

The University of New South Wales
Sydney . Australia



THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY TOWNS: A NEW EQUILIBRIUM?

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FACULTY OF THE
BUILT ENVIRONMENT

THE STORY TO DATE

- **INLAND DECLINE AND SLOW GROWTH**
- **COASTAL AND PERI-METROPOLITAN GROWTH**

RECENT MACRO-TRENDS: 1996-2001

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GROWTH

- Few areas outside of the coastal and metropolitan regions had high population growth – mainly regional and peri-metropolitan centres

AREAS OF RURAL & REGIONAL DECLINE

- **Particularly dry land farming and pastoral areas of northwest NSW, southwest Qld. and central WA.**

AREAS OF INDUSTRY-RELATED DECLINE

- **Significant in places such Whyalla (SA), Duarina (Qld), Ashburton and Coolgardie (WA).**

COUNTRY TOWNS: GROWTH DRIVERS

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- **Global and domestic demand for hinterland primary produce. [Impact varies - highest in the smallest urban centers and non-coastal towns]**
- **Non-central place functions increasingly important components. [Insulates against external change and foundation for growth.]**

A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

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TRADE IN RURAL COMMODITIES

- Global growth in demand for food and fibre products sets floor under Australian rural economies. Output stabilizes at or near current levels. Increases where resource capacities allow.
- Metropolitan population growth and rising affluence fuels growth and diversity in demand for food and fibre products.

Figure 1: DSE Index of Australian agricultural exports

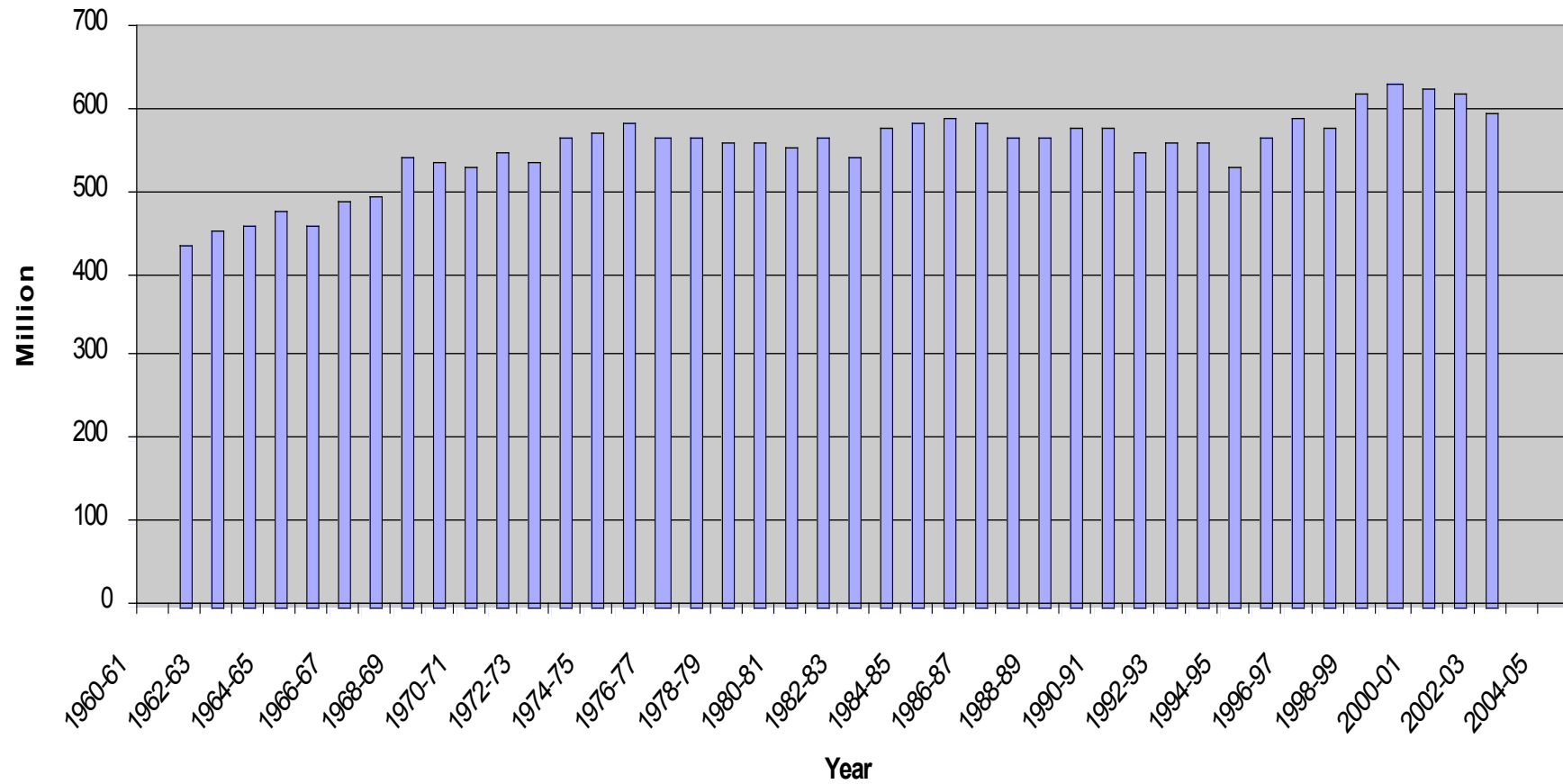
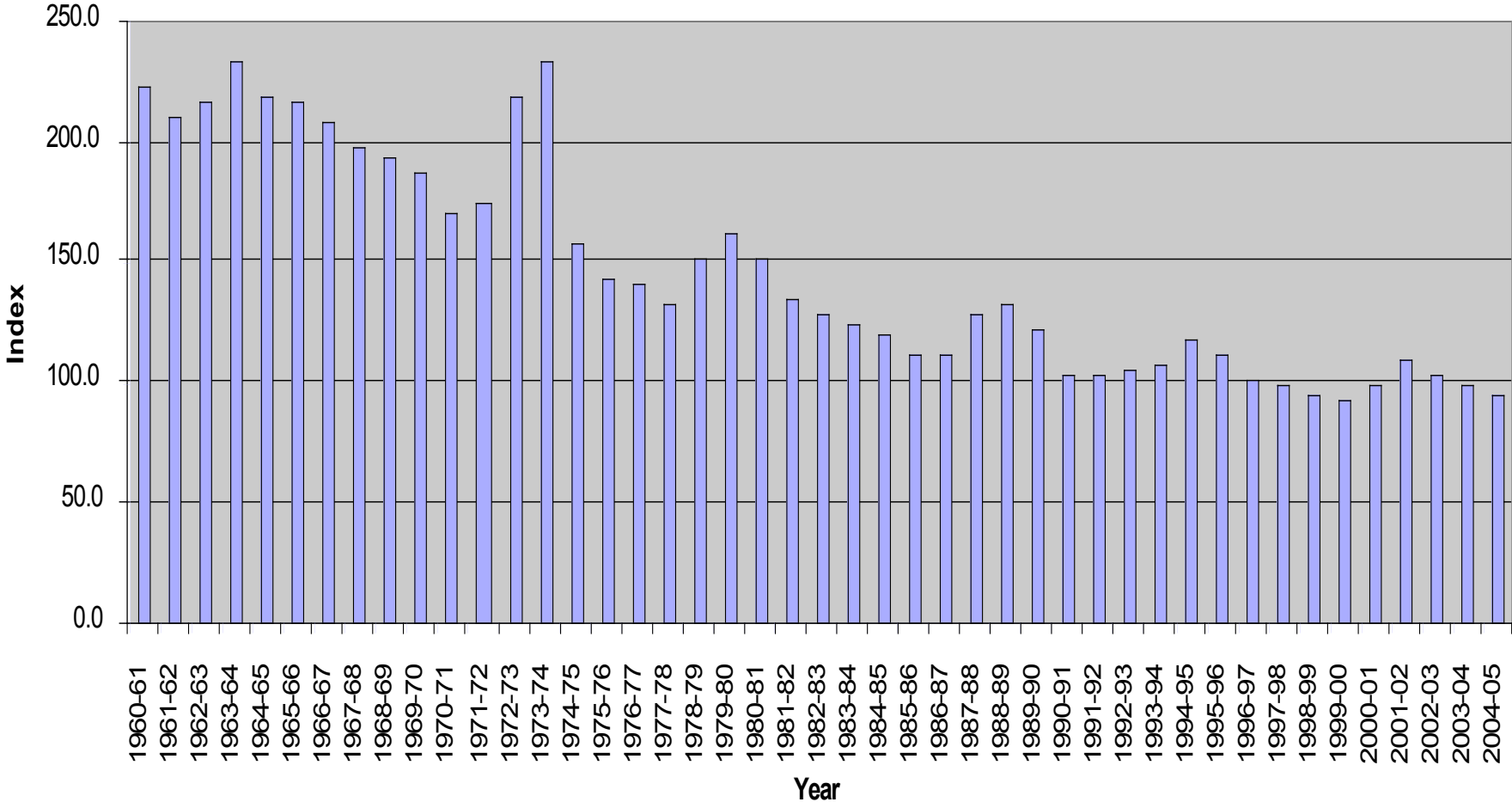


Figure 2: Australian agriculture - terms of trade



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BOTTOMING OUT OF RURAL RESTRUCTURING

- Restructuring of rural industries stabilizes at levels consistent with economic efficiency.
- Town population stabilizes at level required to support production.

Figure 3: Total area of Australian farms (million ha.)

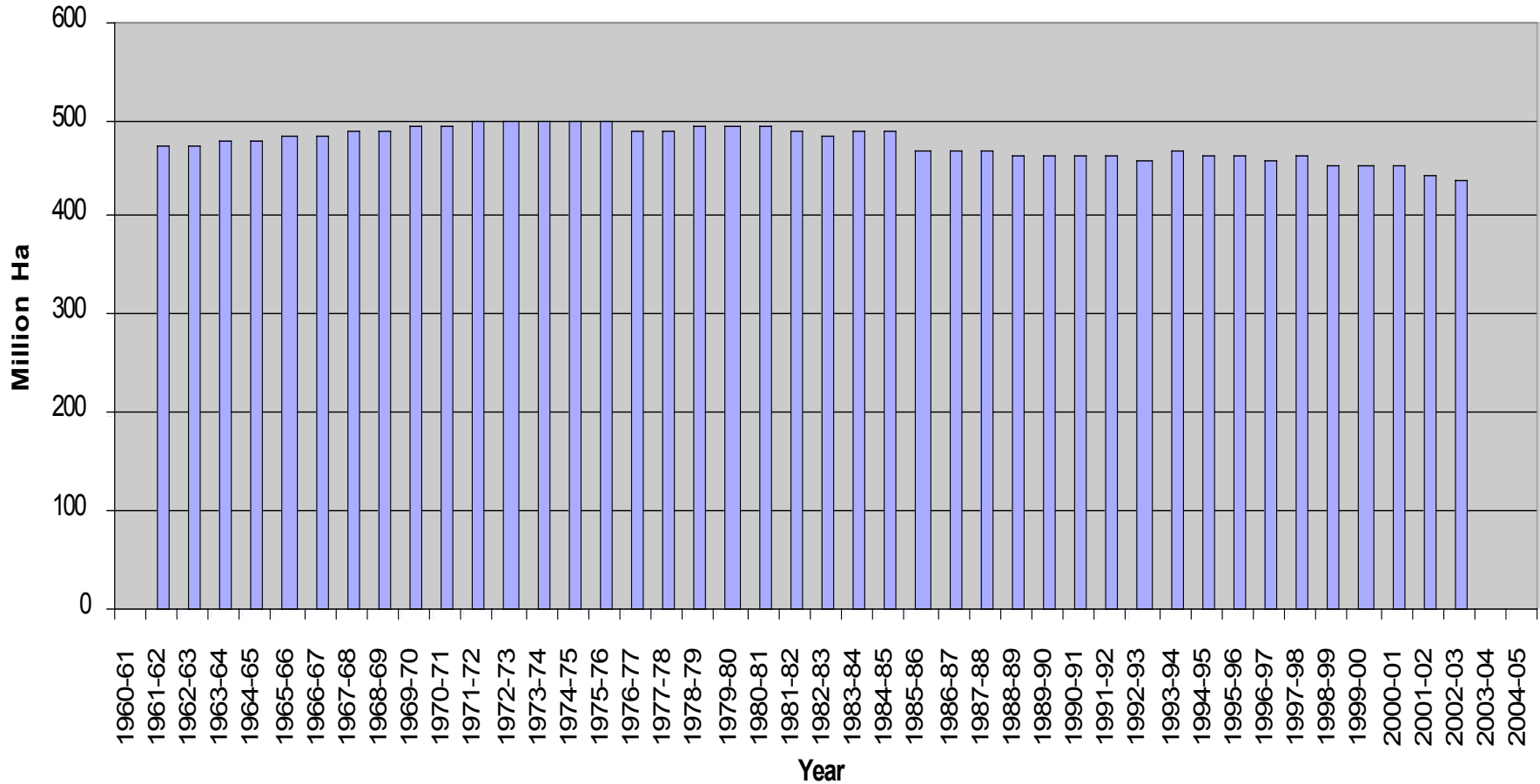
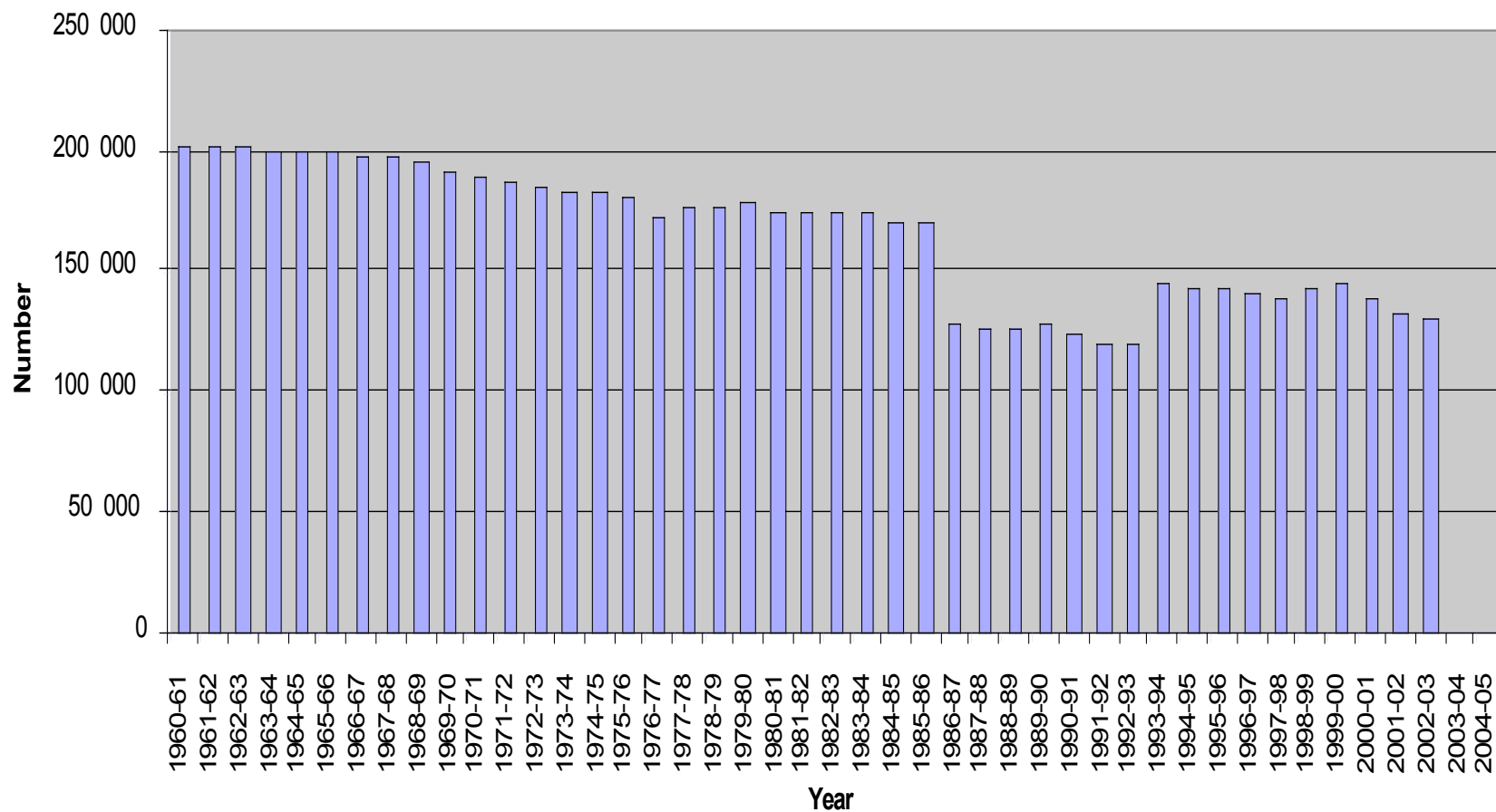


Figure 4: Number of Australian agricultural establishments.



SPONGE FULL

- Capacity of regional centers to cannibalize population from smaller towns is self-limiting.

DIVERSION FROM THE COAST: KILLING THE GOOSE THAT LAID THE GOLDEN EGG

- Diseconomies of growth in coastal areas deflect metro-nonmetro migration into inland areas.

INCREASING FUNCTIONAL DIVERSITY

- Non-metro urban centers less reliant on economic performance of rural hinterlands.

MIGRATION INDEPENDENT OF ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

- Retirement migration
- Welfare migration
- Down-sizing

URBAN CENTER DYNAMICS: NSW: 1991-2001

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Table 1: NSW urban centres: population growth rates 1991-2001

Population	Regional category (*)	1991	1996	2001 Growth Rate 91-01	Growth Rate 91-96	Growth Rate 96-01		
Over 100,000 persons	East Coast Conurbation	3,768,832	3,993,949	4,266,551	1.19%	1.37%	1.32%	
10,000 to 100,000 persons	Coastal SLA		185,706	212,261	232,141	2.86%	1.87%	2.50%
	Near Coastal		32,945	33,264	34,084	0.19%	0.49%	0.35%
	Peri-Metropolitan	150,422	160,317	171,015	1.32%	1.33%	1.37%	
	Rural/Other		298,391	304,795	309,641	0.43%	0.32%	0.38%
1,000 to 10,000 persons	Coastal SLA		155,865	190,330	211,294	4.42%	2.20%	3.56%
	Near Coastal		38,392	39,097	39,920	0.37%	0.42%	0.40%
	Peri-Metropolitan	89,444	102,495	110,204	2.92%	1.50%	2.32%	
	Rural/Other		267,288	266,710	265,633	-0.04%	-0.08%	-0.06%
Less than 1,000 persons	Coastal SLA		22,812	27,325	28,978	3.96%	1.21%	2.70%
	Near Coastal		3,628	4,037	4,454	2.25%	2.07%	2.28%
	Peri-Metropolitan	13,497	18,342	19,994	7.18%	1.80%	4.81%	
	Rural/Other		70,589	76,402	79,850	1.65%	0.90%	1.31%

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**Table 2: Estimated resident population growth in population turnaround areas of New South Wales
1981-96, 1998-99**

Period	Metropolitan		Peri-metropolitan		Coastal	
	Number	Annual average %	Number	Annual average %	Number	Annual average %
1981-1986	154,900	0.84	48,500	3.5	68,300	3.2
1986-1991	184,200	0.96	56,690	3.4	87,010	3.4
1991-1996	198,436	0.98	39,810	2.1	59,259	2.0
1998-1999	60,070	1.4	8,290	2	8,400	1.3
1999-2000	49,900	1.2	7,439	1.9	7,155	1.2

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EAST COAST CONURBATION

- Increasing share of State population
- Growth rate accelerating

COASTAL GROWTH

- Continuing but at significantly reduced rates in second half of decade.

LARGER INLAND CENTERS

- Growth over both periods.
- Growth in second half of the decade lower [but contraction much less than on coast].

COASTAL & INLAND TOWNS [1,000-10,000]

- Significant contraction in coastal growth
- Inland towns decline in both periods but at small rates.

SMALL COASTAL CENTERS [<1000]

- Growth in both periods but
- Much lower rates in second half of decade

SMALL INLAND CENTRES [<1000]

- Growth in both periods,
- Lower levels than coast
- Contraction in second half of decade much less than on the coast.

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES OF COUNTRY TOWNS

- Land prices
- Small scale
- Amenity
- Social climate

COMPETITIVE DISADVANTAGES

- Agglomeration economies
- Conduciveness to creative class
- Welfare population

WINNERS & LOSERS

- **WINNERS**
 - • Metro proximals
 - • Sea change localities
 - • Hill change places
 - • Broader Regions
 - • Anomalies
- **STAY-THE-SAMES**
- **LOSERS**

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