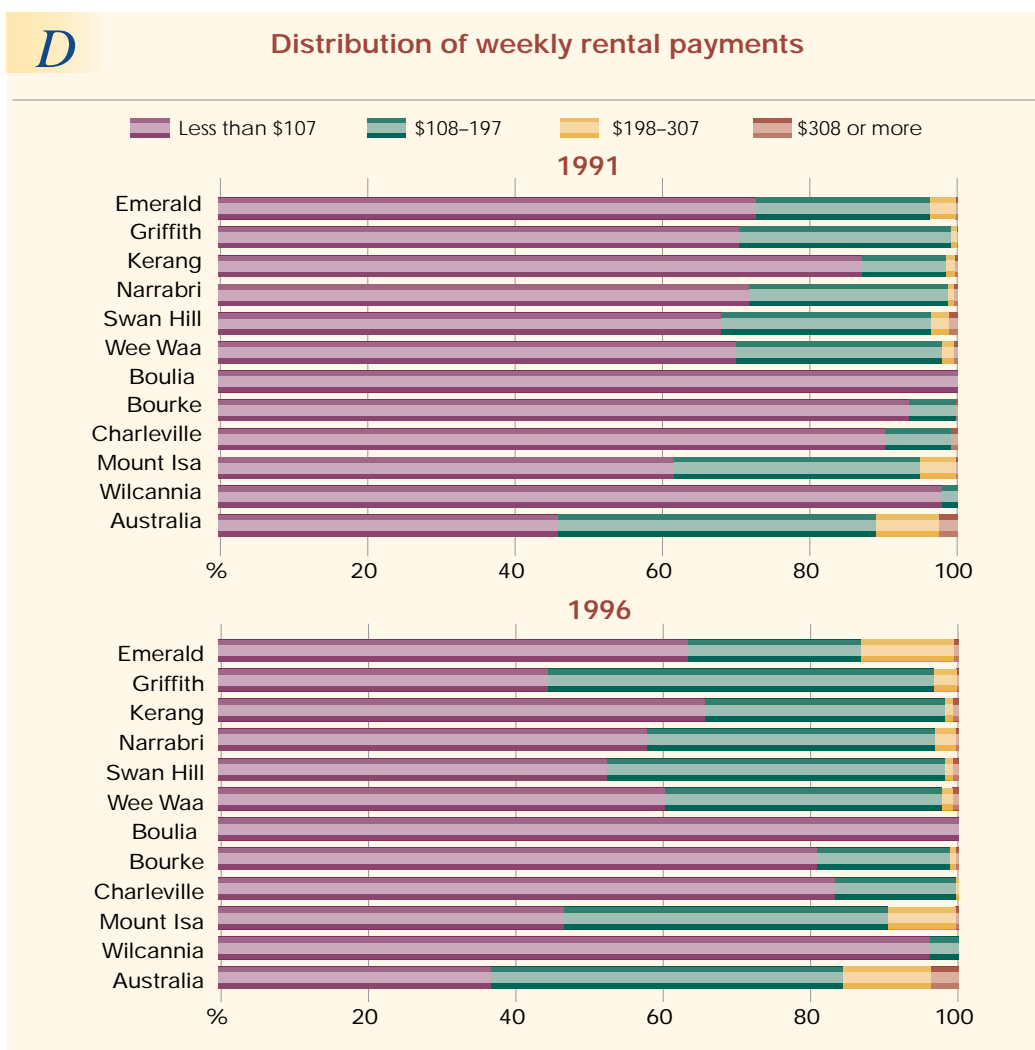
### Rental payments

The proportion of renters paying less than \$107 a week in 1996 was significantly higher in all the case study towns compared with the national average (figure D). Similarly, the proportion paying more than \$308 a week was consistently below the national average.

With the exception of Mount Isa, case study towns located in the pastoral zone had a much higher proportion of renters in the lowest category when compared with the towns in the wheat-sheep zone in both the 1991 and 1996 census collections. During the

intercensal period, rental payments appear to have increased more in the wheat-sheep zone towns compared with those in the pastoral zone. This is consistent with the observed increase in the workforce across the larger case study towns located in the wheat-sheep zone, potentially placing upward pressure on rental payments.

Some of the most dramatic changes in rental payments between 1991 and 1996 occurred in Emerald and Griffith. Notwithstanding the effects of inflation that have not been taken into account, the proportion of individuals paying between \$198 and \$307 rent a week more than tripled during the intercensal period (figure D). This is consistent with Emerald and Griffith being



the fastest growing of the case study towns, reporting increased incomes together with significant increases in the workforce, labor force and population between census collections.

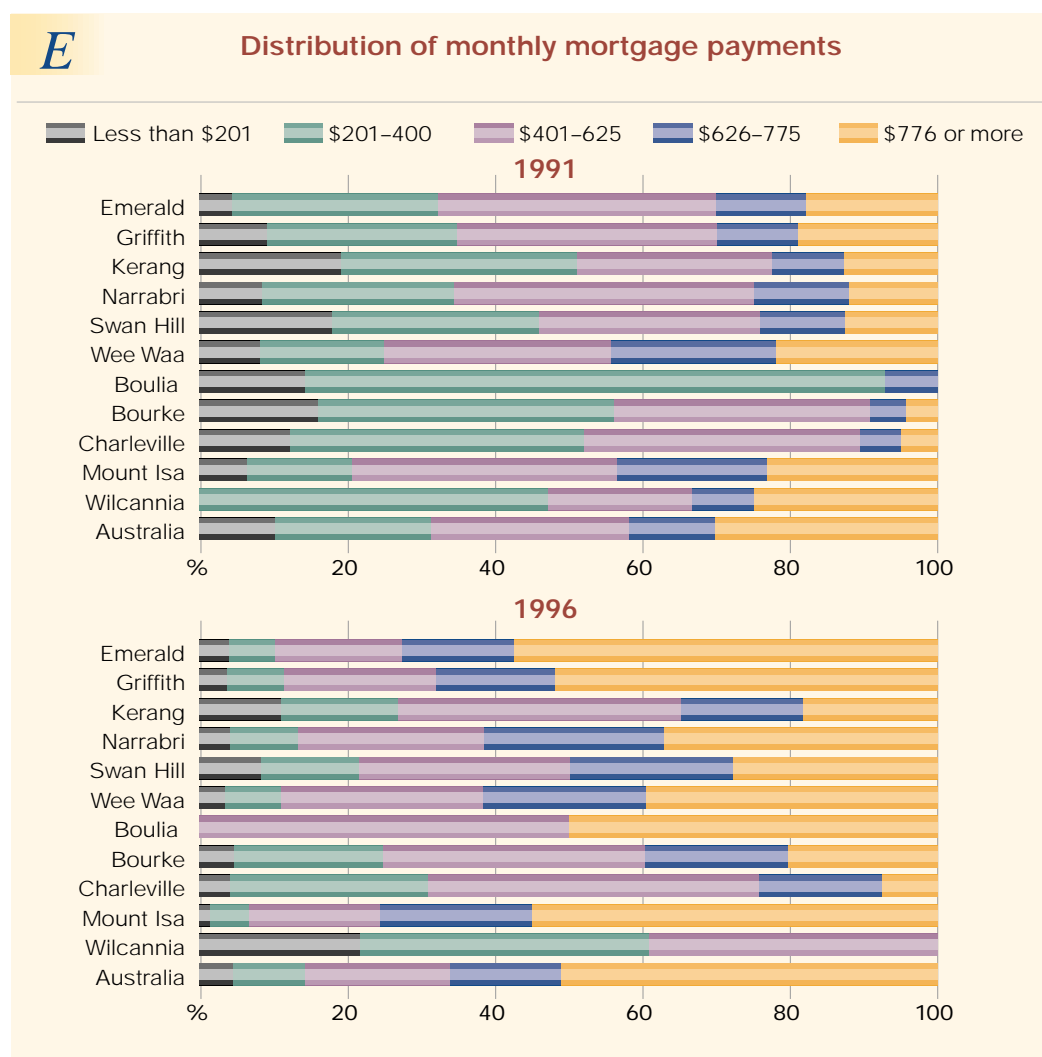
### Mortgage repayments

The ability to pay above minimum repayments on mortgages means that mortgage repayments are not necessarily representative of housing values. However, mortgage repayment data collected in the census can provide some insight into housing costs.

In 1996 only three of the large case study towns — Emerald, Griffith and Mount Isa — reported median mortgage repayments in the same category as the national average

(figure E). All other towns in the case study group reported median mortgage repayments in lower categories. Towns located in the pastoral zone generally had lower median mortgage repayments than for those towns in the wheat-sheep zone.

In 1991, most towns in the study group reported median mortgage repayments in the same category as the national average (figure E). Despite falling interest rates, the national median mortgage repayment increased significantly in the intercensal period. This trend was not as dramatic across the case study towns, indicating that the increase in capital values observed in the major coastal cities of Australia has not been matched in regional areas. In addition, it is





also possible that increased financial pressure — particularly across towns in the pastoral zone — has limited the ability of individuals to maintain or increase mortgage repayments.

### Age composition of case study towns

Analysis of the age composition of the case study towns provides some insight into labor force and workforce characteristics. Specifically, the proportion of people in the over 55 years age category show quite significant differences, consistent with the patterns observed in the workforce.

Compared with the national average, many of the case study towns in the wheat-sheep zone reported an above average proportion of the population in the over 55 years category in 1996 (figure F). This is particularly evident in Kerang where over 30 per cent of the population were over 55 years of age, and to a lesser extent in Swan Hill. The increase in this proportion observed between 1991 and 1996 is consistent with the decline in the labor force that occurred at the same time in these two towns.

Although still below the national average in 1996, the large increase in the proportion of the population over 55 years of age in Wee Waa is also consistent with the observed contraction in the labor force that was greater than the corresponding decline in the population that occurred at the same time.

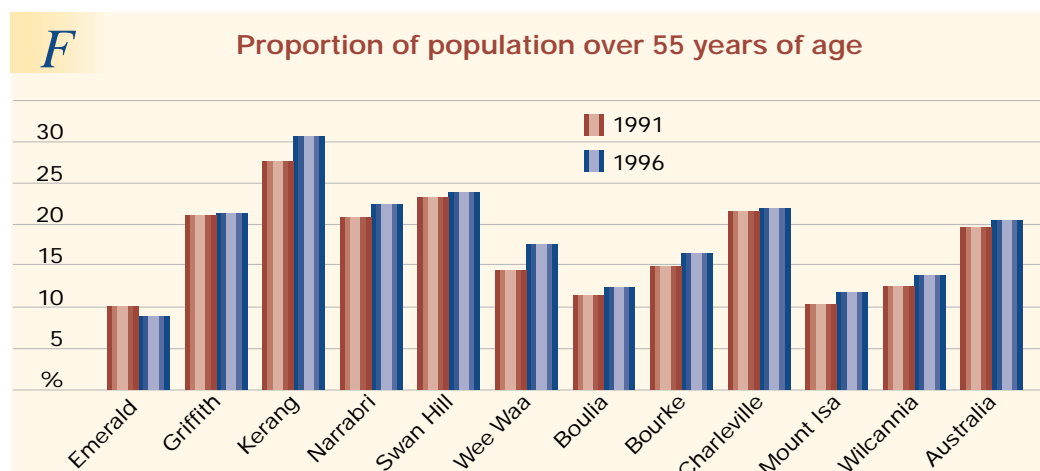
In contrast, the proportion of the population over 55 years of age declined in

Emerald, the town with the fastest growing population and labor force in the sample. The proportion of people in that age category in Emerald was also significantly less than the national average. Charleville, located not far from the border of the wheat-sheep zone, was the only case study town in the pastoral zone that did not report a below average number of persons in the over 55 years age category.

The difference in the proportion of persons over 55 years of age between the different agricultural zones possibly indicates a tendency for retirees and older persons to settle in more populated and better serviced areas, rather than in remote regions with limited access to facilities. In addition, the below average proportion of the population over 55 years of age indicates that the labor force is not declining in these pastoral zone towns because individuals are retiring. Instead it supports the hypothesis that unemployed people have moved to other towns in different regions in search of employment opportunities.

Many case study towns reported a greater increase in the proportion of the population over 55 years of age compared with the national average. This, together with the cost of housing data, may suggest that individuals in smaller towns are less able to move to urban and regional centres.

The proportion of the population over 55 years of age is expected to continue to increase in future census collections as the 'baby boom' generation moves into this age category. Differences between the case study



towns in 2001 are likely to reflect the trend for those in more remote areas to move toward regional centres in more populated areas. However, this may be limited by the ability of some individuals to finance a move, given differences in factors such as housing values.

## Industry composition

At the national level, agriculture — including services to agriculture — accounted for around 4 per cent of all reported employment in the 1996 census (table 2). The services industry was responsible for the majority of all jobs, employing around 32 per cent of all people in the workforce. Wholesale and retail trade was also an important industry, responsible for a further 20 per cent of all employment. In contrast, the mining industry — including services to mining — employed barely more than 1 per cent of all working persons in the workforce.

The relative importance of the different industries varied quite considerably across the case study towns. For many of the case study towns, agricultural industries provided more employment opportunities than that observed at the national level in 1996. This is particularly true of many of the towns in the wheat–sheep zone, perhaps reflecting the suitability of the region to a range of different agricultural activities. Where agricultural establishments in the zone have been able to adjust to changes in the sector they are likely to have been able to maintain employment levels.

Only Mount Isa and Wilcannia in the pastoral zone reported a below average percentage of persons employed in the agriculture sector, although in general the agriculture sector was less important to the case study towns located in the pastoral zone compared with those in the wheat–sheep zone. To some extent, the relatively low importance of agriculture reflects the limited range of viable agricultural activities that exist in the pastoral zone.

The mining sector was not a significant direct employer in many of the case study towns. However, in the two case study towns with a significant mining sector, Emerald and Mount Isa, it was an important employer relative to all other industries.

Manufacturing was generally less important to the economies of the case study towns compared with the national average. Only Griffith reported employment in manufacturing close to the national level. This largely reflects manufacturing in the food industry, with canneries, rice mills, fruit and vegetable packing, the production of fruit juice and Australia's largest egg and poultry plant. Manufacturing was generally less important to the case study towns located in the pastoral zone than those in the wheat–sheep zone.

In contrast, the wholesale and retail trade sector is quite an important source of employment across all the case study towns. Although once again the sector tended to be more important to the case study towns in the wheat–sheep zone than to towns in the pastoral zone. The wholesale and retail trade sector was slightly above average in importance in each of the case study towns in the wheat–sheep zone. It was more variable in the pastoral zone, ranging from around 9 per cent in Wilcannia to more than 22 per cent in Charleville. The particularly low proportion of persons employed by the wholesale and retail trade sector in Wilcannia may reflect the close proximity of the town to Broken Hill, a larger regional centre. However, the low proportions in some of the other larger case study towns in the pastoral zone suggest that their remote location, and therefore higher transport costs associated with the manufacture and production of goods, also limits the size of the sector.

On average, the services sector was considerably less important to the case study towns than across the rest of Australia as reported at the national level. This sector includes persons employed in communication services, finance and insurance, property and business services, health and community services, cultural and recreational services, as well as personal and other services. The proportions employed in services across the case study towns were much lower than the national average, ranging between zero and 8 per cent.

The government sector employed around 5 per cent of all working persons at the national level at the time of the 1996 census. Employment by this sector across the case study towns was generally consistent with

## 2 Proportion of persons employed, by industry type

	Agriculture	Mining	Manu- facturing	Wholesale and retail trade	Services a	Govern- ment	Other industries b
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Emerald</b>							
1991	3.80	13.24	4.88	20.65	2.60	5.76	49.07
1996	4.50	21.02	3.42	20.86	3.63	3.97	42.60
<b>Griffith</b>							
1991	11.40	0	11.58	25.22	2.91	3.81	45.08
1996	13.46	0.10	13.38	24.20	4.38	3.05	41.44
<b>Kerang</b>							
1991	5.00	0	5.43	26.59	3.55	7.32	52.10
1996	5.48	0.22	7.20	27.38	5.19	6.63	47.91
<b>Narrabri</b>							
1991	6.71	0.25	6.92	25.21	2.50	6.59	51.82
1996	6.91	0	7.48	22.10	5.04	6.13	52.35
<b>Swan Hill</b>							
1991	5.17	0.09	5.66	25.41	4.09	6.45	53.14
1996	6.17	0.16	7.45	26.43	6.09	4.93	48.77
<b>Wee Waa</b>							
1991	17.52	0.40	21.21	18.45	1.58	2.37	38.47
1996	24.26	0	9.40	19.78	3.51	1.68	41.37
<b>Boulia</b>							
1991	16.85	3.37	0	11.24	5.62	22.47	40.45
1996	6.82	0	0	12.50	0	38.64	42.05
<b>Bourke</b>							
1991	5.61	0	6.61	19.52	4.20	8.71	55.36
1996	11.10	0.57	6.03	14.45	7.18	8.80	51.87
<b>Charleville</b>							
1991	3.63	0	2.01	23.03	2.86	8.35	60.12
1996	4.49	0.22	2.97	22.23	6.37	7.60	56.12
<b>Mount Isa</b>							
1991	0.77	37.33	4.81	16.40	1.68	3.01	36.00
1996	0.74	31.47	5.47	15.69	3.46	3.26	39.91
<b>Wilcannia</b>							
1991	5.33	0	0	12.44	2.22	12.00	68.00
1996	2.54	0	0	8.90	8.05	16.53	63.98
<b>Australia</b>							
1991	4.86	1.31	13.71	20.61	28.91	6.09	24.51
1996	4.33	1.15	12.89	19.82	31.79	4.99	25.03

a Includes communication services, property and business services, health and community services, cultural and recreational services, personal and other services. b Includes construction, electricity, gas and water supply, education, transport and storage, accommodation, cafes and restaurants.

this national average. However, it was lower than average in Wee Waa, with less than 2 per cent of the workforce employed by the government sector. This may reflect the proximity of the town (less than 100 kilometres) to Narrabri, the administrative centre for the shire.

Both Boulia and Wilcannia were found to be significantly more dependent on the government sector for employment than the other case study towns. The shire council is the largest employer in Boulia, employing almost 40 per cent of the working population (QDPI 2001). Boulia is the administrative centre for an area of more than 60 000 square kilometres, and the shire council is responsible for maintaining the roads. In addition, a number of people in these towns are likely to be working on Community Development Employment Projects, an initiative funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission that provides employment for indigenous people in a wide range of community projects and enterprises (Garnaut et al. 2001).

### **Changes in industry composition over time**

There were some changes reported in industry composition at the national level and across the case study towns between census collections.

At the national level the importance of the agriculture sector has been gradually declining. In 1986 the agriculture sector employed almost 6 per cent of all persons working nationally. This declined to almost 5 per cent in 1991 and further to a little over 4 per cent by 1996. At the same time there has been some increase in the importance of the services sector.

Against the national trend, the relative importance of agriculture increased in many of the case study towns in the wheat-sheep zone. This included Emerald, Griffith, Swan Hill and Wee Waa, towns located in regions that moved out of wool and into cropping during the 1990s. In addition, Emerald and Wee Waa are both located in regions suited to growing cotton, a commodity that has earned relatively high returns compared with all other agricultural activities, and has expanded significantly throughout the period.

Unlike the case study towns in the wheat-sheep zone, the agriculture sector declined in importance across many of the case study towns in the pastoral zone. This is likely to reflect the pastoral zone's lack of suitability for cropping activities — particularly grain based cropping. Several of the case study towns in this zone — including Bourke and Wilcannia — are located in regions unable to move out of wool production during the 1990s. Others, including Charleville and Mount Isa, are located in regions where the only production alternatives were livestock based ones that have rarely generated the same returns as those across the cropping activities during the period.

One exception to this trend in the pastoral zone is Bourke where the relative importance of the agriculture sector increased between 1991 and 1996 despite being located in a region that continued to produce wool after the decline in prices observed in the early 1990s. However, closer inspection indicated that this increase in the importance of the agriculture sector was driven principally by an increase in persons employed in services to agriculture rather than in agricultural activities directly. This increase in the importance of the services to agriculture subsector was also observed in a number of the other case study towns, irrespective of whether they were located in the pastoral zone or the wheat-sheep zone.

Some changes to the mining sector were observed over the intercensal period in several of the case study towns. The importance of coal mining increased in Emerald, with employment increasing from around 13 per cent of the workforce in 1991 to more than 21 per cent by 1996. In addition, although not a significant sector of the economy in the earlier census collection, there was a complete move out of mining in the town of Boulia. Some decline in the importance of mining was also recorded in Mount Isa between 1991 and 1996. This included reduced employment in both the 'undefined' mining category as well as for the metal ore mining subcategory, although it was offset somewhat by an increase in employment in the mining services subcategory.

Following the national trend, there has been some increase in the importance of the

services industry to the economies of the case study towns. Despite the general increase in the importance of the services industry to the case study towns, not only does the importance of this sector continue to be well below that reported at the national level, the growth observed in the sector over the intercensal period across the case study towns has not matched the growth occurring at the national level.

In most case study towns, the importance of the government sector as an employer relative to all other sectors also declined between census collections. This also follows the trend observed at the national level where the proportion of persons employed by the government sector declined marginally between 1991 and 1996.

While most of the case study towns reported an increase in the proportion of people employed in the manufacturing industry, Wee Waa reported a significant decline in manufacturing — from employing more than 21 per cent of the workforce in 1991 and just 9 per cent by 1996. There were very few changes in the relative importance of the wholesale and retail trade sectors in the case study towns.

Some changes in the relative importance of different industries are likely to occur across the case study towns between the 1996 and 2001 census collections. The relative importance of mining in both Emerald and Mount Isa are expected to differ significantly from previous collections. This reflects the closure of several coal mines around Emerald and a resurgence in mining centred around Mount Isa.

### Value shares of different industries

While the number of persons employed by the various industries provides an indication about the structure of the economy, in the case study towns, differences in the wages paid across these industries can mask the real contribution they are making.

For example, both the mining industry and the wholesale and retail trade sector in Emerald were each responsible for employing around 20 per cent of the workforce in 1996. However, the median income for the two sectors varied considerably from \$1000–1499 a week in the mining sector, to

just \$200–399 in the wholesale and retail trade sector.

In addition, although the mining sector was relatively more important to Mount Isa than in Emerald, the median weekly income of those employed in this sector was lower in Mount Isa, at \$700–999 a week.

The median incomes of those employed in the agricultural industries varied across the case study towns, but tended to fall in either the \$200–399 or \$400–699 bracket. In general, the case study towns reporting higher incomes in the agriculture sector tended to be located in regions with significant cropping activities, including towns like Narrabri and Wee Waa that are located in cotton growing regions.

## Conclusions

Despite the continued decline in the importance of the agriculture sector relative to the rest of the national economy throughout the 1990s, the sector remains quite important to a number of regional and rural towns across Australia, both those expanding and those in decline. Structural changes in the agriculture sector have thus affected some of these towns quite significantly.

Against the national trend, the importance of the agriculture sector as an employer of people across a range of case study towns in the wheat–sheep zone increased between 1991 and 1996. This reflects the suitability of the region, in terms of both climate and topography, to a range of agricultural production alternatives, particularly to cropping. The data also support a tendency for higher median incomes across the agriculture sector in regions where agricultural enterprises are able to switch out of wool production and into higher returning cropping activities.

This is true of both Emerald and Griffith, the two case study towns with obviously growing economies. Both towns reported an increase in the relative importance of the agriculture sector between 1991 and 1996. This is likely to reflect the suitability of the regions surrounding both towns for cropping activities, particularly high returning irrigated activities such as cotton, horticulture and rice. Notwithstanding this expansion in agriculture, these towns also reported

an increase in the importance of other sectors of the economy. In the case of Emerald, this included a significant expansion in the importance of mining, and in the case of Griffith the importance of the manufacturing sector was observed to have increased over the period.

The towns where the agriculture sector declined in importance relative to all other sectors of the economy tended to be located in the pastoral zone where the range of production alternatives is more limited. It is in regions across this zone where the lack of higher returning alternative activities resulted in farm businesses continuing to produce wool despite a decline in the price of almost 35 per cent. In other parts of the zone the only viable alternatives were livestock ones, that did not achieve the higher returns obtained for some crops.

The towns in the pastoral zone also tended to be the ones with smaller wholesale and retail trade and manufacturing sectors. This combination of factors is likely to have contributed to the tendency of these towns — regardless of size — to be declining between the two census collections.

Looking forward, continued pressure in some sectors of agriculture, as well as emerging opportunities in others, is expected to significantly influence the performance of the case study towns. Changes

that have occurred in other industries — such as mining — are also expected to alter the economic profile of several towns from that observed using 1991 and 1996 data. The incorporation of data from the 2001 census collection is likely to provide further insight into the economic performance of these case study towns.

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# **REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN POPULATIONS: DIVERSITY DYNAMISM AND DICHOTOMY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

There are many myths which have been perpetuated about non-metropolitan Australia and its residents but among the least tenable is the stereotyping of these areas as being less dynamic and less differentiated than the nation's metropolitan areas. The present paper seeks to dispel this myth by examining some of the contemporary and impending dynamics of the non-metropolitan sector through the window of considering the shifts in its population. The most important resource in regional Australia are its people but our knowledge of them is somewhat limited. It may come as a surprise that 37.3 percent of Australians live outside of cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants at the turn of the century and they are changing in substantial and important ways under the influence of economic, social, political, and environmental shifts. The present paper summarises trends in the size, composition, and spatial distribution of Australians living outside the major cities. It argues that Australia's non-metropolitan based population is becoming more diverse and that this increased diversity offers considerable potential in efforts to work toward social, economic and environmental sustainability in rural Australia. It is also argued that along with increased diversity in non-metropolitan Australia there has been a polarization within the sector, which presents major challenges to policy makers.

## **DEFINING NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS**

With the burgeoning of interest in regional issues in Australia there has been a great deal of confusion about who should be included in considerations of that sector. Part of the confusion has arisen from a lack of conceptual clarity. Terms such as regional, rural, and remote are employed sometimes with a specific meaning and in other cases more vaguely. Much of the present confusion regarding rural, remote, and



regional stems from an attempt to combine into a single classification two distinctly different conceptual elements:

- urban/rural
- accessibility/remoteness

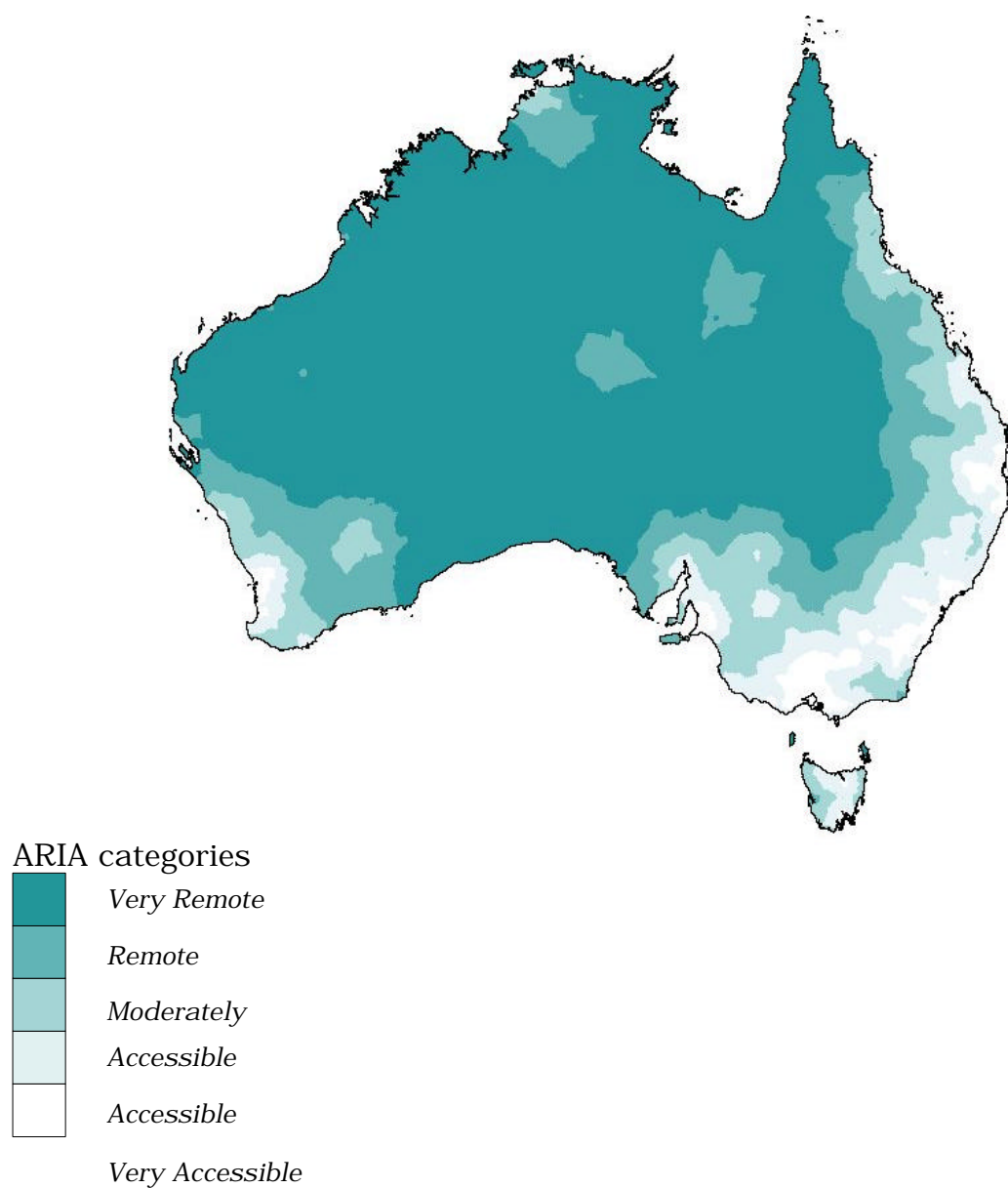
It is argued here that these are quite different concepts and need to be treated as such in differentiating types of settlement. An area can be both urban and remote or rural and remote. Any attempt to classify non-metropolitan Australia into rural and remote areas is misplaced. We need to classify areas in terms of their urbanness/ruralness and we also need to classify them by their degree of remoteness. The Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) already has a system of identifying and classifying urban and rural areas and it is argued that this system needs to be maintained albeit slightly modified. On the other hand, it is also suggested that there is a need for an additional classification of accessibility/remoteness which allows areas outside of the major cities of the nation to be classified according to their degree of accessibility to services. Such a classification, known as ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia), has been developed in the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (GISCA) located at the University of Adelaide (Bamford *et al.* 1999) and recently incorporated with the Australian Standard Geographical Classification.

The definitions employed in this paper can be clearly stated. The term non-metropolitan is used to refer to all parts of the country outside of centres with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Within these areas two types of differentiation are made. Firstly in accordance with the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) 'Sections of State' are recognised as follows:

- Major Urban - urban areas (Urban Centres in the UC/L Structure) with a population of 100,000 and over.
- Other Urban - urban areas (Urban centres in the UC/L Structure) with a population of 1,000 to 99,999.

**Figure 1: Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) 1996**

ARIA index values interpolated to 1km grid



Source: Glover, Harris, and Tennant 1999: 9

- Bounded Rural Locality - rural areas (Localities in the UC/L) with a population of 200-999 population.
- Rural Balance - the remainder of the S/T.
- Migratory - areas composed of offshore, shipping, and migratory CDs.

However, the paper also differentiates within non-metropolitan areas according to their degree of remoteness. ARIA indices of remoteness have been calculated for 11,338 localities outside of Australia's major cities and the entire area of non-metropolitan Australia has been classified into five categories of remoteness:

- a. Highly Accessible - locations with relatively unrestricted accessibility to a wide range of goods and services and opportunities for social interaction.
- b. Accessible - locations with some restrictions to accessibility of some goods, services, and opportunities for social interaction.
- c. Moderately Accessible - locations with significantly restricted accessibility of goods, services, and opportunities for social interaction.
- d. Remote - locations with very restricted accessibility of goods, services, and opportunities for social interaction.
- e. Very Remote - locationally disadvantaged - very little accessibility of goods, services, and opportunities for social interaction.

The distribution of these five types of areas is depicted in Figure 1. Our concern here is with the sectors of Australia which are outside the major urban and highly accessible categories.

## **POPULATION TRENDS IN NON-METROPOLITAN AUSTRALIA**

Table 1 indicates the changes which have occurred in the numbers of places and population in different size categories of places over the last three decades. It will

be noticed that over this period there was a substantial increase in the number of country towns and cities from 450 in 1966 to 728 in 1996 while their share of the national population increased from 20.5 to 23.7 percent. The proportion of Australians living in rural areas (i.e. in localities with less than 1,000 residents) fell from 16.9 percent to 14 percent. In 1996, 46.9 percent of Australians lived outside the five largest cities and 37.7 percent lived outside cities of 100,000 or more residents. The latter amounted to 6.68 million people in 1996 compared with 5.78 million a decade earlier and 4.9 million in 1976. Australia's non-metropolitan population has grown faster than that in metropolitan areas in three of the last four intercensal periods. Hence any characterisation of the non-metropolitan population as static or declining is incorrect.

**Table 1: Distribution of Population by Settlement Size, 1966, 1976, 1986, and 1996**

Settlement Size	Number of urban centres				Percentage of population			
	1966	1976	1986	1996	1966	1976	1986	1996
500,000 and over	5	5	5	5	56.0	57.0	54.5	53.1
100,000 – 499,999	4	6	7	8	5.4	7.5	8.2	9.2
75,000 – 99,999	1	1	1	2	0.8	0.6	0.6	1.0
50,000 – 74,999	5	6	7	6	2.4	2.5	2.8	2.1
25,000 – 49,999	5	13	11	25	1.5	3.1	2.3	4.6
20,000 – 24,999	11	6	22	17	2.1	0.9	3.1	2.1
15,000 – 19,000	17	19	17	14	2.5	2.5	1.9	1.3
10,000 – 14,999	19	22	29	37	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.5
5,000 – 9,999	61	73	83	86	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.5
2,500 – 4,999	103	115	127	165	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.2
2,000 – 2,499	50	56	71	64	1.0	0.9	1.0	0.8
1,000 – 1,999	178	181	252	312	2.2	1.9	2.2	2.5
Total urban	459	503	632	741	82.9	86.0	85.4	86.0
Total rural					16.9	13.9	14.5	14.0
Total population <sup>a/</sup>					100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number ('000)					11,599	13,548	15,602	17,892

a/ Includes migratory population.

Source: Rowland 1982, ABS Censuses of 1986 and 1996

Nevertheless, this pattern of population growth has not been universal throughout non-metropolitan areas. While the population in country towns grew by

44.1 percent between 1966 and 1996 that in rural areas expanded by 25.9 percent. More importantly there were substantial regional variations between non-metropolitan areas in the patterns of population change. Figure 2 shows that between 1991 and 1996 there were wide variations between regional areas with respect to population growth and decline and distinct spatial patterns of growth and decline. Overall, non-metropolitan populations grew slightly faster (6 percent) than was the case in metropolitan areas (5.6 percent). It will be noted that areas of population growth in regional Australia are strongly concentrated in certain areas, namely...

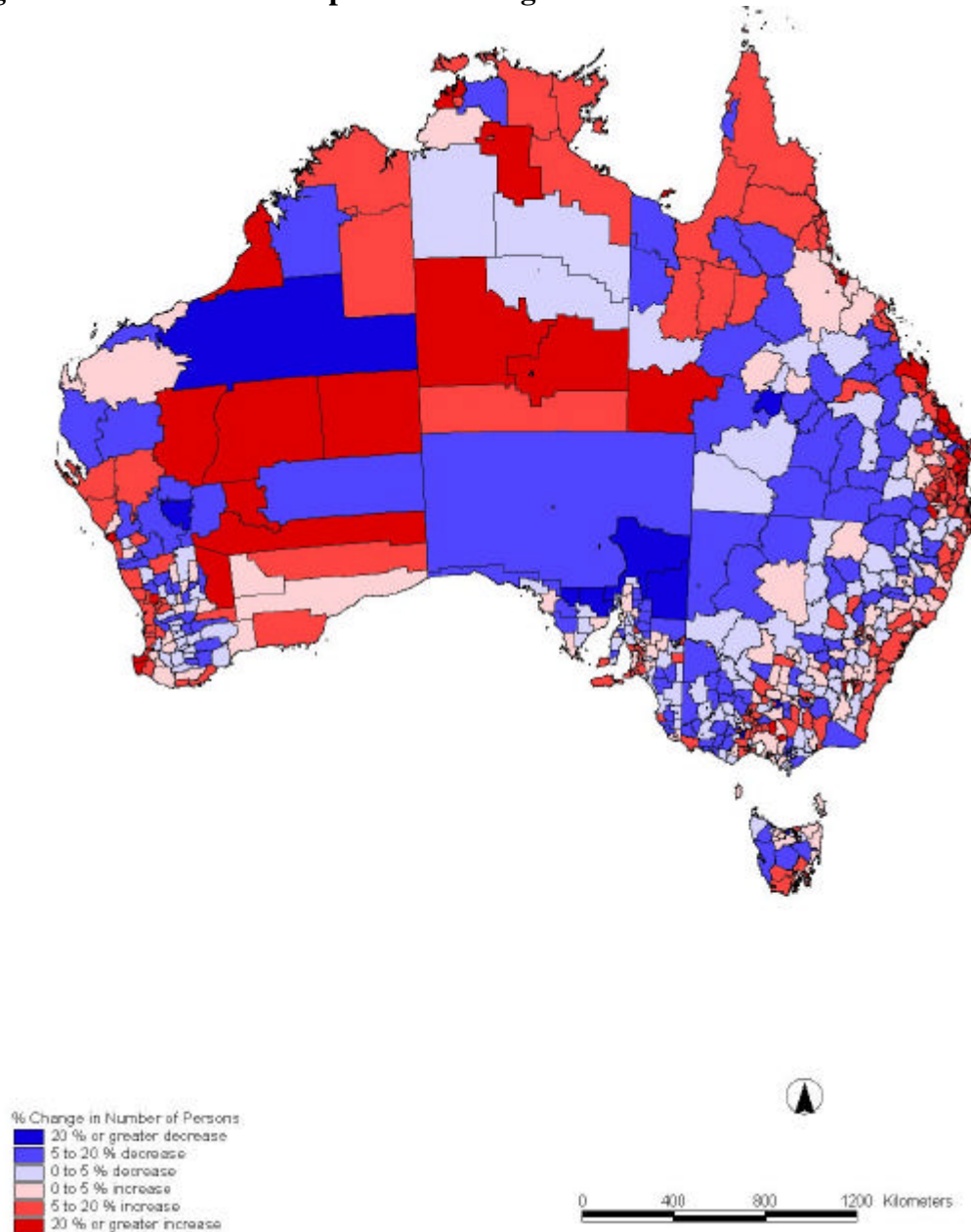
- The areas surrounding metropolitan areas.
- Along the well watered east coast and southwest coast.
- Some resort and retirement areas.
- Some regional centres.
- Along the Hume Highway linking Sydney and Melbourne.
- Some relatively remote areas, especially those with growing mining activities, tourism, and significant indigenous populations.

On the other hand, there is also a spatial concentration of the areas experiencing population decline...

- Above all the dry farming areas of the wheat-sheep belt such as in western Victoria extending through central-western New South Wales and Queensland, the southeast Eyre Peninsula and mid north of South Australia and the wheat-sheep belt of Western Australia.
- Many pastoral areas in central Australia.
- Certain mining areas such as Broken Hill.
- Declining industrial cities such as Whyalla in South Australia.

These stark patterns point to a substantial degree of population variation within regional Australia.

**Figure 2: Australia: Population Change 1991-96**



Source: Haberkorn *et al.* 1999

It is interesting, too, to examine the patterns of population change in non-metropolitan Australia according to the degree of accessibility/remoteness of particular areas. Table 2 shows the rates of population change in the five accessibility sectors of non-metropolitan Australia depicted in Figure 1. This indicates that only in

the highly accessible areas close to major cities are population growth levels above the national average.

**Table 2: Australian Non-Metropolitan Areas: Population Growth by Level of Accessibility**

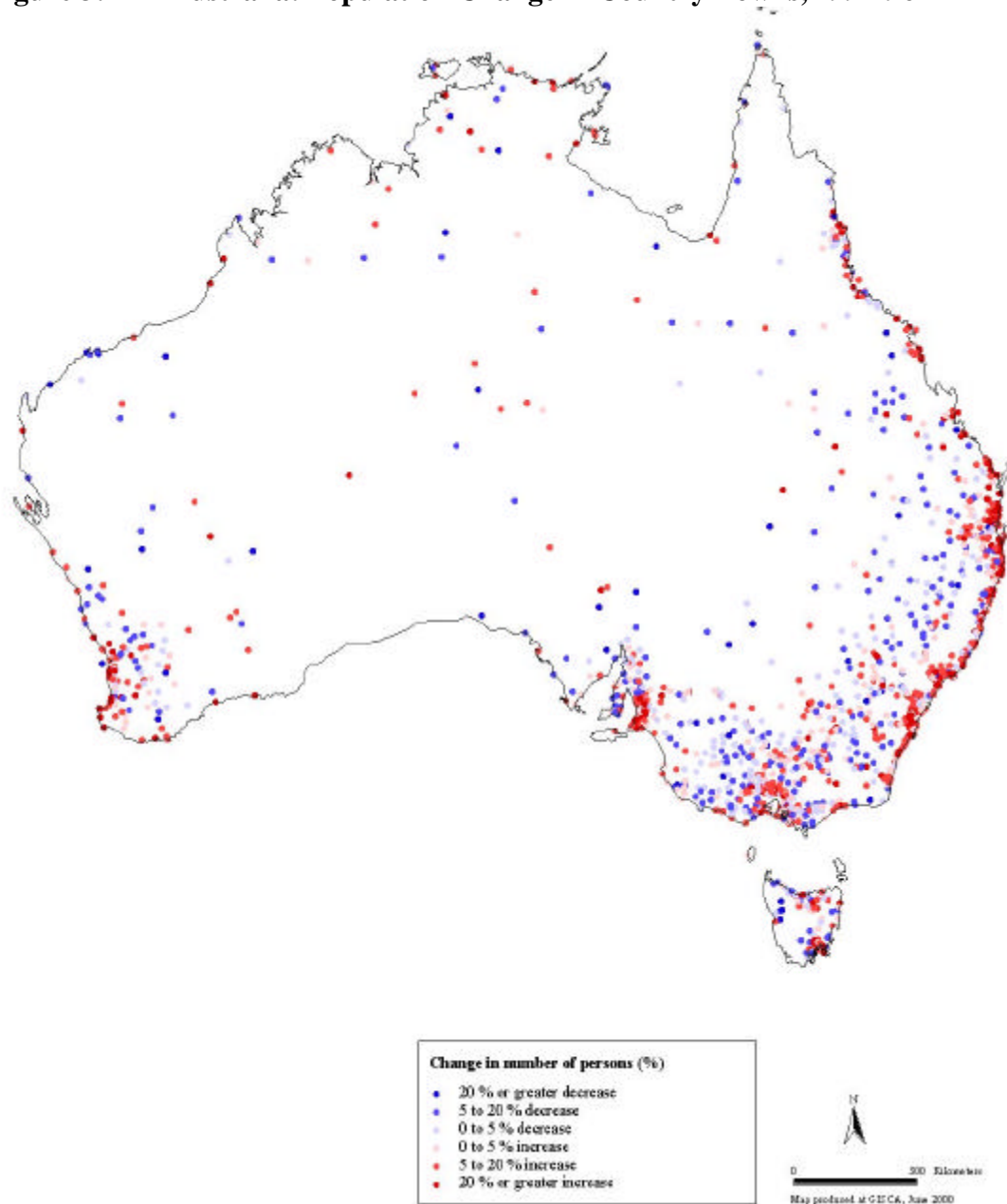
Level of Accessibility	Rate of population growth 1991-96 (%)	Population density Persons per km <sup>2</sup>
Highly accessible	6.2	77.2
Accessible	5.1	4.1
Moderately accessible	3.6	1.0
Remote	1.2	0.2
Very remote	2.9	0.0
Total Australia	5.8	2.3

Source: Glover et al. 1999

There is a decline in the rates of growth with increasing distance away from the large cities except that the very remote areas had a slightly faster growth rate than the 'remote' areas. It will also be noted that there is an association between rates of population growth and population density.

Turning to an examination of population growth trends in country towns, Figure 3 shows the location of urban areas experiencing growth and decline. Again a clear spatial pattern is in evidence. Centres with relatively rapid growth are clustered around the nation's largest cities and strung along the eastern and southwestern coasts. On the other hand, the wheat-sheep belt area tends to have urban places which are experiencing decline. In the more remote areas there is a greater variation with both centres experiencing growth and those recording decline.

**Figure 3: Australia: Population Change in Country Towns, 1991-96**



Source: Australian Censuses of 1991 and 1996



## PROCESSES OF POPULATION CHANGE IN NON-METROPOLITAN AUSTRALIA

In examining patterns of population growth it is necessary to disaggregate the change and examine the processes influencing it separately. The demographic processes shaping population growth in individual country towns as in the non-metropolitan sector generally are as follows...

- Fertility – the extent to which women living in the area have children.
- Mortality – the pattern of death in the sector.
- Internal migration – the extent to which people move into the area from other parts of Australia and which residents move elsewhere in Australia.
- International migration – the extent to which people move into the area from overseas and which residents leave for overseas.

Taking first of all fertility, non-metropolitan Australia has shared the national trend toward a lowering of fertility over the last few decades. Table 3 shows that fertility in non-metropolitan Australia in the first half of the 1990s was around replacement level – 16 percent higher than that of the nation as a whole and 19 percent higher than in Australia's capital cities. Hence, it must be recognised that the non-metropolitan community is replacing itself through fertility, while the metropolitan population is not.

**Table 3: Australia: Total Fertility Rate, State/Territory, 1992 to 1995**

	NSW	VIC	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Total
Capital city	1.81	1.70	1.73	1.64	1.76	1.79	2.06	1.72 <sup>1</sup>	1.75
Other major urban centres <sup>2</sup>	1.91	1.86	1.73	..	..	..	..	..	1.84
Rest of State/Territory	2.24	2.15	2.07	2.12	2.22	2.08	2.66	.. <sup>3</sup>	2.16
Whole State/Territory	1.91	1.79	1.86	1.75	1.87	1.95	2.38	1.69	1.86

<sup>1</sup> Includes Queanbeyan (c)

<sup>2</sup> Includes Newcastle and Wollongong (NSW); Geelong (Vic); and Gold Coast-Tweed Heads and Townsville-Thuringowa (Qld)

<sup>3</sup> Data included with ACT total

Source: Glover, Harris and Tennant 1999: 182

Mortality levels are higher in non-metropolitan than metropolitan areas as Table 4 indicates. This applies to both infant mortality rates<sup>1</sup> and standardised mortality rates (SMRs)<sup>2</sup> for both males and females in the economically active ages of 15 to 64. In all cases it will be noted that the 'other' major urban centres lay between the capital cities on the one hand and non-metropolitan areas on the other. It will be noted also in Table 4 that there has been substantial improvement in mortality levels in non-metropolitan areas over the last decade.

**Table 4: Australia: Infant Mortality Rates and Standardised Death Rates for Males and Females Aged 15-64**

<b>1992-95</b>	<b>Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000)</b>	<b>Standardised Death Rates</b>	
		<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Capital city	5.8	94	95
Other major urban centres	6.2	102	105
Rest of State/Territory	6.8	110	109
Australia	6.2	100	100
<b>1985-89</b>			
Rest of State/Territory	9.3	111	108

Source: Glover, Harris and Tennant 1999: 136, 140, 144

Table 5 shows the pattern of fertility and mortality in non-metropolitan areas according to the degree of accessibility/remoteness of areas. This indicates that there are strong correlations between both fertility and mortality on the one hand and remoteness/accessibility on the other. Fertility increases with the degree of remoteness. This is partly due to intrinsically higher fertility in rural areas and partly due to higher representations of indigenous populations in remote areas. Similar patterns are observable in relation to mortality levels with increases with distance from large centres.

<sup>1</sup> The IMR is defined as the number of deaths of children under one year per 1000 live births.

<sup>2</sup> The SMR is defined as the number of deaths per 1,000 population in a given year, controlling for the effects of differing age composition (Haupt and Kane 1978).

While there are differences in fertility and mortality between areas in Australia it is differences in the migration experience of those areas which is the main reason for variations in levels of population growth or decline. Migration differences are important, however, not only because they influence levels of population growth in areas but because migrants are *always* not a cross section of the population at either their origin or destination. The process of migration greatly influences the composition of the population of areas. The influence of migration can be differentiated between that of internal migration and that of overseas groups. By far the greatest influence is from internal (within Australia) migration and this will be considered first.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 5: Australia: Total Fertility Rate, Infant Mortality Rate and Standardised Mortality Rates for Males and Females Aged 15-64; 1992-95**

Accessibility/remoteness Index	TFR	IMR	SMR Males 15-64	SMR Females 15-64
Very accessible	1.79	5.8	96	97
Accessible	2.15	7.1	118	102
Moderately accessible	2.30	6.3	116	106
Remote	2.43	8.0	128	126
Very remote	2.51	13.4	201	258

Source: Glover, Harris and Tennant 1999: 135, 140, 144, 182

Table 6 shows the net migration<sup>4</sup> patterns for the non-metropolitan parts of each state between 1986 and 1996 and a number of interesting patterns are in evidence. In analysing trends in intrastate migration up to 1991, Bell (1995: 78) comments that the most striking feature 'is the consistent trend towards reduced net gains or increased losses from each capital city to its respective non-metropolitan

<sup>3</sup> For full details of internal migration in Australia see Bell and Hugo 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Net migration can be defined as the difference between the number of persons who have changed their place of usual residence by moving in and the number who have changed their place of usual residence by moving out.

area.’ This pattern appears to have changed significantly in the 1991-96 period in all states except Tasmania. In the two largest states, New South Wales and Victoria, there was a substantial reduction in the net losses from Sydney and Melbourne to their respective non-metropolitan areas. That in NSW was halved and

**Table 6: Net Interstate and Intrastate Migration, Capital City Statistical Divisions and Non-Metropolitan Areas, Six States, Australia, 1966-71 to 1991-96**

Year	Metropolitan			Non-Metropolitan			Metropolitan share of interstate gain Or loss (%)
New South Wales	Intrastate	Interstate	Total	Intrastate	Interstate	Total	
1986-91	-67,348	-71,374	-138,672	67,348	-22,120	45,238	76.3
1991-96	-33,659	-30,136	-63,795	33,659	-28,090	5,569	51.8
Victoria							
1986-91	-29,118	-29,756	-58,874	29,118	-14,995	14,123	66.5
1991-96	-4,264	-45,118	-49,382	4,264	-31,024	-26,760	59.3
Queensland							
1986-91	-3,035	45,752	42,717	3,035	79,047	82,082	36.7
1991-96	1,899	54,021	55,920	-1,899	88,142	86,243	38.0
South Australia							
1986-91	3,902	-644	3,258	-3,902	-3,638	-7,540	15.0
1991-96	4,815	-13,904	-9,089	-4,815	-4,117	-8,932	77.2
Western Australia							
1986-91	4,576	12,884	17,460	-4,576	3,282	-1,294	79.7
1991-96	6,534	12,467	19,001	-6,534	3,852	-2,682	76.4
Tasmania							
1986-91	3,731	-493	3,238	-3,731	318	-3,413	281.7
1991-96	2,982	-2,706	276	-2,982	-3,291	-6,273	45.1

Source: Bell and Hugo 2000: 96

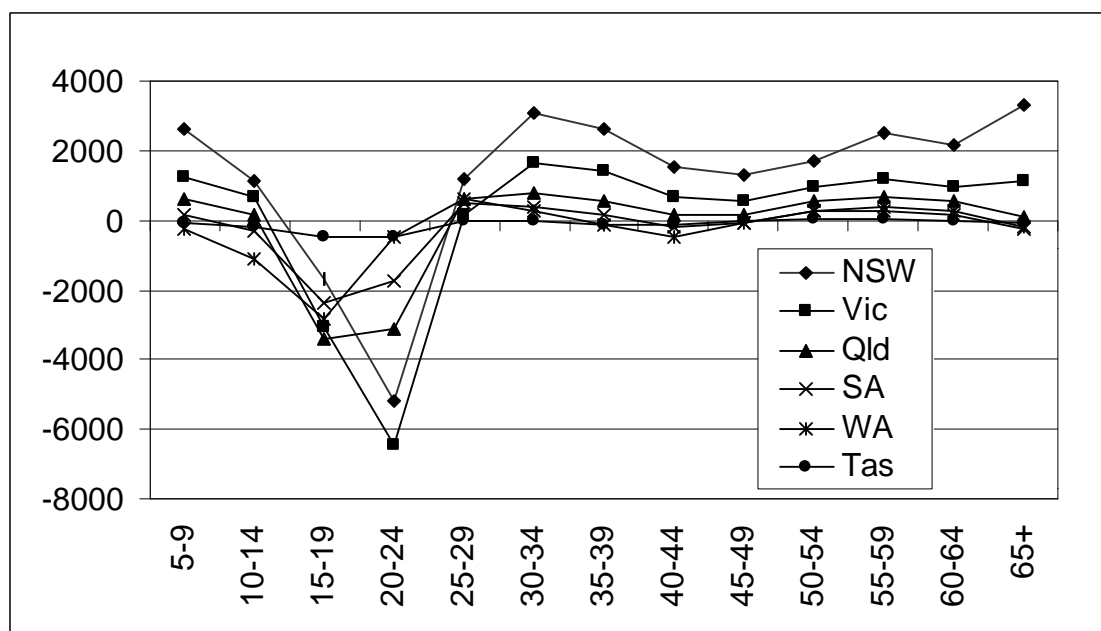
that in Victoria reduced from -29,118 to -4,264. In Queensland a net loss from Brisbane in 1986-91 was reversed to a net gain in 1991-96 while the net gains of Adelaide and Perth from their corresponding non-metropolitan areas increased between 1986-91 and 1991-96. With regard to intrastate migration, there is a migration exchange between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas favouring the latter only in NSW and Victoria and this is less than in 1986-91. Hence, an examination of intrastate trends would support the view that counter-urbanisation trends in Australia have slowed down considerably in the early 1990s compared with

the 1980s. It is clear too that interstate migration has played a role in counter-urbanisation.

It is important to stress the fact that the internal migration affecting non-metropolitan Australia is selective of particular groups. This is readily apparent from Figure 4 which shows the net migration between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Heavy net losses of young adults are a longstanding feature of internal migration between capitals and non-metropolitan areas (Hugo, 1971). Similarly, the greater number of females than males in this movement has been a consistent feature over the last three decades. The fact that even fast growing non-metropolitan areas cannot offer the post-school education and variety of job opportunities that are available in the capital cities means that even these areas are losing population aged in their late teens and early 20s. There is little chance that there will be any significant reversal of this trend toward a net loss of young adults. The key question really is: To what extent can conditions be created to encourage these young people to come back to settle in non-metropolitan Australia after completing their education and gaining experience in metropolitan centres. This flow already exists as is evident from Figure 4 and there is a need for policies to enhance this.

We have dealt so far with the internal migration between metropolitan and non-metropolitan sectors but it is apparent from an earlier analysis of regional population growth that there is considerable variation in the migration experience of different regional areas. As indicated earlier while some areas (especially those near cities, along the east and southeast coasts, and some large regional centres) have recorded substantial net immigration gains, others continue to record substantial net losses (especially in the wheat-sheep belt and in pastoral areas).

**Figure 4: Age Profile of Net Migration to Non-Metropolitan Areas from State Capital Cities, 1991-96**



Source: Bell and Hugo 2000: 100

One of the most dramatic changes in post-war Australian society has been the expansion of immigration and the diversification of the immigration intake. However, this transformation has been more marked in Australia's major cities than in regional areas. Table 7 shows that over the 1947–96 period the number of Australia-born persons living in cities with 100,000 or more inhabitants more than doubled so that in 1996, 57.7 percent lived in such centres. On the other hand, the overseas-born population in the largest urban areas increased more than six times so that by 1996, 80 percent of Australia's overseas-born lived in those cities. Hence the impact of immigration has been felt more in Australia's major cities than in the provincial cities or rural areas. Over the 1947–96 period the proportion of the population in cities with more than 100,000 residents made up by the overseas-born increased from 11.6 percent to 29.1 percent.

**Table 7: Australia: Distribution of Australia and Overseas-Born Population Between Major Urban, Other Urban and Rural Areas, 1947–96**

Between Major Urban, Other Urban and Rural Areas, 1947-96					Percent Change 1947-96
1947		1996			
No.	Percent	No.	Percent		
Australia-Born					
Major Urban	3,390,591	49.7	7,627,194	57.7	+125.0
Other Urban	1,263,724	18.5	3,485,125	26.4	+175.8
Rural	2,173,068	31.8	2,108,236	15.9	-3.0
Total*	6,827,383	100.0	13,220,555	100.0	+93.6
Overseas-Born					
Major Urban	453,368	61.8	3,126,263	80.0	+589.6
Other Urban	98,284	13.5	489,550	12.5	+395.4
Rural	181,180	24.7	290,275	7.4	+60.2
Total*	733,372	100.0	3,906,088	100.0	+432.6

\* Excludes migratory.

Source: ABS 1947 and 1996 Censuses

The proportion of the total national overseas-born population living in provincial cities declined slightly from 13.5 to 12.5 percent over the 1947–96 period. However, their numbers increased almost fivefold so that the proportion of residents who were overseas-born increased from 7.2 to 12.3 percent. In rural areas there was a substantial change. In 1947 a quarter of all overseas-born persons lived in rural areas but this was drastically reduced to 7.4 percent by 1996. Nevertheless the proportion of rural residents who were overseas-born increased from 7.6 percent to 12.1 percent. Hence although the presence of overseas-born has increased in all three urban-rural sectors, the impact has been greatest in major urban areas. This contrasts with a great deal of pre-World War II settlement of NES origin groups which was strongly focused upon rural areas (e.g. Borrie 1954).

Different overseas groups have differed in their tendency to settle outside of Australia's major urban areas. Hence Table 8 shows that all overseas-born groups have a smaller proportion of their populations living outside large cities than the Australia-born. The table indicates that recently arrived groups, especially those from

**Table 8: Australia's Largest Birthplace Groups and Proportion Living Outside Major Cities, 1996**

Birthplace group	Number	Percent outside major cities	Birthplace group	Number	Percent outside major cities
Australia	13,227,766	42.3	Netherlands	87,898	40.5
UK/Ireland	1,124,031	31.4	India	77,551	11.7
New Zealand	291,388	30.9	Malaysia	76,255	11.2
Italy	238,246	15.8	Lebanon	70,225	3.1
Former Yugoslavia	175,422	10.2	Hong Kong	68,430	5.1
Vietnam	151,055	2.5	Poland	65,113	12.1
Greece	126,520	6.7	South Africa	55,755	16.3
China	111,011	5.4	Malta	50,879	18.1
Germany	110,331	32.9	USA	49,528	27.4
Philippines	92,947	16.5	Sri Lanka	46,986	8.1

Source: ABS 1996 Census

Asia, show a high propensity to settle in major cities and have only small populations in non-metropolitan areas. One exception is those from the Philippines where there is a significant representation in the 'other urban' and rural areas. This is partly due to the substantial number of Filipino-born women marrying Australia-born men in non-metropolitan areas. Nevertheless, the overall picture is of overseas migration playing a much less significant role in the growth of non-metropolitan than of metropolitan populations in Australia.

There are substantial variations between different parts of non-metropolitan Australia and the significance of overseas migration. This is evident in Figure 5. Overall the proportion born overseas in non-metropolitan Australia is 11.7 percent compared with 28.1 percent in major cities. In non-metropolitan Australia areas with a high representation are dominated by outback Western Australia and South Australia. However, the numbers in these areas are relatively small and reflect the high foreign-born participation in the mining industry in these areas. There are also isolated areas in the northern Western Australia, the Northern Territory, and Queensland where tourist areas have a substantial overseas-born presence. The largest numbers of overseas-born people in non-metropolitan Australia tend to be in the peri-urban areas surrounding Australia's major cities and in some coastal areas,

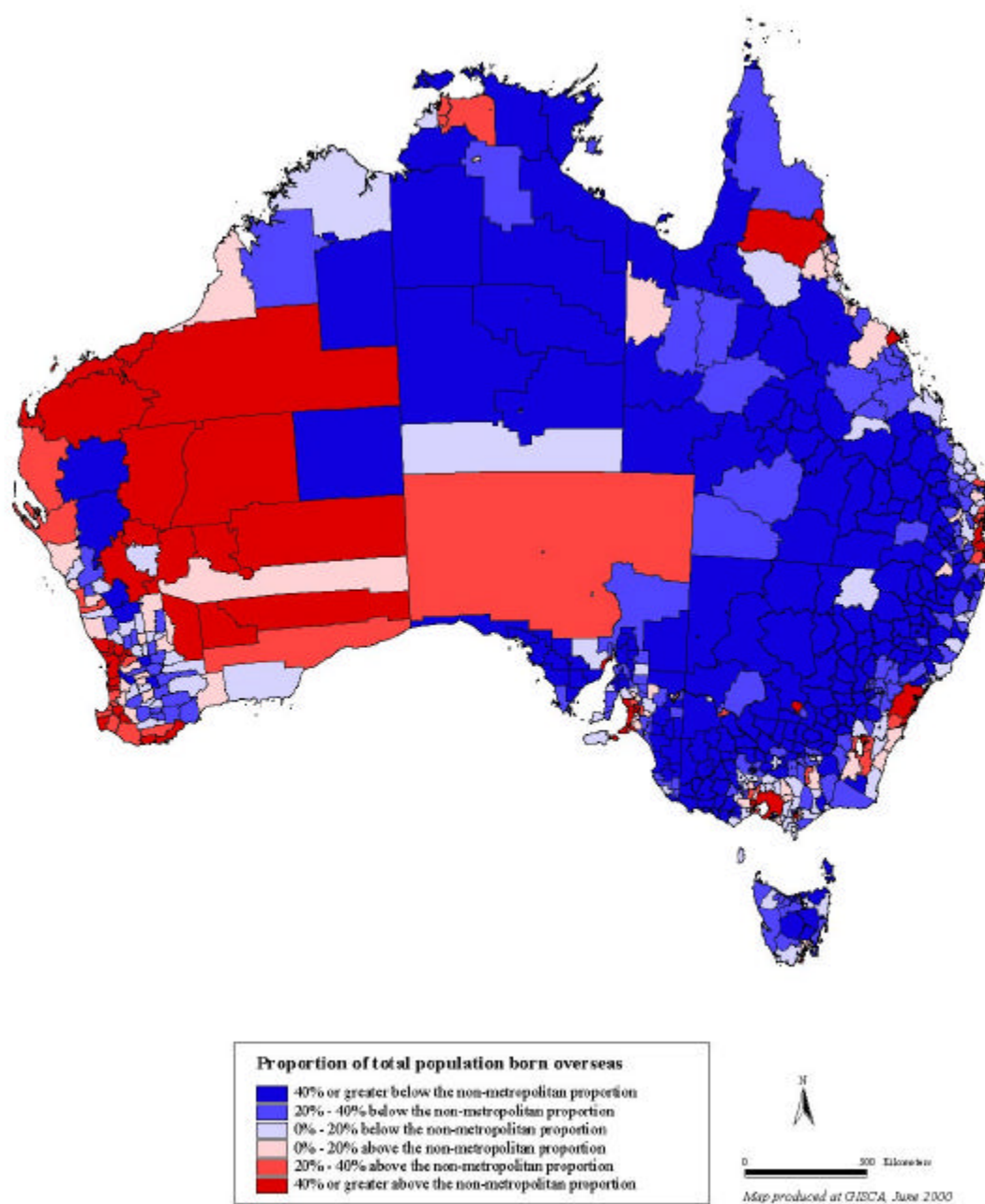


especially southeastern Queensland and southwestern Western Australia. This partly reflects the movement of long standing older immigrants from large cities to areas attractive to retirees. An above average presence of the overseas-born is also seen in large regional centres and some irrigated agriculture areas. However, the dominant pattern for dry land farming and much of the pastoral zone is to have below average levels of overseas-born residents.

## **THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION**

While all overseas-born groups are under-represented in non-metropolitan Australia this is not true of the indigenous population. Special attention should be drawn to this group not only because of their distinctive heritage but also because of the marginal situation of many and their deprived economic and social circumstances. This is depicted in Table 9 which compares the indigenous and total population on a number of key indicators and has important implications for provision of services. In 1996, 2 percent of the national population were of indigenous origin but they comprised 3.7 percent of those living in non-metropolitan areas and 0.97 percent of those in major urban areas. Table 10 shows that in 1996, 69.9 percent of the nation's indigenous population lived in non-metropolitan areas compared with 37.3 percent of the total population.

**Figure 5: Australia: Population Born Overseas, 1996**



Source: Haberkorn et al. 1999: 24

**Table 9: Australia: Comparison of Various Demographic and Social Characteristics of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population and Total Population, 1996**

Characteristic	Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders	Total Population
Expectation of life at birth (years) - male	56.9 <sup>a</sup>	75.9 <sup>b</sup>
Expectation of life at birth (years) - female	61.7 <sup>a</sup>	81.5 <sup>b</sup>
Infant mortality rate <sup>c</sup>	15.2	5.0
Percentage in major urban	30.3	62.7
Percentage aged less than 15	49.8	21.4
Unemployment rate	22.7	9.2
Percentage employed as managers, administrators, professionals	13.9	26.4
Percentage labourers and related workers	24.3	8.7
Percentage with diploma, degree or higher	4.2	16.5
Individual income \$15,548 or less per year	61.6	47.7
Individual income \$41,600 or over per year	2.7	10.1
Percentage of households living in public Rental accommodation	23.3	5.4

a 1991 to 1996 figures

b 1996 to 1998 figures

c 1998 figures

Source: ABS 1998a; ABS 1999

**Table 10: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population Growth By Section of State, 1986-96**

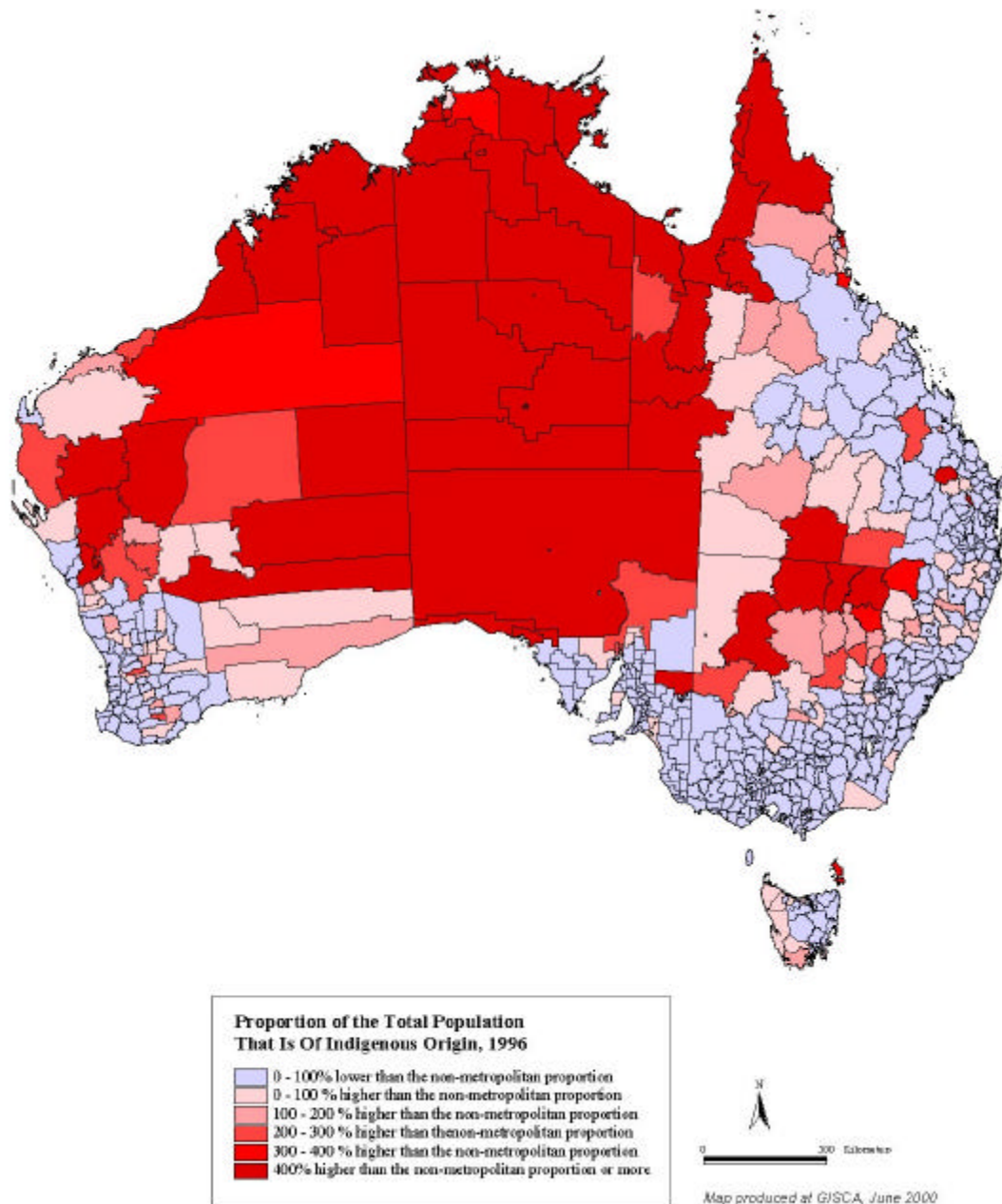
Section of State	Population		Percentage Share		Growth Rate Per Year
	1986	1996	1986	1996	
Major urban	55,537	106,937	24.4	30.3	+6.77
Other urban	95,879	149,269	42.1	42.3	+4.53
Rural	76,229	96,624	33.5	27.4	+2.40
Total	227,645	352,830	100.0	100.0	+4.48

Source: Gaminiratne 1993: 7; 1996 Census of Population and Housing

The table indicates that the indigenous population in major urban areas is increasing faster than that in the rest of Australia but they remain a predominantly non-metropolitan population and are an especially important group in country towns.

The indigenous population is growing considerably faster than the total population but around half of this growth was due to an increased propensity of people to identify themselves as being of indigenous origin (Gray 1997). Table 9 indicates that indigenous fertility and mortality are both higher than overall national levels so natural increase levels are higher than for the rest of the population.

**Figure 6: Australia: Distribution of the Indigenous Population, 1996**



Source: Haberkorn *et al.* 1999

The non-metropolitan indigenous population is distributed in a different way to the total population in the sector. Figure 6 shows that the indigenous population make up a major part of the population in the most remote non-metropolitan areas in contrast to their much lower representation in the more closely settled non-metropolitan areas of the east coast, southeast, and southwest. The highest

representation of indigenous people is in the Northern Territory, the northern three-quarters of Western Australia, northern South Australia, western New South Wales, and western and northern Queensland.

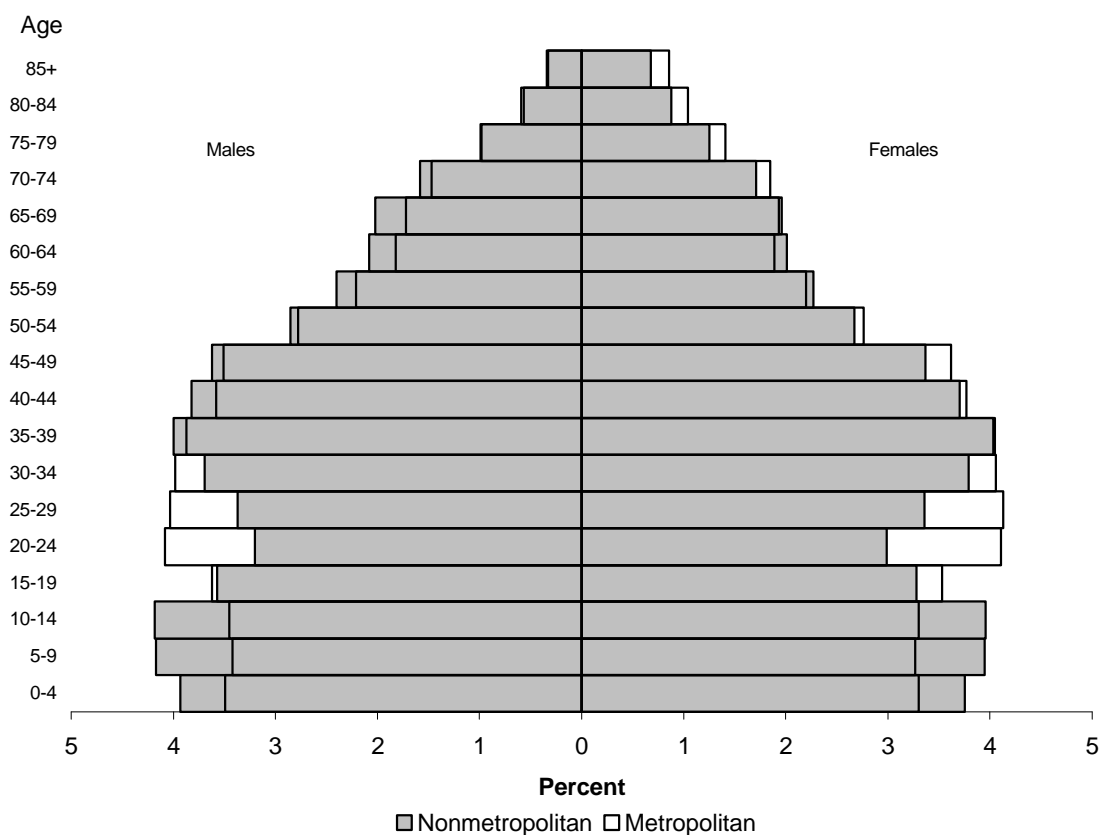
## **CHANGING PATTERNS OF AGE STRUCTURE IN NON-METROPOLITAN AUSTRALIA**

One of the characteristics of populations which most shape their pattern and level of demand and need for services is age structure. Hence in looking to the future it is important to examine the changing age structure of the non-metropolitan population. Figure 7 overlays the age structure of Australia's metropolitan and non-metropolitan populations at the 1996 census. It is strikingly apparent that the young infant and school age groups (0-14 years) are 'over-represented' in non-metropolitan areas while young adults are 'under-represented.' This is a function of:

- Outmigration of young adults from the non-metropolitan sector.
- Higher fertility in non-metropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas.

However it will be noted that there is substantial 'under-representation' in the non-metropolitan age structure of young adults in the 20-34 age groups, reflecting the heavy loss of youth from non-metropolitan areas. There is also an under-representation of women aged 40 years and over. This reflects a pattern where older women in non-metropolitan areas tend to migrate to major cities after the death of their spouse. We need to examine carefully what the implications of these age structure differences are for non-metropolitan communities.

**Figure 7: Australia: Age-Sex Composition of Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan Population, 1996**



Source: ABS 1996 Census

A major feature of Australia's population is that it is ageing. While ageing is occurring across Australia there are slightly different patterns between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Figure 7 shows that non-metropolitan areas have an over-representation of males in the 55-74 age groups and females in the 55-64 age group. This reflects the increasing significance of retirement migration from metropolitan to non-metropolitan areas. However, Table 11 shows that overall the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over in metropolitan areas is greater than is the case for the total population. This reflects a pattern of return migration of former migrants to non-metropolitan areas to be close to family and/or medical services as they experience disability or death of a spouse. It will be noted, however,

that over time the proportion of the 65+ population living in non-metropolitan areas is increasing reflecting the increasing significance of retirement migration. The increasing concentration of the 65+ population in country towns and regional centres is evident in Table 11.

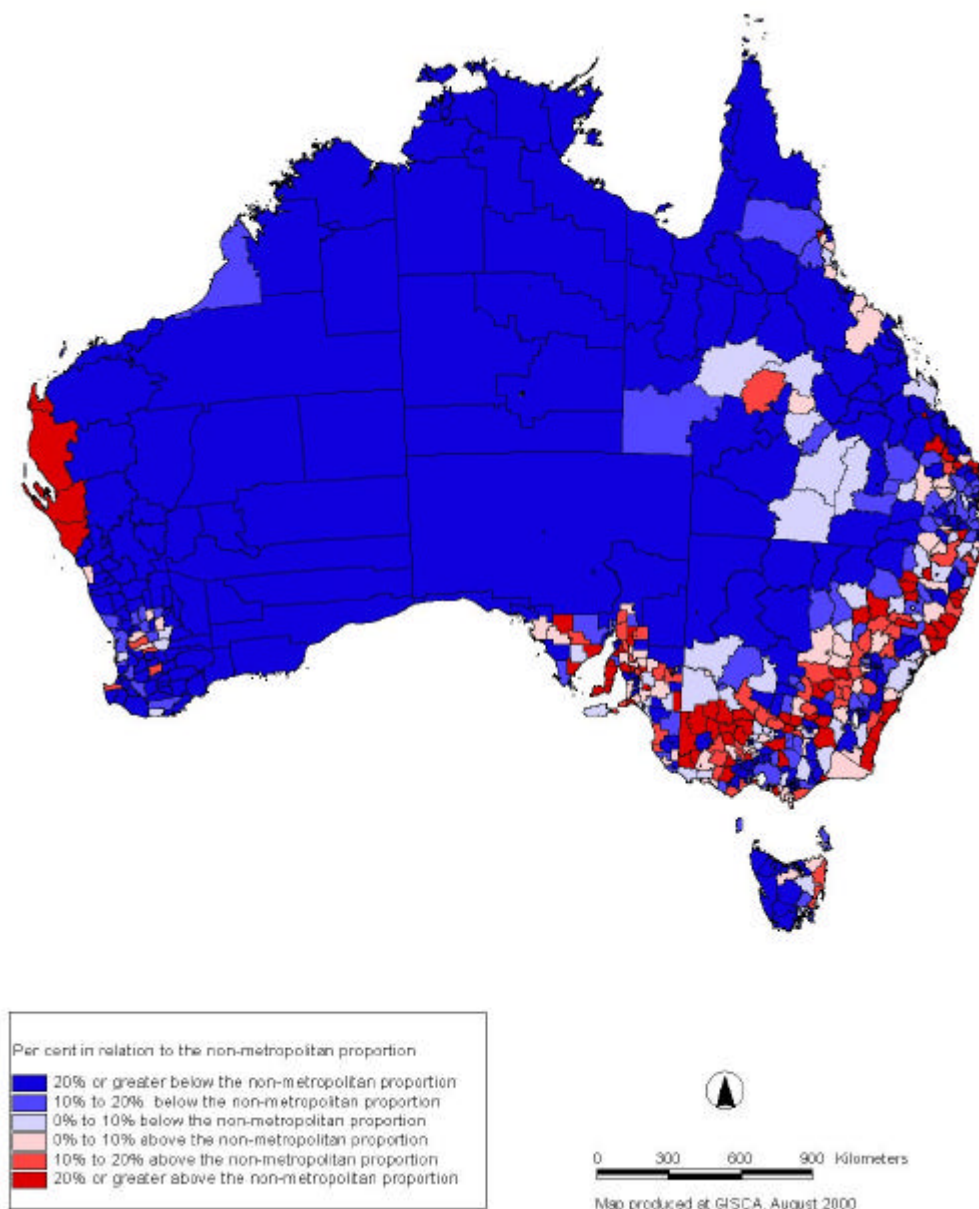
**Table 11: Australia: Growth of Population 1981-1996**

Section of State	65+ Population		Total Population		Annual Rate of Growth 1981-1996	Total
	1981 No.	%	1996 No.	%	65+ Population	Population
Major Urban	919,096	64.2	1,357,519	63.1	62.7	+2.64
Other Urban	358,562	25.1	559,501	26.0	23.3	+3.01
Rural	151,743	10.6	233,875	10.9	14.0	+2.93
Total	1,429,401	100.0	2,150,895	100.0	100.0	+2.76

Source: ABS Censuses 1981 and 1996

The age structure of areas can be significantly influenced by migration since migration is always selective of particular age groups as was shown earlier. In particular almost all non-metropolitan areas, even those recording overall growth of population, record net losses of young adults in the school leaver and workforce entry ages. On the other hand, growing non-metropolitan areas often have net gains in the young family formation ages and those with favourable ecological situations and substantial regional cities have net gains of the older, early retirement population ages. Areas of rural depopulation, however, often face significant problems due to ageing of their populations. The net migration losses are selective of young adults which lifts the average age of the local population. It has social effects by reducing the social potential of the area and is seen in the decline in the number of country sports teams, etc. Accordingly, there are significant variations between non-metropolitan areas with respect to their age structure. This is evident in Figure 8 which shows variations between areas with respect to the proportion aged 65 years and over. The oldest non-metropolitan populations are concentrated in two types of

**Figure 8: Australia: Population Aged 65 Years or Older, 1996**



Source: ABS 1996 Census

areas. The first are those attracting retirees, especially those in coastal and other resort areas. The second are those where the outmigration of young people is causing ageing in the wheat-sheep belt, especially in small towns and regional centres. The youngest populations are in pastoral and mining areas.



## **THE CHANGING FAMILY IN NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS**

Over recent decades Australian families and households have become more diverse in their structure. The Australian Bureau of Statistics divides private households into family and non-family households where the former contains people related by blood or marriage and the latter includes group and single person households. In metropolitan areas 71.7 percent of households are families but this increases to 72.4 percent in other urban areas, 73.9 percent in rural localities and 81.6 percent in rural areas. This difference is maintained when we examine differences in the composition of families and Table 12 shows that rural areas tend to have larger proportions of couple families and couple families with children than urban areas and a smaller proportion of single parent families. It will be noted, however, that country towns have a higher proportion of one parent families than do major urban areas. This partly is a function of many single parent families moving to country towns from large cities to take advantage of cheaper, often public sector, housing (Hugo and Bell 1998). This has important implications for service provision in many country towns, especially when non-metropolitan areas are often stereotyped as being dominated by 'traditional' family types. The higher fertility in non-metropolitan areas is reflected in the fact that rural areas have a higher proportion of families with three or more dependent children (15 percent) than other urban areas (13 percent) or cities (11 percent).

In keeping with differences in family structure there are some distinct differences in housing between non-metropolitan and metropolitan areas. In major cities 81.4 percent of Australians live in separate houses but the proportions are greater in country towns (89.3 percent) and rural areas (95.1 percent). Moreover, half of rural families own their own home compared with 39 percent in country towns and

**Table 12: Australia: Family Type by Section of State, 1996**

	Rural areas %	Urban areas	
		Towns %	Cities %
Couple families	89.7	83.2	83.0
Couple only	35.0	35.4	31.6
With dependents	45.1	40.0	40.5
Other (a)	9.7	7.8	10.9
One-parent families	9.3	15.4	14.8
With dependents	6.4	11.4	9.6
Other (a)	2.9	4.0	5.2
Other families (b)	1.0	1.4	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	'000	'000	'000
<b>Total families</b>	<b>645.9</b>	<b>1,060.0</b>	<b>2,877.1</b>

(a) Comprises families with non-dependent children and/or other relatives only.

(b) Comprises families of related adults such as brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles.

Source: ABS 1998b

43 percent in major cities. The low proportion in country towns and regional centres reflects the significance of the 'floating population' in such centres. This refers to the fact that in such towns and cities there is a higher 'turnover' of population than in the metropolitan centres or in more fundamentally rural areas. This is partly due to the presence in these centres of a large 'so-called 'floating population' of employees on transfer by State and Federal government departments such as the post office and education department, private firms - particularly banks, stock and station agents and, increasingly, supermarket chains' (Hugo 1976, 67). The frequent transfer of people in the middle levels of such organisations between country appointments adds to their high levels of residential mobility. The 'floating population' have played a crucial social and economic role in Australian country towns (Hugo 1971). The reductions in service provision in these towns due to increased mobility of the population allowing them to travel longer distances to larger urban areas to get services together with the effects of depopulation in some areas and 'rationalisation' by government and non-

government agencies in their services have had a doubly negative effect in country towns. They have not only reduced population levels and the level of service provision in those towns but also have deemed those towns an important part of their social leadership and vitality.

Housing costs represent a significant difference between urban and rural areas. Not only are there lower proportions of rural dwellers renting (17 percent compared with 28 percent in towns and 24 percent in cities), they paid less in weekly rent on average (\$77, \$127 and \$168 respectively) or on mortgage payments (\$171) than in major cities (\$192) but slightly more than families in towns (\$163). In accessing services, non-metropolitan households generally have to travel greater distances than their metropolitan counterparts. This is reflected in the fact that only 2 percent of rural families have no motor vehicle but this is the case for 6 percent of other families.

## **CHANGING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NON-METROPOLITAN POPULATION**

One of the abiding myths of non-metropolitan populations is of their homogeneity. Indeed over recent decades there has been a consistent increase in diversity and indeed a trends toward convergence with the metropolitan population with respect to many characteristics. An important area here is employment. Table 13 shows that over the 1976-1996 period there was an increase of 534,966 in the number of employed people living in non-metropolitan areas. Although this was only half the size of the increase in major urban areas (1,113,376) it is apparent that the rates of increase in employment over that period have often been higher in non-metropolitan areas.

**Table 13: Australia: Changing Employment Patterns in Rural and Urban Areas, 1976-1996**

Total Persons	Number				Percent Change		
	1976	1981	1991	1996	1976-81	1981-91	1991-96
Major urban	3,830,365	4,074,588	4,588,113	4,943,741	6.38	12.60	7.75
Other urban	1,121,946	1,298,271	1,450,393	1,612,620	15.72	11.72	11.19
Rural	1,028,036	913,055	1,062,925	1,072,328	-11.18	16.41	0.88

Source: ABS 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991 and 1996 Censuses

Employment change data from the census are a little misleading in that they relate to the place of residence of the worker and not the location of the job, so that an important question remains as to the proportion of workers living in rural or other urban localities but commuting to jobs located within major urban areas. There have been huge increases in personal mobility which have made it possible for people to move out of large cities and live in rural areas at the edge of the city and well beyond it and yet still work and engage in other activities in the major urban area. This has contributed to a blurring of the characteristics of metropolitan and non-metropolitan populations in Australia. This convergence has also been facilitated by greatly increased mobility of the 'native' non-metropolitan population. This enhanced mobility has also been a significant factor in the retention of non-metropolitan populations. It has, for example, greatly extended the area over which farm dwellers can range in seeking off-farm employment.

From an examination of the changing of mix of industry types providing employment in the metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas (Table 14) we can establish what kinds of jobs are being created and lost in non-metropolitan areas. Table 14 shows changes between the 1986 and 1996 censuses with respect to employment in the different sections of state. The structural changes occurring in the economy as a whole are immediately evident in that although overall there was an increase of 17.7 percent between 1986 and 1996 in the total number of jobs there were

declines of 11.0 percent in agriculture, 1.5 percent in manufacturing, and mining, and 10.9 percent in utilities. These were offset by gains of 30.9 percent in trade, finance, administration, retailing, and services and 13.5 percent in construction. However, the table shows some wide variations between the three urban and rural categories.

**Table 14: Australia: Changes in Employment Patterns in Urban/Rural Categories, 1986-96**

		<b>Total</b>	<b>Major urban</b>	<b>Other urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
Agriculture	1986	5.81	0.55	3.71	32.32
	1996	4.39	0.53	3.44	23.77
	Percent change in number	-10.98	+11.75	+13.00	-16.60
Mining and Manufacturing	1986	17.04	18.37	17.02	11.06
	1996	14.25	14.47	15.09	11.93
	Percent change in number	-1.54	-7.51	+7.90	+22.34
Construction	1986	6.81	6.58	7.67	6.63
	1996	6.56	6.25	7.39	6.77
	Percent change in number	+13.50	+11.60	+17.28	+15.85
Electricity, gas, water, transport storage, communication	1986	9.67	9.73	11.25	7.20
	1996	7.32	7.57	7.53	5.83
	Percent change in number	-10.92	-8.58	-18.56	-8.20
Trade, finance, property business services, public admin, defence, comm. service, recreation	1986	60.67	64.77	60.35	42.79
	1996	67.48	71.18	66.54	51.71
	Percent change in number	+30.93	+29.09	+34.14	+37.05
Total	1986	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
	1996	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
	Percent change in number	+17.73	+17.45	+21.67	+13.42

Source: ABS 1986 and 1996 Censuses

The most striking differences are in the rural categories where a decline occurred in the number of jobs in agriculture, the traditional mainstay of the rural economy. On the other hand, non-metropolitan areas experienced a sustained increase in its manufacturing workforce. Rural and other urban areas had a very rapid increase in trade, finance, property, business services, public administration, defence, community services and recreation. Clearly there is a convergence occurring in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas in their employment structures.

Accessibility to education services is a major issue in non-metropolitan Australia. Table 15 shows that the proportions of Australians in non-metropolitan areas with post-school qualifications is lowest in rural areas and highest in metropolitan Australia. Of course this partly reflects the outmovement of young people from rural areas to study in metropolitan areas and to some extent the fact that some rural based jobs do not require post-school training. However, it will be noted that in rural areas a greater proportion of families have a primary reference person with vocational education than is the case in major cities.

**Table 15: Australia: Post-school Educational Qualifications (a), 1996**

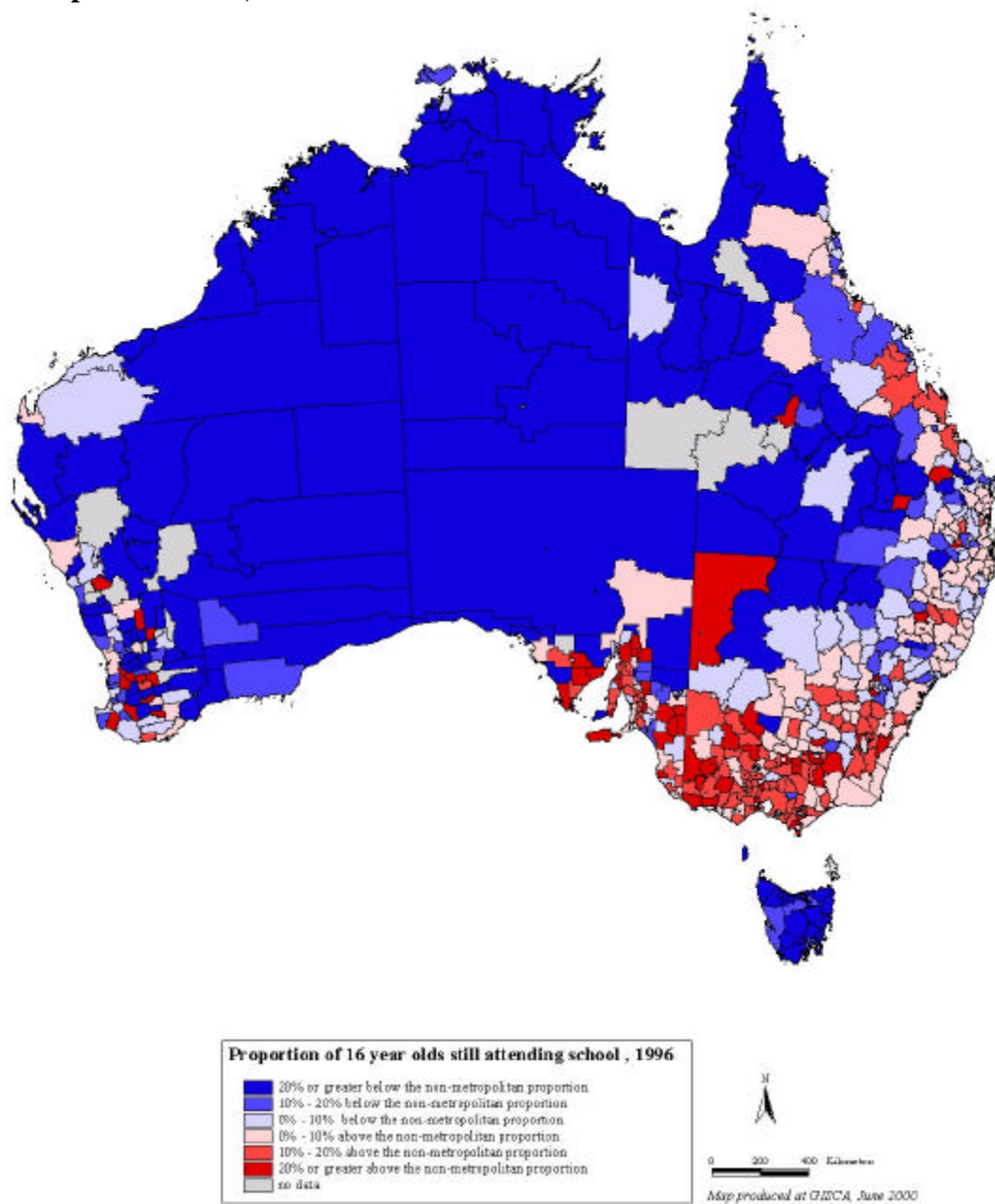
<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Rural areas</b>	<b>Urban areas</b>	
		<b>Towns</b>	<b>Cities</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Bachelor degree or higher	7.7	7.4	15.3
Diploma	6.0	5.7	7.4
Skilled vocational qualification	18.8	19.4	16.7
Basic vocational qualification	2.7	2.9	2.8
Level of attainment			
Inadequately described or not stated	7.9	8.8	8.7
No post-school qualifications	56.9	55.7	49.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	'000	'000	'000
<b>Total families</b>	<b>645.9</b>	<b>1,060.0</b>	<b>2,877.1</b>

(a) Refers to highest post-school educational qualification of primary family reference person.

Source: ABS 1998b

The largest difference is in respect to degrees and diplomas which have a higher incidence in major cities.

**Figure 9: Australia: Proportions of 16 Year Olds Attending School, Non-Metropolitan Areas, 1996**



Source: Haberkorn *et al.* 1999

There does, however, remain significant educational disparities in non-metropolitan Australia and a major issue in the sector relates to differential access to educational opportunities compared with those enjoyed by children in metropolitan areas. This is of particular relevance when it comes to secondary education. Figure 9

shows the proportions of 16 year olds attending school in Australia's non-metropolitan areas. Whereas 82.9 percent of metropolitan 16 year olds attend school this is the case for only 75.8 percent of those living in non-metropolitan areas. Figure 9 shows that the more remote areas of Australia have low levels of school participation.

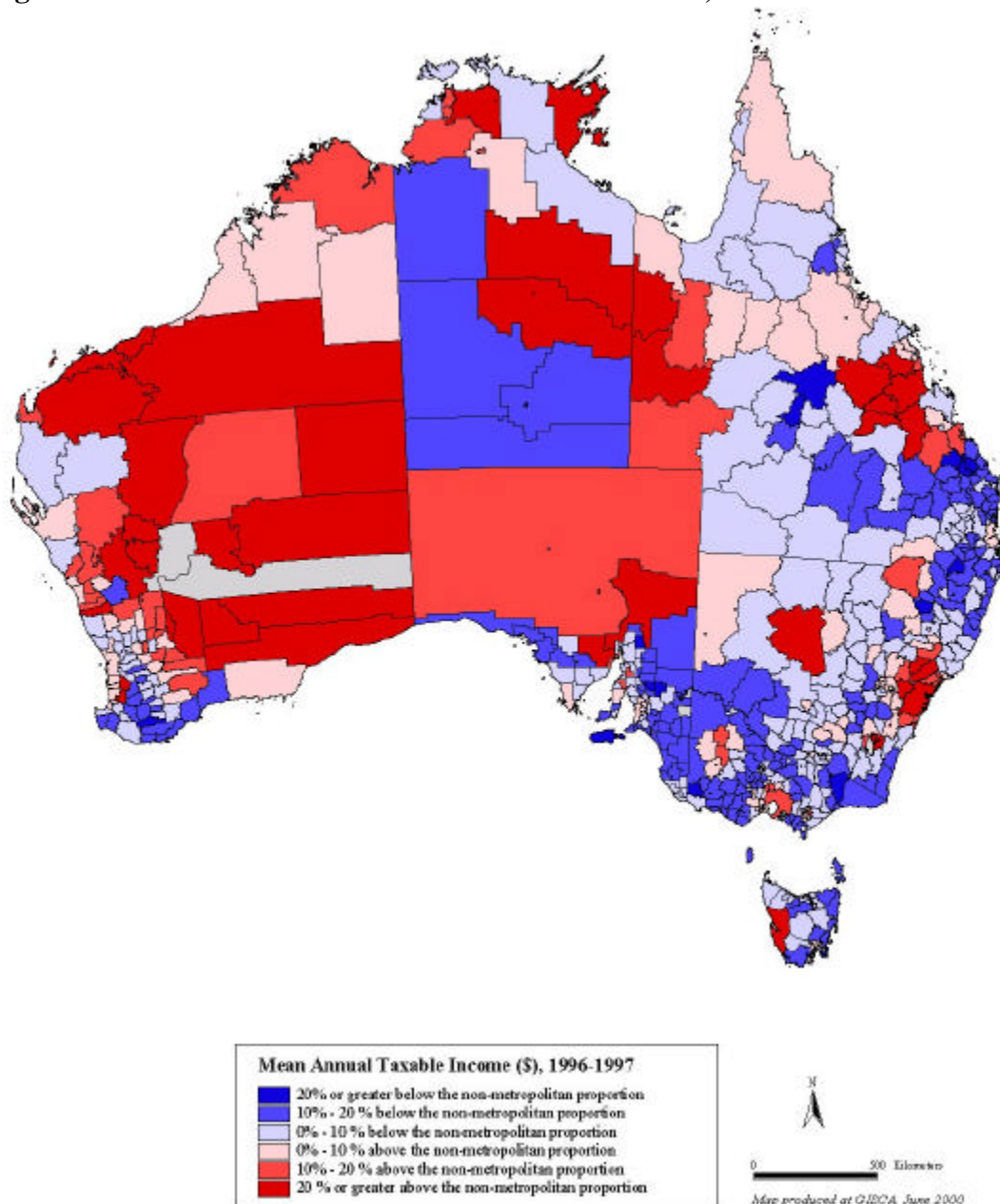
## INCOME

It is difficult to measure income in Australia and especially difficult to compare income between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas because of the difficulty of accounting for some items such as food grown and consumed on farms. Moreover, differences in the cost of living as has already been demonstrated in relation to housing costs make it difficult to compare the two areas. However, the 1996 census indicated that the average weekly income of rural and other urban families was \$641 compared with \$808 in major cities (ABS 1998b: 45). Mean annual taxable income data from the Australian Tax Office in 1996-97 were \$28,599 in non-metropolitan areas - \$4,200 lower than in metropolitan areas. However, there were also considerable variations within the non-metropolitan sector as Figure 10 indicates. There is a concentration of low incomes in...

- Many of the dryland broadacre farming areas which in recent years have experienced low prices and draughts.
- Coastal areas which have experienced a significant immigration of retirees (and hence low income although sometimes asset rich).
- Some remote areas dominated by indigenous groups.



**Figure 10: Australia: Mean Annual Taxable Income, 1996-97**



Source: Haberkorn *et al.* 1999

Higher incomes are concentrated around major cities and in some remote areas, especially those with mining communities and some regional centres.

An increasingly important factor is migration. Hugo and Bell (1998) have shown that there is a strong economic selectivity factor operating in internal migration between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas in Australia. The immigration to

large urban areas is selective of high-income groups, indeed there are net gains of high-income groups in these cities but net losses of low-income groups. On the other hand, there are net gains of low-income groups in non-metropolitan areas. This is a function of a substantial flow of low-income groups from metropolitan to non-metropolitan areas in Australia. This is partly associated with lower living costs (especially relating to housing) in many non-metropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas. Part of the movement is retirement migration but it also includes significant numbers of other income transfer recipients. Accordingly, 36.5 percent of the non-metropolitan population aged 16 years and over claim social security compared with 29.5 percent of the metropolitan population (Bray and Mudd 1998:8). From a family perspective (ABS 1998b) in 1993-94, 24 percent of all Australian families reported receiving a government pension or allowance as their major source of income. While the proportion of rural families in this position was around the national average, that in major urban areas was lower (21.3 percent) while that in country towns was well above the national average (29.9 percent).

While discussions about poverty in Australia usually focus almost exclusively on the poor living in capital cities it is important to realise that the incidence of poverty is higher among people living outside the capital cities. This can be readily demonstrated. The ABS (2000), for example, has examined at the census collection district (clusters of 200-300 households) level measures of socio-economic status<sup>5</sup> and ARIA and the results are presented in Table 16. This indicates that socio-economic disadvantage is not distributed uniformly across either urban/rural areas or areas differentiated according to their degree of remoteness. Whereas 62.7 percent of

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<sup>5</sup> Using SEIFA – The ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage based on information collected at the 1996 census.

Australians live in major urban areas only 55.7 percent of those living in most disadvantaged areas are in those areas. Country towns ('other urban' and rural localities) on the other hand have only 25.8 percent of the population but 39 percent of all areas in poverty. An interesting pattern is also evident in relation to degree of remoteness. Whereas the highly accessible and accessible parts of Australia have 81.8 percent of the national population they have only 74.7 percent of those in poverty. There is then a clear concentration of the poor in non-metropolitan areas and within this sector there is concentration in particular communities. The rural poor represent a fast growing group in Australia deserving of considerable policy attention.

**Table 16: Australia: Geographic Distribution (a) People Living in Most Disadvantaged Areas (b), 1996**

Section of	Most socio-economically disadvantaged people (c)					All persons (c)				
	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately accessible	Remote/ very remote	Total	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately accessible	Remote/ very remote	Total
State	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Major urban	55.2	0.5	0.0	0.0	55.7	62.1	0.6	0.0	0.0	62.7
Other urban	17.3	11.9	2.9	1.7	33.8	12.8	7.1	2.0	1.4	23.3
Rural locality	1.1	2.0	1.0	1.2	5.2	1.0	0.8	0.5	0.3	2.5
Rural balance	1.2	2.2	0.7	1.4	5.4	5.9	3.3	1.5	0.8	11.5
Total	74.7	16.5	4.6	4.3	100.0	81.8	11.8	4.0	2.5	100.0

a) Described using two classifications of areas, see details on the preceding page.

b) Refers to people in the 20% of CDs with the lowest scores on the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage.

c) Excludes overseas visitors and persons in offshore, shipping and migratory CCDs.

Source: ABS 2000

## CONCLUSION

Australia's non-metropolitan population is growing at least as fast as that in major cities and this will continue at least for the next decade. However, this growth is far from universal and, in fact, there is an increasing and growing dichotomy between rapidly growing urban areas and those which are static or declining in population. Indeed, a significant amount of that growth is occurring in towns at and just beyond the commuting limits surrounding major cities, so that some would argue that it is not so much a counter-urbanisation trend that is occurring but more a new,

diffuse form of urbanisation. Certainly the sharp boundaries drawn by the ABS around Australia's major cities are becoming less relevant with each passing year. Nevertheless it is clear that all non-metropolitan growth is not of this type. This paper has demonstrated that non-metropolitan population change is becoming more diversified and complex. It is argued also that there is a growing and widening polarisation occurring in non-metropolitan Australia. The rangelands are generally experiencing the rural depopulation, dominated by school leavers which characterised the early post-war years. However there are substantial areas in the better-watered and more accessible parts of non-metropolitan Australia which are continuing to experience significant and sustained net immigration and population growth. The problems faced in the two different types of areas are quite different. Population change in non-metropolitan Australia is becoming, and is likely to become even more, diverse and perhaps much less predictable than in the past.

With respect to the composition of Australia's non-metropolitan population it is apparent that it is becoming more heterogeneous. There is an increasing tendency toward convergence of patterns and trends in the non-metropolitan sector toward those in large city populations with respect to many social, demographic and economic variables. However, the theme of divergence within non-metropolitan areas with respect to population growth trends presented above also applies to the crucial area of the well being of the population. In the burgeoning of interest in non-metropolitan issues in Australia in recent years much attention has been focussed on a perceived gap in the levels of living of people living outside the major cities compared with the city dwellers. Such a focus, however, draws attention away from the crucially important and ever widening gaps in well being occurring between areas and groups *within* the non-metropolitan sector just as is occurring within Australian

cities. It is not only unhelpful to stereotype and generalise about the characteristics of people who live in non-metropolitan areas and the conditions which they experience; it can lead to the policies and programmes which are initiated to overcome problems in non-metropolitan Australia being substantially reduced in effectiveness. Interventions directed at all non-metropolitan areas will benefit those who are in need but also those who are not, so that their impact is diluted. There are groups and areas in country towns with urgent and important needs that must be addressed but this does not apply to all country towns. Accordingly, interventions need to be carefully targeted so that their impact on the people and areas most in need can be maximised. On the other hand the analysis presented here indicates that many communities in non-metropolitan Australia have populations which are younger, rapidly growing with increasingly diverse and skilled labour forces and populations. This represents a substantial potential for the future in a context where geographical constraints on the location of economic and social activity are being loosened by developments in information technology and transport.

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