

AUSTRALIA: THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF DEPOPULATED RURAL AREAS

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1 . INTRODUCTION

1.1 Issues for comparative analysis

This paper addresses the theme of the role of local government in the development of depopulated rural with reference to Australia. Possibly unlike the case in many other EROPA countries, Australian local governments play a very small role in the development of depopulated rural areas. In recent years, moreover, few attempts have been made to encourage substantial development in such areas. Most effort regarding rural development has concentrated on sustaining and enhancing the viability of country towns of 5—20,000 people rather than seeking to revitalise areas of rural population decline. A large part of this paper, therefore, has to explain, firstly, the reason why Australian rural areas differ from those of other EROPA countries and, secondly, the limited role local government in rural

development.

For purposes of international comparison, therefore, it is important to outline some distinctive features of Australian local government, especially relating to development of depopulated rural areas. Two issues are crucial: federalism and urban/rural population change.

The first issue to address is the role of local government within the Australian federal system of government. This is important because there are three 'levels' of government in Australia: Federal (Commonwealth) Government; State and Territory Governments; and over 800 Local Governments. The system of intergovernmental relations is distinctive in terms of the powers and resources available to local governments to address the question of development of depopulated rural areas.

The second important introductory issue is the overall pattern of urban and rural settlement in Australia and how this has been changing over time. Australia is a very large country with an extremely high concentration of population in a few big cities compared to vast areas of very low population. There are enormous variations, therefore, both in the density of population concentration and the rates of demographic change between local government authorities in Australia. A minority of local governments cover small areas of highly concentrated, populations. The great majority, covering the bulk of the Australian continent, contain a small and diminishing proportion of the Australian population.

1.2 Local government within the Australian federal system

Australian local government is weakest participant within a federal system made up of the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory Governments and Local Government. Local government was not included within the original Federal Constitution at the 20th century. This has enabled the Commonwealth and State 'levels' of government to retain most political and economic powers within the modern nation state.

Australian local government is made up of a series of separate local government systems, within each State and Territory (except the Australian Capital Territory) which have been established by, and are answerable to State or Territory Governments. There is only a national system of local government in the sense of national representative organizations of local government elected members and professionals.

The distinctive character of local government in Australia was summarised well by Dr Michael Wood, the Secretary for Local Government in the Western Australian Department of Local Government (1987: 82):

'Australian local governments face two central governments, not one. Established under state or territorial laws, Australian local governments receive revenue from their parent state or territory government as well as

from the Commonwealth government. The largest transfers are financial assistance grants from the Commonwealth to local government, with the state grants commission responsible for deciding allocations within each state.

Thus the responsibilities and powers of local government systems are defined by state and territorial governments whereas finance for local government comes from both States/Territories and the Commonwealth. In general, there is little direct Commonwealth involvement with local government and, in particular, the Commonwealth is not able to change the statutory basis of the various local government systems.

Local government powers and responsibilities vary between the States and Territories. The major role of local government has been a property service function—the provision of local roads, garbage removal, some infrastructure construction and local works and services. Major economic development functions have been retained by State and Territory governments. Other major functions, too, are undertaken primarily by State and Territory Governments rather local government.

During the 1980s, however, Australian local governments have taken a more positive stance towards questions of economic development. This has happened for two main reasons. Firstly, there has been a growing interest generally in public sector involvement in creation. Secondly, local governments have been faced with tightening budgets as Commonwealth and State Governments have cut back on expenditure.

Local governments, on average, generate about half of their income from property taxes (rates.) Many are heavily dependent on grants from other governments and thus potentially vulnerable during periods of fiscal restraint. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the small scale of local governments within Australian public sector and economy generally.

Local government in Australia only accounts for 5–6 percent of total public expenditure compared to 20–25 percent in other federal societies such as the USA, Switzerland, Canada and West Germany (Self 1986.) During the last five years, moreover, the Commonwealth Government has operated a policy of fiscal restraint which has reduced public sector outlays from 37.3 percent of Gross Domestic Produce (GDP) in 1983–84 to 34.4 percent in 1982–88 (Howard, 1988:3.) Local government's share of total public expenditure has fallen slightly over a similar period, from 2.5 percent of GDP in 1982–83 to 2.3 percent in 1986–87. Overall, therefore, there has been a restriction of the already-small fiscal role of local government within Australia during the 1980s.

A general problem facing rural governments is their financial vulnerability. This has two elements. Firstly, many rural local governments, especially in areas of population decline, are very heavily dependent on external sources of funds—pri-

marily grants from the Commonwealth and State Governments—to enable them to maintain services. This dependence on Commonwealth and State grants makes these authorities highly vulnerable in an economic climate of fiscal restraint. In particular, many rural local governments receive most of the funding for road works—which is their major activity—from external sources. Secondly, many rural authorities have a very limited economic base, being primarily dependent on resources such as agriculture, timber, mining or fishing. Such activities can suffer from cyclical decline resulting in further loss and consequent falls in rate revenue. Periods of prosperity the opposite, of course, but mining is particularly prone to a 'life-cycle' of rapid growth and subsequent decline. The capacity for rural local governments to engage in developmental activities, therefore, is limited by dependence on external and their narrow (and often vulnerable) economic base.

1.3 Changes in Australian urban and rural settlement patterns

The settlement pattern Australia is distinctive in a number of ways.

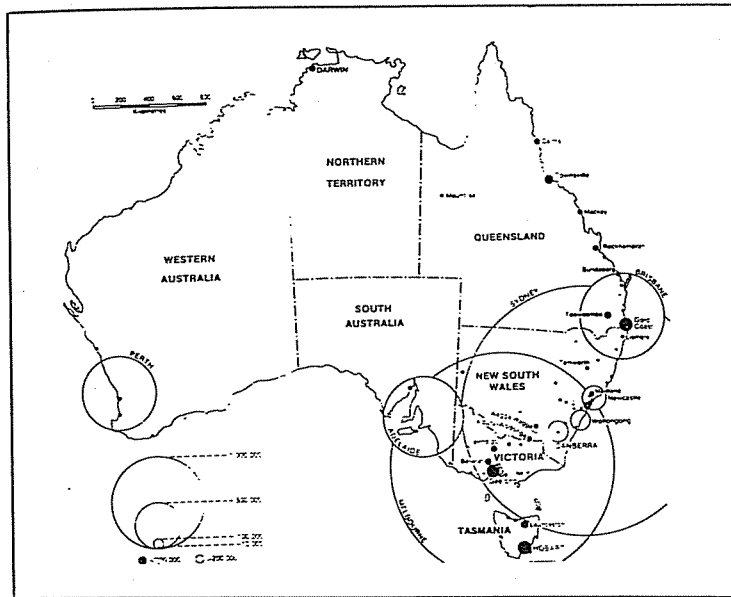
Firstly, the country has been highly urbanised for most of the last 100 years. Secondly, the population is heavily concentrated in a few major cities especially in the south-eastern corner of the continent. Thirdly, there has never been a large number of inhabitants throughout the bulk of nonmetropolitan areas.

Australia already was one of the most highly urbanised nations in the world at the time of Federation in 1901 (Maher, 1987.) Over 50 percent of the population was in the main capital cities of the newly-formed States. In New South Wales and Victoria, which always have been the most populous States, the capital cities respectively housed 37 percent (Sydney) and 40 percent (Melbourne) of the States' population (op cit.).

The Australian urban system has been characterised, therefore, by metropolitan dominance because throughout the twentieth century an increasing proportion of the population has been concentrated in a small number of large cities. By 1976 around 66 percent of all Australians lived in cities of 100,000 or more (op cit.). Moreover, in 1981 over 37 percent of Australians lived in just two cities—Sydney and Melbourne. The State capitals of South Australia—Adelaide—and Western Australia—Perth—totally dominated the population distribution in their States, containing 69 percent and 64 percent respectively of the total State population (op cit.).

Most Australians live in the south-eastern corner of the vast continent (see Figure 1), with especially heavy concentrations in three sprawling coastal conurbations (Newcastle—Sydney—Wollongong, Melbourne—Geelong and Gold Coast—Brisbane—Sunshine Coast.) By world standards population densities within the conurbations are relatively low, but high levels of car ownership enable long-distance commuting.

Figure 1: Australian Urban Centres 1981



Source: Maher(1987.)

Some geographers have suggested that there was a reversal of the trend towards metropolitan dominance after the mid-1970s. Hugo and Smailes (1985) used census data to argue that there had been a slight proportional increase in the population of rural areas and small towns, between 1976 and 1981, at the relative expense of major metropolitan areas. They suggested that the census data indicated the beginnings of a population turnaround, as had been noted in the USA. Professor Blandy (1987), an economist, also has argued that deconcentration is indicative of the coming 'Third Wave' of industrial revolutions as manufacturing industries are replaced by 'high tech' and service industries which do not rely on economies of scale within major metropolitan areas.

Evidence for the population turnaround thesis rests heavily on census data. There can be little disagreement about the relative growth of modest service centres within rural areas. Most of the net increase in so-called 'rural' population, however occurred in three kinds of areas.

Firstly, there has been growth of low-density 'rural residential' living within commuting distance of major cities. Secondly, there has been continued low density growth in the sprawling coastal towns and small settlements, mainly between Brisbane and Melbourne but also in far North Queensland, especially Townsville and

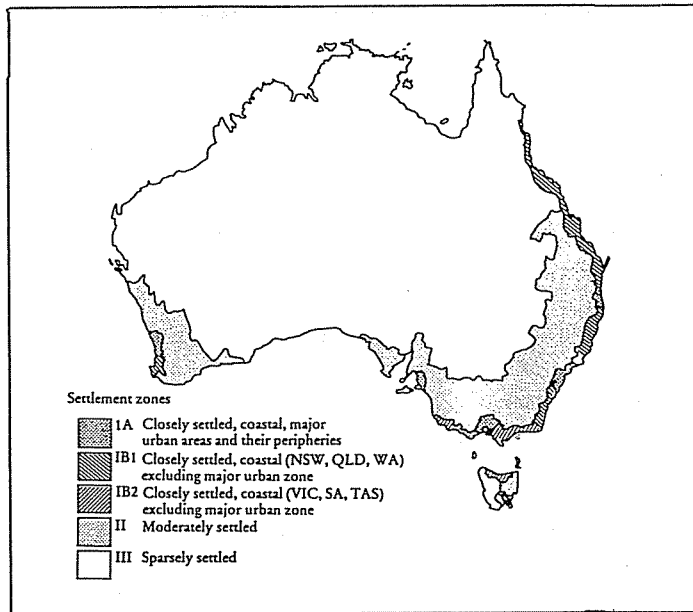
Cairns. In other words, the use of the census definition of 'rural' included many people who were functionally part of the low-density conurbations, intervening narrow belts of coastal sprawl or growing tourism and retirement coastal towns. Finally, although there are numerous 'rural' inland local government areas which experienced substantial population gains, in most cases these were associated with new mining ventures, especially in Western Australia (Musgrave, 1987.)

Many analysts, therefore, are only to sustain the turnaround/deconcentration thesis by including coastal population growth which is not associated at all with agriculture or other resource activities. Their definition of 'rural', therefore, crucially influences the whole argument. If we look at areas characterised by agriculture (including pastoralism) and other resource activities, then a different picture emerges.

The final distinctive element of Australian settlement pattern is the persistent low level of population within the bulk of the vast interior of the continent. Unlike many other EROPA countries, Australia never has a large rural population. The interior was sparsely settled by semi-nomadic aboriginal peoples for thousands of years before the white invasion of 1789. Colonial settlement of the interior and north was slow and sporadic. Settlers gradually colonised areas with adequate water supplies (or gold deposits!) By the end of the nineteenth century, a sparse population of pastoralists and their workers was sprinkled throughout the interior. Unlike Western Europe or most of Asia, however, there was neither a dense indigenous peasantry nor any intensive colonial settlement.

Goddard (1983) has identified five broad settlement zones in Australia (see Figure 2.) The first three zones are in the closely settled coastal strip between Cairns and Adelaide plus Perth and environs. Goddard's Zone IA contains the major urban areas and their peripheral settlements. Zone IB experienced rapid non-metropolitan population growth between 1976 and 1981 mainly due to net migration gain. Zone IB2 grew much less rapidly, with most population growth resulting from natural increase (op cit.).

Figure 2: Land—use population density settlements zones in Australia



Source: Hugo (1987) after Goddard (1983.)

The final two zones, which cover by far the greatest part of the country, are Zone II moderately settled and Zone III sparsely settled. Zone II experienced a small net loss of population between 1976 and 1981, though there was a slight overall increase in population (0.9 percent per annum) due to natural increase. The sparsely settled Zone III recorded a slight population gain from natural increase during the same period (op cit.) It is useful at this stage to distinguish between areas of depopulation and sparsely settled areas.

Sparsely settled areas, covering the bulk of continent, are not so much areas of depopulation as areas of limited settlement and very slow population growth. Areas of depopulation, by way of contrast, are mainly within Goddard's Zone II. It is important to note, however, that within both zones overall there has been absolute population growth during the last 20 years, even though their relative position has been declining.

Local variations, however, have of more significance than broad-scale population trends. The moderately settled zone contains both country towns and extensive rural areas. The limited population growth in the zone as a whole is made up of solid growth in a few bigger country towns, slow (or even negative) growth in

smaller country centres and continuing depopulation of the rural hinterlands.

The rest of this paper will focus on local governments within Goddard's Zone II and III. Much agricultural production and resource development (especially timber and fishing), it should be noted, is located in Zones IB1 and IB2. Most population growth in those zones, however, as concentrated in the towns. The agricultural labour force is declining even in these zones but is being replaced by tourist-related development, retirees and second home owners.

II. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEPOPULATED RURAL AREAS

2.1 The present situation regarding depopulation and the need for development of depopulating rural areas

2.1.1 The present situation

Section 1.2 outlined some broad trends in overall spatial distribution of the Australian population. With regard to the depopulation of rural areas, four main features emerged:

1. Depopulation has been concentrated within a broad moderately settled zone adjacent to, but inland of, the closely settled coastal zones;
2. Depopulation has not been uniform within that zone, rather there has been modest growth of some country centres—service towns—and a declining population agricultural and pastoral areas;
3. There is an enormous sparsely settled zone which has some centres of rapid—albeit transient—population growth associated with mining;
4. The main factor causing depopulation has been net migration.

Compared to most other EROPA countries, moreover, those parts Australia which are experiencing depopulation are relatively recently settled. Most parts of the moderately settled zone were first occupied by colonialists in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Most of the colonial farmers and pastoralists arrived Australia with little experience or understanding of the Australian environment. Settlement patterns were based on the expectation that population densities could be achieved similar to those of British or Irish agricultural areas.

Australian history over the last 100 years is replete with evidence that those expectations were wrong. Ignorance of the mixture of harsh climate and fragile ecosystems resulted in many small farmers failing. Farming areas which were settled between 1850 and 1890 have consequently experienced both relative and absolute population decline ever since.

Since 1945 there have been major changes in the agricultural industries, including the growth of large-scale capital intensive, agribusinesses and extensive mechanisation

of agriculture, which have resulted in both higher productivity and declining agricultural employment. Over the last ten years, moreover, much publicity has been given to a so-called rural crisis involving increased indebtedness and a rapid decline in the number of viable small family farms (Sargent, 1985; Lawrence, 1987.) The new global political economy of agriculture is forcing a shake-out of marginal agricultural units as well as the replacement of people by machines. Similar trends have been noted in the timber industry (Dargavel, 1987) where increased productivity has been accompanied by rapid long-term job loss.

Under present circumstances, therefore, it is likely there will be continued population decline in large parts of the moderately settled zone of Australia. Many country towns, however, are experiencing net population gains, not least because former agricultural workers and family farmers move in. Other people moving to county towns include elderly farmers who choose to retire to town as well as, in a few cases, light industry and associated workers.

2.1. ii The need for development

Although there is strong community feeling amongst small family farmers in Australia, there is no widespread support for the introduction of policies to develop areas experiencing depopulation. The structural changes which are affecting Australian agriculture are generally accepted as part of overall transformation of the Australian economy.

This was not always the case. Many governments have tried to encourage closer settlement within the moderately settled zone. Such policies included land grants especially after the First World War, to former service people and their families. Governments have also tried to element population movement into northern regions of Australia. One element in the latter policy was a fear that Australia could face invasion from the north unless it could be demonstrated that land was being fully utilised. The history of soldier settlements and other attempts a closer settlement has been generally one of failure. Land allotment has been generally one of family farms. Land allotments, often in marginal area were too small to support family farms. Northern parts of Australia are both harsh and fragile and, without massive capital investment, unlikely to provide a living for an enlarged population. The hope of development, therefore, has given way to a new philosophy of trying to retain existing communities.

Some other Commonwealth development programs, however, were very successful. The Snowy Mountains Scheme, undertaken during the 1950s and 1960s succeeded in providing a major source of long term energy—hydro electric power—as well as facilitating major irrigation schemes in New South Wales and Victoria.

The main thrust of policies of all levels of government today, regarding areas of

general depopulation is to try facilitate the retention of communities in the urban centres of those regions. Local communities are of ten highly jealous of their autonomy and value their way of life. Even so, there is little, if any, prospect of reversing the depopulation of agricultural areas. The Australian environment already has been damaged substantially by agricultural practices over the last 100 years: the desert area has increased and there are extensive problems of salination. If anything, it may be necessary to reduce population further and to reform drastically the approach taken to the utilisation of the land.

2.2 How to make development plans for depopulated rural areas

The discussion so far has indicated that, in Australia, few attempts are being made to try to reverse depopulation from agricultural areas. Priority is given, instead, to preserving and, if possible, expanding country towns.

All three leves of government in Australia are involved in local development planning to varying degrees.

The Commonwealth Government has an Office of Local Government within the large Ministry of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs. A junior Minister is responsible for local government, that post currently being held by Senator Margaret Reynolds. The Commonwealth does not has established a number of programmes to assist encourage local government.

One of the most important Commonwealth initiatives has been the Country Centres Project. This project was initiated as part of the Commonwealth Government's response to problems of rural communities in Australia. In April 1986 the Commonwealth Government announced an Economic and Rural Policy Statement. The first priority was to address macro-economic issues and sectoral performance. Other objectives included developing a more outward-looking industry structure, reducing costs and encouraging improvements in rural sector efficiency and welfare problems of residents of rural communities.

The Country Centres Project was aimed directly at country towns with the objective of 'enabling local communities in rural areas to adjust positively to the cumulative impacts of economic and social change'(Department of Immigrative, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, 1987:11.) The project was seen to have the potential to enhance local econmic performance, improve Commonwealth and State awareness of the impact of broader policies on local needs and priorities and to develop effective means for community participation in local development.

Another important Commonwealth initiative has been the Local Government Development Program. This has four main objectives (Office of Local Government, forthcoming):

- (1) to raise the standard of local government management through documentation and dissemination of best practices in financial resources management, human services strategies and by extending research and development,
- (2) to ensure a sufficient and properly skilled personnel supply and encourage modern personnel management practices such as equal employment opportunity,
- (3) to encourage the growth of effective local and regional community networks by supporting voluntary regional organisations of councils and improving their links with business, unions and other organisations,
- (4) to improve local government's strategic planning and facilitative role especially regarding economic development.

State governments play an important part in development planning, though in recent years they generally have given higher priority to new developments than to the problems of depopulating rural regions. Most State governments have policies of decentralisation but, in practice, they rarely divert significant resources towards the achievement of such objectives. State governments mediate between the Commonwealth—which collects bulk of tax revenue—and local governments. Crucially, the State Governments control State Grants Commissions which allocate to local government.

Although local government traditionally has a limited role within Australia—primarily a property—service role—many Australian local governments are taking a more active role today in local economic development. Local governments in many small towns as well as major urban areas see economic development as a vital part of overall of activities.

Local development plans vary from highly worked—out schemes to little more than wishful thinking! They are typically prepared by a working group of elected representatives and senior council officials. In many cases there are representatives of local business, professional organisations, community groups and trade unions. Some councils have sought widespread community participation whereas others have had much more authoritarian approaches.

There is no statutory framework for such local development plans. In that sense, therefore, they do not have to be approved by any other level of government or government agency. The implementation of local development plans, however, may require grants, loans or loan approval. Such issues are much more likely to require approval from other governments and are also likely to meet substantial difficulties.

2.3 Implementation, resources and role sharing

The questions of implementation, resources and role sharing eaten together as they are closely inter-connected. This section of the paper has to comprise a preliminary statement as the role of local governments regarding development in depopulated rural regions of Australia has not yet been extensively explored or documented. It would be easier to report on local government development activities in metropolitan areas well as rapidly growing coastal regions.

Local development in depulating rural areas has limited resources available for implementating, any development plans. One of Australia's leading experts on local government finance, Mr John Howard of Ernst Whinney and Associates has recently undertaken a study of Flinders Island a small rural community in Bass Strait and part of Tasmania. He has identified five kinds of resources available to local government: land and property; council staff; powers under Local Government Acts and, grants and advances from other levels of government. To this list, in my view, can be added another resource: political legitimacy.

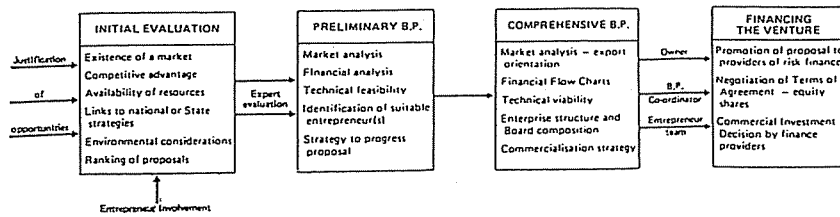
The first resource available to councils comprises land, building and council-owned resources. Many rural governments own land and buildings and they are therefore in a position to use their assets either directly (for example through establishing a tourist information office) or indirectly, sometimes in partnership with another level of governments or the private sector.

Council staff represent another resource available for the implementation of local development plans. Council officials are frequently involved with local committees formed to encourage economic development. Some councils have appointed an official with the precise task of encouraging entrepreneurship within the community. The Australian Centre for Local Government Studies ran a successful one-week training course in August 1988 for local government officials involved in economic development and entrepreneurship. Participants on the course came from numerous Australian States and scholarships were given to people from small (in population term) local government authorities.

One of the key elements implementing development plans is involving local communities in the preparation of a local business plan. Local people are often in the best position to undertake feasibility studies of the scope for new economic activities. It is always important, however, for local initiatives to be assessed fairly by more objective outsiders who can help to guard against over-optimistic assumptions. A good example of over-optimistic involves virtually every local government believing that it can boost local earnings considerably by encouraging tourism. In many cases, for sure, there will be successes, but other places have little to offer and could find that tourism ends up costing the local community more in terms of infrastructural provision than is returned through jobs and demand for commercial services.

The business plan has been identified within the Country Centres Project as being of critical importance. The business planning process is illustrated in Figure 3 which derives from a review of progress after the first year of operation of the Country Centres Project. Four phases are identified: initial evaluation, preliminary business plan, comprehensive business plan and financing.

Figure 3: The business planning process



Source: Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs(1987:22.)

Local governments which are serious about development are encouraged to follow this model of the business planning cycle. The Country Centres Project also has produced guides for undertaking feasibility studies for entrepreneurial activities by local governments.

Powers given to local government by State or Territory Governments are another resource in development planning. Powers available to councils vary between the states but they usually permit both entrepreneurial activities and joint-ventures with the private sector or other governments. The main difficulty regarding the use of powers is that, in the main, they are regulatory rather than innovatory. The most important powers available to local governments relating to development are local planning, zoning and building regulation controls. Councils can vary requirements, for example space standards for offices or light industrial premises, as an inducement to attract investment. Councils in areas of growth, however, have more bargaining power in this regard than those in areas of population loss.

The most vital resource available to local governments is finance. The general problem of the financial vulnerability of local governments in areas of rural depopulation was discussed in section 1.2. There is a high level of grant dependency and such councils, therefore, need either to enhance their income or to proceed very cautiously with any investment decisions. Councils are unable to offer direct tax or loan concessions. The Country Centres Project noted that a general problem facing councils was access to risk finance. Council spending is, in any case, limited somewhat by general public sector expenditure restraint. A widespread problem, too, is the lack of experience of packaging proposals and negotiating financial deals in the private sector. Rural local governments and officials are often rather conservative and have little any real experience of entrepreneurship.

Existing structures of local governments finance are geared mainly to the provision of local roads and modest levels of local infrastructure provision. There would need to be more money available if councils were to try to undertake additional road and infrastructure development programs. At Commonwealth and States, rather than more.

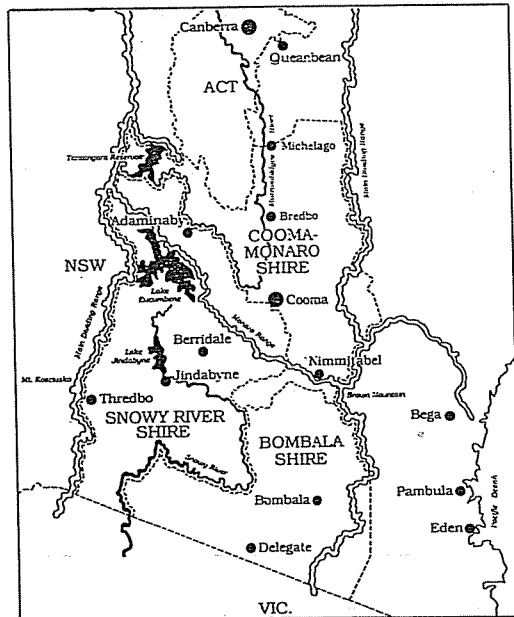
The last, but not the least significance, resource available to local government is its political legitimacy. Local government elected representatives can claim intimate knowledge of their locality as well as the support of local electorates. There is considerable sympathy within Australia for the view that rural communities are the backbone of the society. In some ways this is a myth, but, despite the high levels of urbanisation in Australia, there is strong support for the maintenance of viable rural centres. Local politicians and their appointed officials can draw on that popular support in their campaigns to convince State and Commonwealth governments of the need for funding.

The fundamental commitments of other levels of government to ensure that Australia adjusts to structural change may yet result in the continued run down of country centres. But the strong Australian belief is rural development can still be harnessed by able and articulate representatives of the country towns and their hinterlands.

2.4 An example of development in areas of rural depopulation

I have decided to refer to an area which I know well through my involvement as policy adviser to the local community. This example illustrates both successes and failures and exemplifies the diversity of processes of change and local response in rural Australia. This section draws heavily on an earlier study in the region (Paris and Cocke, 1986.) To the south of Canberra, the national capital of Australia, is a region known as Monaro (see figure 4.)

Figure 4: Monaro in regional context



The region comprises three local governments—Bombala Shire, Cooma—Monaro Shire and Snowy River Shire. The three shires approximate to the pastoral district known as Monaro (pronounced 'Mon -airo' not 'Mon-ahro'), sometimes referred to as 'the Monaro'. The name for this area originates from an aboriginal word referring to high and rolling country between the Snowy mountains and the coastal escarpment. Monaro has seen many social and economic changes since 1945 and is still changing today and different parts of it are experiencing very different processes of change.

The three shires constitute the ABS Census Statistical Subdivision of Snowy in the South Eastern Statistical Division of New South Wales. The total area is 14,674 square Kilometres of which Bombala Shire is 3,924 sq.km., Cooma—Monaro Shire is 4,886 sq.km., and Snowy River is 5,864 sq.km.

2.4. i Social, economic and demographic change

The region was settled by white colonists during the nineteenth century. Cooma, proclaimed a municipality in 1879, was the only substantial town in a pastoral region dominated by extensive squatters' runs (Hancock, 1972; Neal, 1976.)

The discovery of gold at Kiandra in the 1850s had stimulated the growth of Cooma. The ending of the gold rush in the early 1890s coincided with the growth of agricultural settlement. Many small villages grew during the 1860s and 1870s,

associated with attempts to broaden the agricultural base. Such ventures were brave but unsuccessful. They were foiled by changes in demand for agricultural products, the variable and uncertain rainfall and, at times most devastating of all, rabbit plagues.

Despite various attempts to encourage closer settlement, therefore, regional population fell after the 1880s and there was continued depopulation during the first half of the twentieth century. Total population fell by just over 2,000 people or 15 percent between 1911 and 1947 (see table one.)

Depopulation affected rural areas rather than Cooma, which grew, albeit unevenly, throughout the period. The population of what are now the shires of Bombala and Snowy River fell consistently between 1911 and 1947 as did rural Monaro Shire. Rural depopulation throughout the region reflected the limited scope for agricultural activities other than large-scale pastoralism. There were also changes in the relative viability and organisation of the pastoral economy which, too, led to out-migration.

Table 1: Population of Monaro 1911–1947

<u>1911</u>	<u>1921</u>	<u>1933</u>	<u>1947</u>
13,201	12,755	12,066	11,189

Source: Censuses.

By 1947, then, this was a region dominated by pastoralism, with a long history of rural depopulation, with only one town of note. There was virtually no manufacturing industry. A modest commercial service sector was concentrated in Cooma. Cooma was also the regional administrative centre and a minor railway town.

The post-war period, by way of contrast, has been one of major economic development and change (see Wigmore, 1986; Ravenscroft, 1962.) The Snowy Mountains Authority (SMA) has been the main engine of change. 'The Authority', as it is usually called locally, has had profound effects particularly on the town of Cooma and throughout the Snowy River Shire. Major engineering works were accompanied by waves of both itinerant construction workers and also longer-term residents. Construction camps came and went; vast landscapes have been transformed, especially through the two major impoundments of Lakes Eucumbene and Jindabyne. The townships of Adaminaby and Jindabyne were drowned and recreated. New suburbs of Cooma were constructed by the SMA. Ethnic diversity increased considerably.

The region has also been affected by the changing fortunes of primary

industries during the post-war period. Pastoralism has remained relatively prosperous, but there has been a substantial loss of jobs on the land. Pastoral properties in Monaro are generally family businesses today. Full-time labour has been replaced by capital equipment and sub-contractors are employed for specific tasks such as shearing or fencing. Some land which had been used for summer grazing has been lost to national parks. Forestry industries have provided a valuable alternative source of employment, particularly in Bombala Shire, where there has been greatest relative loss of pastoral jobs. Forestry industries, however, are sensitive both to market factors and political decisions: the question of the renewal of the Eden wood-chipping licence hung heavily over Bombala for two years.

The latest chapter in this changing regional economy has been the growth of the leisure and tourism industry associated with the snow fields. Jindabyne has experienced the most rapid growth, together with something of a boom-bust local property market. The effects of the growth of this industry also have been felt strongly in ski resorts of Thredbo and Perisher. Development has been spill-over recreational accommodation demand from Jindabyne into East Jindabyne, Berridale and, to a much lesser extent, Cooma. The seasonal rhythms of pastoralism have been replaced in the high country by the noisier, more flamboyant seasonality of leisure activities.

Pressure exists for more development in the Snowy River Shire, and with the completion of the Ski-Tube, proposals for new hotel complexes. Many locals keenly anticipate the coming of the proposed Very Fast Train between Sydney-Melbourne. There is already some conflict over the siting of the station, despite the fact that the feasibility study has yet to be finished! It is sometimes difficult to disentangle the rhetoric of development from the reality of demand. Even so, demand for seasonal accommodation remains very high and there is every prospect of continued growth.

The most striking overall changes in terms labour force composition have been shifts away from primary production and into trade, community services and recreation. There was also a period, between 1947 and 1961, when there was a preponderance of building and construction work in two shires for the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority(SMA.)

The pattern of change has varied between the three shires and has shifted markedly over time. Bombala's labour force still mostly was comprised of primary workers in 1981. Cooma had a more varied workforce in 1981 with a strength in the trade and community service sectors. Snowy River was dominated by the recreation and trade sectors. The overall distribution of occupational characteristics, not surprisingly, has shifted from farming, mining and forestry and trades into the other occupations of professional/administration and clerical/sales.

Both the total population and its distribution within the region have varied

considerably since 1947. Growth was most dramatic in overall terms between 1947 and 1954, when the total population doubled as a result mainly of the development of the Snowy Mountains Authority (tables two and three.)

Table 2: Population of Monaro, 1947—1986.

	1947	1954	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1986
Bombala	3.4	3.8	3.9	3.7	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.0
Cooma-Monaro	4.5	9.7	10.9	11.1	9.6	9.0	9.7	9.6
Snowy River	3.3	6.8	4.6	5.4	5.1	6.1	8.1	8.9
Total	11.2	20.3	19.2	20.2	18.1	18.4	21.0	21.5

Source: censuses.

Table 3: Population growth in Monaro, 1947—1986

expressed as the percentage change during the intercensal period.

Shire	1947-54	1954-61	1961-66	1966-71	1971-76	1976-81	1981-86
Bombala	10.7	0.7	-1.9	-8.1	-3.9	-3.2	-4.9
Cooma-Monaro	116.6	11.7	2.6	-14.1	-5.7	7.8	-3.7
Snowy River	106.5	-32.8	17.6	-5.7	20.5	31.9	2.3
Total	81.5	-5.3	5.3	-10.7	2.0	13.9	2.4
NSW	15.0	14.4	8.1	8.7	3.8	7.3	5.3

Source: censuses.

The total population of Monaro fell gradually during the 1960s and increased slightly in the 1970s and early 1980s. Tables two and three show population totals for the three shires and rates of population change in each shire during intercensal periods.

Four things emerge strongly in terms of the distribution of population within the region:

1. There was rapid growth of population in the town of Cooma and parts of

Snowy River Shire between 1947, and 1954, during the establishment of the SMA.

2. There was virtual stagnation in Cooma's population during the late 1950s and early 1960s followed by population decline between 1966 and 1976 as the SMA wound down construction activities. Cooma subsequently experienced a period of modest population growth during the late 1970s and a slight fall between 1981 and 1986.
3. The population of Snowy River Shire rose dramatically between 1947 and 1954 during the initial SMA construction phase. Population then declined slightly between 1954 and the mid-1960s only to grow again rapidly during the 1970s. It is important to note, however, that much of the growth in population recorded in the Census represents nonresidents, i.e. mainly people on skiing holidays or in temporary employment associated with ski-related activities.
4. There was modest population growth in Bombala Shire between 1947 and 1954. There was little net population change during the late 1950s. Since the early 1960s, however, the Shire has experienced constant net population decline.

The net effect of these patterns of net internal population change has been the three shires (see table four.) There have been four main periods of adjustment:

1. Between 1947 and 1954 there was a rapid increase in the population of people in both Cooma and Snowy River Shire; Bombala's population share dropped considerably.
2. Cooma's share of the regional population continued to increase between 1954 and 1961 whilst Snowy River lost comparatively.
3. There was little change during the 1960s, though Cooma's population share fell slightly.
4. Since the early 1970s the centre of gravity moved back towards Snowy River Shire and Cooma's dominance, in population terms at least, has become less marked.

Table 4: Population of Monaro, by shires, 1947—1981

expressed as the percentage of regional population within each shire on census night.

Shire	1947	1954	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981
Bombala	30.4	18.5	19.7	18.3	18.9	17.8	15.2
Cooma-Monaro	40.1	47.9	56.5	55.1	53.0	49.0	46.4
Snowy River	29.5	33.6	23.8	26.6	28.1	33.2	38.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: censuses.

Net population change can be summarised in terms of a number of processes operating in different localities over different time scales:

1. Continuous decline of the base rural population and small rural service centres between 1947 and 1981.
2. Rise and fall of the construction workforce in Snowy River Shire between the late forties and the late fifties.
3. Rapid growth of Cooma between 1947 and the mid-fifties with subsequent quiescence.
4. Rapid growth of the snow resort centres during the 1970s.

There have been important variations in rates of change at the local level, both between towns and rural areas and between different settlements. Between 1976 and 1986 there were very clear differences between parts of the region in terms of net population change. Growth rates were far higher in the ski resorts than elsewhere. Even so, the contrast between the resorts and declining small towns such as Delegate and Nimmitabel is striking. Cooma and the rest of Cooma—Monaro increased their population by eight to ten percent. The rural part of Bombala Shire continued to lose population while Bombala itself increased marginally. The rest of Snowy River Shire included developments closely associated with resort development and did not represent a rural revival.

The urban component of the total population increased in Bombala Shire between 1976 and 1986. It increased, too, in Cooma—Monaro, there was also growth in 'rural residential' living (much of which comprised commuting.) In Snowy River Shire, the terms 'urban' and 'rural' do not help to describe types of settlement as most recent developments in 'rural' areas is linked to the development of a non—primary 'rural' resource: the snow fields.

2.4. ii Local government and local development in Monaro

The point in sketching out some of the processes of economic, social and demographic change in the Monaro region was to emphasise the limited role of local government in development planning. Major projects have been outside the influence of local government in the region.

Some recent initiatives, however, are worthy of note in terms of relative success and failure. In passing, however, I believe that it is important to stress that neither 'success' or 'failure' is usually absolute. 'Failures' can involve important lessons being learnt and some successes may only be transitory : local government involvement in development should be seen as a continuing process and not merely as a series of one-off projects,

The growth of tourism within the region was primarily oriented towards the snow areas within Snowy River Shire. Cooma—Monaro, Shire Council, however, saw an opportunity to try to arrest the decline in the town's population after the ending of the construction programme of the Snowy Mountains Authority. Together with the local Chamber of Commerce, the Shire Council runs a busy Tourist Information Centre as well as energetically promoting Cooma as a base for skiing holidays. It is hard to quantify the 'success' of this activity but it is clear from recent levels of investment in motels and hotels that Cooma is benefiting from increased snow-related tourist activities.

Bombala Shire offers limited scope for tourism and, indeed, the local economy is dominated by farming and forestry. The town of Bombala was recently threatened by the possible closure of timber mills when the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments were reviewing the operations of the local timber industry. The Shire Council lobbied hard for the renewal of timber leases together with representatives of forestry industries. The outcome was the renewal of licences to clear the forests—despite strong opposition from conservationists—and the retention of between 50 and 100 local jobs.

The Bombala Shire Council has also undertaken some sub-development to provide young local people with access to relatively cheap building blocks for their first homes. The council has also entered into joint ventures with the New South Wales Housing Department to develop cheap rental accommodation to attract teachers and policemen to the area. The council is acutely aware of the fragile base of the local economy and of the need to attract professional workers and has given high priority to encouraging new investment into the area.

Snowy River Shire has different kinds of problems. There is massive seasonal variation in demand for services, with huge numbers of snow-tourists and seasonal workers coming in during the winter months. The base non-tourist population, however, has fallen, partly due to restrictions on access to the Kosciusko National Park. Before the Kosciusko National Park was created, local pastoralists used to

take cattle up into the mountains for summer pasture. This is no longer allowed and so, combined with general job—loss in pastoralism, the base agricultural population has continued to fall. In a positive way, though, the council has sought tourist—related development and has entered into joint ventures with commercial developers. One example concerns the council providing some land in exchange for a new indoor swimming pool under its control.

The economy of the Snowy River Shire has been transformed, but the council is now trying, too, to reduce the impact of seasonality. It is actively promoting summer season tourism in the area and trying to provide infrastructural investments consistent both with its objectives and its limited financial resources.

In many ways, of course, these three local governments have witnessed changes occurring through forces over which they have had no control. The massive Snowy Mountains Scheme, in particular, has had profound influences on local communities both in the short and longer terms. The area has been affected by the changing fortunes for Australian agriculture and the growth of national and international tourism. Local governments were slow to take direct roles in local development planning but are now becoming proactive rather than passive.

This region, therefore, illustrates some of the themes of the overall review of Australian local government's role in development planning in areas of rural depopulation. There have been some successes and some failures and no doubt there will be more. The current climate of fiscal restraint and macroeconomic policies means that it will not be an easy task for rural local governments to achieve local economic development. The need for positive local approaches, however, has never been greater.

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