



about Australia

Regional Australia

- Known as the 'bush' or the 'outback', regional Australia provides much of the nation's identity and the foundations of its wealth.

Many iconic images of Australia are of isolated parts of the country. Regional Australia remains the home of many Indigenous Australian and rural farming communities, unique flora and fauna, beautiful scenery and ancient geological formations.

It also provides bountiful natural resources—minerals, energy and primary produce—that are the foundation of Australia's economy and its position in the world. Regional Australia therefore continues to be of crucial importance to the nation.

Overview

Regional Australia comprises areas outside the capital cities. It includes more than 99 per cent of the country's landmass, ranging from remote settlements to rural towns and cities, from the northern tropics to temperate Tasmania, and from island territories to arid, mineral-rich zones.

The regions do not always have commonly accepted boundaries. These may be defined by the natural environment or landscape, by a sense of economic and social interdependence or by another shared sense of purpose.

About one-third of Australia's population of 21 million people lives outside the capital cities. These people make an important contribution to Australia's economic and cultural life and to its prosperity in the global economy.

key facts

- Seven million people, or 37 per cent of the Australian population, live outside state and territory capital cities.
- The healthy, friendly and safe environment and community lifestyle of regional Australia attracts many people from the cities.
- In 2006, regional Australia contributed around \$65 billion, or about 67 per cent, of the country's export revenue.
- Major sectors of the Australian economy—resources, energy and primary industries—are located in regional Australia.

The Australian Government recognises the contribution regional Australians make to the nation's development and supports their communities.

Regional Australia and its historical development figure prominently in Australian culture and identity. This is particularly reflected in literature and the visual arts, and in Australian values and traditions.

Defining Australia

The Australian identity is drawn from its people and its ancient and modern history set against a backdrop of a unique environment.

Indigenous Australians have inhabited the continent for up to 60 000 years.

Since 1788, Europeans have settled in towns and cities, usually located around river valleys, estuaries and along the coastline.

Australia's harsh terrain and dry climate claimed the lives of some of the early European explorers who attempted to open up the interior of the continent for settlement. Much of regional Australia was explored and settled between the 1820s and 1850s, when large tracts of land became available for agricultural development. The Gold Rush in the mid-nineteenth century brought new migrants to regional Australia. Many failed to find riches and sought work in the bush as farm labourers.

Australia's poetry and ballads at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries record tales of the resilience, self-reliance, humour, courage and innovation of those living beyond the cities—especially the writings of Henry Lawson and AB 'Banjo' Patterson. Patterson was the author of Australia's unofficial anthem, *Waltzing Matilda*.

Important elements of Australia's national character were born at this time. These include the values of a 'fair go' (fairness and reasonableness) and 'mateship' (loyalty to family and friends). These values have been evident in times of both war and peace. They are still visible today in Australians' underlying sense of optimism in difficult conditions such as drought.

Australians who create literature, visual arts, music and oral stories continue to draw inspiration from the history and challenges of life in the bush. The traditions and values are also evident at country shows and festivals and in the voluntary work of regional organisations such as the Country Women's

Association and bushfire brigades. Sports such as football, cricket and netball have also played an important role in uniting and binding communities living in isolation.

Images, environment and lifestyle

Many quintessentially Australian images come from regional areas. These are images of the extremes of the desert, wide open spaces, tropical rainforests, stunning beaches, the winter landscapes of the Snowy Mountains, and vast fields of sheep or cattle and crops like sugar cane. There are world heritage sites, such as Kakadu, the Great Barrier Reef and the Tasmanian wilderness, and ancient geological formations, such as fossil reefs, rocks, river systems and gorges.

Australia also has an immense biodiversity of plants and animals. For example: the distinctive eucalyptus, acacias and grevillias; snakes, goannas, frilled-neck lizards and crocodiles; cassowaries, parrots, kookaburras and emus; and echidnas, kangaroos, koalas and platypuses. Introduced species include rabbits, foxes, cane toads and camels. Australia has the largest wild camel population in the world.

Other features of the outback include cattle stations as big as the American state of Texas, jumbucks (sheep), sheep shearers, sheep dogs, jackaroos (cowboys), pubs (bars and hotels), rodeos, hats with corks to keep flies away from the face, swags (outdoor covered bed rolls), billabongs (isolated river pools) and large sculptures in regional towns, like the Big Banana in Coffs Harbour, New South Wales, and the Big Pineapple on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

Regional Australia also offers inviting images of a healthy lifestyle and outback adventure.

Australia is famous for its world-class wines, seafood, beef and fresh produce. Many people in metropolitan Australia opt for a 'sea change' and move to regional Australia in search of a healthy lifestyle.

Economic contribution

Regional Australia continues to be the economic backbone of the nation's prosperity, especially with exports like minerals, grain, wool, beef, seafood and wine.

As a result of widespread farming in the 19th century, Australia came to be regarded as 'the breadbasket of the British Empire'. The increasing use of mechanical equipment in the 20th century led to the clearance of vast areas of land for agriculture, including cropping, livestock and forestry.

By the 1970s, widespread livestock farming had earned Australia the label 'the country that rides on the sheep's back'. Today it is no longer true to say this. Farming includes a mix of wheat, cattle, sheep, cane sugar, lupin, canola, fruit orchards, vineyards and dairy farms. The gross value of agricultural production in Australia in 2005–06 was \$37.8 billion. The most important agricultural commodities by production value were cattle and calves (\$7.7 billion), wheat (\$5.2 billion), milk (\$3.3 billion) and wool (\$2.1 billion).

Australia's forest industries employ about 82 900 people. The annual turnover is more than \$18 billion. Employment and wealth flow directly from the wood products derived from forests and plantations, but these also generate other products like honey, wildflowers, natural oils, firewood, craft wood and fodder.

Regional Australian vineyards and dairies produce world-class wines and cheeses.

These include outstanding wines from the Margaret River, the Coonawarra region, the Yarra, Hunter and Barossa valleys, and cheeses and fine foods from Tasmania.

Tourism in regional areas is a major industry. It includes ecotourism, fishing and coastal cruising, where visitors can watch whales, dolphins and turtles. National parks and old towns with heritage-listed buildings, spacious streets and friendly locals are all popular.

Australia has some of the world's largest known resources of minerals, including coal, copper, bauxite, gold, silver and diamonds. The mining industry accounted for 37 per cent of the total value of the country's exports in 2006–07, mainly from the coal and metal ore mining industries.

As in most rural communities around the world, the soil, climate and seasons drive the people engaged in primary production in regional Australia. Australia is a dry continent and the management of water resources is a major concern for most people.

While much of regional Australia has recently been badly affected by drought, levels of unemployment in regional Australia have fallen to an average of 5 per cent and real income has consistently increased.

Linking regional Australia

Regional Australia is home to some of the most geographically isolated and remote communities in the world. The Australian Government continues to support the maintenance of infrastructure to ensure that regional centres service smaller, more remote towns.

Regional centres provide a central node for business, work and tourism opportunities, farmers markets, wholesale food and access

to farm machinery. A strong transport and communication network is vital for connecting these communities to the rest of Australia and to the world.

Historically, because unsealed roads made travel difficult, the Queensland and Northern Territory Air Service (QANTAS) was formed to connect regional towns via air. The commercial arm of the Australian airline started operating in 1959.

Today, road trains form transport networks across the continent and have become a symbol of regional Australia. Usually four carriages long, they transport cargo through the dusty outback to ports and regional centres.

East and west Australia are linked by the Indian Pacific rail service, which operates between Sydney and Perth, and southern and northern Australia are linked by the Ghan, which runs between Adelaide and Darwin via Alice Springs. These are regarded as two of the world's great train journeys.

Access to medical services throughout regional Australia has also been important. The Royal Flying Doctor Service was established in 1928 to bring health care and community services to remote areas. It combines medical, air and radio services and was the first comprehensive aviation medical organisation in the world.

The reliable two-way radio system established throughout regional Australia by the Royal Flying Doctor Service was the basis for another innovation: Australia's School of the Air. This unique and successful initiative has provided children with educational services via correspondence since 1950. It currently services over 1000 students in 12 schools and is expanding into adult education.

As communications technology improves, increasing mobile phone coverage and

a satellite broadband network, regional Australia's access to information is also improving.

Government support

The Australian Government, through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, plays a key role in assisting regions to develop, adapt to changing economic, social and environmental situations, and work towards self-reliance. The government is committed to ensuring regional Australia remains vibrant and healthy.

At August 2006 (the date of the most recent census), around one third of Australia's population lived in rural and regional Australia. The ageing of this population, exacerbated by the tendency of young people to move from regional Australia to urban centres, has been a major demographic trend over the past century. By the end of the twentieth century, the median age of farmers had reached 50 years. In 2001, 82 500 young people moved from regional to urban areas, almost twice the number recorded as moving in the 1976 Census.

To help counteract this trend, the Australian Government has introduced a range of State Specific and Regional Migration initiatives aimed at encouraging young, skilled, English-speaking migrants to settle in the regions of Australia where they are most needed. Under these initiatives, prospective migrants receive priority immigration processing and rely on sponsorship by regional employers, state and territory governments, or family members. More information on Australia's migration policies, including the regional migration initiatives, is available at the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all dollar amounts are in Australian dollars. The term 'billion' means 'a thousand millions' (one billion therefore equals 1 000 000 000).

Further information

Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and
Regional Economics
www.bitre.gov.au

Country Women's Association of Australia
www.cwaa.org.au

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and
Forestry
www.daff.gov.au

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Local
Government
www.infrastructure.gov.au

Department of Immigration and Citizenship
www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/26state.htm

Royal Flying Doctor Service
www.flyingdoctor.net

Last updated August 2008

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