

SMALL TOWNS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Suniti Bandaranaike

School of Tropical Environment Studies & Geography
James Cook University, Townsville, Q. 4814

E-mail: suniti.bandaranaike@jcu.edu.au

Abstract: *Small towns are experiencing a rural drift in the context of economic restructuring, globalisation, social inequities, environmental adversities and public attitudes. Australia needs to retain small towns for a number of reasons including the preservation of cultural identity and protection of primary productivity. This research argues the relevance of social sustainability in the sustainable futures of rural Australia. The research is based on interviews conducted in small towns of Queensland and on current census data, and incorporates the concepts of social capital and social cohesion. It is argued that small towns have the potential to contribute to our demographic demise of low fertility, high ageing populations and future productivity. The research concludes that human enterprise and initiative can prevail over rural adversity and that small town sustainability is a realistic option.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world with 86% of its population living in urban areas. Yet more than three fourths of its sustenance relies on the production in rural areas [ABS cat.4102.0]. Currently the dilemma of policy makers is whether to support continued growth of cities or to supplement rural growth.

A key element of the rural futures debate is the retention of ‘strong communities’ [Morris & Bailey, 2001; Barker & Selman, 1990; Clark et al., 1997]. This paper argues the need for a holistic, integrated, strategic vision of rural economies and its communities. It also highlights the need to understand the complexity of the links among social, economic and environmental issues implied in the concept of integrated sustainable management.

This research draws on the experiences of three rural towns to provide evidence of social sustainability and small town survival. Emphasis in this paper is on building “strong communities” in rural settlements.

The paper examines the background to the issue of declining rural populations and future sustenance with special reference to demographic characteristics. It then analyses the attitudes and characteristics typical to small rural towns using three case studies and other small town examples, to demonstrate the role of social sustainability. Finally strategies for the future are discussed.

2 DEFINITIONS & METHODOLOGY

The Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] defines a ‘small town’ as a settlement with a population of between 1000 and 19,999. This research is concerned with ‘small towns’ not only in terms of population size, but also in terms of physical isolation in remote areas. Therefore its arguments do not apply to small town populations in coastal towns located in proximity to larger urban centres. The three case studies in this research represent towns with a population of less than 4000 persons and with a physical location of more than 300km inland from the coast. The localities are typical small towns experiencing the current rural drift and other dominant characteristics of small inland towns.

During the period June to August 2002, the researcher conducted personal interviews in the towns of Cloncurry, Richmond and Hughenden using a structured questionnaire supplemented by interviews and focus group discussions.

Interviews were carried out mainly within the business centres of the towns with some graziers coming into town to be interviewed. The town populations for Cloncurry, Richmond and Hughenden were 2459, 733 and 1444 respectively [ABS, Urban Centre Localities 1996]. A total of 119 interviews were conducted among the three towns or a 2.6 per cent sample. The rate of response was excellent with only one respondent refusing to answer owing to lack of time. The questionnaire had 32

variables but for the purpose of this paper only those variables that are directly concerned with the main hypothesis have been analysed.

In the demographic analysis of these towns the unit of measurement used is the Local Government Areas [LGA] or Shires, owing to the unavailability of 2001 urban centre locality data at the time of writing. The resident population [including visitors] as provided in the first release of the 2001 census for the select LGAs were - Cloncurry Shire [4828], Richmond Shire [1050] and Flinders Shire [2193].

3 THE ISSUE

Changes to the rural agricultural sector have threatened the survival of rural communities. This situation has been exacerbated by mainstream attitudes of predicted doom and gloom towards these communities. Some suggest rural populations in small towns be shifted elsewhere, and others of their complete shutdown [Stimson, 2002], leading on to a general perception that small towns must disappear. The projected future of small towns is based on long term projections and predictions that – the population is decimating, people are moving out in swarms, services are closing down, the economic output is at a point of no return, ecological environment is suffering and the mainstream politicians are not interested in developing the outback.

Some of these predictions are based on population projections and others on economic forecasts based on current market conditions. Population projections predict future growth potential based on the current population size, age and sex distribution, fertility [births] and mortality [deaths] rates by age and sex groups and the level of migration. Census data, and other available data on the region are used to calculate or estimate these parameters [values]. But if the data collected is unreliable or the conditions change in a region [due to new technological innovations or closing down of a life supporting economy], then the accuracy of these predictions will vary. These projections therefore are not always accurate as testified by the 2001 projections for Townsville and Cairns. Townsville's actual population for 2001 was much higher than the projected [estimated] population, while that of Cairns was much

lower than expected [ABS Population projections, 1996, 2001]. This error as a percentage of total growth for Townsville was +28 per cent and for Cairns - 48 per cent [Barker and Taylor, 2002].

Ironically however, population expansion in urban areas has led to overcrowding, environmental degradation and numerous social problems. Recently *The Australian* highlighted these issues in Brisbane and surrounding regions of the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast [2002 a, 2002 b]. These areas have lost their aesthetic appeal as they merge into a huge concrete jungle. Moreover, the rise of manufacturing and service industries in the larger urban centres accompanied by technological change and other factors have worsened the situation of the regional economy and society [Gray & Lawrence, 2001:95]. It is therefore economically, socially and environmentally opposing to encourage further population growth in these metropolitan centres.

The major barriers confronted in remote rural areas can be summarised as:

Narrow economic base

Poor income earning capacities

Loss of Population

Agricultural over production

Environmental degradation

Decline of the farming workforce

Maintaining the Infrastructure

Resource use and land management.

1973 Native Title Act & Land Ownership issues

However despite these limitations this research illustrates that community attitudes have supported small town survival and that these towns can make a difference to our economy, our society and our existence as a unique nation.

4. THE REGION [SHIRE]

The demographic and social background of the study area – Cloncurry Shire, Richmond Shire, Flinders Shire - is typical of many remote inland towns. The social sustainability of a population needs to be measured against this prevailing background.

4.1 POPULATION GROWTH

Cloncurry is one of the few regions in the North West that has recorded a substantial increase in its population since 1995 [FIG 1]. The Shire had a population of 3594 excluding local and overseas visitors [2001 census]. It also has an unusual sex ratio¹ where the proportion of males to females was almost double, as illustrated in FIG 2. This feature can be attributed to the substantial mining population within this Shire. In the 2001 census questionnaire one of the requirements of stating your usual place of residence is “...*usually live* means that address at which the person lived or intends to live for a total of six months or more in 2001”. Personal investigation by the researcher in Cloncurry mining villages revealed that this could have been interpreted by the fly in fly out sub population as ‘Cloncurry’ being their *usual place of residence*. Much of the fly in fly out operates on two weeks stay in the mine and one week off. This would then calculate as Cloncurry being their *usual place of residence* because of the higher days of residency. The accuracy of usual resident population data is highly relevant to local Shire Councils since government subsidies and taxes are calculated using this statistic.

Richmond Shire and Flinders Shire on the contrary record a decrease in their population between 1986 and 2000. FIGS.3 and 4 illustrate the long-term population trends for these two Shires that are similar to those found in most inland towns.

According to the projected population median series of the North West SD [Department of Local Government and Planning], eight out of the ten Local Government Areas [LGA] had negative growth forecasts [% change 2000-2021]

¹ Males per 100 Females

including Richmond Shire [-3.8%] and Flinders Shire [-28.2%]. Cloncurry was one of two LGA's with positive growth [+14.8%].

4.2 AGE/SEX COMPOSITION

The age/sex composition is an important determinant of future trends in this region. FIGS 5 a-c illustrate the Distribution of Population by Age Cohorts 1986-2001, for the three Shires.

In all three Shires there is a very significant decline in the age cohort 15-19 years due to the out migration of youth. This is a direct consequence of a government subsidy [excluding Cloncurry] given to attend boarding schools in larger towns.

Flinders Shire had a further decrease in the 19 to 24 ages before picking up numbers in the cohorts that followed up to and including 40- 44 years. After 44 the population numbers were stable until age 54 and then declined. The trend in 2001 census data is encouraging since it shows a clear upward trend in the age cohorts between 20-24 and 40-44, followed by stability in numbers up to 50-54.

Richmond Shire had significant increases to its population between 1986 and 1991 in the ages of 20 - 34. But since then even though the numbers have declined up to age 50-54, the population is now stable.

Cloncurry Shire in contrast to the two previous towns, had a significant increase in its population growth in the age cohorts 20-24. The population numbers dropped in the remaining cohorts but these numbers were still higher than recorded in previous census years.

Based on the significant decline in the 15-24 age cohort, policy makers and critics of small towns have concluded that there is a major drift from rural areas to the cities. What has been ignored is the stability in the trends of the balance more mature age cohorts which indicate population momentum in these Shires or the potential for growth. There is, therefore, the possibility that the population

could increase if some of the strategies considered for small town survival [section 6] are followed through.

Characteristically in outback towns men outnumber women. The sex ratio in Cloncurry Shire was 180 men to 100 women, almost double the proportion of women. In Richmond Shire the male/female sex ratio was 105, and in Flinders Shire 111.

Table 1 : Comparative Demographic and Economic Statistics of Brisbane and the North West SDs & the Shires of Cloncurry, Richmond, Hughenden, 2000

	Estimated Resident Population	Persons aged 0-14 [%]	Persons aged 65+ [%]	Unemployment Rate [%]
Brisbane Statistical Division	1 626 865	20.4	10.9	6.8
North West Statistical Division	35 760	26.1	5.9	7.4
Cloncurry Shire	3 452	28.9	7.0	4.6
Richmond Shire	1046	24.0	12.0	4.2
Flinders Shire	2 057	26.0	11.3	5.8

Source: <http://www.abs.gov.au/Websitedbs/c312...>

Of all Queensland Statistical Divisions [SD], the North West SD records the highest proportion of persons less than 15 years indicating that the population in the small rural towns of North West Queensland are still youthful. This is further emphasised in the statistics of the smaller regional units [Shires within the North West SD] of Cloncurry, Richmond and Flinders Shires having relatively high percentage of youth under 15 ranging between 24.0 per cent and 28.9 per cent. This also supports the fact that the average fertility levels are higher in these small towns than in the larger cities.

The proportion of persons of the age of 65 and above in Brisbane, is almost twice as much [10.9%] as the North West SD [5.9%]. Individual variations however are noticed at the Shire level, where Flinders and Richmond have a higher proportion

than Brisbane in the 65 plus age category. This is partly a consequence of the high rate of out-migration from these Shires. On the other hand, Cloncurry Shire has a smaller percentage of 65 plus, because of the in-migration of younger persons in the mining communities and associated industries.

As characteristic of major cities the unemployment rate in Brisbane is below that of the North West where the large indigenous population contributes to the high unemployment levels. On the other hand the unemployment rates for the Shires of Cloncurry, Richmond and Flinders, are much lower than the average for the North West SD.

4.3 DEPENDENCY RATIO²

Trends in dependency ratios indicate whether a population is ageing, and in which age group the dependency is higher – aged [65 and over] or young children [less than 15]. The dependency ratios in both Richmond and Flinders are increasing with growing proportions in the 65+ age cohorts. Cloncurry however is the exception where the dependency ratio has declined – from 50.6% in 1986 to 34.1% in 2001 owing to a substantial increase in the working age population [15 - 64 years] and because of the impact of a younger fly in fly out mining population.

4.4 INCOME

Analysis of median weekly incomes for Queensland by ABS statistical subdivisions[SSD] indicate the North West SSD [Burke, Carpentaria, Cloncurry, Flinders, McKinlay, Mornington. Mount Isa, Richmond] had the highest income at \$447 with Brisbane city ranking only fourth with \$416 [*The Courier Mail*, 2002 a]. For the individual Shires the median weekly income varied from \$600-669 for Cloncurry, \$300-399 for Richmond and \$400-499 for Flinders. The highly inflated median income in Cloncurry is due to the impact of earnings from the fly in fly out mining communities.

² The ratio between the population aged less than 15 and over 65 years, and those between ages 15 and 64. This ratio is based on the defined 'normal' dependent population and working age population.

4.5 MARITAL STATUS

Another demographic feature of interest in these towns is the large number of divorced and separated males in the population [FIG 6]. This feature is common to other mining regions such as Mount Isa City and McKinlay Shire. It is believed that with the heavy work schedule in these mining towns, not only among the miners but also with the associated mining contractors and suppliers, there is a high incidence of marital breakdown. Discussions with women in this region showed evidence of marital stress resulted from the long working hours of the men, and women being left on their own without adequate social support. Several of these women had left their husbands and returned to their previous place of residence. The main issue appears to be the lack of organised social interaction in a relatively new location and networking opportunities, for these women.

This social and demographic background is fairly typical of agricultural and mining towns of North Queensland. The three case studies in the field survey were set within this background.

5. THE SURVEY

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the significance of the rural sector in formulating strategies on integrated sustainable development. The focus is the management of the rural environment for sustainable development. Much of the research to date [Lawrence, 1987; Gray *et al*, 1993; Stehlik *et al*; Baum *et al*, 1999; O'Connor *et al*, 2001.] has argued the futures of rural communities on economic and ecological grounds. This paper on the other hand, is based on original field research and focuses on the relevance of social sustainability [in addition to economic and ecological sustainability] in assessing the future of small towns. Stakeholder input is essential to gain an insight into the needs and concerns held for the relevant social system and for assessing their future [Pepperdine, 2000]. Shucksmith *et al* [1994: 343] states that household surveys are basic to our understanding of what constitutes rural disadvantage, which client groups are affected, and how policies can contribute towards relieving those pressures.

5.1 SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Typically communities aspire to sustain development or growth that is built on solid foundations [business, industry, agriculture] that will last. Yet, an integrated approach to managing people resources and planning requirements, together with environmental and economic considerations, is fundamental to promote sustainable development.

Measures of community sustainability for rural areas have been constructed in North America [Dykeman, 1990], Scotland [Copus & Crabtree, 1996], New Zealand [Pomeroy, 1997] and more recently in Australia [Pepperdine 1998, MacGregor 2000]. These studies have identified aspects important for local sustainability.

In this research the constructs of social sustainability are:

Attachment to place

Willingness and Reasons to move

Ancestral ties

Satisfaction levels with existing place

Community spirit

First the main demographic characteristics of the township or business centre [major focus of the survey] will be discussed to provide a background for the survey and then the individual variables in the survey will be analysed .

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC & SOCIAL BACKGROUND [TOWN]

Table 2 summarises select demographic characteristics of the towns using urban centre locality [UCL] data from the 1996 census [data for 2001 was unavailable at the time of writing].

Cloncurry has a positive average growth rate of 3.62 per annum, while Richmond and Hughenden [Flinders Shire] have negative growth rates of -0.54 and -1.27 respectively over the 10year period 1991 to 2001 [data provided by OESR, Townsville] .

Table 2 : Select Demographic Characteristics of the Townships [UCL 1996] of Cloncurry, Richmond & Hughenden

	Cloncurry	Richmond	Hughenden
Total Persons	2459	733	1444
Sex Ratio ¹	121	131	112
% Aboriginal & TSI	24.2	11.7	10.2
% Australian Born	88.1	91.4	89.3
% Born Overseas	5.9	3.4	5.6
% Unemployed ²	4.1	2.9	2.9
% Employed ²	42.3	48.2	43.1
% same address 5 yrs ago ³	37.5	42.8	45.5
% different address 5 yrs ago ³	47.3	44.6	41.0

¹ Expressed as number of males per 100 females; ² Persons 15 years and over; ³ Persons 5 years and above;

A characteristic feature of most outback small towns is the high male sex ratios as indicated in the Shire demographic statistics [section 4.2]. Cloncurry Shire, for example had an excessively high sex ratio [180] attributed to the mining communities within that Shire. But, according to the business centre [town] demographics [Table 2] Richmond has the highest male/female ratio of 131 males per 100 women. This situation is reversed in most cities, where there is a higher proportion of females to males [<http://www.abs.gov.au>] and this also the case for Queensland overall [98.7 males per 100 females].

The outback is also characterised by a very high proportion of Australian born population and a small overseas born population. This proportion is well above the Queensland average of 78.4 for Australian born and 16.9 for overseas born [<http://www.abs.gov.au>]. The Australian born persons in the three Shires ranged from approximately 88 per cent to 91 per cent. In terms of both numbers and proportion, Cloncurry has a larger Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander population than Richmond or Hughenden. However although Richmond's Aboriginal population had the smallest numbers, its proportion as of the total population is higher than Hughenden. In contrast, the proportion of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander population in Queensland as a whole, is a mere 2.8 percent for the same period. Both Cloncurry and Hughenden have special offices to administer needs of this sub-population.

Contrary to popular belief the percentage of the population unemployed is relatively low ranging between 2.9 per cent and 4.1 per cent within the townships of Cloncurry, Richmond and Hughenden. This is despite the fact that a number of youth deliberately opted to stay on social security benefits, as indicated in the interviews and focus group discussions held in these towns.

Census statistics on persons living at the same address 5 years ago gives an indication on the movement of the people in and out of the town. Cloncurry, with its large mining and associated industries, main roads workers and railway workers, has the least stable population. 37.5 percent of its population resided at the same address five years ago, compared with 42.8 per cent and 45.8 percent for Richmond and Hughenden respectively. In Cloncurry, the Main Roads and Railway workers generally have an average turnover every three years or less.

5.3 SURVEY ANALYSIS

Social capital and social cohesion of the communities were measured via responses to Attachment to place [Q. 1, 2, 11], Willingness and Reasons to move [Q. 3, 4, 7], Ancestral ties [Q. 5, 6], Satisfaction levels with existing place [Q.B1-16] and Community spirit [Q. 9, 10].

5.3.1 *Attachment to Place*

Length of residence [in the town] was selected as a variable to find out whether there was a relationship between the residential period and attachment to place. The length of residence of those interviewed varied between, less than one year to 77 years. In all three towns 58.9 per cent of the residents had been in those towns for more than 15 years. This percentage was higher for Hughenden [70 per cent] and Richmond [63.2 per cent] and as expected lower for the itinerant population in the town of Cloncurry [43.9 percent]. It must be noted that this percentage would have been even higher if the mining villages were sampled.

Associated with the length of residence was the question on whether the respondent was born in the town to assess Attachment to Place. Overall less than

a third [31.1%] of the respondents were born in these towns. Among the individual towns Richmond had the highest proportion [52.6%] of people born locally, followed by Hughenden's 25.5 per cent and Cloncurry's very low proportion of 17.1 percent.

It was found through cross tabulation of data that irrespective of whether the respondents were born in the locality or not there was overall a very strong attachment to place and the willingness to remain in these towns and participate in voluntary community oriented activities. Attachment to place was also measured in terms of the question – *What do you Enjoy most in this region?* Responses were grouped into 4 categories:

Community & Family oriented factors

Lifestyle factors

Environmental factors

Work Related factors

The Community Spirit was one of the major factors that the people enjoyed in the outback and which glued them together as a group enabling them to work towards a common goal. Bringing up the family in a safe and crime free environment was equally important to respondents living in this region. Specific reference was made to benefits of '*a small community knowing every one ... the feeling of security within a small community ... the community spirit ... caring atmosphere... quality time spent with family*'.

Lifestyle factors that were attractive were '*riding the mountain bike in the bush and discovering new things ... bush photography and painting ... in general 'things you cannot do in the city'*'.

Environmental Factors promoting place attachment were – *the love of warm weather ... outback experience with rural animals* and more generally *the bush environment*. A significant group of respondents also mentioned their high degree of involvement and participation in work related activities as a significant factor in their attachment to place.

Other specific comments were –“ *Enjoy the Heat, Space, colour of the Nature*”
 “*I like motivating people to do things and making things happen in our community*”
 and from a publican ... “*I enjoy shutting the door of the pub at 4am*”

5.3.2 *Willingness & Reasons to Move*

Reasons to move out of the region are connected to a number of circumstances such as availability of jobs, education opportunities, stage in the life cycle, family related issues etc. Overall almost a third of the respondents [30.3 %] had moved in and out of the region during their length of residence in the town and approximately just over two thirds [69.4%] stated the move was connected with work. Other reasons given were Education [19.4%], Family [8.3%] and a combination of Work and Education [5.6%].

These responses were supported by a school survey conducted at Richmond State High School, by the researcher, where youth responded via a questionnaire on their willingness to move out of the region and future options. Almost two –thirds [16 of the 25 respondents] said they would either stay in Richmond or return to Richmond after completing their training/studies elsewhere.

5.3.3 *Ancestral Ties*

Ancestral ties with the region were assessed through the questions on – *How many Generations in their family had lived in this region* and *How many Relatives and Family Members live here now*. More than half the respondents [56.5%] stated their ancestral connections went back two generations or more. Focus group discussions revealed that longer the period of residence of a family within a region, the greater the involvement with the region and the initiative to participate in community activities. However, it was also evident, that irrespective of previous family/ancestral connections people have taken the initiative to improve their communities. For example in Cloncurry despite the itinerant population and large numbers of relatively recent residencies with no family or generational connections, there were people willing to contribute substantially to the well-being of the community. One individual had established a business enterprise with the regional mines to service those communities with equipment and food, and another young entrepreneur was building

a gymnasium to contribute towards the much needed recreational facilities of the region. Both residents were relatively new to Cloncurry having lived in the town for only four years.

Social sustainability relies on community networking and how comfortable people are within their communities. This can be facilitated, most of the time, if individuals have relatives and family within the region. Overall family connections within the town were lower than expected. Just under three fourths of the respondents [73.9%] had 10 or less family members in the region. This could be related to the fact that less than one third of the population were born here. This supports the thesis that people do not necessarily have to be born in a region to support the community. It is concluded in this research therefore that ancestral ties are not always an essential component to measure social sustainability. If the people are willing to live in the region and form community ties with other people living in the region, social sustainability can be achieved.

5.3.4 Levels of Satisfaction

The degree to which residents are satisfied with the availability of services and their delivery is a deciding factor in their willingness to live in that area. This then becomes an important measure of sustainability.

Interviewees were asked to select on a scale of 4 [*1=excellent; 2= not bad; 3=could be better; 4= poor*] their levels of satisfaction for specific services available to them. If they had not accessed a particular service, they answered ‘don’t know’. Table 3 gives the summary [excludes response 5= *don’t know*] for the three towns surveyed. The terminology used in defining ‘the levels of satisfaction’ was selected after a pilot survey conducted in this region. If the service/variable was faultless they responded ‘excellent’. Term ‘not bad’ indicated they were satisfied with the service, and if dissatisfied they responded as ‘poor’. A scale of 4 was deliberately selected to elicit direct and uncomplicated responses by eliminating a neutral mid value. The variables selected related to out back living conditions and service delivery that respondents were familiar with.

**Table 3: Summary of Responses for Levels of Satisfaction in Cloncurry [N=40],
Richmond [N=38] and Hughenden [N=41]**

	Excellent [%]	Not Bad [%]	Could be Better [%]	Poor [%]	Total Response* [N]
Living in town	32.3	41.5	25.4	0.8	130
Primary Education	19.1	51.7	22.5	6.7	89
Secondary Education	8.0	38.7	42.6	10.7	75
Distance Education	20.5	56.8	15.9	6.8	44
Employment Opportunity	27.0	39.1	25.2	8.7	115
Recreation - Facilities	14.2	43.3	34.5	8.0	113
Public Transport	6.1	26.1	20.0	47.8	115
Computers & Phones	20.0	38.2	32.7	9.1	110
Postal Services	31.6	54.8	8.5	5.1	117
Banks Servicing	11.8	54.6	24.4	9.2	119
Medical & Health	27.4	35.0	26.5	11.1	117
Food Shopping	16.9	47.5	28.0	7.6	118
Speciality Shopping	2.6	15.4	51.2	30.8	117
Water Supply	30.5	26.3	11.0	32.2	118
Electricity Supply	26.7	48.3	17.2	7.8	116
Personal Safety	36.4	47.5	11.9	4.2	118

* Missing respondents answered 'Don't Know' to these questions.

Of the 16 variables tested for levels of satisfaction among the residents clearly 12 variables were 'not bad' or satisfactory to the residents. Water [32.2%] and Transport [47.8%] were the services that most respondents stated as being 'poor'. Also, Speciality Shopping [51.2%] for middle and high order goods such as clothes and furniture together with Secondary Schooling [42.7%] were declared as 'could be better'.

In the responses for individual towns to this question, it is noteworthy that Richmond, with the smallest population of the three, had a much higher level of satisfaction than

the other two towns in 50 per cent of the variables tested [FIG.7] . That is, primary education, computer and phones, postal services, medical, food shopping, water supply, electricity supply and personal safety all have a modal³ ranking of ‘excellent’.

Water remains a major issue for most inland towns with several regions currently declared drought stricken. Therefore 32.2 % of those interviewed rated the level of satisfaction of water as ‘poor’. The situation was worst in Cloncurry facing a major water shortage with the Flinders River drying up. Others in Richmond referred to the ‘reddish colour’ in the water but said it was not a major issue.

There is a consistent agreement among the three towns that the services of Primary School Education and Banks are satisfactory. This is despite the recent closure of several banks in the rural areas. Most residents were satisfied with the services of the remaining banks.

Of those who responded to the question, more than half were satisfied with the delivery of Distance education [56.8%] and Primary schools [51.7%] for their children. On the other hand more than half [53.4%] the respondents stated Secondary schooling is poor or inadequate/could be better.

Given that a large number of students are moving out of this region for secondary schooling elsewhere, it implies that given better educational facilities at the secondary school level there is the possibility that these students may be retained in the outback. However, the rural education sector needs a major overhaul in terms of upgrading infrastructure and facilities and could take several years to complete.

Comments from distance education students themselves yielded not so positive responses. They said assistance was minimal and this could probably be due to a short supply in school staff. They commented:

“It’s alright, but harder to do your work without a teacher helping sometimes”

“We don’t get a lot of help. There’s a teacher who helps us a bit and that’s about it.”

“Accessibility to distance education is good, but it is just coming to school...”

³ the modal frequency is the category/group with the highest response.- eg: *Living in town*, majority in Cloncurry had a level of satisfaction of 2=not bad.

Also, these students do not appear to have a clear vision and they stated so in the questionnaire. Distance education is a major feature of outback education and if the youth are to be retained in the outback it is very important that the service delivery is improved.

Despite these limitations, on the whole, the residents were satisfied with the majority of services available to them in their towns. Some of the specific comments were -

“ We are happy with facilities as is. Not bothered whether there is No K-mart or No Coles. Services we have here are sufficient for a small town. Don't want it growing into the size of a large city. We want to keep this place small as it is now”. [lived in region for 18yeras]

“I see inland towns as the economic hub of the nation [64 yrs lived here, Property & Business owner]

“ I Like the lifestyle here. Don't like traffic etc in big cities. I can get a job in Townsville but don't like to live there; life is too rushed.” [born & lived here 27yrs.]

“Easy to live here. Lot of things you can't do and can't get. But doesn't worry us”. [lived 40+, born here; office administrator]

“Do things at your own pace” [lived 9 yrs, Hotel Proprietor]

“Have to do without things. Need to compromise. Not that hard. Variety not there. Fuel expensive. It is a compromise living here. Safer for kids. The country lifestyle is interesting with picnics and travelling to fishing holes. Kids love this lifestyle”. Born and lived here 51 yrs]

In summary, since most of the responses to the individual variables are at levels 1 and 2 [1 excellent, 2 not bad] , contrary to popular belief there is a high degree of satisfaction with the lifestyle options available in small rural towns. In terms of applying potential stocks of social capital this situation is most encouraging.

5.3.5 Community Spirit

Assessing community spirit of the residents is integral to measuring social sustainability. The questions relating to this variable were – *How would you describe the way of life in this region?* and, *What kind of community activities are you engaged in?*

In assessing the response to their ‘Way of Life’ answers were grouped into two categories depending on whether they stressed *Lifestyle Factors* or *Community/Family Factors* in describing their Way of Life [Table 4]

Table 4 : Description and Scores [%] on the Way of Life by Respondents [N=119]

	Cloncurry	Richmond	Hughenden	
Community/Family Factors	15.9%	47.5%	28.6 %	
Lifestyle Factors	84.1%	52.5%	71.4%	

A majority of respondents used Lifestyle Factors to describe their ‘Way of Life’ in the outback. They appreciated the relaxed, laid back, satisfying, enjoyable, less stressful, peaceful, isolated, easy going, free to do what you wanted to do lifestyle of these small towns. Cloncurry and Hughenden stressed the Lifestyle as the most satisfying factor in their way of life in the region, while Richmond had equal emphasis on both the community/family factors.

With regard to Family and Community orientation particular reference was made to the safety and security of bringing up children in the community, and the fact that everyone knew each other and helped each other.

Some specific comments by respondents were –

“Great lifestyle. We can sit out on our patio and enjoy the quietness. There are no cars racing by.”

“We can do things at our own pace. It is much less stressful than city life.”

Voluntary participation and initiative to set up community activities is a major component of social capital. Community participation ranged from rodeos, race meetings, charity work, sporting events, school activities, fund raising, voluntary work in the SES to ambulance service. A third of those interviewed had leadership roles within the community and contributed to decision making. Others were content to contribute their services, when required. Seven respondents stated they had little time now for active community participation, but they attended community events.

Recent community events like the Matron's Ball or the Dinosaur Festival in Hughenden, the Outback Celebrations in Cloncurry and 'The Pig & Dog Hunt' in Richmond are examples where the community has pooled their resources to support these events and build strong communities. These events attract not only people from the region but tourists as well, and thereby contribute to the local economy.

5.4 ISSUES IN SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

A number of social issues have been identified in this research as vital to community wellbeing or social sustainability in the towns of Cloncurry, Richmond and Hughenden. Three of these issues – Youth, Family and Business Interaction are discussed here.

5.4.1 Youth

Processes associated with globalisation are largely responsible for the migration of people from rural to urban areas. Unfortunately those who migrate are usually the more promising and better educated youth aged 15-24 years.

Education has become a major catalyst in the out-migration of youth. Government subsidies to boarding schools are available from year 8 onwards to those regions where secondary school facilities are minimal or lacking. Originally to receive this subsidy there was a qualifying resident mileage. Today it is available to all and includes higher subsidies for low income earners thus encouraging students to attend boarding schools elsewhere. This has exacerbated the out-migration from these towns.

Cloncurry on the other hand does not receive this subsidy [unavailable to P12⁴ Schools] and has managed to retain a substantial proportion of their youth.

Investigations revealed that the choice of subjects in rural schools was more limited than in larger towns. With either the non availability of subjects like Maths C, Physics, Chemistry and Biology, or having to access these subjects via distance education has prompted some students to go elsewhere. The survey revealed that Education is of high priority to most resident families and the limitation in subject choices in rural schools is the major factor why they leave these towns.

It was also not uncommon for students to have their secondary education elsewhere and then return to their outback towns, as was the case with some young adults interviewed. They stated the outback life style prompted their return. But these would be in the minority. Absence of tertiary institutions – universities and technical colleges - means further out-migration among the 17 to 24 year olds

According to the Principal of Cloncurry SHS, Cloncurry's transient population has meant large fluctuations from year to year in class sizes, but the overall enrolment numbers have remained stable over the past five years. Even though new concepts like Virtual Schooling have been introduced to rural schools to overcome limitations in subject choice and staff availability, it is more a fad than a guaranteed learning technique. Students are on trial on this system in Cloncurry and Hughenden.

Cloncurry appears to be maintaining its enrolment numbers and is one of the few districts where schools have not closed down [some schools in Richmond, Hughenden and Julia Creek have closed down]. If the success in Cloncurry is a direct result of not receiving the government subsidy then administrators must look at the option of whether rebuilding and improving school education within small towns is a better option than offering government subsidies.

⁴ Classes run from pre school to Year 12.

5.4.2 *Family*

The large percentage of divorced and separated persons in the inland mining towns in particular could be a major barrier to social sustainability if left unaddressed. Long working hours and sometimes temporary separation of partners owing to work, has taken its toll in marriage relationships. The high male ratio in these towns is partly a consequence of many wives living and educating their children in the cities. Majority of these long term distance relationships have fallen apart.

It was noted that a few marriages had dissolved among the pastoral population as well where women had left their husbands and returned to their parental home. The survey also revealed that with marriage, females of pastoral families moved out of the region with their husbands, and thus contributed further to the imbalance in the sex ratio and the out migration of youth.

5.4.3 *Local Businesses*

One of the major concerns of the business community of Cloncurry was the inadequate participation of the fly in fly out populations within **mining communities**. Their interaction with the mainstream community was perceived as being minimal. This could work against community strengthening. However those businesses that made an effort, such as a young entrepreneur in the town who has become a major supplier of food and electrical equipment to the neighbouring mines responded in an interview that his business dealings with the mines were excellent. He further stated that it was the mines that prompted him to become a successful entrepreneur. A few other businesses – coffee shops, motels, saddlery, hardware stores - stated that they had the occasional visits from the mining population. It was evident overall that although the mining community may contribute towards the perceived “high income” weekly earnings of the region referred to in section 4.4, there was very little benefit to the community *per se* of those high earnings.

Particularly in the context of small towns, local businesses need to be supported by the residents for economic survival. While the majority of businesses relied on the local clientele and neighbouring LGAs, a few like *Just Jills* in Cloncurry, a clothing and gift shop, had a Queensland-wide clientele. The potential therefore exists for rural business to attract a wider market if structured accordingly.

Thus performance in education, maintaining family connections and supporting local businesses are important aspects of social sustainability and should be monitored closely for rural sustainability.

6 HOW CAN SMALL TOWNS MAKE *THAT* DIFFERENCE?

The need to build strong communities for rural sustainability hinges on the need to understand community strengths from a purely economic point of view to one which encompasses “the social” viewpoint. This approach incorporates the building of social capital and other resources into rural communities. The key elements of social capital are:

- Community Spirit
- Leadership
- Partnerships
- Volunteers
- Skills & Knowledge

Based on the research in this paper, some of the major sustainable issues that need to be addressed are - diversifying the economy, sustaining population growth, improving infrastructure, focussing on the future and building social capital. The application of some of these variables and their success in several small towns in Australia and are discussed in section 6.6.

6.1 DIVERSIFY ECONOMY

6.1.1 *Retain Economic Momentum*

The long term decline in the profitability of rural agriculture on which rural small towns relied, must now be restructured to retain **economic momentum**. This can be achieved through-

- Diversification of output to non-farm income to off set the adversities of globalisation.
- Subsidies and Tax concessions to retain the existing primary producers and attract new investors.
- Attracting other investment opportunities - tourism, land management, farming of native species and the application of innovative technologies.
- Mining towns with limited life spans to re-examine their futures and find alternative means of adjustment prior to closures.

The goal should be to slow down the rural drift and maintain momentum for growth within the town and this can be achieved with improved employment prospects via diversification.

6.1.2 Utilise Tourist Potential

Tourism is a viable proposition for small towns with unique features such as the “Dinosaur Triangle” of Richmond -Winton –Hughenden, or old timber pubs and Aussie icons in Kynuna for example. Kynuna with its historic Waltzing Matilda heritage and the Blue Heeler Pub have made its mark as a tourist destination with a small local population of just 22. Other pubs like the *Walk-About* at McKinlay gained popularity with the filming of *Crocodile Dundee*.

Unlike the indisputable advantages of large cities in economies of service delivery and other economic rationalisms, despite the very small populations in the rural towns they have made a difference to the people and economy of our country through their individuality, heritage identity, community efforts and spirit of survival.

6.1.3 Lobby for Government Assistance

It is the responsibility of governments to protect rural communities against the effects of globalisation. Partnerships developed among key players such as Federal and State authorities, universities and private enterprise in US, to work with rural communities have succeeded [<http://www//abc.net.au/landline/>]. Partnerships should also accompany strong leadership in rural communities, to seek alternative solutions such

as diversification and attracting foreign investment to locally based industry. For example, the case of Taiwanese investment in the sandalwood industry of Richmond is a successful partnership between local government, foreign entrepreneurs and local business.

Rural communities not producing sufficient income should be subsidised by the government until such time they are self-reliant again. Cross-subsidies by the government should be provided in small towns to improve health, education, transport, telecommunications and other services. Smaller the population greater the need for cross- subsidies. The cut back on services has impinged on a range of job opportunities essential to the maintenance of rural communities.

6.2 SUSTAIN POPULATION GROWTH

Population growth is a function of fertility, mortality and migration. Out migration is the biggest issue contributing to negative population growth in small towns as evidenced in Richmond and Hughenden. In contrast, Cloncurry has sustained positive growth from the influx of mining communities to the region.

Out-migration of youth in the age cohorts of 15-24 is a major feature of this region. Therefore there is the need to retain the youth by introducing more youth friendly features such as youth oriented recreation, new technology and better educational facilities. Croydon in the Gulf country have used water recreation as an attraction to retain the youth in their community. It has been said of Croydon , *“The magic of water has worked its charm and in a town where the weekend social activities used to revolve around drinking and pig catching, people now have ski boats and fishing tinnies”* [Andersen, 2002].

Population decline takes place when mining leases terminate. Therefore efforts should be made to retain some of this population after the mines close down. Cloncurry’s Ernest Henry Mine’s [EHM] policy dictates that approximately 50 per cent of their workers should settle in the town in an effort to contribute towards the region. The known fact that EHM has a life span of another eight years only means efforts should

be made from now on to retain those families in Cloncurry by diversifying the economy and making use of their specific skills.

The higher fertility rates in rural towns is a positive feature and should be maintained to balance the below replacement national fertility rate of 1.7⁵. Small towns will always lose a few people through out migration, but efforts must be made to retain more youth and attract young families. Key responses [in survey] for living in outback towns – the laid back leisurely life style, safe environment for bringing up children and the abundance of outdoor activities – makes the outback more suited to increasing natural fertility in Australia, than the urban areas. This is a feature exclusive to small towns and in this instance, ‘size’ [being small] does matter.

Life expectancy has increased in rural areas as in the rest of Australia and mortality is not a major factor affecting natural increase [difference between births and deaths] except in those towns where the indigenous population is high. Therefore in most inland towns, the natural increase is positive but population growth rates [function of natural increase and net migration] are negative because of the substantial out migration.

In the short- term large increases in the population of small towns is not viable and should not be a priority. In terms of short-term sustainability it would be more beneficial for small towns to maintain a stable population first and then sustain a growth rate of no more than 0.6 per cent per annum, a viable option to many. Small towns in rural areas should remain ‘small towns’ and not risk losing their Aussie identity and outback character by increasing their population at the same rate as cities.

6.3 IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Equity is a major policy issue in isolated regions. Basic access to education, health care and communication services are necessary to deliver social equity. The Australian human rights and equal opportunity commission argue that irrespective of spatial location all Australians have an equal entitlement to human rights [AHREOC 1996]. The processes of restructuring internationally and locally have affected rural

⁵ the replacement level fertility is 2.1 children per woman.

communities particularly in the delivery of services. Infrastructure delivery requires partnerships between the layers of government and private institutions as evident in the delivery of banking services, telecommunication, postal services, utilities, education, health, public transport etc. Partnerships should also be developed where possible with mining companies that locate in the region to contribute towards the town's infrastructure and economy. The case of Adel's Grove near Lawn Hill in the North West statistical division is an example. A group of Mt Isa businessmen are targeting tourists by using local attractions of Lorn Hill Gorge National Park, World Heritage Riversleigh Fossil Plateau and the Pasma zinc mines [Townsville Bulletin, 2002a] to develop local natural resources to the advantage of the community.

The State of the Environment Report as early as 1996, categorically stated that it is important not to neglect small towns for environmental as well as social and economic reasons. It says 'Maintaining and expanding regional infrastructure and services is an essential part of reversing further rural decline'. The government needs to use the sustainable infrastructure plans suggested in these Reports to guide rural area economic development.

6.3.1 Transport and Communication

A major drawback of rural towns is that of **poor transport** and made worse by the withdrawal of major airline services to the outback. Recent attempts by Macair to replace some of these services have not been completely successful owing to poor advertising, limited schedules and cost factor.

Many residents in the towns surveyed, felt the need for better road connections to the more populated areas, and particularly the Reef, to diversify their economies and open up the region. Forsayth [population 90] a small outback town, had a resurgence from a downturn in the cattle industry because of the introduction of a weekly goods train service from the Reef to the Gulf [*personal communication* 1, 2002]. The survey also revealed that most of the residents commuted between the towns and the main cities of Mt Isa, Townsville and Brisbane was by road.

6.3.2 *Health*

The outback health facilities in small towns are confined to ‘Health Centres’ [no ‘Hospitals’] where a single doctor in each town is expected to service a population of approximately four thousand people in Cloncurry, and lesser numbers in Richmond and Hughenden.

The overall level of satisfaction with health services depended on the quality of service received from the local doctor. Eg. Richmond, very pleased with local doctor. Unfortunately owing to medical indemnity issues pregnant women from Hughenden must go to Townsville to deliver their babies at great expense. The Flying Doctor Service was described as “excellent service” and the non-resident allied health professionals service these remote towns on a periodic basis.

6.4 FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

Rural Towns need to project in the future. Service provision can be enhanced with improvements in Online Facilities and application of information technology and satellite communication.

- MITEZ [Mount Isa Townsville Economic Zone] made up of 9 LGAs, is developing a set of pilot projects in selected communities to demonstrate the power of new information technologies and the potential of creative industries as regional development activities. Eg. Mt Isa paper making business initiative among Mt Isa women. [The Courier Mail 2002].
- Local Govt Association Queensland [LGAQ] is assisting local councils to develop information & services through the internet, IT on line marketing, e-commerce & on-line education. [CW Networking the Nation’s Program]
- These online connections will facilitate better service delivery in rural and remote communities and improve their connectivity through networking, partnerships, leadership roles and building social capital.
- Problem with small rural towns is not that of a small population but that of spatial isolation and economic downturn but this can be addressed via information technology. “Connecting the Outback” should be the motto.

6.5 BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital is the networks, norms [or values] and trust present in a community that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit [Putnam, 1993]. Moreover, strong social capital is associated with tolerance of diversity, networking and good leadership. Katz [2000] refers to social capital as the ‘glue’ that holds societies together, and natural resource management.

According to Cox [1995] social capital consists of –

- Trust – acceptance of differences and mutual respect
- Cooperation – willingness to be involved in shared enterprises on a give and take basis.
- Time – having the capacity to engage with others
- Voluntarism – being able to and willing to participate by own volition.
- Community – the sense of being part of an immediate society in which people live and work.
- Democracy – Social and political structures at all levels are based on citizen involvement that incorporates all of the above.

Social capital therefore provides the basis for a general sense of wellbeing and promotes integration.

6.5.1 Strong Leadership

Strong leadership is essential to gather and direct the energies of a community and provide future directions. Small town communities struggling to get their message across needs leadership and must be guided in its restructuring and reinventing strategies. Leadership could be provided by the Shire Council as illustrated in the townships of Mitchell and Surat in Queensland. In Mitchell [population 1200], strong Council leadership has led to a tourism and youth focus. Surat [population 500] once abandoned as a ‘dead’ town has revived through a focus on economic development [*The Courier Mail*, 2002 b].

6.5.2 *Vision for the Future*

Communities must consciously select a strategic vision for their future and this relies largely on the prevailing leadership. The path to be followed is ‘Where do we want to go and when do we get there?’ Boonah [population 2700] had a comprehensive action plan and a vision, which guided the town into a diversification strategy for the future. It has achieved national recognition for its community led rural economic revival [Kenyon & Black, 2001:34].

6.5.3 *Community Networks & Civic Pride*

Increasing community participation and civic pride of the people is based on cooperation, voluntarism and trust. Despite the off the beaten track location on 26km of dirt road, the township of Kajabbi with 45 people, has maintained a stable population over the past five years owing to community networking. It has established a Community Association that now supports SES activities and a distance education unit at the Kajabbi Community School. The local pub remains the focal point in the township and catalyst for community activities [*personal communication 2, 2002*].

6.6 SUCCESS STORIES

As illustrated below, population decline is not related to size or location. Following are a list of small towns in Australia that have achieved community and economic renewal irrespective of size and location [Kenyon & Black, 2001]

Contrary to popular opinion that supporting the sustenance of small towns is costly, politically fated and their long term survival is doomed [O’Connor et al 2001; McKenzie 1996; Sorensen, 1992], this research has shown that there is a more positive outlook to small town survival. It is possible that some towns with declining resources and poor social capital may have to close down in the future. But for a majority of these towns, a declining population trend cannot be identified as a

TABLE 5 : Examples of Small Town Revival

Rural Town	Township Population	Community Renewal built on ...
• Boonah [Qld]	2 700	Comprehensive action plan; co-ordination; diversification .
• Deloraine [Tas]	2 100	Historic township; spirit of enterprise ; youth events;
• Donald [Vic]	1 800	“Never say Die” attitude; initiative, positive attitude and united community spirit.
• Mitchell [Qld]	1 200	Council leadership ; tourism focus; youth focus.
• Tumby Bay [SA]	1 100	Vision for the future ; catalyst of negative story; attitude; focus on telecommunication
• Burra [SA]	980	Local action and creativity ; home of the Burra Charter [heritage conservation]
• Coolah [NSW]	880	Set of community projects that have built community pride , confidence and positive economic outcomes.
• Balingup [WA]	525	Natural beauty; alternative lifestyle for city dwellers; social capital
• Gulargambone [NSW]	500	The Rural Transaction Centre & spirit of community ownership; passionate leadership.
• Oatlands [Tas]	500	Youth oriented planning; Central Tasmanian Community College; partnership
• Hyden [WA]	400	Hyden Progress Assoc.; Focus on young ; support for local business.
• Kulin [WA]	300	Community initiative and participation: commitment to local business
• Harrow [Vic]	90	Economic necessity , the fun ingredient, outside technical assistance, importance of success.

Adapted from: Kenyon & Black 2001

signature to their death sentence. Cloncurry, Hughenden and Richmond are classic examples where there is an ongoing battle against major economic and environmental problems, yet these towns have shown initiative to keep their head above water and long term survival should not be an issue.

What we need is balanced growth between the rural and urban areas. We need to consider the demographics of sustaining our fertility at replacement level and balancing the ageing equation of high aged dependency. Therefore, we desperately need to maintain our rural townships since we cannot afford to overcrowd our congested cities.

7 HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSION

Approach to The Issue

- The traditional emphasis on economics alone as the basis of rural sustainability has been challenged in this research. Measuring future sustainability of small towns must be inclusive of social issues. The momentum of the people to live in difficult areas is the clue to small town sustainability.
- Rural communities must not be assessed by published statistics alone. Community attitudes need to be considered as well.
- Local Shire Councils should have a major participatory role in decision making and allow the People a greater involvement in decision making processes.
- The need to build “*strong communities*” for rural sustainability hinges on the need to understand community strengths from a purely economic point of view to one which encompasses “the social” viewpoint.
- Foster partnerships between levels of government, business and the community.
- Work towards changing the existing trend of SEA CHANGE to that of ‘OUTBACK CHANGE’.

Demographics

- High fertility in rural areas should be encouraged and retained to supplement the declining National fertility levels and counteract ageing.

- In the short- term large increases in the population of small towns is not viable and should not be a priority. In terms of short-term sustainability it would be more beneficial for small towns to maintain a stable population first and then sustain a growth rate of no more than 0.6 per cent per annum, a viable option to many towns and acceptable to ecological sustainability.
- Size Does Matter. Small towns in rural areas should remain ‘small towns’ without increasing their population at the same rate as cities. They are safe and ideal locations to bring up young children in a hassle free social and natural environment.
- We need to retain our rural towns for aesthetic values – preventing the development of ‘concrete jungles’ in urban areas.
- Based on the significant decline in the 15-24 age cohort in small towns, policy makers and critics of small towns have concluded that there is a major rural drift. What has been ignored is the stability in the trends of the balance population, the more mature age cohorts, which indicate population momentum in these Shires or the potential for growth.
- Caution required in interpreting published statistics, & effect of ‘mining village’ populations on demographic and economic output in rural towns.
- Advertise and Stop the rural drift by building on alternative lifestyles in the Bush.

Integrated Sustainability

- Strong vision and leadership are key factors in small town survival.
- Agribusiness should work in partnership with rural farmers to increase rural output, create jobs and direct the profit to the local area.
- The prospect of rebuilding and improving the standard of secondary schools education in small towns should be looked at as an option to offering government subsidies for the long term retention of secondary school students.
- Strategies must be developed to minimise out-migration particularly of youth by making local towns more oriented to youth requirements.
- Diversify the economy – utilise non-farm products, other crops, tourism, attract small industry.

- Manage existing infrastructure to foster social capital – address family disruptions in mining and farming communities.
- Encourage small towns to keep up with futuristic changes of the global economy and global connectivity via new technology.
- Problem with small rural towns is not that of a small population but that of spatial isolation & this can be resolved via information technology.
“Connecting the Outback” should be the motto.
- Inland Towns are part of our National Heritage and should be retained.
Australia’s national identity is distinctive to small towns and rural community values that evolved as part of the pioneering settlers and their descendant’s response to the harsh conditions of frontier life.
- The need to recognise the complexity of links among the social, economic and environmental issues implied in the concept of integrated sustainable development, particularly in managing rural small towns.

8 CONCLUSION

All Australians wherever they might live, should have the right to a decent living standard. They should not be unduly disadvantaged because they live in a rural area. Widening disparities in wealth have created an ‘abyss’ between the city and the bush.

The aim of this research was to demonstrate the value of the human component in small town sustainability. While economic productivity contributes substantially to the survival of a community, and ecological considerations are essential for maintaining healthy resources, nevertheless social sustainability is the linchpin that supports integrated sustainable development. The economic analysis of small rural towns assumes that economic growth remains the underlying development paradigm and that without this small towns are doomed.

Long-term demographic projections reveal that the population is declining in eight out of the ten Local Government Areas in the North-West Statistical Division. It must be noted however that these projections are based on fertility, mortality and migration

trends at the time of projection and there is the possibility that these predictions can be reversed if conditions change.

This research has shown that high levels of satisfaction and the strong sense of belonging to the region have assisted the strengthening of the communities of Cloncurry, Richmond and Hughenden. The large pool of social capital in these towns in terms of volunteer work, entrepreneurial initiative, co-operation, trust, citizenship involvement, willingness to give their time to the community have all contributed to their success as a strong community despite the rural drift. Evidence was also provided from other small towns to prove a turnaround from the predicted gloom and doom.

Small towns therefore, can make a difference despite their smaller populations given the right approach to natural and human capital resource management and right partnerships. The presence of social capital within a community has made that difference. As Peter Kenyon [2002] puts it – “you don’t build communities from top down, or the outside in, but from inside out?”.

REFERENCES

Andersen, John. 2002. Town dodges ugly image. *The Townsville Bulletin*, 17 August, p. 10.

Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS]. 2000. *Population Projections, Australia, 1999 to 2101*. Catalogue 3222.0. Canberra: ABS.

Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS]. 2001. *Australian Social Trends 2001*. Catalogue 4102.0. Canberra: ABS.

Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [AHREOC]. 1996. The Human Rights of Rural Australians. *Occasional Paper*, May 1996.
http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/

Barker, A.J. and Selman, P.H. 1990. 'Managing the rural environment: an emerging role for planning authorities'. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 1, 185-196.

Barker, Ross and Taylor, Alison. 2002. *Findings from the 2001 Census-North Queensland*. Planning Information and Forecasting Unit. Townsville. 9 September.

Baum, S., Stimson, R., O'Connor, K., Mullins, P. and Davis, R. 1999. *Community Opportunity and Vulnerability in Australia's Cities and Towns: Characteristics, Patterns and Implications*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press for AHURI.

Brunckhorst, D.J. 1998. Creating institutions to ensure sustainable use of resources. Guest Editorial. *Habitat International*. 22 [4], 347-354.

Clark, G., Bowler, I., Shaw, A., Crockett, A. and Ilbery, B. 1997. 'Institution, alternative Farming systems, and local regulation'. *Environment and Planning, A*. 29:731.

Ellis, F. 1998. Household strategies and rural livelihood diversification. *Journal of Development Studies*, 35 [1], 1-38.

Gray, I. and Lawrence, G. 1996. Predictors of stress among Australian farmers. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 31 [2], 173-89.

Gray, Ian and Lawrence, Geoffrey. 2001. *A Future for Regional Australia-Escaping Global Misfortune*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<http://www.abs.gov.au>. 1997. 1996 Census Basic Community Profile.

<http://www.abs.gov.au>. 2002. 2001 Census basic Community Profile and Snapshot.

<http://education.qld.gov>. 2002. Education Queensland. School Centre Profile.

<http://www.abc.net.au/landline>. 2002. US Small Towns fight back. Australia's National Rural Affairs weekly. ABC TV.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/Websitedbs/c312>.... 2002. Regional Statistics Queensland Data-Qld 2000 SD

<http://www.abs.gov.au/Websitedbs/c312>.... 2002. Regional Statistics Queensland Data-Qld 2000 SLA

<http://health.qld.gov>. 2002. Queensland Health. Health Service District Facility Profile.

Katz, E.G. 2000. Social capital and natural capital: a comparative analysis of land tenure and natural resource management in Guatemala. *Land Economics*, 76 [1], 114-132.

Kenyon, Peter and Black, Allan [eds]. 2001. Small Town Renewal. RIRDC Publication No 01/043. Canberra:Union Offset.

Lawrence, G., Lyons, K. and Momtaz, S. [eds]. 1996. *Social Change in Rural Australia*. Rural, Social and Economic Research Centre. Rockhampton: Central Queensland University.

McKenzie, Fiona, 1996. Policy Implications of Population Decline, in P.W. Newton and M. Bell, M. [eds], *Population Shift- Mobility and Change in Australia*. Canberra: AGPS.

Morris, J. and Bailey, A. 2001. Managing the Environment for Sustainable Development: Rural Environmental Management and Planning, in Morris, J., Bailey, A., Turner, R.K., Bateman, I.J. 2001. *Rural Planning and Management*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.

Morris, J., Mills, J. and Crawford, I.M. 2000. Promoting farmer uptake of agri-environmental schemes: the arable options of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. *Land Use Policy*, 17, 241-254

Newton, P.W. and Bell, M. [eds]. 1996. *Population Shift-Mobility and change in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Nutley, S.D. 1996. Rural transport problems and non-car populations in the USA. *Journal of Transport Geography*, 4 [2], 93-106.

O'Connor, K., Stimson, R. and Daly, M. 2001. *Australia's Changing Economic Geography: A Society Dividing*. Melbourne: OUP.

Pepperdine, Sharon, 2000. *Social indicators of rural community sustainability: an example from Woody Yaloak Catchment*. Future of Australia Country Towns National Conference. Bendigo.

Personal Communication 1. 2002. Forsayth & Einasleigh Mayor John Smith, and community members.

Personal Communication 2. 2002. Publican Trevor Long, Kalkadoon Hotel, Kajabbi

Pritchard, Bill and McManus, Phil. [ed] 2000. *Land of Discontent-The dynamics of change in rural and regional Australia*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd.

Putnam, R. 1993. *Making democracy work : Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Shucksmith, M., Chapman, P., Clarke, G. and Black, S. 1994. Social Welfare in Rural Europe. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 10 [4], 343-356.

Sorenson, A.D. 1992. The Australian country town: present trends and future prospects. *Australian and New Zealand Regional Science Association Annual Conference*, Ballarat, 7 December.

Stehlik, D., Gray, I. and Lawrence, G. 1998. *Australian Farm Families' Experience of Drought in the 1990s: A Sociological Investigation*. Canberra: Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

Stone, W. and Hughes, J. 2002. Understanding Community Strengths. *Family Matters*, Autumn. pp 62-68.

Stimson, Robert, 2002. Address on rural small town viability. *Richmond Forum*. May 9. Richmond, Queensland.

The Australian. 2002 a. Coast fears set in concrete. Adrian McGregor. 5 September, p. 5.

The Weekend Australian. 2002b. Paradise lost to urban sprawl. Andrew Fraser. 14-15 September, p.2

The Courier Mail, 2002 a. Income Barometer. Catriona Mathewson. 18 June, p.4.

The Courier Mail, 2002 b. Tiny Town Survives ... and Thrives. Bruce McMahon. 22 June, p.12.

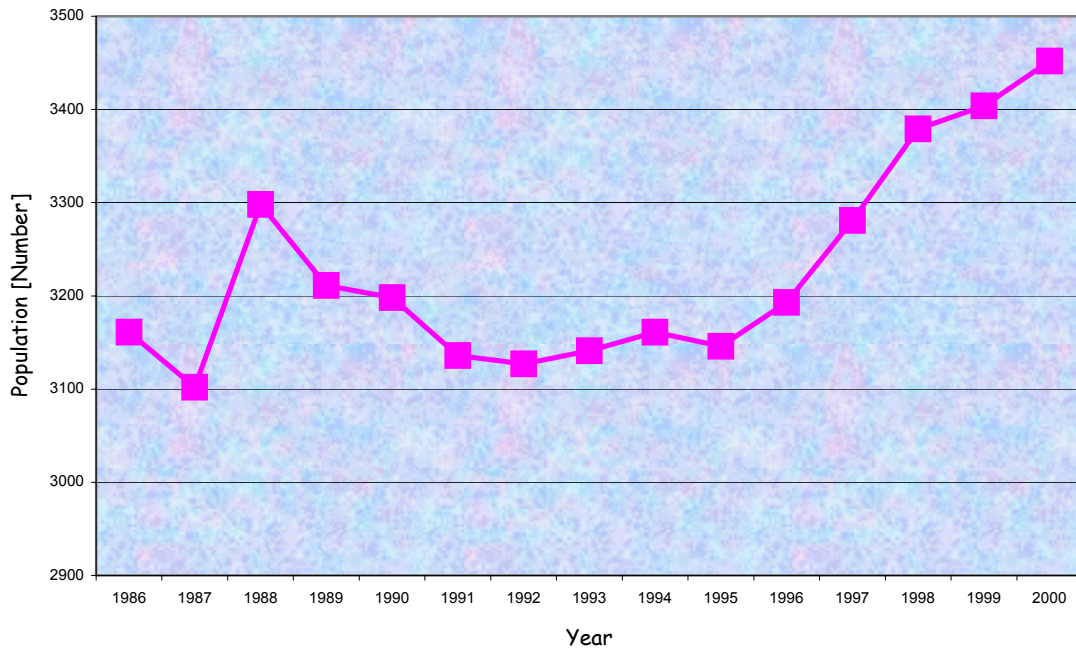
The Courier Mail, 2002 c. Federal funding to assist online services. 27 august, p.14.

The Townsville Bulletin, 2002a. Stunning spot is all mine. John Andersen. 31 August, p.10.

The Townsville Bulletin, 2002b. Great Divide. Olivia Katter and AAP. 26 August, p.1

World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987. *Our Common Future*, WCED, Oxford: Oxford University Press

**FIG 1 : CLONCURRY: POPULATION GROWTH
1986 - 2000**



**FIG 2: CLONCURRY SHIRE - POPULATION
DISTRIBUTION AGE BY SEX, 2001**

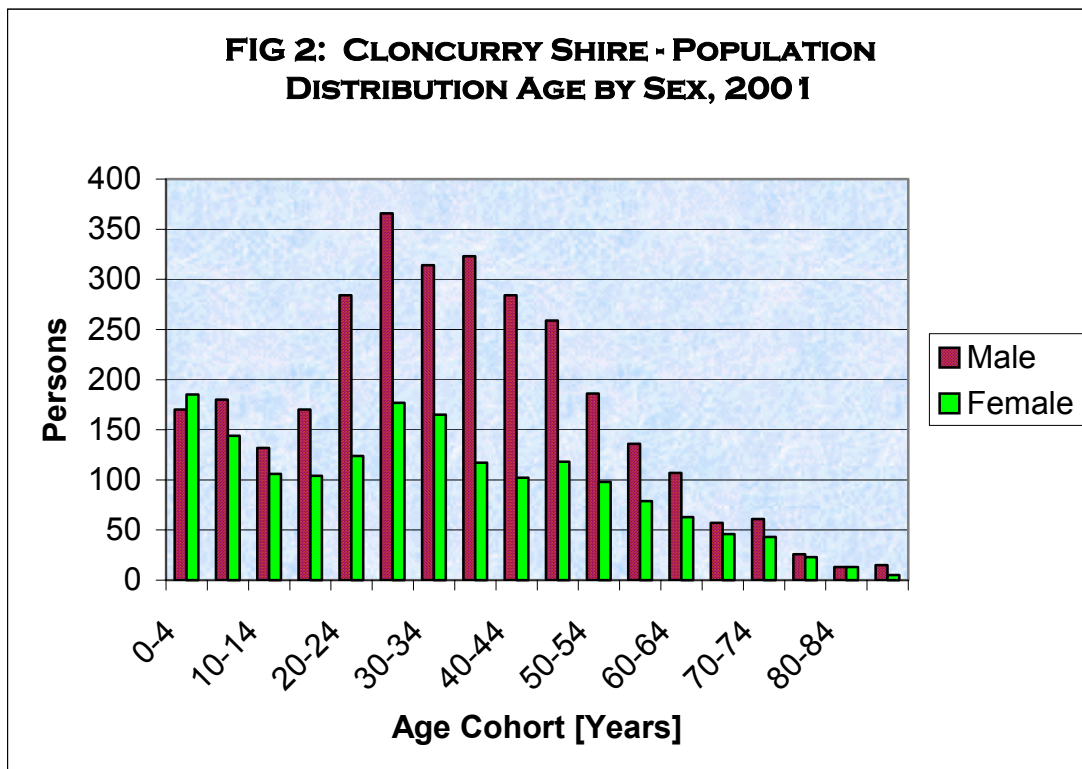


FIG 3: RICHMOND SHIRE: POPULATION GROWTH 1986 - 2000

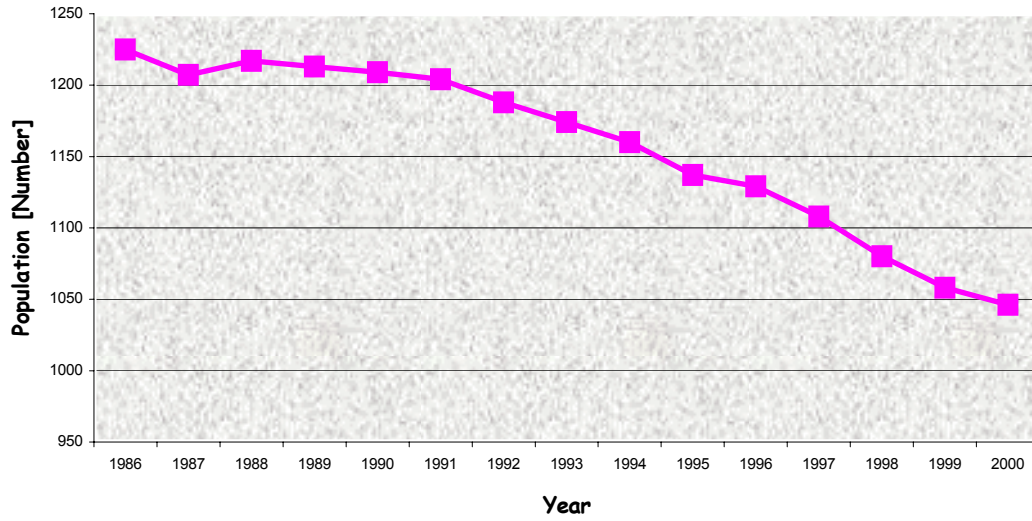


FIG 4: FLINDERS SHIRE POPULATION GROWTH 1986 - 2000

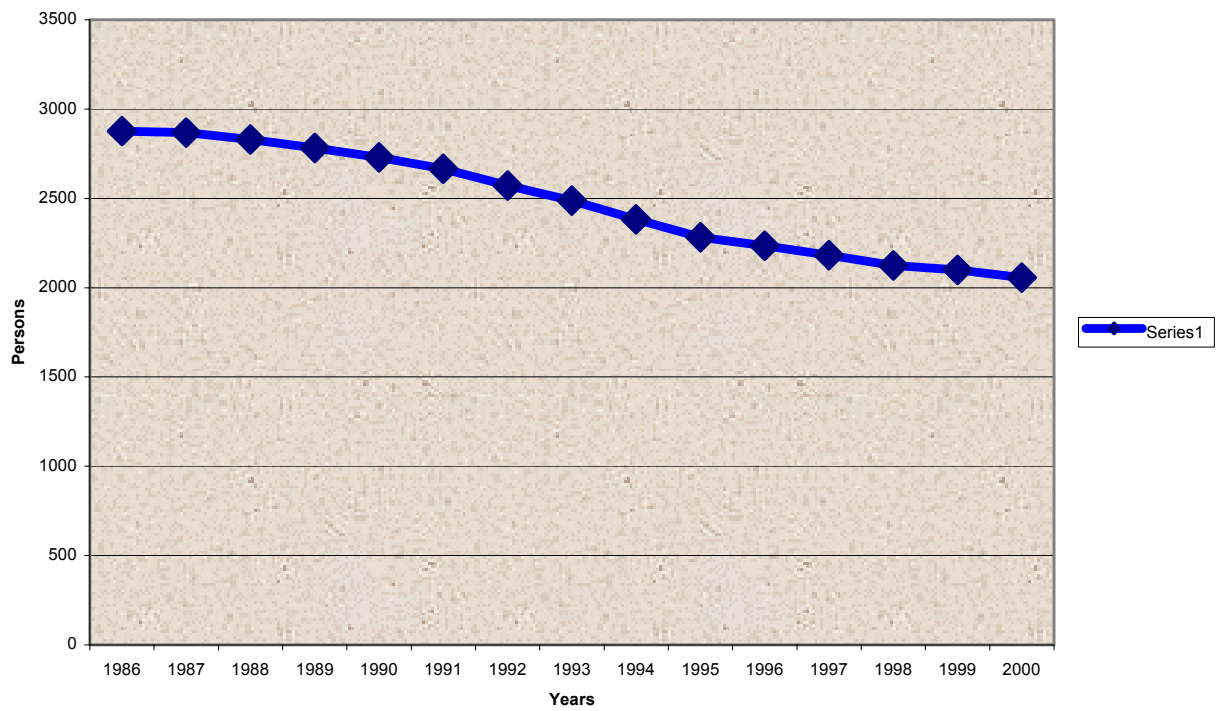


Fig 5a: Cloncurry Shire - Distribution of Population by Age Cohorts, 1986 -2001

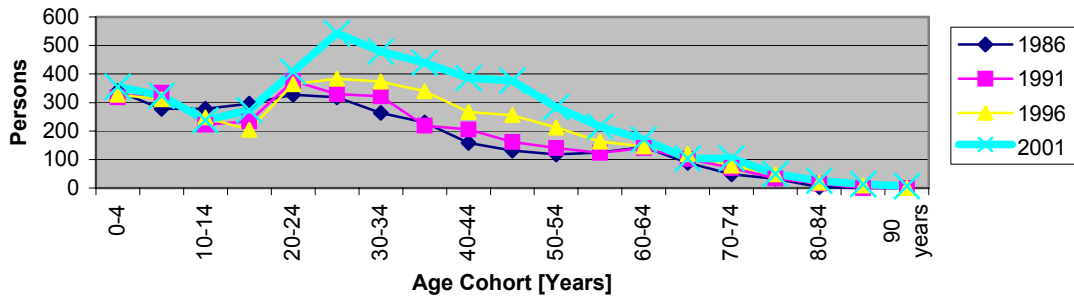


Fig 5b: Richmond Shire - Distribution of Population by Age Cohorts, 1986 - 2001

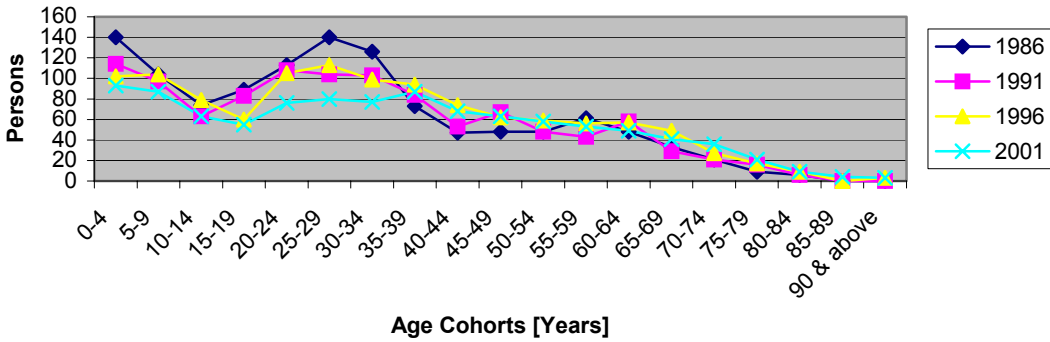


Fig 5c: Flinders Shire - Distribution of Population by Age Cohorts, 1986-2001

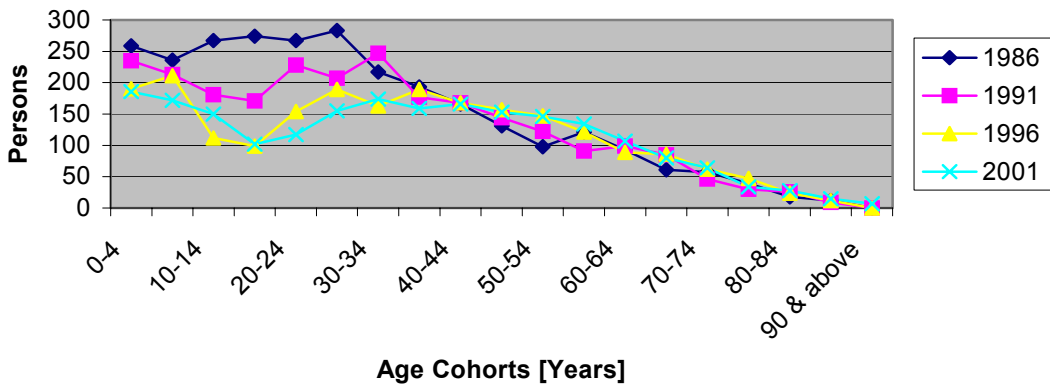


FIG 6 : CLONCURRY - DIVORCED PERSONS, 1986 -2001

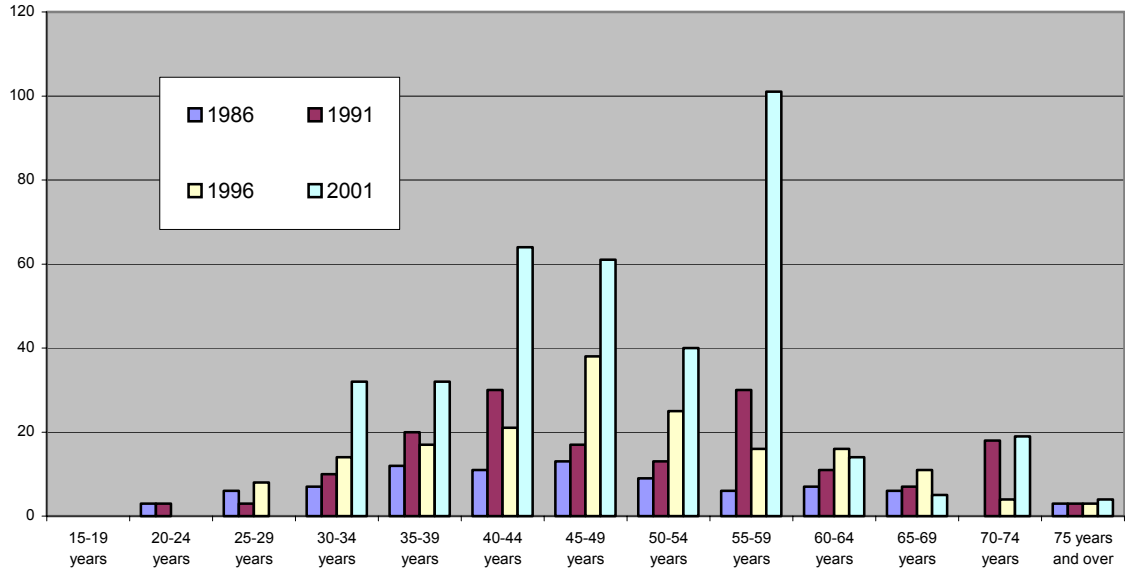


FIG 7: LEVELS OF SATISFACTION OF RESIDENTS [FIELD SURVEY 2002]

