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# Regional Cities and City Regions in Rural Australia

## A Long-Term Demographic Perspective



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# Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics (formerly Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics)
CAP	Comparative Age Profile
CCD	Census Collector's District
GFR	General Fertility Rate
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LGA	Local Government Area
RAI	Relative Ageing Index
RDA	Regional Development Australia
RDO	Regional Development Organisation
RNI	Rate of Natural Increase
SA1	Statistical Area, level 1
SA2	Statistical Area, level 2
SLA	Statistical Local Area
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UCL	Urban centre/locality

# Abstract

This monograph analyses the demographic consequences of the rapidly increasing concentration of economic activity and population growth into a limited number of locally dominant regional cities in non-metropolitan Australia. It traces demographic and economic change in the functional regions centred on six growing cities in south-eastern Australia, over the period 1947–2011. The selected regional cities are dominantly service centres in either inland or remote coastal agricultural settings.

Changes in the relative roles of the central cities, other urban centres and rural population components in overall regional population growth are outlined, over the entire period 1981–2011. From 1981 onwards, the economic and demographic interactions between the central cities and the individual smaller surrounding communities are examined at a finer scale of resolution. The consequences of the exodus from primary industry employment are traced in terms of increased work-force centralisation and spatial concentration of growth and diversity in non-farm employment.

The uneven impact of structural ageing impelled by falling fertility and net out-migration arising from the above changes is quantified and examined, demonstrating the dominant role of age-specific migration in producing differential structural ageing, with a growing gap between the regional cities and their hinterlands. Structural ageing is placed in the context of Jackson's (2014) sequential and progressive model of potential depopulation and shown to conform to the greater part of the sequence, though not yet reaching the final stages. The potential of inter-state and overseas in-migration to either ameliorate or exacerbate structural ageing is found to have only a marginal impact. Selective analysis of more recent data from the 2016 census confirms the trends outlined above.

A concise summary of findings supports the conclusion that the continued growth of the overall regional populations camouflages a future demographic decline, which is already in full progress in the hinterlands, being followed more

slowly in the regional cities themselves, and beginning to impact on the entire functional regions. The final chapters explore the implications of the findings for Australian and international rural research, and for Australian regional policy.

**Keywords** Regional cities · Population concentration · Age-specific net migration  
Fertility decline · Structural ageing · Depopulation process  
Regional development · Australia

# Chapter 1

## Introduction



### Regional Centres in the Australian Space Economy

A striking feature of post-1945 population change in non-metropolitan Australia has been the consistent rapid population growth of a relatively small number of regional cities, in sharp contrast to the limited growth, or population loss, of the majority of country service centres. This study seeks to throw light on the demographic consequences of this rapid growth for the broader regions in which these growing cities are set, arising from the changing demographic relations between the regional capitals, the smaller urban centres and the dispersed rural element of the population. Of particular interest is the question of whether concentration of development in the regional capitals is likely to have a long-term positive or negative overall demographic effect on their respective broader regions. On the one hand, it may drain people and enterprise from the periphery so that gains in each region's Centre are more than offset by losses in its Periphery, resulting in long-term decline in the region as a whole. On the other hand, it may be that the robust growth of these dominant central cities has postponed or even averted what might otherwise have been a disastrous regional decline. The study traces change between 1947 and 2011, but concentrates on the period 1981–2011, in which rapid demographic change resulted from radical political and economic reforms starting from the early 1980s—effectively replacing limited protective measures for Australian agriculture by deregulation and full exposure to market forces—followed by the ten-year ‘Millennial Drought’, which ended in 2010.

To cover a 64-year timespan using six widely separated case studies, this monograph presents a broad and selective demographic overview. We outline the political and economic elements behind the population changes, but do no more than hint at the equally important social, cultural and emotional aspects. Demographically, we have chosen to restrict the main thrust of the argument to the age structure/ageing, city/hinterland, and rural/urban dimensions of regional and local community populations, without further systematic differentiation by gender, occupation or social status changes. At a more detailed level, significant transformations remain to be doc-