



Australian Government

**Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities**



Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities

A Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia

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MINISTER'S FOREWORD



We are experiencing historic changes to the way we live and work. The resources boom mark II, the roll out of the National Broadband Network and efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change will have profound impacts on Australia. These forces will shape population change and will in turn be shaped by changes in our population.

Population change is not only about the growth and overall size of our population. It is about the needs of our population, it is about the skills of the population, it is about how we live and, importantly, where we live.

The needs of our population include the services, infrastructure and amenity that improve our quality of life. A skilled workforce gives people the opportunities they need to share our prosperity and provides the economy with the skills it needs to grow.

The challenge of energy and water efficiency and the promise of digital connectivity will shape how we live and work. Our patchwork economy makes where we live even more important. We need to support growth in areas where demand for skills is increasing, but also ensure pressure is eased in areas where growth has outstripped infrastructure.

This document, our nation's first ever sustainable population strategy, outlines the Gillard Labor Government's vision for a sustainable Australia.

A sustainable Australia is a nation of sustainable communities which have the right mix of services, job and education opportunities, affordable housing, amenity and natural environment that make them places where people want to live, work and build a future.





This *Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities* Strategy will enhance the wellbeing and opportunities of current and future generations through more effective anticipation, planning and responses to the impacts of a changing population on our economy, environment and communities.

Effort and coordination is required across governments, portfolios and sectors to secure our economic prosperity, improve the liveability of our cities, suburbs and regions, and protect our environment.

A changing population will present both challenges and opportunities for our nation. These challenges and opportunities will differ across and between cities, suburbs and regions. For too long we have failed to understand how our actions affect different communities in different ways.

The Government is already delivering on substantial reform to help meet the challenges we can anticipate:

- in health to relieve pressure on our system as our population grows and ages;
- water to ensure sustainable use for communities, industries and the environment;
- building the National Broadband Network to connect regional Australia to the economic capitals of this country and the world;
- skills, education and training to deal with structural economic shifts; and
- reforming our skilled migration system to restore integrity and get skilled labour to employers who need it.

However, it has become clear that there are a range of pressures that we are not as well placed to meet - pressures felt in the community and confirmed by the Sustainable Population Advisory Panels and public consultation process.

There are some parts of Australia with more jobs than homes leading to high rents, while in others there are more homes than jobs, leading to more traffic congestion. To support a sustainable Australia the Government needs to help get the balance right to meet Australia's future challenges.

This Strategy complements the Government's National Urban Policy and the Government's commitment to strengthening regional Australia. Through these initiatives the Gillard Government is enhancing urban liveability, promoting regional development and improving the way we measure and plan for change.

The National Urban Policy, the Sustainable Communities Package and reform of Infrastructure Australia will support the creation of jobs closer to where people live, improve amenity, develop high quality public spaces, and encourage greater interaction in suburban communities.





Among the most important things we can do to take pressure off our major cities is to ensure we are making regions more attractive places to live, work and build a future.

That is why we are making the most substantial investment in our regions for decades: over \$4 billion of investments in regional hospitals, health care, affordable housing, universities, roads, and improved planning – to lift living standards outside the big capitals, provide the best services, and help regional communities reach their potential.

One of the biggest challenges to improving our sustainability is getting an accurate picture of how we are tracking against the key factors that determine sustainable communities. This is why we are developing a set of national sustainability indicators that will tell us how different communities are faring.

The Government's existing agenda, bolstered by recent Budget initiatives, puts us on a path to a sustainable Australia. However, as our population changes so too will our responses. This strategy provides an enduring framework to help better anticipate, plan and respond to change. Together, we can build an Australia where the strength of our economy supports a better quality of life across our communities.

Tony Burke

Minister for Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities







OVERVIEW

Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities



This Sustainable Population Strategy outlines the Government's framework for a sustainable Australia. It will help to ensure that future population change is compatible with the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of Australia.

Achieving sustainability for Australia means maintaining and improving the wellbeing and opportunities of current and future generations.

The *Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities* Strategy recognises that population change is not only about the growth and overall size of our population, it is also about the needs and skills of our population, how we live, and importantly, where we live.

It recognises that population change impacts different communities in different ways.

A sustainable Australia is a nation of sustainable communities which have the services, job and education opportunities, affordable housing, amenity and natural environment that make them places where people want to work, live and build a future.

The Strategy's focus is ensuring that we have in place the necessary policy settings and governance arrangements which will deliver improvements in our wellbeing, at the local, regional and national levels into the future. It outlines the Government's commitment to improving the liveability of our urban areas, and building stronger regions.

In many cases population changes clearly benefit Australia. Increases in the size and mobility of our skilled, working age population (whether natural increase or through migration) enable us to take advantage of significant economic opportunities, while greater cultural diversity increases the vibrancy of Australian society and helps build our relationships with other nations.

These changes need to be well managed, to avoid possible impacts on the quality of life in our communities, our economic prosperity and our natural environment.



The Government's current broad-ranging policy agenda is an agenda for the sustainability of our environment, our economy and our social and cultural opportunities now and into the future.

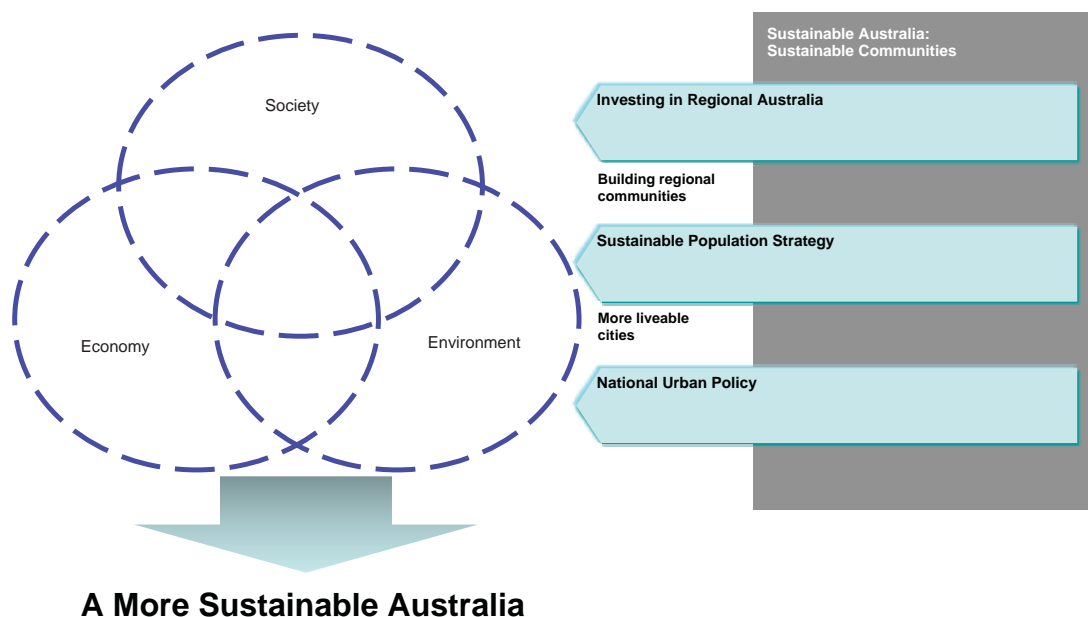
The Government is committed to a range of reform agendas that are making the most of opportunities, and addressing the challenges of, population change at the community, regional and national levels. Some of the key elements of this agenda are:

- In health, to relieve pressure on our system as our population grows and ages;
- In water, to ensure sustainable use of communities, industries and the environment;
- Building the National Broadband Network to connect regional Australia to the economic capitals of this country and the world;

- In skills, education and training, to deal with structural economic shifts;
- Reforming our skilled migration system to restore integrity and get skilled labour to employers who need it; and
- Infrastructure reform and investment through Infrastructure Australia and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Reform Council's review of capital city strategic planning.

In addition, the Government has outlined three key initiatives in the 2011–12 Budget that underpin its framework for a sustainable Australia. Through *Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities*, the National Urban Policy, and the Ministerial Statement on Investing in Regional Australia, the Government is working to achieve more liveable cities and stronger regional communities.

Building our Regional Communities and Enhancing Liveable Cities





Specifically, the Sustainable Population Strategy is supported by the following four new measures:

- *Suburban Jobs* – encouraging states and local government to plan and provide for employment precincts outside the Central Business Districts (CBDs) of our major cities
- *Sustainable Regional Development* – building on the Government's existing program of strategic assessments under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to provide greater capacity for undertaking strategic environmental impact assessments of our high growth regional areas;
- *Measuring Sustainability* – to improve the information on Australia's sustainability and develop indicators to assist decision-making at the regional level; and
- *Promoting Regional Living* – supporting regional communities to promote themselves as places to live and do business.

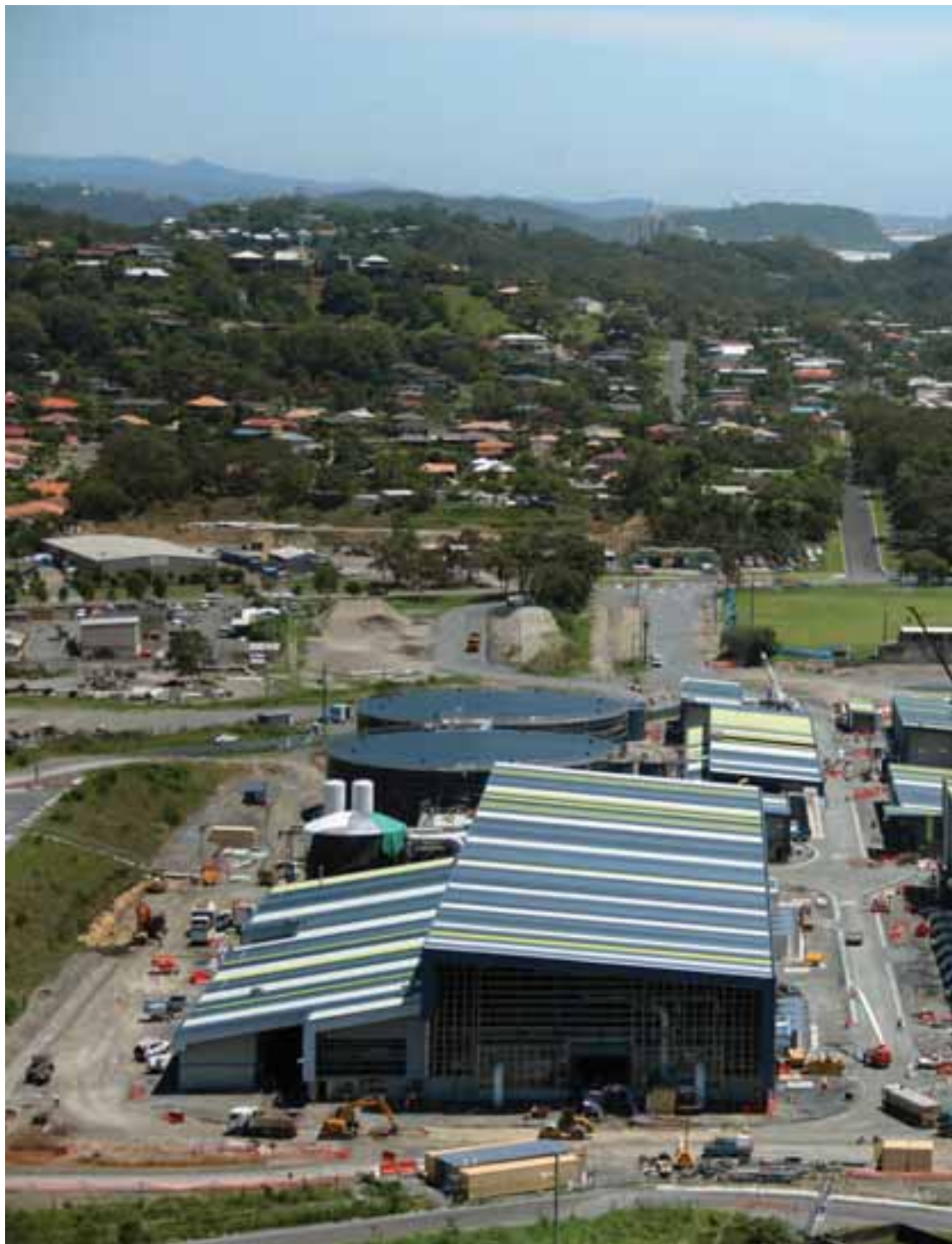
Further detail on the above measures is provided in chapter 5.

Together with these measures, the Government is also introducing a number of other significant new initiatives that complement the sustainability focus outlined in this Strategy. These initiatives include:

- *Building Australia's Future Workforce* – investing in the skills needed in the workforce and increasing participation;
- *Increase the effectiveness of our migration program* – ensuring that it is able to respond effectively to the changing needs of the economy, including through building the skills needed in regional areas;
- *Improving the Liveability of our Cities* – investing in managed motorways and inner city urban renewal projects; and
- *Investing in Australia's Regions* – delivering over \$4.3 billion of initiatives to ensure that individuals and communities across regional Australia share in the nation's prosperity.

This comprehensive approach to addressing the impacts of a changing population will ensure we deliver on the Strategy's objective that future changes in Australia's population are compatible with the sustainability of our economy, communities and the environment.







CHAPTER 1: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF A SUSTAINABLE AUSTRALIA

Introduction

In 2010 the Government committed to develop Australia's first Sustainable Population Strategy, in response to a range of issues raised by the community.

Given the diversity of views across Australia on population changes and impacts, the Government undertook an extensive consultation process to ensure comprehensive consideration of these views in the development of the Strategy. Three advisory panels were convened to consider population change from different perspectives and advise the Government on possible approaches. The work of these panels, together with the ensuing public consultation process on the Government's *A sustainable population strategy for Australia Issues Paper* (Issues Paper) has provided a comprehensive picture of the many opportunities and challenges that result from our changing population (see Box 1).



Box 1 – The consultation process

This strategy has been informed by a two-stage consultation process.

As a first step, three Sustainable Population Strategy Advisory Panels were established. The three advisory panels each produced a report reflecting their perspectives, which are included as appendices to the Issues Paper released on 16 December 2010.

The release of the Issues Paper marked the start of the formal submissions process. Over 370 submissions were received from individuals, state governments and their bodies, environmental, social and population non-government organisations, industry associations and businesses, academics, local governments, and regional and community groups. Stakeholder roundtables were also convened by the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, bringing together key organisations and individuals.

The key messages raised during the consultation process included the following:

- There is a divergence of views in the community as to whether population and immigration should be increased or stabilised.
- There is broad consensus that this Strategy needs to consider environmental, social and economic needs, but people have different views as to which needs are most significant in determining future wellbeing.
- Australia is generally a great place to live and there are many aspects of our economy, our environment and our communities that people value highly and would like to protect and enhance.
- Impacts on the environment from, and the vulnerability of the Australian environment to, continued population and economic growth are key concerns, including loss of biodiversity, limits to water availability, impact of greenhouse gases and food security.
- Liveability is an area where significant improvements can be made, especially in cities, including housing availability and affordability, access to services, infrastructure, green space, and traffic congestion.
- Immigration has contributed to rising living standards, and can reduce skills shortages, address ageing population issues, and increase Australia's economic prosperity. Immigration has also made Australia a more dynamic, vibrant and welcoming place that is more connected to the rest of the world.
- There is a need for greater whole-of-government cooperation and coordination across all three levels of government especially in relation to cities, urban development, planning and infrastructure provision.



It is clear that as a nation, we have much to be proud of: our lifestyle, freedoms and strong democracy; our safe, stable and cohesive society made up of people from a diverse range of cultures; our strong economy; our high standard of living and life expectancy. At the same time, we face a range of diverse challenges: our cities are seeing more congestion; the cost of housing is rising, disadvantage persists in some communities; and our environment is under a range of pressures. The future wellbeing of our population will depend crucially on addressing these challenges.

The Government already has a strong agenda in place to address many of these challenges and maximise our opportunities (see Box 2). The Government is committed to ensuring that our future growth and development are managed consistently with maintaining and enhancing our way of life while managing pressures on our natural resources.

To do this, we must plan effectively and manage the many dimensions of change in population to ensure that our infrastructure, environment and communities (in the cities and regions) are able to absorb these changes, and to facilitate the building of communities in which all Australians can participate and feel connected.

The Government's population strategy *Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities* has therefore been developed to serve a number of purposes:

- to outline the key changes occurring in Australia's population;
- to explain what the Government means by a sustainable population and how this links to the broader goal of a sustainable Australia; and
- to outline how the Government's existing initiatives and new initiatives in this Budget help to prepare communities for changes in our population.

Australia's population will continue to grow over the short to medium term, however will also clearly continue to change, in its distribution across Australia and its composition – especially in regard to ageing.

The Strategy's focus is ensuring that we have in place the necessary policy settings and governance arrangements which will deliver improvements in our wellbeing, at the local, regional and national level into the future. To this end, the Strategy outlines the Government's commitment to both improving the liveability of our urban areas, and effectively building our regions – so as to enhance the wellbeing of regional Australians while also absorbing some of the growth being experienced in major cities.

Box 2 – The Government's broad policy agenda

- Economic prosperity based on policies to support labour force participation, enhanced skills and education and productivity growth; and stable macroeconomic policy settings including a return to budget surplus by 2012–13;
- Strengthening liveability in our urban, regional and rural communities including through the Nation Building Program, the National Broadband Network, policies to enhance housing affordability, and strengthening our regional communities through the \$974 million Regional Development Australia Fund;
- Enhancing the economic and social participation opportunities for Australians through Building the Education Revolution, investing to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage, delivering national health reform, and improving access to mental health services; and
- Delivering environmental sustainability through: the introduction of a carbon price designed to achieve cost effective greenhouse abatement; the Clean Energy Initiative; addressing water security through the ten year Water for the Future initiative; restoring the health of the Murray-Darling Basin; the establishment of a network of marine protected reserves; and implementing a National Waste Policy.

Australia's Changing Population

"Population is only one of many variables that affect the economy and the environment. Others relate to how we live, how we work, how governments govern, and how business is conducted. Informed consideration of population dynamics will assist in determining policies to address environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and sustainable communities."

Australian Population Association, Submission 146

It is important to understand how our population is changing to appreciate the range of opportunities and challenges we face as a nation. There are a wide range of drivers that cause change across the dimensions of our population. A sustainable population strategy is not only about population size and growth; we need to look at all aspects of our population:

- our household structures and location;
- who we are: our age, health, education, values and cultural diversity;
- how we engage with society and the opportunities we have to be included in our communities; and
- how we participate in the economy.

Most importantly, it is about ensuring all members of our community share in the economic and quality of life benefits that characterise Australia, and improving the wellbeing of our population into the future.



Population size and growth rate

“The rapid urbanisation on the outer fringes of capital cities, impacts of sea-change and tree-change movement into some regional areas, changing population demographics and the depopulation of other parts of rural and regional Australia, have resulted in rapid changes to the profile and characteristics of communities.”

Australian Heritage Council, submission 364

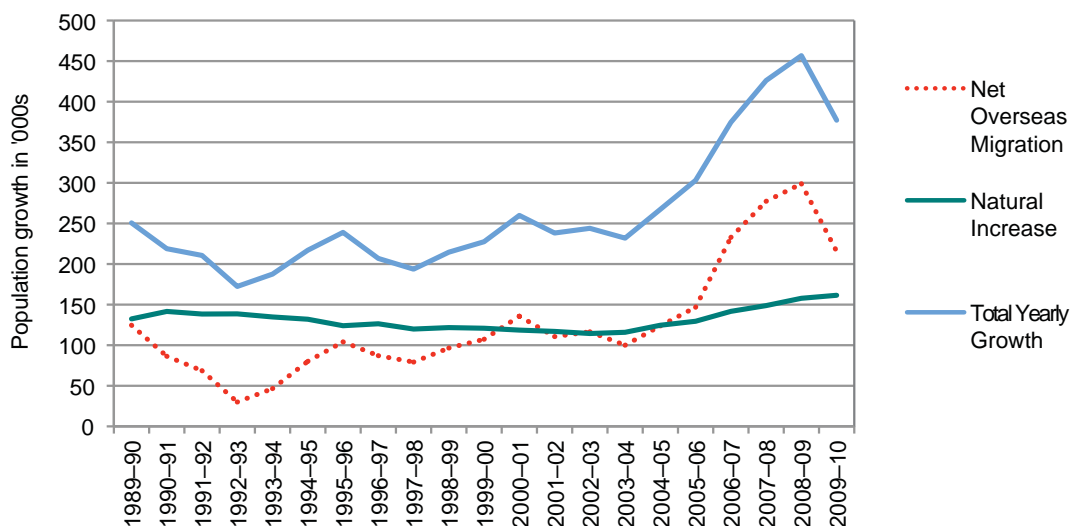
Over the past 40 years Australia's population has grown at an average annual rate of 1.4 per cent per annum, taking Australia's total population to approximately 22.4 million in 2010. The annual population growth rate was 1.6 per cent for the year ending September 2010, which represented an increase of 345,500 people over the previous year. This was down from the peak growth rate of 2.2 per cent for the year ending December 2008.¹

A country's population is never static. Current projections suggest Australia's population will continue to grow over time, but at slower rates than in the past. Changes in the rate of growth of Australia's population are inevitable as a result of changes in the fertility rate, increased life expectancy, and net overseas migration (NOM) levels. Of the three measures, NOM has in recent years had the largest impact on overall population change (Figure 1). From a peak in 2008–09, (due to an influx of temporary migrants), NOM has since been falling, contributing 54 per cent of additional population in the twelve months to September 2010 compared to 65 per cent in the previous twelve months to September 2009².

1 ABS (2011) (b)

2 ABS (2010) (a)

Figure 1. Components of Population Change



Source: Derived from ABS (2010) (e)





Fertility and mortality rates determine the natural rate of increase in the population. Since the ‘baby boom’ of the post Second World War period, when the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) reached 3.6 births per woman in 1961, fertility has generally been in long-term decline. Fertility levels fell steeply in the 1960s and 1970s before stabilising in the 1980s to around 1.9 births. Following an historic low of 1.7 births per woman in 2001, fertility has been slowly rising throughout most of the first decade of the 2000s. By 2009, birth levels within the non-Indigenous population had reached 1.9 births per woman, while the birth rate of Indigenous women recorded a higher rate, to reach 2.6 births per woman³. Even though the TFR has shown some growth in recent years, for the population as a whole it remains below replacement levels of 2.1 births per woman.

Australia’s Indigenous population is a small but rapidly growing segment of the Australian population. In 2006, the Indigenous population was estimated at around 517,000 or 2.5 per cent of the total population. Between 1991 and 2006, the Indigenous population grew by 2.6 per cent per year, more than twice the annual average rate of the Australian population as a whole, as a result of a higher TFR, and partly due to an increasing number of people identifying as Indigenous for the first time. Current projections suggest that the number of Indigenous Australians will grow to around 721,000 by 2021, an increase of 39 per cent over 2006 levels, compared to the projected increase of 24 per cent for the non-Indigenous population⁴.

3 ABS (2010) (f)
4 ABS (2009) (a)

Population composition

Similar to most other developed nations, Australia has an ageing population. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of people aged 65–84 years is expected to increase by more than 40 per cent and the number of people aged over 85 years is expected to increase by a quarter⁵. Professor Hugo⁶ has noted that Australia is expected to leave the ‘demographic dividend’ window – where the proportion of working aged citizens is high compared to the number of non-working-aged people, resulting in high rates of productivity and economic growth – in 2014.

Australia is a multicultural society: we identify with more than 270 ethnicities, speak more than 260 languages, and observe a wide variety of cultural and religious traditions. Today, almost one quarter of people in Australia were born overseas and some 44 per cent of all Australians were either born overseas, or have at least one parent who was born overseas⁷.

Australians generally enjoy good health and long life expectancy compared with other countries. Average life expectancy for non-Indigenous women is 82.6 years and 78.7 years for men. Life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men is 72.9 and 67.2 years on average⁸. Life expectancy and health status are also lower in rural than urban areas and lower in socioeconomically disadvantaged groups than in advantaged groups, with estimated gaps in life expectancy between the highest and lowest socioeconomic groups of four years for males and two years for females⁹.

5 Australian Government (2010)
6 Hugo (2010)
7 Australian Government (2011)
8 ABS (2010) (g)
9 Draper et al (2005)



By comparison to the national population, Australia's Indigenous population is relatively young, with more people in younger age groups than older age groups. At the time of the 2006 Census, the median age of the Indigenous population was 21 years, compared to 37 years for the non-Indigenous population¹⁰. These different age profiles reflect the higher rates of fertility and higher death rates occurring in the Indigenous population. The mortality rate for Indigenous people was also substantially higher across all age groups than for non-Indigenous Australians¹¹.

As the population ages, the profile of household composition also changes, as demonstrated in Table 1. Families have continued to make up the majority of Australian households, with couples with children the most common type of family. However, as a percentage of all families, couple families with children have decreased over the period 1996 to 2006, while couple families without children have increased over the same period. The relative number of single person households and one parent families has also increased during this time.



10 ABS (2011) (c)

11 ABS (2009) (b)



Table 1. Household Composition, 1996 to 2006

	1996 (million)	1996 (% of households)	2006 (million)	2006 (% of households)
Total number of households	6.4	100	7.1	100
Family	4.7	73.3	5.1	71.7
<i>Couple family with children</i>	2.3	36.3	2.3	32.8
<i>Couple family without children</i>	1.6	25.0	1.9	26.4
<i>One parent families</i>	0.7	10.6	0.8	11.2
<i>Other families</i>	0.1	1.3	0.1	1.3
Single person household	1.4	22.5	1.7	24.4
Other (non-family) household	0.3	4.2	0.3	3.9

Source: Advisory Panel on Demographic Change and Liveability, in Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2010, *A sustainable population strategy for Australia: Issues paper*, Demographic Change and Liveability Panel Report, Canberra, page 82.

Growth in the number of households is strongly influenced by population growth, but also by the age structure of the population and the propensity of individual age groups to form households. The rate of household growth has outpaced the growth of the population for much of the past few decades, a function of the decreasing size of the Australian household, and this trend is projected to continue over the next two decades. The ABS has projected that couples with children at home, currently Australia's most common family type, will be overtaken by couples without children at home in 2011. Single person households are projected to be the fastest growing household type, increasing their proportion of all households from 24.3 per cent in 2006 to 30.2 per cent in 2026.¹²

12 ABS (2010) (g)

Another factor affecting how we experience the impacts of population change is the volume of international tourists visiting Australia at any given time. In 2008, around 6 million international visitors came to Australia, spending a total of 165.7 million visitor nights. However, the distribution of these tourists is not evenly spread, with the vast majority of visitors staying in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland¹³. A number of regional areas, particularly on the Queensland coast, are particularly dependent on tourism for their economic wellbeing and the impact of tourism on population numbers is evident in these and other locations where at certain times the number of tourists causes the population to expand significantly.

13 ABS (2010) (g)





Population location (distribution)

“Regional areas have capacity for more people.”

Regional Development Association Grampians,
Submission 139

“...the great majority of Australia’s population chooses to live close to the coast. If left unchecked, this preference will result in an unsustainable future for many small towns as people continue to desert these for the coastal lifestyle.”

Regional Development Association Far Western NSW,
Submission 328

Australia has a distinctive population distribution, being one of the most mobile and spatially concentrated of any country. It is highly urbanised, with 87 per cent living in urban areas, including 64 per cent in capital cities. In addition, the population is concentrated in coastal areas, with 81 per cent living within 50 kilometres of the coast¹⁴.

Population growth has been uneven, with coastal cities growing faster than Australia as a whole, while remote and inland country areas have grown slowly or declined. The most significant declines occurred in small rural townships with populations of between 1000 and 2000 people. These typically have an agricultural base.

All inland cities have seen population growth over the past decade, although this has been slower than in coastal cities. A number of small regional cities, many of which are adjacent to major capital cities, had growth rates which outstripped population growth in the nearby capital city. The Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and West Moreton areas in south-east Queensland all had higher relative growth than Brisbane. Outer Adelaide grew relatively more quickly than Adelaide, and south-east NS W including the city of Queanbeyan, grew faster than neighbouring Canberra, while the outer areas of Melbourne also experienced high rates of growth. This growth proved to be consistent with other studies of population growth in major cities where fringe growth generally outstrips infill and increased density in established areas¹⁵.

There are also differences in the age profiles of populations across Australia. Clearly some areas have greater proportions of families with young children while others attract higher proportions of retirees. For example, Blacktown, in western Sydney, has a much younger profile than Coffs Harbour, on the north coast of New South Wales (figure 2). Differing regional age profiles have implications for the types of services required, and other infrastructure needs (such as housing).

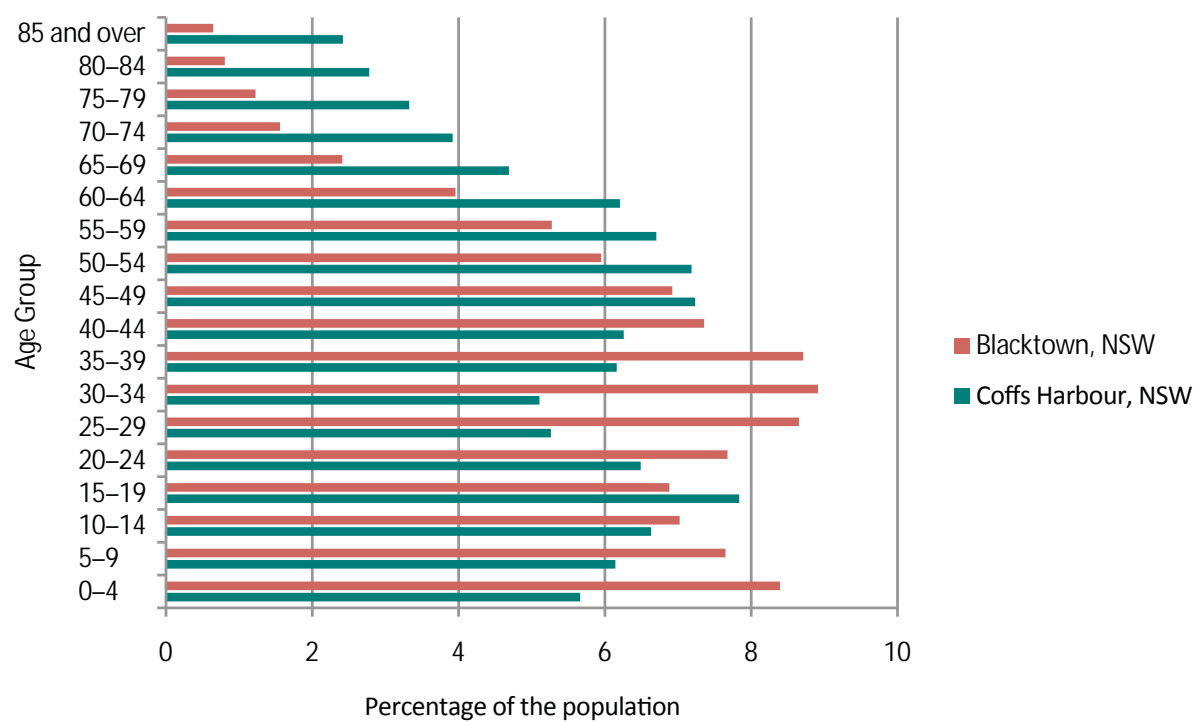
14 Hugo (2010)

15 BITRE (2011)





Figure 2: Age Distribution – Blacktown and Coffs Harbour, NSW

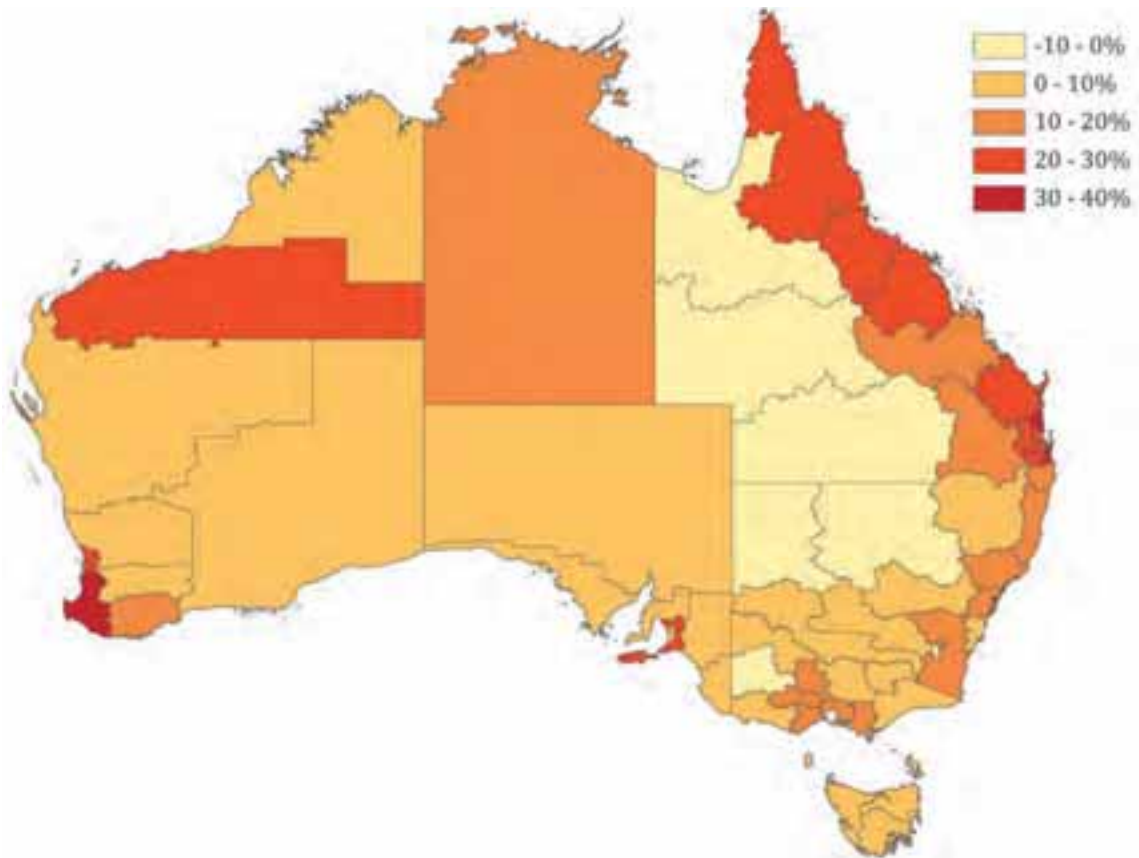


Source: Derived from ABS (2010) *Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia 2009*, 3235.0






Figure 3. Population Change in Australia 2001–2010



Source: Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Population data ABS (2011)





Most population growth has been occurring in capital cities, which grew by 1.6 million people between 2001 and 2009, accounting for 65 per cent of total population growth over that period. Capital cities also accounted for over 80 per cent of new migrants and a large share of inter-regional migration by domestic residents.

Australians move house regularly: between 2001 and 2006, 1.9 million people moved to a different city or region, and 6.6 million relocated within their own city or region. The majority of population movement within a region is driven by housing and accessibility considerations, while inter-regional movements on the other hand are generally motivated by factors such as moving closer to family and friends; and lifestyle and employment prospects¹⁶.

Internal migration since 2001 has been characterised by two main trends: the movement of immigrants and regional Australians (particularly young people) to capital cities; and a flow of some groups (especially older people or those who are welfare dependent) from urban areas to the regions, particularly towards coastal areas and peri-urban areas. These people typically moved from away expensive urban areas to take advantage of cheaper housing and lower costs of living or for other lifestyle reasons.

16 BITRE (2011)

The role of migration

“Australia has a highly diverse population that is reflected across all of its regions. This diversity is a source of economic, social and environmental strength for rural and regional areas.”

Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, Submission 129

A robust migration program is a critical determining element of Australia's population as both temporary and permanent migrants affect the size, composition and distribution of the population. Migration occurs for a range of reasons however Australia's migration program is now firmly founded on the skills Australia needs to support its economy.

The migration program makes an important contribution to our economy through the delivery of higher levels of productivity, labour force participation, and labour force growth. Detailed migrant survey data¹⁷ show that skilled migrants are younger and have participation rates and incomes higher than the national average.

Migrants have also increasingly been contributing to growth and development in regional Australia. One in every six new permanent arrivals is now settling in a regional area. This is around 70 per cent higher than 10 years ago¹⁸. The increase in regional settlement has been driven by skilled migrants, with initiatives such as the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme encouraging employers to sponsor skilled workers consistent with labour and skills needs.

17 DIaC (2011) (a)

18 Cully (2010)



The Australia that we have today has benefited from the contributions of many migrants from around the world who have made Australia home and helped shape our unique national identity. Our journey from a culturally homogenous British colony to a more diverse and cosmopolitan society accelerated following the end of World War Two. In the post-war period, the Government wanted to increase its population by encouraging migration. Through a process of gradual liberalisation, we adopted a non-discriminatory immigration program with a strong emphasis on skills, designed to progress Australia's national interest.


As observed in Australia's Multicultural Policy¹⁹, since 1945 over seven million migrants have come to Australia. Migrants provide new and different skills, open up valuable cultural and business opportunities in an increasingly globalised world, fill labour and skills shortages and invigorate the social and human capital of all Australian communities. Migrants have enriched and helped to build our country, and will continue to do so into the future.

19 DIaC (2011) (a)

Box 3 – Why Australia does not have a population target

A number of submissions to the public consultation phase called for the Government to set a population target. Indeed, public discussion over the past 40 years has periodically called for a population 'target' to be set. The pressure to provide such a target is often based on a belief that there must be a measurable, finite limit to the capacity of the country to provide resources for its population. These debates have often been fuelled by the publication of possible projected population trends.

There are many aspects of population growth, such as changes in fertility rates, longevity, or emigration, that we cannot accurately predict nor directly control, especially beyond the immediate future. Further, governments have limited practical tools through which they can influence population. Immigration is the most direct lever, but this is still limited in practicality (for example, migration from New Zealand, or the movement of Australians overseas or returning home). The adoption of a population target would also limit the use of the migration program as a policy lever to address emerging skills gaps and labour shortages.



Box 3 – (cont.)

It is clear that any perceived ‘optimum’ population is likely to change in the future due to changes in the way resources are used and developments in technology. Such developments may, for example, facilitate an increased water supply, greater yields in food production, and increasing take-up of alternative, renewable energy. As we strive for greater efficiency in consumption of resources, it follows that a larger number of people could be supported for the same consumption. Improvements in urban planning and technology in the future also have the potential to change the way we live and work, reducing the external costs of population growth currently being experienced, such as traffic congestion. Hence, it is more useful for governments, businesses and communities to focus on ways of improving our wellbeing, protecting our environment and making better use of the resources we have, rather than trying to determine an absolute limit to our population and focussing efforts on restricting growth in order to not exceed this ‘limit’.

Since the 1970s, all population inquiries sponsored by Australian governments have rejected the notion of a population target or national carrying capacity. Mandated population targets would typically be arbitrary, and impossible to deliver in practice. In addition, setting such a target has the potential to distract attention from addressing the challenges presented by other aspects of population change, including location, age and skill composition.

Population projections are illustrations of what the population might look like, on the basis of various assumptions about mortality, fertility and migration. These are generally based on past trends, and at best should be seen only as rough guides to the direction of current population movement. For example, if assumptions about fertility do not eventuate, then projections are likely to be quite different to actual population numbers, particularly in the medium to long-term.

So, rather than setting a target, the central objective of this Strategy is to lay the platform for a more sustainable Australia. In contrast to relying on long term projections, this can be better achieved by managing the impacts of all aspects of our current population, closely monitoring migration levels, and using population projections for the short to medium term to plan and prepare for our population’s needs in the future.



CHAPTER 2: A FRAMEWORK FOR A SUSTAINABLE AUSTRALIA



The Strategy's objective is to ensure that future changes in Australia's population (size, growth rate, composition and location) are compatible with the sustainability of our economy, communities and the environment.

Foundations of Wellbeing

"Population policy should shape sustainable communities that are fair, prosperous, liveable, secure and economically productive."

Property Council of Australia, Submission 379

"A flourishing and sustainable economy should aim to deliver human wellbeing (not just increased material prosperity) and ecological sustainability."

Australian Conservation Foundation, Submission 289

These three elements – *economic prosperity, liveable communities* and *environmental sustainability* – are the foundations of the nation's wellbeing.





Economic prosperity is a vital component of our sustainability as it underpins our capacity to take the actions required to build a sustainable Australia. It underpins our security, quality of life, the inclusiveness of our society and capacity to ameliorate our environmental impacts. It also funds research and development into smarter ways to achieve sustainable outcomes across the environment, communities and the economy.

Liveable communities are those which effectively provide for and support a high quality of life, wellbeing and health. These communities achieve this by providing ready access to employment and services, ease of connecting with friends and family, and high environmental amenity.

Environmental Sustainability encompasses the protection of the natural and built environment; sustainable use of Australia's natural resources; and conservation of biodiversity and our heritage. Sustainable environments are those which are resilient in the face of threats and which continue to provide value to the nation over time.

The Strategy and associated measures aim to maintain and improve the wellbeing of current and future generations through more effective anticipation, planning and responses to the impacts of population changes on our economy, communities and environment.

There are complex interactions between these foundations of wellbeing. Sometimes developments in one area can support positive outcomes in others, while in

other instances communities will need to weigh up the relative costs and benefits. At the same time, there are other key drivers. For example, unavoidable climate change impacts will affect the choices we make about how and where we build our settlements and develop our economy. Government policies should seek to make the implications of actions transparent and ensure that the assessment of new initiatives considers the breadth of community, economic and environmental outcomes.

Although not directly affecting population change, a wide range of policies set by governments influence or support individual choices, for example through significant investment in services and infrastructure in regional Australia, or through the provision of income support for families.

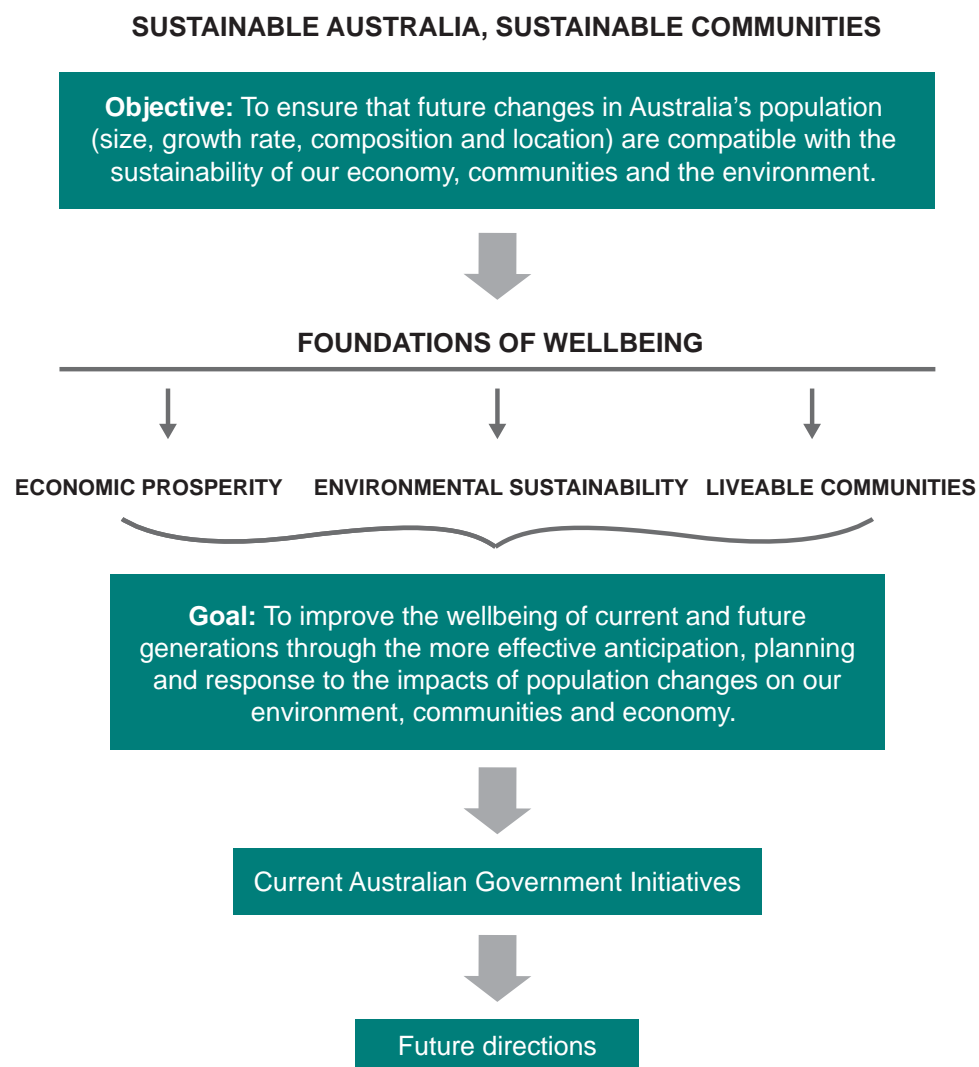
State, territory and local governments have critical roles in the provision of infrastructure and services that impact on the sustainability of the population, including primary responsibility for planning systems.

Population is not the cause of, or solution to, all of Australia's challenges. Whether the community concern is urban congestion or lack of skilled labour, changes in Australia's total population number alone may not be the most direct, long term or effective mechanism to deal with such issues. For this reason, the objective of each level of government must be about getting the policy settings right to maintain and enhance the wellbeing of our population.



Figure 4 provides a conceptual summary of how population is addressed in the Government's broader sustainability agenda:

Figure 4. Population and Sustainability



Against the backdrop of our changing population, the Strategy is framed by a set of six principles that express a commitment to essential aspects of the Australian way of life and the benefits of our democracy and governance. The principles will guide how the Government addresses population issues into the future.

Principles

1. *Freedom of choice:* Where to live; household structure and family composition; engagement with the community, economy and our institutions; and the use of government services and infrastructure are a matter of choice for individual Australians and their communities.
2. *Valuing diversity:* Recognising the benefits of diversity – in culture (including Australia's Indigenous culture), age, beliefs and lifestyle – within the broader objective of community harmony and national unity. Commitment to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society in which everyone can participate in the opportunities which living in Australia offers.
3. *Enhancing our prosperity:* Our capacity to provide the opportunities, benefits, and investments expected by Australians depends on enhancing our prosperity and living standards, in real terms, into the future. This can only be achieved through investment in the long term drivers of economic growth and productivity.
4. *Good custodianship:* The protection of the natural and built environment; sustainable use of Australia's natural resources; and conservation of biodiversity and our heritage is an essential responsibility we owe to past and future generations and the global community.
5. *Place matters:* Our quality of life and sense of community is linked to our physical location and shared experiences. The diversity of Australia's physical environments (both natural and built) give rise to a wide range of communities as expressions of the way Australians choose to live.





6. *Joint responsibility:* Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments all have particular responsibilities and must work together, including through COAG, to support a sustainable Australia. Further, many factors that support our population are rightly delivered through the private and non-government sectors.

The last principle embeds a concept of shared responsibility that recognises that managing our changing population is the responsibility of all levels of government. The policy levers available to state, territory and local governments differ from those at the national level. The varied ways in which population changes impact across Australia demands effective policy and program responses that can be precisely targeted to specific communities, be they national, regional or local. In addition, individuals and communities, as well as the not-for-profit and business sectors have a critical role to play in responding to the challenges and opportunities of Australia's changing population.

In targeting policy or program responses to specific communities, this Strategy recognises that the impacts of population change are experienced differently by different communities. The public consultation process has highlighted that there are substantial differences in the way our regions and cities experience population change, and the challenges they face as a result of that change. For example, housing affordability is an issue in those regional places experiencing strong population growth, while in some of our urban centres the challenge is to create more liveable and cohesive communities.

The Government is committed to implementing policies which improve wellbeing across Australia and creating a sustainable Australia by promoting sustainable communities.







CHAPTER 3: PLACE MATTERS – POPULATION DISTRIBUTION AND SUSTAINABILITY

While the framework outlined in Chapter 2 provides a national perspective on managing population change, an understanding of how the patterns and nature of settlement across Australia are changing is vital to ensuring that governments, communities and the private sector are able to effectively plan for and provide the investment and support that future communities will require.

Urban settlement

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world: almost nine out of ten Australians live in urban areas, while around 75 per cent of the population lives in a major city (that is, a city of greater than 100,000 residents)²⁰. This high concentration of urban living is not a new phenomenon as Australian settlement has been highly urbanised over the past century and, consistent with global trends, has had a continuing concentration of urban living in recent years.

While Australia's rate of urban living is high, there is significant variation in the types of communities in which Australians live. Over 8 million Australians live outside the capital cities²¹. So, although it is necessary to better

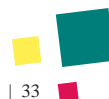
understand and addressing the pressures within capital cities, this is not sufficient to build a comprehensive picture of sustainable communities. Around half of those living outside capital cities live in other urban areas, including large urbanised centres such as the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast in Queensland. The recent rapid growth of 'non-capital' cities and towns has demanded significant infrastructure investment.

The growing numbers of people choosing to live in urban areas drives the geographic expansion of our major cities. Most of Australia's cities have relatively low population densities when compared to international cities. To alleviate outward growth, urban infill development is being actively pursued in some areas, especially in underused and/or derelict sites across capital cities. Infill development has the potential to increase the efficiency of our major cities through economies of scale. When appropriately integrated with existing urban environments, and when linked to transport corridors, urban green spaces, recreation locations and access to services, infill development offers an opportunity to provide high amenity living environments while

²⁰ Ridout H. et al (2010)

²¹ ABS (2011) (f)







maximising the use of existing services and infrastructure. Indeed, many cities around the world with considerably greater population densities than those in Australia have comparable liveability rankings to Australian cities. These issues are addressed in more detail by the Government's National Urban Policy which sets out a long-term national framework to guide policy development and public and private investment in our cities.

One of the challenges for major cities is the location of employment centres with respect to residential areas. Our major cities have spread considerably, driven by the availability of land for residential development in outer suburbs, lifestyle choices, and a desire to own larger, newer houses. However, these outer suburbs usually provide a limited range of job opportunities and most workers are required to commute long distances.²² Increased congestion and longer travel times place the populations in outer suburbs at clear disadvantage in terms of access to employment opportunities and services, as well as having a detrimental impact on the psychological, social and cultural wellbeing of those populations²³.

Outer metropolitan growth areas also have significantly fewer community services than the metropolitan average, making the populations in those areas potentially less socially and economically resilient than their counterparts in inner metropolitan areas²⁴.

Our regions

"Regional Australia is the central character to enable Australia to experience economic growth and recovery, as well as providing food security to not only Australians but contribute towards food and fibre provision worldwide. However, regional Australia will lack the labour force to achieve growth and accelerate to full capacity."

National Farmers Federation, Submission 370

Beyond our cities, there is a mixture of growth and decline in regional and remote areas. Regional, coastal communities are generally undergoing significant population growth, particularly those in proximity to urban centres, as are selected pockets of inland and remote Australia on the basis of very significant mining and gas opportunities. Development in inland Australia has historically been driven by patterns of agriculture and resource extraction. Current trends show regional centres (such as Dubbo and Wagga Wagga in NSW for example) expanding, while the population of some smaller inland towns declines (see Box 4).²⁵

Changes to Australia's settlement patterns are predominantly driven by economic and lifestyle trends. From an economic perspective, the increasing demand for labour in the mining and resources sector is clearly driving the growth of regional communities situated close to these operations.

22 O'Connor & Healy (2002)

23 Hugo G. et al (2010)

24 Baum & Mitchell (2009)

25 BITRE, (2011)



Economic opportunities, especially in the expanding services sector, are also highly significant in drawing people to job opportunities in metropolitan and larger regional centres. Industries such as tourism contribute significantly to regional economies, providing significant growth opportunities for regional economies and their associated populations.

In contrast, the challenge of recent extended periods of drought, changing commodity prices, consequent changes in agricultural production in the south-east and south-west of Australia, the contraction of agricultural labour demand, and changes in the size of farm holdings have led to a reduction in the populations of some agriculture-dependent communities.

Relocation for lifestyle reasons is a major driver of the growth in coastal communities, particularly those that remain within easy travel distance of a major urban centre.

Technological advances and communications improvements are providing increasing opportunities for Australians to live remote from their workplaces and educational institutions, to establish enterprises remote from a customer base, and to remain connected with their families and friends.

The economic and social opportunities anticipated through the Government's investment in the National Broadband Network may enable greater choice for Australians about where they live.

Box 4 – Promoting Regional Communities

Managing the future impacts and opportunities of population change is not just the responsibility of governments. While governments can support, facilitate and promote the benefits of regional living, cities, towns, business and individuals all have a significant role to play in shaping their future populations. In New South Wales, a group of seven regional cities are helping to influence the future size and shape of their communities through an innovative marketing campaign called “Evocities”. This campaign promotes the benefits of regional living – from the employment and educational opportunities, to the lifestyle benefits and the affordability of housing. While this campaign is receiving funding support from governments including the Commonwealth, it was initiated and is being driven by the communities themselves, and provides one example of a proactive approach to influencing future population outcomes.







Why place matters

“Different places around the nation have their own distinctiveness, attributes and opportunities. Appropriate policies will recognize these features and the connections between places”.

National Growth Areas Alliance, Submission 185

The variation and change in the patterns and drivers of Australian settlement mean that population challenges and opportunities play out differently across different locations. In areas experiencing growth, many Australians are experiencing pressures due to the cost of living, whether they relate to housing, transport, utilities, groceries or other necessities. Many Australians continue to experience entrenched and persistent disadvantage and some are considerably more vulnerable to these rises in the costs of living.

There is a strong link between social disadvantage and location: research by the Australian Social Inclusion Board has found that more than 17 per cent of people living in the most disadvantaged locations experience multiple disadvantage (that is, they are disadvantaged in three or more of six markers), compared to less than 1 per cent of people in the least disadvantaged locations²⁶. Not only are people in these locations more likely to be unemployed, but they are also less likely to be in a position to contemplate relocation to other areas due in part or wholly to financial circumstances and the high transaction costs associated with re-locating.

The Intergenerational Report notes that the difficulties faced by people living in disadvantaged locations are often compounded by the tendency for these locations to be characterised by lower quality (or lack of) community infrastructure and lack of transport linkages²⁷.

Actions by all levels of government to address economic, environmental and social sustainability will require an approach to location that recognises the different needs of our regions and urban areas.

First, we need to effectively build our regions, enabling the economic and lifestyle drivers set out above. Where this results in expanded but sustainable regional communities, it will help relieve the pressure currently being experienced in our existing major urban centres and enhance the wellbeing of regional Australians. In building our regions it will be important to recognise that proximity to the facilities and opportunities offered by larger cities is clearly a vital component of the success of regional centres.

Secondly, there is a need to consider the liveability of major urban areas, especially outer suburbs. This includes improving access to transport and services, educational facilities, local employment opportunities, and amenities such as parks and recreation facilities, bushland and shared community spaces.

26 ASIB (2011). The six areas of disadvantage are income, work, health, education, safety and support. Analysis is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Socio-Economic Index for Areas data.

27 Australian Government (2010)





Market-led regional development

Consistent with the principle of freedom of choice of individuals and their families, the Government does not intend to directly engineer large growth in one or two selected regional areas (see Box 5). Instead, economic and lifestyle drivers will continue to be the key determinants of where Australians choose to live, and it is the role of governments to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place to support these growing communities.

The benefits of such a “market-led” approach include harnessing economic opportunities across the nation to ensure we effectively maximise their potential contribution to our prosperity and standard of living. Also, by supporting remote, regional, peri-urban and inner urban areas to become more sustainable and better places to live, we will promote labour mobility. When people are willing and able to move where the jobs are, we can take advantage of economic opportunities and resolve localised unemployment in an economy which is currently running close to capacity. Finally, communities that are supported and encouraged to grow on sound fundamentals and existing drivers are more enduring and resilient.

Ultimately the Government will promote and support the development and maintenance of sustainable communities in all their forms: inner city, suburban and regional. By understanding the differences between our various communities and working towards sustainability for each, we will enhance the wellbeing of current and future generations.





Box 5 – Influencing the Development of Regional Areas

The reasons why a particular location may thrive, economically and socially, while another may struggle to keep its population and requisite services and infrastructure, are many and varied. In simple terms, areas which are economically diverse are more likely to do well because they will be less vulnerable when one part of the local economy is negatively impacted in some way. Unexpected opportunities can also arise on either a temporary or permanent basis and quickly change the prospects and future of particular areas.

Success in a region is likely to be driven by leadership of business and community organisations, which may to some degree leverage off government programs. Ultimately it is the businesses in a region which provide the bulk of investment, driving innovation and employment growth. Government's main role in this space is to provide support to ensure that the right conditions exist to attract this investment, not to directly provide the investment. As noted by the Productivity Commission, the most effective role for government may include ensuring the availability of clear information, improving coordination between stakeholders, and ensuring necessary infrastructure (services, schools etc) is delivered in time to support regional population change.

Productivity Commission 2011, *A 'Sustainable' Population? — Key Policy Issues*, submission on *A sustainable population strategy for Australia, Issues paper and appendices*





Box 6 – Managing skills and workforces in boom areas

A feature of the recent resources boom has been the rise of the use of long distance commuting workers to fill employment needs on specific projects.

One significant driver of the increasing use of long distance commuting workers is the growth in the minerals and resources sector which increasingly employs staff on weekly, fortnightly or monthly shift rotations and can involve non-resident workers undertaking long distance commuting from their place of residence to work. This can include ship-in / ship-out, drive-in / drive-out, bus-in / bus-out and fly-in-/ fly-out arrangements. Feedback from stakeholders during the consultation process for the Strategy indicated that around 50 per cent of all mining employees in Western Australia are employed on such a basis and this proportion was expected to continue to grow.

There are a number of reasons why employers and employees choose these arrangements, including the need to attract appropriately skilled workers very quickly during the start-up phase of a project; current growth in short-term high return mining operations; employee and family preferences regarding work-life balance and relative proximity to established friendship, family and social networks in other locations; and to minimise costs through providing temporary rather than permanent infrastructure and services for the non-resident workforce.

As with any significant change in the structure and location of a population there are issues for all parties involved in non-resident workforce arrangements including employers, employees, their families and friends, and local businesses and community members.

In considering these impacts it is important to recognise that non-resident workers are not unique to resource regions and that our cities and urban areas also have many non-resident workers. However the impact of these workers on mining-based communities is magnified due to the small size of the resident population.





Box 6 – (Cont.)

One crucial aspect is the impact on communities within the local or regional area, where the provision of infrastructure, services and housing to the temporary non-resident population, often drives up the cost of living (for example rental accommodation in Karratha, WA averages \$1823 per week²⁸). While the non-resident workforce generates significant wealth from the operation, permanent residents may not all realise benefits from the activities occurring within their region which can also have attendant social impacts from relatively large numbers of non-residents. Concerns have also been raised regarding the sustainability for workers and their families who may face stresses associated with long shifts and family dislocation.

There are also steps that governments, employers and communities can take to effectively manage the challenges of a long distance commuting workforce. Better planning prior to the commencement of operations, including consultation with local communities can improve outcomes for the local community, the workforce and the industry.

Regional workforce plans that include strategies to manage the impacts of major resources projects on the community and maximise opportunities for local people, can ensure a more effective, sustainable, non-resident workforce. Similarly, adapting social infrastructure and services to reflect the needs of both resident and non-resident populations can alleviate some of the social issues identified with a rapidly changing population.

28 Anglicare WA, (2011)





CHAPTER 4: THE FOUNDATIONS OF A SUSTAINABLE AUSTRALIA – ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Australians enjoy, on average, one of the highest standards of living in the world. We have a strong economy with a high rate of employment, and most Australians are well educated and can access high quality health services. We enjoy benefits of cultural diversity, and few advanced economies have similar potential for economic growth. Our natural environment forms an important part of our identity and way of life, and the attributes of iconic environments of Australia such as Kakadu and the Great Barrier Reef attract people from around the world.

On many fronts, we are already taking real and tangible steps to realise the benefits that a changing population presents. We are investing in our future through initiatives like the National Broadband Network (NBN), which will not only produce economic benefits, but will also see benefits for our communities and environment. The NBN can

facilitate greater social inclusion for those people who feel isolated or disconnected from their communities. The NBN also shows how, when we plan for the future, we can deliver initiatives that produce benefits across the foundations of wellbeing, rather than needing to trade off between economic, environmental or community benefits.

In a similar way, the skills agenda will ensure we can meet the workforce needs of the economy through maximising opportunities for participation.

In ensuring we make the most of the opportunities, and also effectively respond to the challenges, our task is to plan for and manage change. Enhancing our wellbeing and striving for a more sustainable future is not just a role for governments. Business and the community, alongside all levels of government, have a role to play in planning for and managing changes to our population.





Very few issues are confined to only the economy, the environment or communities. Similarly, many of the Government's policies are also relevant across the three foundations of wellbeing. When we have a healthy and resilient environment, our communities are more liveable as we enjoy clean air and fresh water, and our economy benefits through industries such as agriculture and tourism that rely on our natural resources. An inclusive and cohesive society not only builds the wellbeing of our communities, but supports increased workforce participation which also has benefits for productivity and the economy.

The Government already has an extensive agenda to support a sustainable Australia, at the local, regional and national levels. While this agenda also cuts across the three foundations for wellbeing—the economy,

environment, and communities—each element of the Government's agenda can be considered as having a primary focus on one of these three areas. For example while investments in education and training have clear and direct benefits in our communities, they are mainly aimed at increasing the productivity of Australians and are therefore considered first and foremost an economic measure.

This chapter considers relevant areas of the Government's current agenda in regard to population sustainability under the headings of economic prosperity, liveable communities and environmental sustainability.





Table 2. An illustrative representation of the relationship between Government policy and the foundations of population sustainability.

Government Policy Agenda / Domains for Action	Economic Prosperity	Liveable Communities	Environmental Sustainability
Building our Skills Base and Enhancing Participation	✓	✓	
Planning and Infrastructure Investment for Connected Communities (incl. NBN)	✓	✓	✓
Liveable Urban Communities	✓	✓	✓
Meeting our Housing Needs (Housing Supply and Affordability)	✓	✓	
Social Inclusion and Service Delivery Reform for Stronger Communities	✓	✓	
Embracing our Diversity for Vibrant Communities	✓	✓	
Indigenous Australians: Closing the Gap and Strengthening our Future	✓	✓	✓
Healthy People: Healthy Communities	✓	✓	
Resilient Landscapes and Communities	✓	✓	✓
Climate Change: Decoupling Emissions from Population Growth	✓	✓	✓
Water for Liveable Communities, our Environment and Industries	✓	✓	✓
Securing Food Production for our Communities and the World	✓	✓	✓
✓	Highly significant impact		
✓	Moderately significant impact		
✓	Relatively minor impact		



Economic Prosperity

“Sustainable communities prosper. They encourage opportunities for investment, business diversity, innovation and economic development that support local jobs for people in the region.”

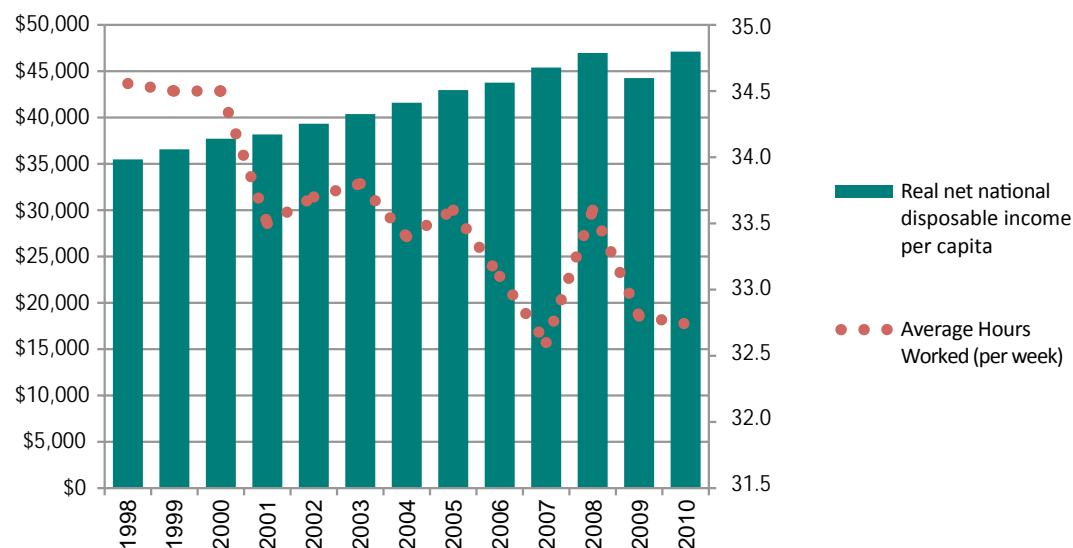
Green Building Council of Australia, Submission 121

Building our Skills Base and Enhancing Participation

The ageing of our population is a challenge that will have a significant effect on our future living standards. An ageing population slows economic growth as the proportion of people of working age in the population decreases. The ‘baby boomer’ generation currently accounts for 41.8 per cent of the labour force, and many workforce groups will soon see large cohorts reaching retirement age. Further, while the current proportion of people aged over 65 is around 20 per cent, by 2050 it is projected to have risen to 37.6 per cent²⁹.

29 Australian Government (2010)

Figure 5. Real Net National Disposable Income and Total Weekly Hours Worked



Source: Derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics Cat No. 6291.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia – Table 9: Average Actual Weekly Hours Worked (Total) & Cat No 5206.0 Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product – Table 1: Real net national disposable income per capita: Chain volume measures (year ending December)



Reflecting Australia's growing economic prosperity is growth in Real Net National Disposable Income (RNNDI). RNNDI provides a comprehensive picture of income accruing to Australians and is a key measure of national economic wellbeing. Australia has seen significant real income growth during the past decade. Between 1998–99 and 2008–09, RNNDI per person grew by 2.6 per cent a year on average³⁰.

In order to sustain improvements in our living standards, we need to implement policies which support a strong and flexible economy, encourage individuals to increase their participation in the workforce where appropriate and stronger productivity growth.

In the medium to long term, improving the level of skills and the responsiveness of supply to labour demands relies on investment in and reforms to domestic education and training as well as expanding the workforce. These outcomes can be achieved through a mix of measures to encourage increased labour force participation, expand opportunities to access more responsive and better quality education and training, and through a well-designed skilled migration program.

The Government is undertaking significant investment to support skills development for the domestic workforce, including through substantial reforms to higher education. This includes delivering a more flexible and responsive system and significant increases in investment such as the Productivity Places Program and the \$660 million Skills for Sustainable Growth strategy in the 2010–11 Budget (which included \$200 million to target immediate skills hotspots).

30 ABS (2011) (d)





The skills focus of Australia's migration program has meant that recent immigrants have tended to be highly educated. This can result in new ideas for production, management, technological advancement and other forms of innovation which would have positive impacts on productivity. Skilled migrants also tend to have higher workforce participation rates than the Australian born population and immigrants on other visas.

Beyond fulfilling the immediate skills needs of the economy, migration contributes in other ways to Australia's continued economic growth. Migration can help to lower trade costs as migrants utilise existing links and networks to generate bigger and more diverse markets for Australian goods and services, and reduce information barriers to trade. This in turn increases competition between businesses which benefits consumers, provides higher tax revenues to enable governments to fund services, and cultural benefits that enrich our society and further our awareness of the rest of the world.

At the same time as the workforce is being complemented with skilled migrants, the Government has also undertaken significant investment to support skills development for the domestic workforce, including through substantial reforms to higher education in the 2009–10 Budget. This includes the uncapping of Commonwealth supported university places from 2012. The Government has also announced substantial investment in new skills initiatives under its *Building Australia's Future Workforce* package in the

2011–12 Budget, which includes \$1.75 billion in funding for a National Partnership with the states and territories to pursue ambitious reforms to the vocational education and training sector.

Meeting the future skills needs of the economy will require policy settings and institutional arrangements that are flexible and responsive to economic change. Key elements required to achieve this outcome include effective transmission of information, the ability to substitute labour between sectors and regions, labour mobility and the responsiveness and efficiency of education and training systems.

Innovation is also a key driver of productivity growth. It has the potential to enhance skills and increase participation in our economy, while support for and access to world class research is important to provide new knowledge for our businesses and industries. A more innovative and productive population will have much greater awareness of, and be better prepared to tackle, many of the challenges for a sustainable population, such as enhancing our capability to develop new energy efficiency and other technologies that decouple economic growth from increases in greenhouse gas emissions and energy use.

In addition to the economic benefits that arise from building a more educated, skilled and productive population, a more innovative population also leads to higher rates of participation, community engagement, health and access to opportunity.





The Government's commitment to lifting Australia's innovation, research and development performance, as set out in *Powering Ideas: An Innovation Agenda for the 21st Century*, is vitally linked to our capacity to sustain our population. The strengthening of Australia's innovation system offers the potential to address challenges across a range of environmental, climate, water, land use, urban planning and food security issues. The innovation agenda includes the development of a deep and broad research workforce in the public and private spheres, facilitating commercialisation of new ideas, the effective dissemination of new technologies and processes, and better collaboration between researchers and industry here and overseas in the creation and adoption of new ideas.

Planning and Infrastructure Investment for Connected Communities

Australia's transport and telecommunications infrastructure are crucial in supporting economic, social and environmental outcomes for communities across Australia. They facilitate access to employment and commerce, leisure, healthcare and education as well as transporting goods to, from and within Australian markets.

While it is likely that a greater urban population will make it more viable for transport providers to offer more accessible and frequent services, it will also put pressure on transport infrastructure. Over recent years, all levels of government have substantially increased their investment in public transport infrastructure, recognising its importance for growing populations.

Due to the long lead times to build major infrastructure, planning that takes account of future demand for infrastructure is vital. Through the COAG cities reforms and the National Urban Policy, the Government is working to promote integration of Australia's transport system with urban and regional planning, in collaboration with the states and territories.

The Government is also currently investing \$36 billion on road and rail infrastructure. Infrastructure Australia was established in 2008 to drive evidence based infrastructure planning, investment and reform. Infrastructure Australia's focus is on assisting Australian governments to develop a strategic blueprint for unlocking infrastructure bottlenecks and to modernise the nation's economic infrastructure. Infrastructure Australia audits national priorities and reports on priorities for future investment.

The emergence of the digital economy – the network of economic and social activities that are enabled by the internet, mobile and sensor networks – has highlighted the need for appropriate telecommunications infrastructure to ensure the long-term growth of our digital industries and meet the needs of our changing communities. The Government is committed to meeting this need through the delivery of the National Broadband Network (NBN). The NBN will connect 93 per cent of homes, schools and businesses with optic fibre, which will provide internet services that are up to 100 times faster than current internet connections. The remaining 7 per cent of premises will have access to speeds of at least 12 megabits per second through next generation wireless and satellite technologies.





The economic benefits of the NBN include enabling the use of widespread smart technologies in electricity, health, irrigation and energy, and the opportunity for businesses to extend market reach through new digital services. Environmental benefits will become apparent as a proportion of future business travel across the country and overseas will be replaced with digital applications such as high-definition videoconferencing and telepresence.

The NBN will also enable better social outcomes for people living in regional, remote and rural areas, by facilitating greater access to health services and educational opportunities. In this way, the NBN will help to link those members of the community who are socially or geographically isolated and allow people to better engage and interact with their communities.

Liveable Communities

“Population policy should shape sustainable communities that are fair, prosperous, liveable, secure and economically productive.”

Property Council of Australia, Submission 379

Liveable Urban Communities

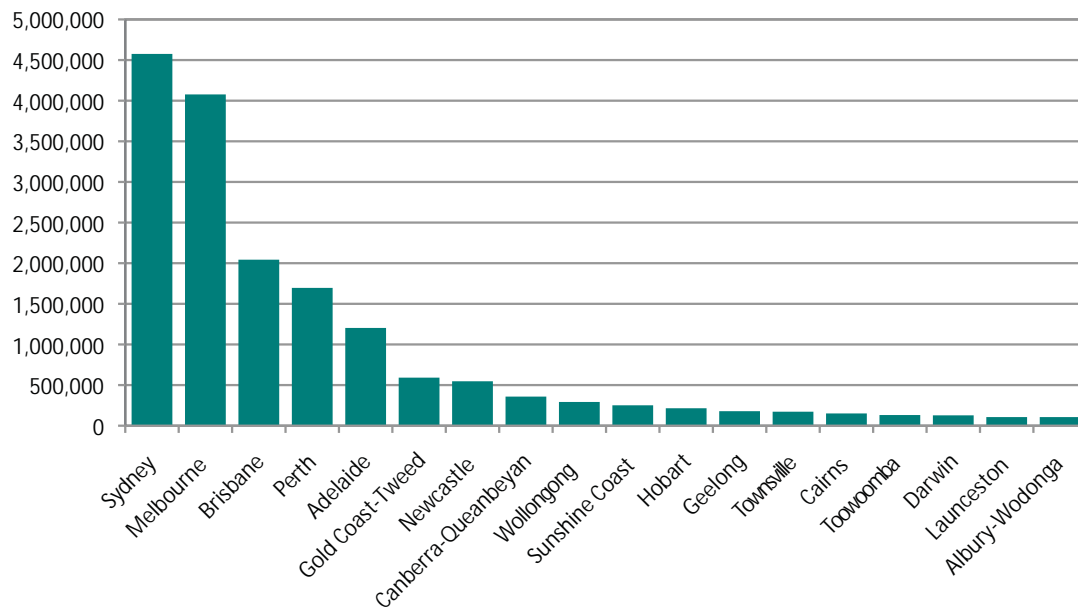
As noted previously, Australia has a highly urbanised population and these urban centres are vital to the economy. Major cities contribute approximately 80 per cent of the national Gross Domestic Product and employ approximately 75 per cent of the workforce. By 2026, approximately 4.5 million additional people are expected to live in our capital cities³¹.

31 ABS (2008) (b)





Figure 6. Population of Australia's Major Cities



Source: ABS 2011 (f)

This population change presents a number of challenges and opportunities for the provision of social and economic infrastructure, the urban environment, transport and housing.

Cities offer benefits of economies of scale – arising especially from businesses locating in close proximity to one another. Businesses can draw from local sources of labour and materials while still being close to their customer base. Information sharing between enterprises can enable growth in productivity and a higher level of specialisation in urban businesses.

Economies of scale also apply to infrastructure in cities. Per capita, it is cheaper to provide infrastructure for cities, where there are a large number of users. Economies of scale also exist in areas of government service delivery. In cities, services in health and education can be delivered at lower costs per capita, however increasing population can lead to congestion costs that potentially offset the benefits of scale.





Careful planning for Australia's future population will be central to future productivity growth. In order to have productive, sustainable and liveable cities that can support our changing population now and into the future, we need to ensure that the right planning is in place in relation to our environment, infrastructure and social services. Adequate and well-planned infrastructure, particularly housing stock and transport systems, is vital in ensuring our cities can accommodate larger populations. Additionally, well-planned and vibrant cities are important in attracting tourists and enabling the benefits from visitor expenditure to be realised by the wider economy.

The Government currently invests significantly in Australia's urban communities through economic, transport and other infrastructure, including in the areas of health, housing, education and training, social services and welfare. These investments, together with policies and regulatory activities, influence the way cities are planned, managed and developed.

The Government is committed to strengthening the advantages of Australia's cities and responding to emerging environmental, infrastructure and social challenges. The National Urban Policy establishes policy objectives and principles to promote productivity, sustainability and liveability in our 18 major cities, that is those with populations greater than 100,000 people.

The National Urban Policy recognises that cities are centres of economic activity, where the workforce, industry and the institutions that support their activity are concentrated. However, our cities are also centres for living, education, recreation and entertainment. Liveable cities offer a high quality of life and are socially inclusive, affordable, accessible, healthy, safe, and resilient to the impacts of climate change.

States and territories, together with local governments, have primary responsibility to plan for urban growth and change. To support the states and territories in this role, the Commonwealth works cooperatively with these jurisdictions through COAG.





On 7 December 2009, COAG agreed to reforms to capital city strategic planning systems, including a set of nine criteria to ensure Australian cities are globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable, and socially inclusive and are well placed to meet future challenges and growth. COAG identified the need for capital city strategic planning systems that ensure investment in cities is guided by long-term strategic objectives and national priorities.

The National Urban Policy is an important component of meeting the Commonwealth's commitment to the COAG cities reforms. It sets out a long term, national framework to guide policy and investment decision-making in cities. In doing so, it facilitates a whole-of-government approach to working in partnership with state, territory and local government, and the communities and businesses they represent and support.

Meeting Our Housing Needs

Central to the liveability of our communities is ensuring the availability of adequate affordable housing. In addition to the fundamental right to shelter, targeting housing to community needs has implications for individual wellbeing and community cohesion. Currently, Australia has a substantive housing supply gap that is impacting on housing affordability, particularly low income households. Housing supply has struggled to keep pace with demand, and continued population growth is likely to mean continuing strong underlying demand for housing.

While many of the underlying issues require action by local and state governments, in recognition of the seriousness of this issue, the Government is making an unprecedented investment in increasing the supply of affordable housing. The Government has committed \$20 billion across a range of programs addressing housing issues including housing affordability, remote indigenous housing, social housing and homelessness.

Included in this commitment are:

- the \$6.2 billion National Affordable Housing Specific Purpose Payment which assists private renters, those who are (or are at risk of becoming) homeless, and first home buyers; and
- the \$5.6 billion Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan: Social Housing Initiative, which is funding construction and repair of over 19,300 new and some 80,000 existing social housing dwellings. The Social Housing Initiative includes over 17,200 new dwellings containing one or two bedrooms to respond to the trend towards decreasing numbers of people per household. Dwellings being built as part of this initiative are also well connected, with almost 77 per cent within one kilometre of local services, and more than 43 per cent within walking distance of public transport. Furthermore, 16,770 dwellings target older people by incorporating universal design features such as grab rails, wider corridors and step-free showers.





- the National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing which has provided a further \$400 million to construct around 1900 new social housing dwellings, 300 of which are designed for older people.
- The \$450 million Housing Affordability Fund, which is helping to reduce the cost of new homes for many Australians. The program provides grants to local councils and state agencies to reduce housing-related infrastructure and planning costs, and to pass these savings on to new home buyers. A total of 52 infrastructure projects are planned to bring forward around 35,000 new dwellings and provide direct savings to over 13,000 new home buyers, while a further 23 reform projects will benefit around 380,000 future home buyers by improving planning and approval processes.
- Affordable rental housing for Australians and their families is supported through the Government's \$1.1 billion National Rental Affordability Scheme. The Australian Government is committed to stimulate the construction of 50,000 high quality homes and apartments by offering financial incentives to the business sector and community organisations to build and rent dwellings to low and moderate income households at a rate that is at least 20 per cent below the prevailing market rates. The Scheme is increasing the supply of new affordable rental housing, reducing the rental costs for low to moderate income households, and encouraging large scale investment and innovative delivery of affordable housing.
- The \$100 million Building Better Regional Cities Program, which will be invested in local infrastructure projects to help build thousands of more affordable homes in high growth regional cities over three years, relieving pressure on our major capital cities.



Building on this investment, the Government is working with the states and territories through the COAG Housing Supply and Affordability Reform agenda to examine issues such as zoning and planning approval processes, infrastructure charges, environmental regulations, and opportunities to identify currently underutilised land. The results of this work are due to be reported to COAG in mid-2011. Recognising and responding to these issues and trends in household formation will help ensure existing and new growth areas in both urban and regional places are equipped to house our population as it changes, contributing to our future wellbeing.

Social Inclusion and Service Delivery Reform for Stronger Communities

In Australia, a number of locations and communities can be identified by persistent and concentrated disadvantage. Better strategic planning of our communities – particularly providing equitable access to employment, education, welfare, health, transport and other important services – will help to improve wellbeing in these areas as well as avoid the creation of areas that are predisposed to disadvantage.

The Government's Service Delivery Reform Agenda and Social Inclusion Principles are helping to facilitate access to government services and to ensure they are better targeted and coordinated according to need. It is imperative that, in the current growth corridors that will contain the suburbs of

the future, social inclusion is considered at the start of development not at the end point, after the location has become clearly disadvantaged. Early and ongoing planning is required to ensure that all residents are able to access social and economic opportunities and the services they need.

Where concentrations of disadvantage exist there is a risk that problems will become entrenched, however there is considerable scope for working in different ways to help address barriers to inclusion. Potential solutions lie in community capacity building, coordinating the efforts of all levels of government, understanding the distinct economic context of each community and adapting programs to local circumstances.

It is important to ensure that all communities – new, developing and existing – have access to a full range of services that meet their needs. The Government is planning for these service delivery needs to help ensure the wellbeing and sustainability of communities through:

- Service Delivery Reform to provide better support for people when they need it, including those in regional and rural areas. This will include better matching the service delivery network to the specific needs of communities; more self service options such as online and telephone claiming; more one stop shops through the co-location of multiple services like Medicare and Centrelink into a single physical location; and a needs based case coordination service delivery model to provide tailored and intensive support



to those Australians who face multiple, complex challenges and entrenched disadvantage. Service Delivery Reform will also facilitate access to education, employment and non-vocational services for all Australians to help them overcome barriers to social inclusion and economic participation;

- coordinating the efforts of state and territory governments under the National Disability Strategy to meet the diverse needs of people with disability and their carers. Already a sizable group in our society, numbers are likely to increase due to increasing longevity;
- the National Compact with the Third Sector, working to strengthen the not-for-profit sector by reducing red tape so that these organisations are better able to provide support to vulnerable individuals and families; and
- developing strategies to support and expand volunteering, philanthropy and social investment as ways of building community resilience and inclusion and liveability.

The Government is also investing in a large range of policies and programs, including in partnership with state and territory governments, targeted at helping Australians remain engaged in their communities, making them safer, more productive and liveable places to work and raise families. State and territory governments also discharge various responsibilities in these areas in their own right. Some of the Government's initiatives

for meeting future labour market needs and helping to prepare Australia for the challenges of an ageing population include:

- supporting women to maintain their connection with the workforce which is expected to increase the workforce participation of women in their child bearing years;
- providing employment services that respond effectively to individual circumstances, local labour market conditions and to the needs of employers, including services tailored to assist people with disability; and
- enhancing skills training and education opportunities.





Supporting Australian children, young people and families to participate in society and to help parents with the vital job of raising children is particularly important in long term policy planning for sustainability. Whatever the changes to the population in the future, the children of today will shoulder the responsibility of managing the resulting challenges and ensuring our nation's ongoing sustainability.

Going some way to address current needs and build social capital for the future, the Government is delivering family policies that foster the wellbeing and safety of all, particularly children, through the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020 and the development of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. Other strategies such as universal access to preschool and the Communities for Children initiative which funds non-government organisation to implement a place-based, whole of community approach to enhance early childhood development, are helping our children to grow into adults who are socially included and engaged in education, work and training.

In the face of changing population size and composition, planning for a sustainable Australia should be guided by the principles of social inclusion. This will help individuals and communities have access to a full range of the services that meet their needs and be able to take advantage of opportunities to participate in the economy and in society. This will support the important role the not-for-profit sector plays in this field. The flow on effect of improvements to individual quality of life lead to more liveable communities and shared economic prosperity.





Embracing our Diversity for Vibrant Communities

Australia needs to continue to work to address cultural, racial and religious intolerance by promoting respect, fairness and a sense of belonging for everyone. This is essential for ensuring our communities are safe and resistant to tension or conflict. In working to ensure the liveability and sustainability of our communities, it is important to consider diversity and harmony at the design and planning stages for development, policy, programs and service delivery.

There are many successful policies and programs which give valuable support to our new arrivals as they transition into life in Australia and adjust to a new set of cultural and legal norms. Migrants are supported through multicultural policy and community and economic integration programs, including the Adult Migrant English Program, which assists migrants in their transition to Australian society; the Access and Equity Strategy, which aims to ensure that all government services and programs overcome cultural and language barriers so that they are accessible to all Australians; and the Diversity and Social Cohesion Program, which aims to build harmony and community capacity around Australia.

Encouraging orientation and opportunities for participation in Australian society is another important way that Australia supports our migrants. This provides benefits to new arrivals, as they interact with and understand the broader community, and to the broader community, by promoting positive community integration. Australia gives extra help to those new arrivals most in need, especially refugees and humanitarian entrants in their first five years, through intensive initial settlement support, based on an individual assessment of needs. Our commitment to ensuring that they are properly supported and made welcome in Australia is the key to our success in building a vibrant, dynamic society.

Australian communities and their sense of identity are shaped and enlivened by the people, places and events within them. Heritage and culture are at the heart of this identity. They define how we as a people view ourselves and our place in the world and how we define and respect each other. In order to sustain these benefits, the Government provides support through its heritage grants and regulatory activity to preserve heritage places and values, including in relation to urban development. Engagement with heritage places, stories and cultural activities enables Australians to feel confident about their national and local identity, better understand the different cultures, races and ethnicities that have shaped communities, and face a changing future with hope and optimism.





Cultural vitality has an important role to play in fostering safe and cohesive communities. In this way recognition of Australia's Indigenous culture and heritage is an important part of acknowledging and validating the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in contemporary Australia. Using Indigenous knowledge where appropriate in environmental and planning policy could further strengthen these ties and benefit the sustainability of our natural environment At the national

level, the Government has continued to build on the new relationship which began with the Apology to the Stolen Generations in February 2008 and is currently progressing its commitment to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Australians in the Australian Constitution. More than just symbolic gestures, these actions are integral to strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and sense of belonging, as well as promoting equity and fostering social cohesion in Australia for the future.







Indigenous Australians: Closing the Gap

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are complex and diverse and make an inestimable contribution to broader Australian culture and society. However, Indigenous Australians, on average, experience greater levels of disadvantage than non-Indigenous Australians. Addressing the challenge of Indigenous disadvantage is a major policy priority for the Australian, state and territory governments.

Reflecting this priority, the Australian, state and territory governments are making a substantial investment aimed at Closing the Gap including through a range of National Partnership agreements and by improving access to mainstream services. Integral to this is the commitment to building strong engagement with Indigenous communities. Without the building of trust, governments will continue to struggle to create and sustain the positive changes required to achieve the ambitious Closing the Gap targets.

The Government has established the Working on Country program, which builds on Indigenous traditional knowledge to protect and manage land and sea country. As well as delivering environmental outcomes,

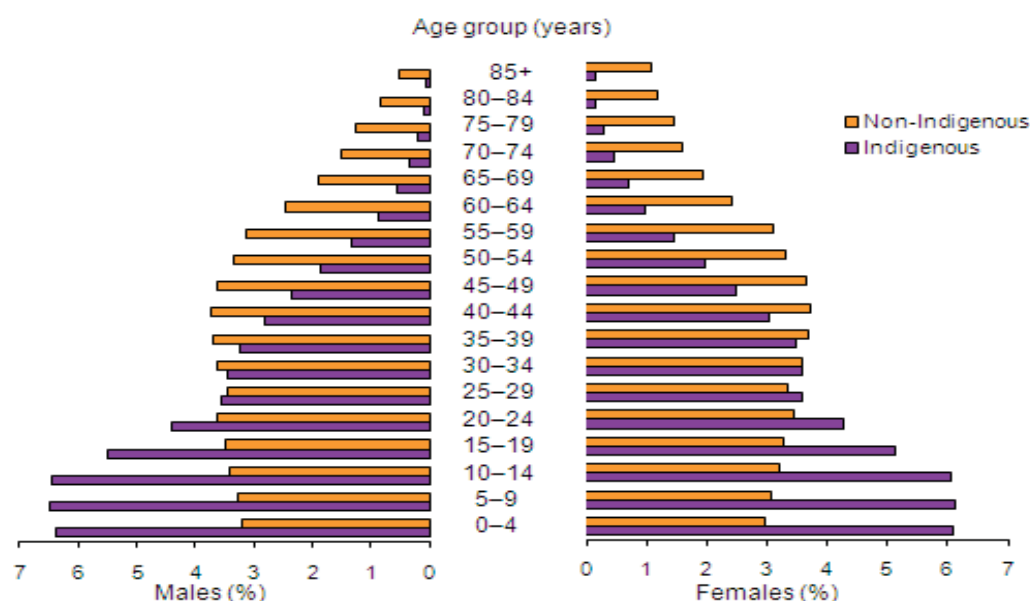
the program provides land management employment opportunities. Currently, over 600 Indigenous rangers are employed across Australia and it is expected that by June 2013 around 660 rangers will be trained and employed through Working on Country.

However, labour force non-participation is a major contributor to the employment gap, with 41.9 per cent of the Indigenous population aged 15–64 not in the labour force, compared to 23.3 per cent of the non-Indigenous population³². This highlights the need to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the labour force, and a need for targeted workforce skills development, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Ensuring opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to develop skills through education and training and to take up workforce participation opportunities will increase their ability to take advantage of and contribute to economic prosperity. For example, Indigenous Australians in regional and remote areas, with appropriate support, including from employers, could be assisted to take advantage of the growing number of employment opportunities in the mineral resources and tourism sectors.

32 ABS (2009) (c)

Figure 7. Age and Population Distribution of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians



Source: ABS 2008 (a)

Healthy People – Healthy Communities

The changing profile of our population is a particular challenge for the health sector. The Government is working to improve health through national health reform. Meeting the health needs and liveability of regional communities is also being assisted through investment in the Health and Hospitals Fund.

In cooperation with the states and territories, the Commonwealth is addressing the future challenges of an ageing Australia by ensuring there is equitable access to the information, care and services older people need. As the population ages, the proportion of people

of working age (18–64 years) will decline and many workforce groups will soon see large cohorts reaching retirement age.

Support for our ageing population is being delivered through the Productive Ageing Package and Delivering for Seniors as well as aspects of the broader health reform agenda. In light of the projected increase in the number of frail older people, the Government is exploring options for structural reform of the aged care system, including housing, so it can meet the challenges of coming decades. The Government is also increasing investment in training of health and aged care professions to meet the projected increase in need for this workforce, especially in rural areas.



As the numbers of older people increase, the community will face opportunities and challenges in enabling and enhancing their continuing contributions, and ensuring there is ready access to support and care as needed. Meeting the future health needs of all Australians clearly necessitates forward planning and preventative measures.

Like most developed countries, the burden of disease has also changed in the Australian population. Success in the control of communicable diseases and increases in the general standard of living mean that non-communicable diseases (such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes) now make up the majority of the burden of disease in the population. As the onset of these diseases is generally directly related to lifestyle factors such as physical activity, obesity, alcohol and tobacco consumption, preventive approaches are gaining more emphasis in the overall health system. Preventive steps taken now will have a direct impact on the health and aged care services that Australia's population will require in the medium to long term, particularly in light of the impacts of population ageing.

Mental illness is also an increasing contributor to the burden of disease. Given that mental health problems are the leading cause of disability among young people, looking after the mental health of Australia's young people is an important factor in improving the future wellbeing of the population. Current mental health initiatives, including Access to Allied Psychological Services and the Day to Day Living program are working to better deliver mental health services to the community.

Environmental Sustainability

"Sustainable population growth will require us to properly value and care for our natural environment and manage it on behalf of future generations. Australians place a high value on our natural environment and the amenity they enjoy from our native wildlife and flora and access to natural space such as our beaches, rivers and mountains."

Business Council of Australia, Submission 178

Resilient Landscapes and Communities

One of the key challenges for the decision-makers is conserving and protecting our natural assets while facilitating human habitation. Human habitation can threaten the ecosystems and environments that are essential to life. A changing population, especially in terms of changing population size and location, can have detrimental effects on the environment if governments and communities are not ready to proactively address these changes.

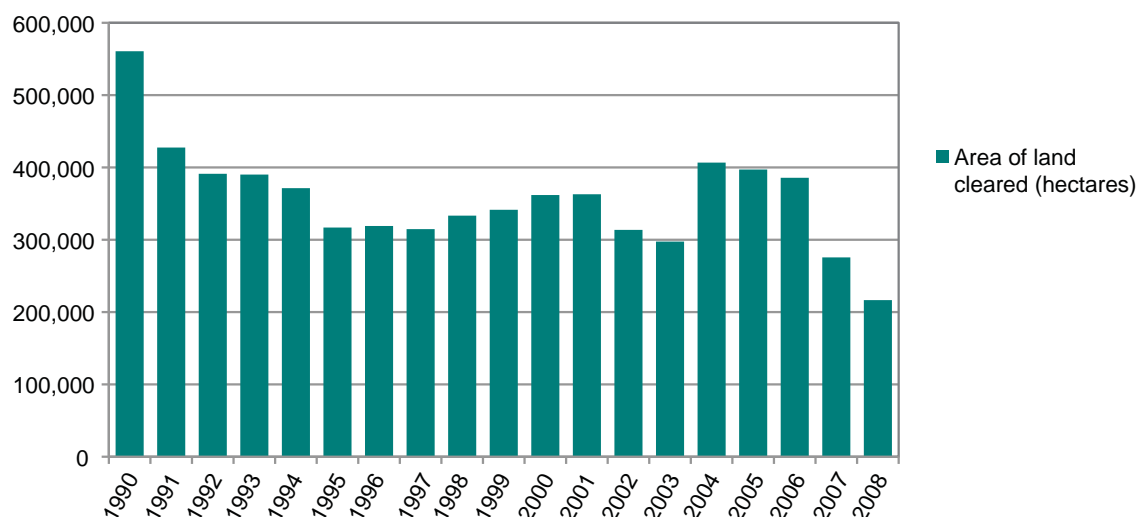
At the same time, a changing population and economic development through growth in industry sectors such as tourism can have direct positive outcomes in conserving and protecting natural assets. Tourism has the potential to create environmental benefits through:

- contributing to the restoration and maintenance of biological diversity and the sustainable use of natural resources;
- raising awareness of environmental values and issues, and increasing public appreciation of the environment; and
- serving as a tool to finance protection of natural areas and increasing the economic importance of those natural areas.





Figure 8. Area of Land Clearance (annual hectares)



Source: DCCEE (2009)

Protecting natural systems from the impacts of human settlement and habitation is a role the Commonwealth shares with the states and territories. Under the *Heads of agreement on Commonwealth and State roles and responsibilities for the Environment* (1997), the Commonwealth's role is focused on matters of national environmental significance.

The Government's key piece of environmental legislation that enables protection and management of nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places is the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). A recent review of the EPBC Act

recommended that greater use be made of strategic assessments and regional plans in order to improve the decision-making process and achieve better outcomes for regions.

The Government's broader sustainability agenda recognises that to ensure better environmental outcomes and deliver more liveable communities, the Government must adopt a more holistic and proactive approach to planning for sustainability through improved regional environmental planning and approvals. This means taking account of all assets in a region – the natural and built environments, population and economic considerations.





The Strategy advocates that a broad ‘systems’ view of interactions between these assets, backed up by better information on environmental attributes and sustainability indicators, will provide the foundation for strategic assessments of plans developed by state and local governments. This will deliver better environmental outcomes and provide clarity for infrastructure providers and other decision makers in the context of a changing population.

Under the \$2 billion Caring for our Country investment, a real and measurable difference to Australia’s environment can be achieved through projects which improve biodiversity and sustainable farm practices. Caring for our Country is working to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well-managed, resilient and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

The Government will also work with 56 regional natural resource management groups to develop a National Wildlife Corridors Plan to prepare our native plants and animals, as well as our agricultural landscapes, for climate change. The National Wildlife Corridors Plan also aims to protect stores of carbon in native ecosystems so as to minimise our greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, the Government is working to manage impacts of human settlement and habitation on the environment. This includes the impacts of waste generation, addressed through the National Waste Policy, and air quality issues associated with increased transport and energy demand addressed through the National Environment Protection Measure for Ambient Air Quality, national fuel quality and motor vehicle emission standards.





Climate Change: Decoupling Emissions from Population Growth

Climate change brings serious risks to our society, environment and economy. The Government is managing these risks by reducing emissions to prepare the economy for a low carbon future, while also helping communities adapt to the challenges that climate change presents.

In order to achieve the Government's international commitment to reduce carbon pollution by between 5 and 25 per cent of 2000 levels by the year 2020, we will need to implement a market-based mechanism. A market-based mechanism will achieve the necessary abatement at a significantly lower cost than other policies.

That is why the Government is committed to putting a price on carbon to drive the transformation of the Australian economy to a low pollution future. A carbon price, along with complementary measures will ensure that Australia meets its international commitment to reducing carbon pollution in the most efficient way. These policies will create incentives to reduce carbon pollution, stimulate innovation and investment in low emissions technologies, and enhance Australia's long-term economic competitiveness.

The Government will use every cent of revenue raised from a carbon price to assist households and businesses to adjust to a clean energy economy and to tackle climate change. In particular the Government will provide assistance that supports those households most needing help to adjust to a carbon price.

Communities, in adapting to both climate change and population change, are facing a significant behavioural, structural, and demographic transformation. Together, this Strategy and the Government's climate change agenda is designed to enable communities to respond to these changes and smooth the adjustment path towards a sustainable low emissions future.

Water for Liveable Communities, our Environment and Industries

Water is an essential resource for our communities, environment, industries and the economy. The availability of potable water for household consumption and recreational use underpins the wellbeing of our population. Water is also vital to our economy, particularly for those industries, such as the agricultural industry, that rely on the health of natural water systems.

Population growth and the recent extended dry period has tested the capacity of water supplies to reliably meet demand in many cities and towns across many parts of Australia. It is likely that population change and growth will put further pressures on the availability of water if not appropriately managed.

At the same time, we also value water-dependent environments and ecological processes in rivers, wetlands and estuaries. Without reform, river health and water quality will decline over time and the impact of droughts will become increasingly difficult to manage.





In 2004, Commonwealth and state governments committed to a suite of reforms set out in the National Water Initiative. Building on this blueprint, the Commonwealth is investing in water recovery to the environment, implementing water use efficiency and water planning, providing improved information about water availability and introducing a range of other supporting reforms.

Urban communities, with support from all levels of government, are already investing in water infrastructure and research to secure and diversify their water supplies to address ongoing urban population change and growth and the significant variability in rainfall.

In southern and eastern Australia, a key focus of water reform is the Murray–Darling Basin – a significant source of agricultural output and the site of many important wetlands. The Government is working with the states and Basin communities to return the Basin to a more sustainable footing by increasing the water flows available to the environment.

Securing Food Production for our Communities and the World

Australia has over 135,000 agricultural based businesses, with farmers managing close to 60 per cent (457 million hectares) of the Australian landscape.³³ Their land management practices can make a significant contribution to maintaining and improving biodiversity and the natural resource base. Healthy agricultural landscapes support sustainability by providing ecosystem services, maintaining food and fibre production, building climate change resilience and supporting rural and regional communities.

Issues relating to effective land use include concern about food security and the management of our natural environment. These concerns are exacerbated by the potential impacts of climate change on agriculture, the competing pressures from mining, forestry, non-food and fibre agricultural production such as biofuels and the potential loss of productive agricultural land to urban expansion and development.

Australia's food industry is a major sector of our economy and our export trade, with gross production of \$49.6 billion in the 2010 calendar year, and industry value-added agricultural production (which takes into account input costs) reaching \$24.1 billion in the same year.³⁴

33 ABS (2010) (b)

34 ABS (2011) (a)





The industry supplies the majority of our food and is also a significant contributor to regional economies, communities and to our national character. Australia is sheltered from immediate concerns about food shortages because we produce significantly more food than we consume. In 2009–10 Australian exported \$24.4 billion worth of food products, compared with imports of \$10.1 billion. In recent years we have been able to export more than half of our food production, depending on crop size, while still ensuring that around 98 per cent of the fresh produce sold in supermarkets is grown and supplied domestically. This provides significant capacity to meet our future food needs, and to be a significant and reliable supplier to the world food market.

However, we cannot afford to be complacent in the face of challenges such as climate change, resource constraints and an increasing population. The Government is currently investing in a number of initiatives to engage with these issues, including Water for the Future, Australia's Farming Future Climate Change Research Program and the Climate Change Adaptation Program.

The Government has also committed to developing a National Food Plan, encompassing the entire food chain, from the paddock to the plate. A key aim of the plan is to protect Australia's food security for years to come. The Government is committed to developing a plan with a broad scope examining issues including food security, productivity and efficiency, sustainability, health and nutrition and general economic policy relating to the food sector.





CHAPTER 5: FUTURE DIRECTIONS – THE 2011–12 BUDGET

There are many dimensions of this Strategy that require Commonwealth, state and territory and local governments to work together to help achieve sustainable communities. The issues identified within the Strategy fit within COAG's strategic theme of a more sustainable and liveable Australia, and link to reforms in the areas of capital city strategic planning, housing affordability and water management. Much like COAG's reform agenda, the ultimate goal of the strategy is to improve the wellbeing of all Australians.

While there are many initiatives underway at the national, state and local level to support sustainability, the 2011–12 Budget includes a modest set of measures to further drive this outcome.

Sustainable decisions must aim to maximise wellbeing of Australians now and into the future. This is a continual challenge for governments, the private sector, community organisations and individuals.

Decision-making will be most effective where it is informed by relevant, clear and timely information about the liveability of our communities, the sustainability of our environment, and our economic prosperity.

New Measures to Support a Sustainable Population

During the development of this Strategy and its public consultation process, it was acknowledged that the existing government agenda is an agenda for sustainability, and that there is a wide array of policies and programs that support the future sustainability of our population. However, it was also clear that in some areas further support could be given to ensure the wellbeing of Australians.

In responding to this, the Government has developed targeted further measures to meet the future challenges for a sustainable population. These measures aim to improve our planning for sustainability, build better regions, contribute to the liveability of growing outer suburbs of our major cities and, as outlined above, improve our ability to measure and understand our sustainability.





Enhancing Urban Liveability

A sustainable Australia is made up of sustainable communities: communities that are vibrant, liveable places that have a mix of affordable housing, employment opportunities, access to services, transport and natural amenity. Through targeted investments, the *Suburban Jobs* Program (\$100 million over four years) will support local and state governments and the private sector to plan and provide for increased employment opportunities outside capital city CBDs. Influencing the pattern of employment in our major cities in a way that also promotes efficient economic outcomes requires good long term planning. The Commonwealth Government has a particular role to play through the transport infrastructure funding provided to state governments under the Nation Building Program.

In the nearer term, the Suburban Jobs Program will deliver additional support for initiatives by state and local governments to provide for employment centres outside the central business districts of our major capital cities. This may take the form of support for additional planning initiatives where a gap in planning information has been identified (including, for example, undertaking detailed surveys to inform future decision making),

or a contribution towards the cost of state or local government funded infrastructure where this would help facilitate faster progress for projects that can be advanced over the next few years. In addition, funding will also be available for innovative use of the NBN to achieve the program's objective.

To be eligible for Government assistance, local and state governments (including potentially in partnership with the private sector) will be required to demonstrate how their initiatives will contribute to enduring improvements in the distribution of employment across metropolitan growth areas in our major cities. Funding will be directed through a competitive process to initiatives that have public good aspects and are linked to capital city strategic plans.

The provision of Commonwealth funding through a competitive process will allow the highest quality proposals to be identified. Relevant state and local governments will be closely consulted in the development of the details for the competitive process to ensure that the guidelines for the program will encourage well targeted proposals.





In particular, the guidelines will be designed to target proposals that contribute towards the longer term foundations for the better distribution of employment within our major cities. Proposals will need to be consistent with promoting economic efficiency: private companies also benefit from better longer term planning and having viable alternatives to concentrating their employment in central business districts. At the same time, good planning must avoid costly government investments in projects that work against underlying economic forces.

By contributing to better longer term planning and assisting with early works, the program will help to improve wellbeing for urban communities by supporting a more balanced future distribution of jobs in our cities, with more ongoing employment opportunities closer to where people live in growing suburbs.

In addition to the \$100.0 million committed to the *Suburban Jobs* initiative, the Government will provide a further \$81.4 million in new investments to help cities become more productive, sustainable and liveable. These commitments include:

- \$61.4 million for *Managed Motorways* that allow more efficient use of our road infrastructure, bringing mums and dads home from work faster; and

- \$20 million for *Urban Renewal* to help improve planning and design of the outer suburbs and major regional centres that are experiencing population growth pressures and housing and transport affordability cost pressures. The program will seek to improve the capacity of regional cities to undertake strategic planning in line with the COAG agreed criteria.

The Prime Minister will begin a rigorous COAG process that asks state premiers to lead the development of Commonwealth-state reforms that are of particular relevance to their jurisdiction, whether it be labour mobility in the west or easing congestion in Sydney. The measures outlined above form part of the Government's down payment on the COAG reform process.

The Government is also funding projects in every capital city to help ease congestion and the time spent in cars and traffic, including the duplication of the F5 in Sydney as well as the Regional Rail Link and the Western Ring Road in Melbourne.





Promoting Regional Development

The aim of this Strategy is to maintain and improve the wellbeing of current and future generations through the more effective anticipation, planning and response to the impacts of population and economic changes. When we plan for change and sustainable growth, we are better able to realise the benefits that growth offers whilst avoiding the challenges that unplanned growth can present.

Sustainable Regional Development (\$29.2 million over four years) will build on the Government's existing program of strategic assessments under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to provide the capacity for up to seven additional strategic assessments by the Commonwealth of sustainability plans developed by state and local governments for priority high growth areas. These plans will protect long-term sustainability and biodiversity values while cutting red tape.





Strategic assessments may be undertaken for urban growth areas (such as the recently completed strategic assessment for Melbourne's outer suburbs, which now provides the foundation for the approval of future projects), or can cover a regional area facing significant development of its natural resources (such as the recently completed assessment of the Tasmanian Midlands Irrigation Scheme).

This initiative will improve environmental outcomes while also giving certainty to state and local governments as well as the private sector to invest in housing, infrastructure and natural resource development in growth regions. The improvement in outcomes stems from taking a 'whole of landscape' view of future development, identifying how to best protect environmental values, rather than a piecemeal project-by-project approach. Business benefits from knowing well in advance where developments will be permitted and the conditions that will be required.

In addition to meeting the liveability challenges in outer suburbs directly, there is scope to relieve pressure on the major cities by making regional cities a more viable alternative to suburban living. One of the key challenges for the regions in attracting new residents is a lack of awareness in the general population of the benefits of regional living. These benefits – lifestyle, cost of living and employment – need to be communicated, particularly to city dwellers and new arrivals to Australia if they are to see regional centres as a desirable destination. Under the *Promoting Regional Living* program (\$11.5 million over four years), non-capital cities that can demonstrate the potential for future growth will be eligible for support to market themselves as good places to work, live and build a future.





Measuring and Reporting Sustainability

“There is an old adage that ‘you cannot manage what you cannot measure’ and this is particularly pertinent to topics such as sustainability and liveability.”

Water Services Association of Australia, Submission 161

It is vital that we understand the impact on wellbeing that changes in our population and other key drivers have at both the national and regional levels. To meet this need, *Measuring Sustainability* (\$10.1 million over four years) will see better information incorporated into decision making, including through the development of a set of sustainability indicators.

Enhanced information on wellbeing (comprising social, economic and environmental aspects) allows better decision-making based on the costs and benefits of proposed activities. For example, a proposal that promotes growth in the economy at the expense of the quality of family life, environmental health, or the strength of a local community may negatively impact on overall wellbeing if the social and environmental costs outweigh the economic growth benefits. Further, even if the proposal increases wellbeing in the short term, it may reduce wellbeing in the long term and therefore be unsustainable. Without

sufficient information about the impacts on communities, the environment and the economy, decision-makers and communities themselves may be unable to effectively weigh the relative merit of the proposed activity and risk making decisions that will potentially leave Australia worse off in future years.

Regular reporting of national economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product, the Consumer Price Index and the unemployment rate inform decisions by governments, the private sector, community groups and individuals. Substantial information about economic wellbeing is also available at regional and household levels. While measures of economic prosperity are important they do not, on their own, provide an overall picture of Australia’s sustainability. Our economic data needs to be better integrated with measures of social and environmental sustainability.

Australia also collects a wide range of social and demographic data to inform decision-making. Recent Government initiatives such as the Social Inclusion Agenda and the Closing the Gap Initiatives are bringing into focus the importance of having a broad range of data on the social health of our country. It will be important that we identify gaps in our understanding, both thematically and spatially, and prioritise these for further investigation, measurement and integration into policy.





The National Plan for Environmental Information, announced in 2010, sets out the Government's approach to coordinating the collection and application of priority environmental information to fill gaps in our knowledge base. This initiative will establish the foundation for coordinated and robust environmental information. Due to the enormous diversity of Australia's ecosystems, building and maintaining our information base will take time and ongoing effort.

National and state level data is important to build a broad picture of economic, social and environmental conditions within Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics publishes a wide variety of information in *Measures of Australia's Progress*.

National and state level data, however, does not show important regional differences, and can mask specific areas of persisting unsustainable outcomes whether they be economic, social or environmental. Governments will continue to pursue opportunities to standardise and collect regional and community scale sustainability information to readily identify issues specific to particular areas and take action to address them. For example, the Government will develop improved demographic information about the changing composition of populations at a regional level to inform planning and decision making for our communities.





Information about sustainability needs to be relevant and meaningful to people. The Government's commitment is to develop Sustainability Indicators that can be used in decision-making at a regional level. Sustainability Indicators for Australia, developed during 2011, will reflect the foundations of wellbeing – environmental sustainability, community liveability and economic prosperity – and inform decisions made by all Australians.

Box 7 – Travel Time to Work

Time spent travelling to work is an issue of concern to many Australians, particularly those dealing with urban congestion on the outskirts of our capital cities. Delays caused by traffic congestion in our major cities have generally increased over the past decade. Regularly reporting travel time or congestion information will provide valuable information about the wellbeing of communities and the efficiency of existing infrastructure and services.

Sustainable initiatives to address travel time concerns must take into account wellbeing into the future, as well as in the present. Contextual and supporting information about work travel, such as data about the current availability and use of public transport, or the distance from residential homes to public transport services, will enhance the relevance and use of travel time information.

Source: Austroads National Performance Indicators: <http://algin.net/austroads/site/index.asp?id=2>





The assessment of trends against the Sustainability Indicators will allow us to understand the effectiveness of current policies, programs and regulation and identify those areas where further effort is required.

The Government will enhance the use of sustainability information by governments and communities by regularly reporting Sustainability Indicators for Australia and coordinating online access to data underpinning the indicators. The Government will also work through COAG to promote the use of sustainability indicators and other information to inform planning and action by governments to address sustainability pressures on our communities.

Decisions made by governments are, and will continue to be informed by an increasing range of information. Two new Government initiatives will embed sustainability within the work of the Government to ensure that policies aim to maximise wellbeing for current and future generations:

- regular reporting against Sustainability Indicators will be introduced to better inform decisions by the Government; and
- Sustainability Impact Statements will be implemented within the Government Cabinet process.





Building on the Government's reform agenda

“Without a clear and committed population strategy, governments won't plan well to manage future population outcomes. They won't equip Australian cities and communities to manage the growth already occurring.”

Business Council of Australia, Submission 178

In addition to the above new measures, the Government also has an existing substantial reform agenda that supports the sustainability of our population. Through the 2011–12 Budget, the Government is delivering further policies in a range of areas that will enhance our future wellbeing.

Making our Regions a more attractive place to live

One of the most important things that governments can do to take pressure off our major cities is to ensure that regions are attractive places to live, work and raise a family.

The 2011–12 Budget highlights that the Government is making the most substantial investment in regions for decades, with \$4.3 billion of investments in regional hospitals, health care, universities and roads – to lift living standards outside the big capitals, improve services, and help regional communities reach their potential.

To build a sustainable Australia and strong regions which have a greater stake in our strong economy the Government is investing:

- \$1.8 billion over six years to renew regional health infrastructure, expand regional hospitals and support training in regional hospitals, providing families in regional Australia with confidence they will be able to access the health care they need, when they need it;
- \$500 million over five years for investment in regional higher education and vocational education and training projects, providing a real choice to school leavers in regional areas on where they advance their education;
- \$109.9 million over four years for universities with regional campuses through increased and better targeted loading payments to regional areas;
- \$916 million for the first projects to be funded under the Regional Infrastructure Fund to help unlock the economic potential of our regions; and
- \$974 million over five years through the Regional Development Australia Fund to finance infrastructure projects that best fit the economic and community needs of the region – from bridges, to child care centres to sporting facilities.







These initiatives are in addition to the new funding for *Sustainable Regional Development* and *Promoting Regional Living* initiatives. In addition, the Government's \$35.9 billion investment in the National Broadband Network will help connect regional families, communities and businesses – reducing the tyranny of distance, changing the way we live and work, and offering new opportunities in areas like health and education.

Regional Migration

Australia's migration program plays a significant role in meeting labour supply. The Government will continue to monitor the migration program to ensure that it is able to respond effectively to the changing needs of the economy.

The Government will introduce a new model for selecting skilled migrants to better target Australia's future skills needs, as well as initiatives to encourage more skilled migrants to settle in regional areas, including:

- specifying for the first time 16,000 skilled migration places to the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) – a 60 per cent increase on 2010–11;
- fast-tracking permanent residency for 457 visa holders who have spent two years in regional Australia and where their employer is continuing to sponsor them for a further two years;
- introducing Regional Migration Agreements that allow local authorities to negotiate and coordinate access to overseas labour for employers in the region;
- introducing Enterprise Migration Agreements (EMAs) to address genuine skill vacancies in major resource projects with capital expenditure greater than \$2 billion and a peak workforce of 1,500. Projects that utilise EMAs will be required to contribute to training Australian workers to address future skills needs in the resources sector; and
- providing priority processing for regional visa categories, that is, for visa applications made under RSMS and the Regional (Residence) visa.

Skills and participation

In addition to the migration program, the skills agenda has a very significant role to play in meeting the future needs of the economy and society. In the 2011–12 Budget, the Government announced the *Building Australia's Future Workforce package*, designed to ensure all Australians have the opportunity to benefit from our strong economy by investing in skills and encouraging participation in the workforce.

The Government is investing in training in order to help Australians get the skills which industry needs, focussing on a new partnership with industry to address skill shortages, whilst also delivering medium term reform. This investment will be important to maintain strong economic growth, especially in the context of skilled labour shortages and capacity constraints.





The Government will undertake a range of measures to assist and encourage groups with typically low participation to enter the workforce or to undertake activities that will improve their future employment prospects. The measures in this element of the package will focus on families on income support, youth, the very long-term unemployed and people with a disability. In recognition that certain regions experience greater disadvantage, a number of these measures will be focused on more disadvantaged areas.

Digital Economy

The Government has indicated that it will release a National Digital Economy Strategy which will position Australia as a world leading digital economy by 2020.

Ensuring Australia becomes a leading digital economy will contribute to Australia's productivity, maintain our global competitiveness, improve our social wellbeing and help ensure the sustainability of our communities. The Government's commitment to build the enabling infrastructure for the digital economy, in particular the commitment to build the National Broadband Network is a key step to this vision.

The digital economy goals set by the Government in its National Digital Economy Strategy will ensure services – including health, government and education, are more readily available online to all Australian's no matter where they live, and that teleworking is accessible to more Australians. This will support a greater range of options for Australians in how they work and where they live.





Conclusion

This Strategy sets out a clear framework, demonstrating that a sustainable future for Australia must be achieved across all three foundations of the nation's wellbeing – economic prosperity, liveable communities and environmental sustainability. The Government's commitment to the objective and principles of this Strategy, together with its supporting initiatives and our reform agenda, will underpin the ongoing wellbeing of our population.

In making this commitment, the Government will ensure that, as a nation, we are better placed to anticipate, plan for and respond to changes in our population and the impacts of these changes on our economy, communities and environment.





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Submissions received from the public through the consultation process informed the development of the Strategy. These are available on the department's website: www.environment.gov.au/sustainability/population.





IMAGE CREDITS

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