

**National Coastal Urbanisation Symposium**  
**29 March 2004**  
**Robina Community Centre**  
(Sponsored by Gold Coast City Council/Griffith University)

Attendance: approximately 250 people, with a broad cross section from local and state governments throughout Australia, and including Commonwealth agencies, consultancies and interested individuals.

9 speakers around 45 minutes per presentation.

**Professor Brendan Gleeson** briefly spoke about the need to understand the complex social, economic and environmental impacts of the so called 'sea change'. He said this exploration was the purpose of the Symposium.

Dean and Professor of Planning and Urban Development, University of New South Wales, **Peter Murphy** gave an historical overview of the drivers of coastal urbanisation in Australia. He nominated the affluence of urban dwellers during the 'long boom' and the rise of domestic tourism as key historical drivers. For Peter, the current 'sea change' is consistent with past trends 'similar population processes operate today'. That is, the affluent urban dweller moving into their holiday home.

Though, he said a current pattern that deviates from the past is the move of the urban poor to non-metropolitan areas (coastal and peri-urban areas gaining as poorer people leaving Sydney).

Peter posed the question 'what will the baby boomers do?' Will they sell their metropolitan homes for cheaper coastal dwellings? Peter said the peri-urban areas were growing faster than the coastal areas of Australia.

Professor of Human Geography, University of New South Wales, **Ian Burnley** spoke specifically about the New South Wales experience of coastal urbanisation. He agreed with Peter Murphy that there was no greater coastal growth than in the past.

He said the coastal areas were losing young people (school leavers and early 20s) to urban areas and gaining middle aged people. He presented the results of a survey of 1200 coastal dwellers (central coast NSW) and found that:

- more than 80% moved when they were under 65 (still working age)
- 40% were from Sydney
- 25% were from inland NSW
- Development on the coast is urban in nature, not rural
- For the coastal movers, amenity was synonymous with privacy, not necessarily natural environment
- Many dissatisfied with town planning
- Few very satisfied with health services

Ian then referred to research of peri-urban movers (Blue Mountain etc) that found:

- Amenity was a more important motivator for those moving to peri-urban areas (such as Blue Mountains), than it was to coastal movers
- Most opposed to manufacturing industry development in peri-urban areas.

Ian referred to a study of Centrelink clients which found that, of those leaving Sydney for non-metropolitan and coastal areas, there is a ratio of 5 (non-metro): 4 (coastal).

He said that between 1980 and 1990, there was a higher rate of growth of single parent than conventional families on the coastal area of NSW. In the 1970s and 1980s, out migration from Sydney and Melbourne coincided with economic growth and this is not the case with current out migration (1990s, 2000) from these centres. Coastal growth is locationally specific in Australia (not all coastal areas growing strongly)- the Sunshine and Gold Coasts with projected estimated resident population growth of 4.2% and 3.7% respectively in 2002/2003 outstripped Sydney 0.8% and Brisbane 2.5%.

The population multiplier effects of coastal urbanisation in the 1970s (service workers moving to the new residential areas of the coast) may not be repeated in current times, as improvements in transport and other infrastructure and services and local suburbanisation are all part of the push to a more accessible Coast.

Professor of Geography, University of Adelaide, **Graeme Hugo** gave a national overview of population movements. He advocated a classification system beyond urban/rural to better reflect the complex current patterns of settlement in Australia.

Graeme prefers use of the following typology:

- Metro
- Regional city
- Populated coastal
- Populated inland
- Remote

Though, he also made reference to:

- High accessible
- Accessible
- Moderate accessible
- Remote
- Very remote

as worthy settlement classifications.

He said 81% of Australians live within 50km of the coastline. We have a stable settlement pattern, with some movement between settled areas. He said that ethnic sub-groups were differentially distributed and Indigenous Australians most broadly distributed across Australia. The populated coastal areas were the least ethnically diverse and new migrants tend to settle in the Capital cities (with no dispersal after 5 years). Graeme was most interested in the movement patterns of new migrants.

According to ABARE, it is regional cities that are the fastest growing areas in Australia. From 1996-2001:

- the coastal areas show loss of young people
- coastal areas gain 30-40 year olds and some 65+ and 75+
- biggest increase in regional cities is 65+ and 75+

Australia's Coastal areas have:

- high numbers of low income households
- high unemployment of 45+
- Low levels of university qualified residents
- Low levels of recent migrants

Graeme highlighted concerns with the ALP policy of settling 40% of new migrants in regional areas, given from 2001-2003, 90% settles in capital cities. He supported a bonus and reward system for skilled migrants to support their settlement in regional areas.

**Ross Barker** is a demographer and Manager of the Dept of Local Government and Planning's, Planning Information and Forecasting Unit (PIFU). Ross confirmed the statistics of earlier speakers regarding movement to the coast in Queensland.

He said:

- The Gold Coast gained population from all other areas of the State
- Movers to the Gold Coast were 30-40 and their children, retirees not a significant feature
- Sunshine Coast is losing young adults and gaining middle age to retirement age population
- There was a 50% increase in residential land approvals in the year 2002-2003. Is this land speculation by developers?

**Alison Taylor** is the Senior Demographer with the PIFU. Alison explored the drift of young people from the Sunshine Coast in some detail. She found that:

- education levels were lower for young people (19-24 and particularly young men) on the Sunshine Coast with
- lower enrolments in Uni,
- more unemployed (31% compared to 20% for Qld)and
- less having completed year 11.

The Gold Coast is the opposite to the Sunshine Coast and all other coastal areas of Qld- it gains young people (19-24) from all areas of Qld and interstate. The Gold Coast City council area has between 1991-2001:

- increased part-time employment,
- increased retail sector employment,
- higher single parent and lone person households than Qld and Australia).

Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Melbourne, **Kevin O'Connor** presented on coastal economic development. He described the coast as a product of the metropolitan areas and in particular the wealth generated in the urban area as commuters, second home buyers, retirees and holiday makers move to the Coast. For Kevin, this metropolitan dependence limits the potential of coastal economic growth. There are retail and service sector (banking etc) leakages from the coast to the urban areas where head offices are located. Tourism is not a good business colleague for agriculture or mining or many other productive industries as it is fussy about its neighbours impacts, but tourism it also drives land prices up. Medical and educational industries may be able to neighbour tourism in coastal areas. Kevin called for a new (regional) management framework for the coastal areas.

Emeritus Professor **Patrick Troy AO** spoke about coastal urbanisation and path dependency. He talked about sea changers and how beachfront development has been in the natural erosion zone in a very piecemeal manner, and how in these communities there is tension between the old settlers and the new comers. He also talked about the pollution of estuaries seaside development causes and outlined the developments in water infrastructure and their impact on the environment and development (people started with providing their own water- tanks, then water was piped and septic tanks were installed, then a bigger treatment system was needed and more development was possible, this is an ongoing phenomenon). He said this infrastructure development is often at the expense of the upper ecosystem as that is where the water is taken from. He said we are on an unsustainable path and this has created a 'path dependency' that is very difficult to alter and we need to plan for what we want, not what is easiest and conventional.

The final speaker, Executive Director of the Brisbane Institute **Peter Spearritt** spoke of the lure of the coast. He showed images of the Gold Coast throughout the years and how it took the 'prime holiday' destination label from Sydney and Bells Beach. He also talked about how the Gateway Motorway took tourists from Brisbane airport straight to the Gold Coast without entering Brisbane at all. Peter said Brisbane, as a result has 'an identity problem'. He also highlighted the traffic problems on the Gold Coast due to the scale of car dependent development.