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# Recent urban growth in the Illawarra-South Coast region

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## Recent urban growth in the Illawarra-South Coast region

### **Abstract**

Patterns of urban growth tell us much about changing regional fortunes. In this broadsheet an attempt is made to draw some inferences about recent urban population trends in the Illawarra- South Coast region, an area which is defined as stretching from Helensburgh to Narooma and which contains 13 centres with populations of more than 1,000 and as many more with populations numbering in the hundreds (Figure 1). Urban growth patterns are examined at the regional scale and within the major urbanized area of Wollongong-Shellharbour (population about 200,000 in 1971).

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# WOLLONGONG STUDIES IN GEOGRAPHY No. 1

## Department of Geography, University of Wollongong.



### RECENT URBAN GROWTH IN THE ILLAWARRA-SOUTH COAST REGION

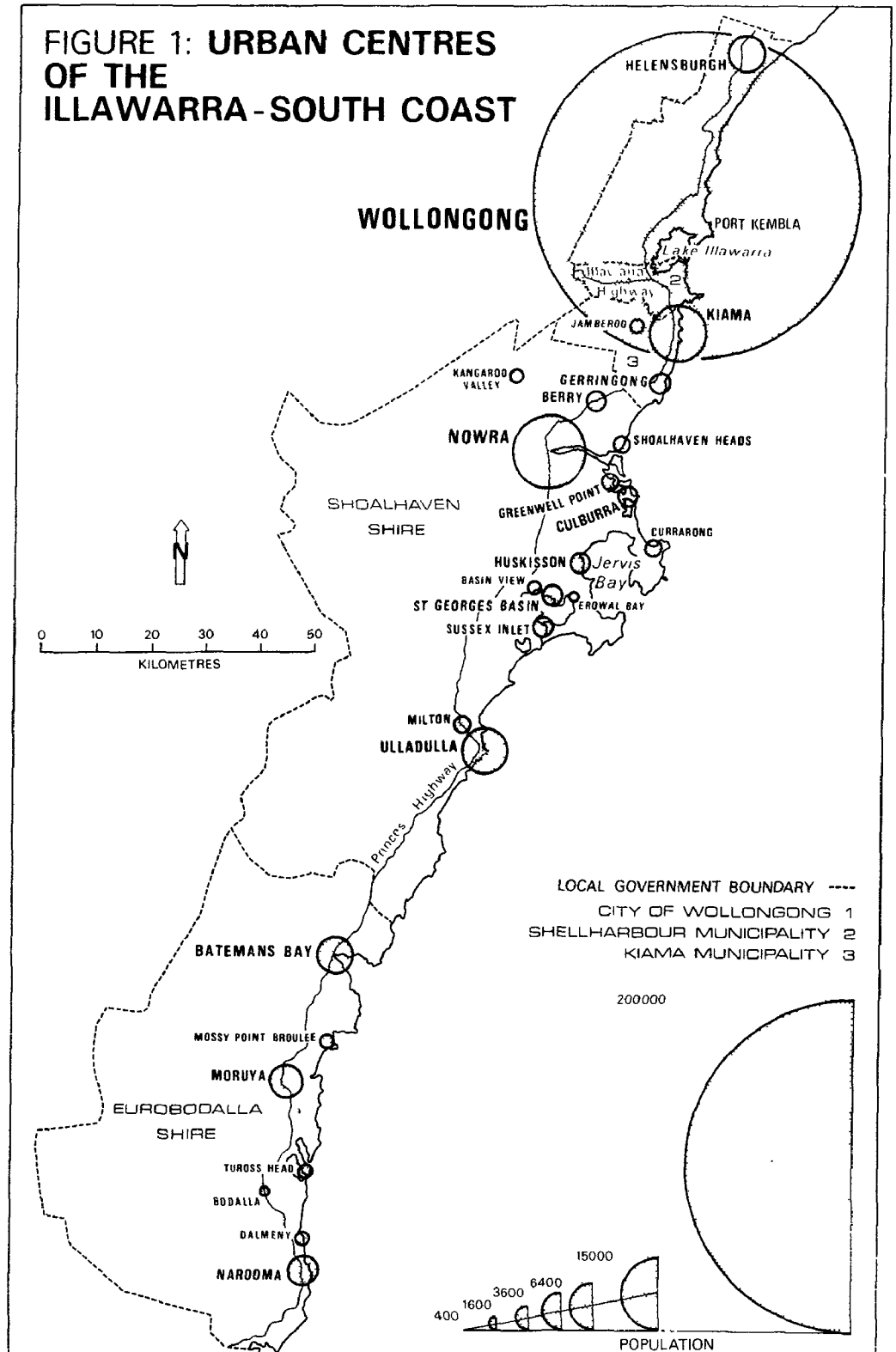
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Patterns of urban growth tell us much about changing regional fortunes. In this broadsheet an attempt is made to draw some inferences about recent urban population trends in the Illawarra-South Coast region, an area which is defined as stretching from Helensburgh to Narooma and which contains 13 centres with populations of more than 1,000 and as many more with populations numbering in the hundreds (Figure 1). Urban growth patterns are examined at the regional scale and within the major urbanized area of Wollongong-Shellharbour (population about 200,000 in 1976).

#### THE REGIONAL SCALE

Population growth patterns frequently reflect the functional characteristics of towns and cities. Within the Illawarra-South Coast Region, three groups of urban centres can be identified on the basis of their dominant economic functions. Wollongong operates overwhelmingly as a centre of heavy industry: more than 40% of its workforce is employed in the manufacturing sector and most of the remainder are indirectly dependent for their livelihoods on the existence of the steel-making complex at Port Kembla. Further south are a number of service centres whose employment structures are dominated by retailing and other servicing activities. In towns such as Nowra, Ulladulla, Moruya and Narooma, for example, approximately three quarters of the workforce is engaged in the tertiary sector and manufacturing industry accounts for less than 20% of total employment. The third group of urban places comprises a number of small resort-retirement centres located on the South Coast. In these places populations fluctuate seasonally: in winter, when the Australian census is taken, most house fewer than 1,000 people, but during the summer tourist season populations commonly reach levels several times greater than this. The resort function in these centres is made visually apparent by their concentrations of motels, campgrounds, caravan parks and fibro-constructed holiday cottages, most of which are little utilized for the majority of the year. In the off-season, high proportions of the stock of dwellings are unoccupied.

FIGURE 1: URBAN CENTRES OF THE ILLAWARRA-SOUTH COAST



That these places are also retirement centres is illustrated by their demographic characteristics: in all of them the proportion of retired people is high. For example, in 1976 some 34% and 40% respectively of the populations of Sussex Inlet and Currarong were aged 60 and over, while the New South Wales average was only 13.5%. All the coastal resort centres of the region exceed this value.

Not all of the centres, of course, can adequately be defined as concentrating on one or other of these major functions. Kiama, for example, has traditionally operated as a service centre for a surrounding rural area, but in recent years the town has emerged

as an important dormitory for Wollongong and also as something of a retirement centre. Nowra, the major service centre for the Shoalhaven and Eurobodalla shires, is developing as a centre of light industry and is the headquarters of the burgeoning construction industry of the South Coast. Narooma, Ulladulla and Bateman's Bay operate small fishing industries but in the main are service centres in which the resort-retirement roles are becoming increasingly important. Table 1 illustrates, in summary form, some of the characteristics of the urban centres of the region.

TABLE 1: INDICATORS OF URBAN FUNCTIONS

	Employment by Industrial Sector, % of Total (1971)*			% of Dwellings Unoccupied (1971)*	% of Dwellings Built of Fibro (1971)*	% of Population Aged 60+ (1976)
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary			
Helensburgh	23.6	21.4	55.0	5.2	48.7	9.6
Wollongong**	7.0	43.3	49.7	5.1	34.7	9.6
Kiama	5.6	21.5	72.9	14.4	37.4	15.9
Gerringong	12.1	13.2	74.7	49.8	60.8	24.2
Berry	7.3	24.1	68.6	7.8	29.5	15.5
Nowra**	3.3	19.8	76.9	6.9	52.7	10.4
Shoalhaven Heads	1.7	21.5	76.8	40.1	77.7	27.1
Greenwell Point	7.4	15.3	77.3	42.3	75.4	26.5
Culburra	2.9	15.9	81.2	72.2	77.7	24.4
Currarong	6.6	7.9	85.5	65.5	82.1	40.0
Huskisson**	2.8	14.2	83.0	48.3	60.8	21.2
St. Georges Basin**	8.9	17.0	74.1	68.5	86.6	26.0
Sussex Inlet	0.0	7.6	92.4	70.2	76.6	33.8
Ulladulla	10.9	14.0	75.1	47.2	65.1	21.5
Bateman's Bay	14.1	12.7	73.2	43.8	51.8	24.0
Moruya	7.0	9.9	83.1	5.9	42.6	15.1
Narooma	10.5	15.0	74.5	31.3	49.3	24.4
N.S.W.	7.6	25.9	66.5	9.2	23.5	13.5

\* 1976 data for these indicators are not yet available.

\*\*In this table and elsewhere in the broadsheet, Wollongong includes Shellharbour, Nowra includes Bomaderry, Huskisson includes Vincentia and St. Georges Basin includes Sanctuary Point.

Sources: Censuses of Population and Housing, 1971 and 1976.

Within the region, growth rates during the 1970s are higher in the south than in the north. In earlier years this was not the case. Until the mid-sixties the overwhelming majority of the region's growth was concentrated in Wollongong, which grew rapidly as a result of migration induced by the expansion of the Port Kembla steel complex. Between 1947 and 1961 more than two thirds of Wollongong's population growth was directly due to net in-migration (Wilson, 1977, p.241), and a significant proportion of the remainder resulted from births to migrant couples. During the sixties, however, the urban area's growth rate declined as in-migration rates fell: between 1961 and 1971 net in-migration accounted for only 40% of total population growth. Since 1971, as a result of the steadily-worsening situation of Australia's steel-producing industry on the international market and the urban area's continuing inability to diversify and stimulate its economy by attracting new growth industries, population growth has fallen off dramatically. In the five-year intercensal period to 1976 the urban population of Wollongong-Shellharbour increased by only 11,000, of which net in-migration contributed less than 5%. The urban area as a whole is clearly no longer attracting large numbers of migrants from overseas or from other parts of Australia. The rapid-growth, high migration situation of the fifties has given way to a slow-growth, low-migration situation in the seventies. Indeed, large areas within the City of Wollongong are experiencing out-migration and population decline.

To the south the picture is very different. Growth in the rural service centres was steady rather than spectacular until the sixties (Ryan, 1966) and derived more from natural increase than from in-migration. Australia's post-war influx of overseas migrants had little effect on these centres and while the small coastal settlements operated as summer resorts, few experienced rapid and sustained population growth. "Takeoff" for the centres of the Shoalhaven and Eurobodalla shires occurred during the sixties and for several places rates of growth have increased further during the seventies.

The larger service centres (Nowra, Kiama, Ulladulla and Narooma) showed high rates of growth throughout the decade prior to 1976 (Table 2), though the smaller places set back from the coast (Jamberoo, Berry and Kangaroo Valley) appear to be growing only slowly. Places such as Ulladulla and Bateman's Bay, which have combined the servicing function with significant developments of the resort and retirement roles, have grown very rapidly and show little sign of any levelling off in growth. But the most spectacular rates of population increase are seen in the towns which operate almost exclusively as resort-retirement centres: Currarong, Huskisson, St. Georges Basin-Sanctuary Point and Sussex Inlet have all more than doubled their populations since 1966. At the same time a number of places, previously the sites of only scattered holiday cottages, have begun to emerge as clearly-definable centres. Dalmeny, Tuross Head and Mossy Point-Broulee are examples of these.

In the resort centres, the majority of growth derives from net in-migration. Moreover, the migration is highly selective. High proportions of the inflow are made up of retired people, most of whom originate from Sydney and who are seeking a congenial non-metropolitan environment (Sparkes, 1977). The needs of these people appear to be ideally suited by the small towns of the South Coast: they are situated within a scenically attractive environment in which climatic extremes are rare, they are removed from the daily hustle and bustle of metropolitan living, and yet they are not remote from the services provided by larger towns and cities. In several of these places rates of population increase are quickening and there are clear signs in the age structures of their populations that increasing proportions of the inflow are made up of retired people (Figure 2). In all cases for which data are available, the proportion of the population aged sixty and over has increased since 1966, primarily at the expense of the shares of adults in the middle-aged group and children.

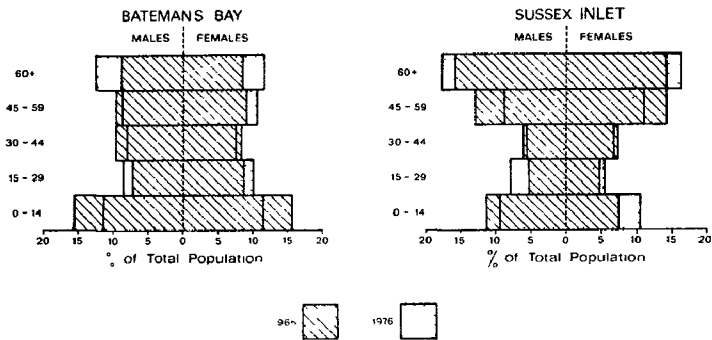
**TABLE 2: POPULATION CHANGES, 1966-76**

	Population*			%Growth	
	1966	1971	1976	1966-71	1971-76
Helensburgh	2,334	2,543	2,663	9.0	4.7
Wollongong	162,171	186,136	197,127	14.8	5.9
Kiama	3,814	4,719	6,133	23.7	30.0
Gerrington	805	895	1,240	11.2	38.6
Berry	924	1,049	1,132	13.5	7.9
Nowra	9,641	12,873	15,496	33.5	20.4
Shoalhaven Heads	N.A.	488	718	N.A.	47.1
Greenwell Point	N.A.	607	768	N.A.	26.5
Culburra	N.A.	696	1,416	N.A.	103.4
Currarong	176	324	466	84.1	43.8
Huskisson	641	1,048	1,502	63.5	43.3
St. Georges Basin	N.A.	523	1,129	N.A.	115.9
Sussex Inlet	386	535	933	38.6	74.4
Ulladulla	1,611	2,781	4,271	67.4	53.6
Bateman's Bay	1,458	2,213	3,463	51.8	56.5
Moruya	1,449	1,656	1,869	14.3	12.9
Narooma	1,295	1,546	2,038	19.4	31.8

\* These figures should not be regarded as precisely accurate. In all census counts some people are not enumerated, and in 1976 the underenumeration error was of the order of 3%. Errors for the earlier censuses were of a lesser magnitude.

Sources: Censuses of Population and Housing, 1966, 1971 and 1976.

**FIGURE 2 AGE - SEX PROFILES, 1966 & 1976**

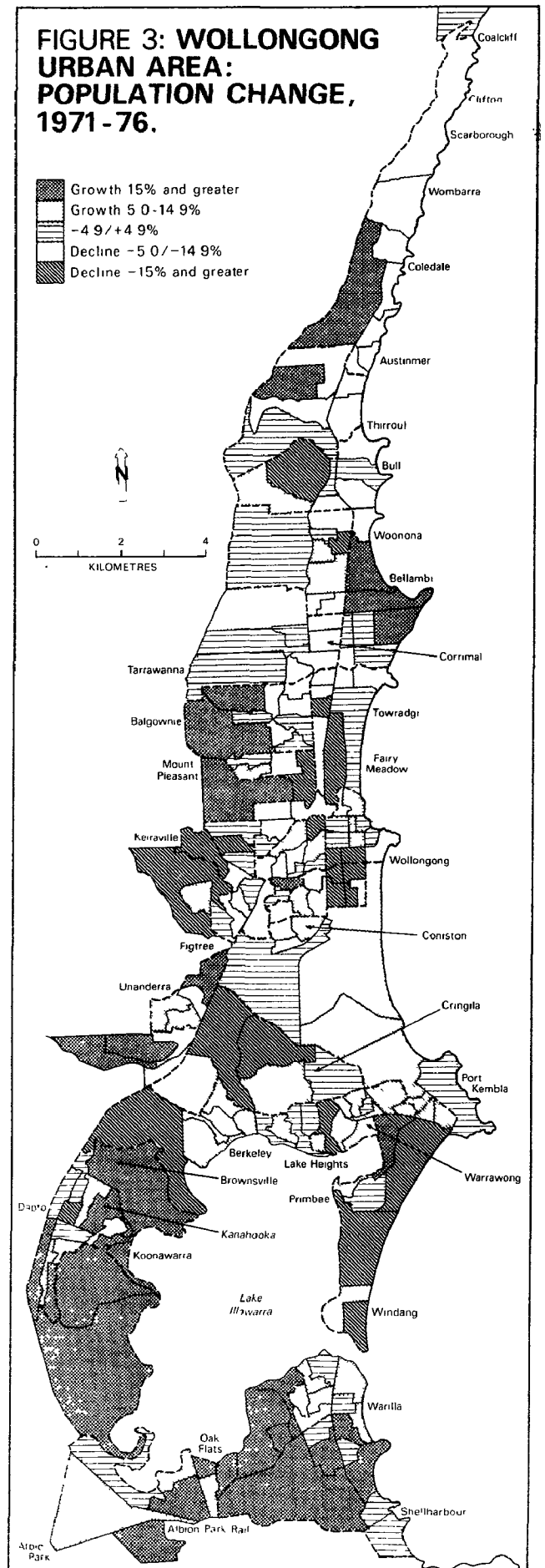


**THE WOLLONGONG URBANIZED AREA**

Within the major urban area of the region, the pattern of population change is highly variegated (Figure 3). In essence, the situation for the 1971-76 period represents a continuation of that which existed during the fifties and sixties (Cardew, 1977; Robinson, 1977) when both the rate and volume of growth were much greater. The basic thrust of growth is westward onto the slopes of the escarpment and toward the south; most of the established inner city and suburban areas are in decline.

The location of population growth reflects more than any other factor the availability of land. Along the scarp between Mt. Pleasant and Coledale are a number of areas of rapid growth, reflecting the opening up of new subdivisions at Austinmer, Thirroul and Balgownie and the infilling of gaps in established suburbs such as Mt. Pleasant and Woonona. On the coastal plain at Balgownie and Russell Vale, the major break in the otherwise continuous suburban development of the norther suburbs is slowly being filled, and rapid growth is the rule in the undulating western suburbs of Mt. Keira, Figtree and Farmborough Heights. But the most spectacular growth has occurred in the south and south-west where, south of a line joining Brownsville and the lake entrance, population grew by more than 11,000 between 1971 and 1976: the growth of the entire urban area was thus contained within the expanding southern suburbs.

**FIGURE 3: WOLLONGONG URBAN AREA: POPULATION CHANGE, 1971-76.**



Elsewhere in the city, areas of decline are more numerous than areas of growth. The older seaside and coal-mining suburbs north of Woonona are losing population through out-migration, as are the lowland areas of Fairy Meadow and Corrimal. In addition it appears that the volume of natural increase is falling as the resident population grows older and birth rates continue to decline. In the older inner suburbs population decline is again the rule, partly as a result of the tendency of young families to avoid such areas but also because of encroachment by warehousing, retailing and service industries into previously residential territory. Areas flanking the central business district are particularly notable in this regard. Nonetheless some portions of the inner city (Mangerton, Mt. St. Thomas and parts of Smiths Hill) are experiencing growth as a result of the intensification of residential land use which occurs when apartment dwellings replace single-family dwellings. The traditional migrant staging-areas in the vicinity of the steelworks are for the most part losing population. This situation reflects both the lessened influx of migrants into the city during the seventies, and the fact that many migrant families are moving to other parts of the urban area.

The net result of these population trends is that the centre of gravity of Wollongong's population distribution is shifting to the south (and the increasingly dormitory role of Kiama serves to accentuate this situation). There is, of course, nothing new about this development. What does appear to represent a change is the increasing extent to which large portions of the city - and particularly the older areas - are losing population. With available land for residential development north of Crown Street now severely limited in volume, population growth is unlikely unless medium-density residential development is intensified. For the urban area as a whole, the southward orientation of growth will in the foreseeable future be further entrenched. Among the consequences of such a trend are a continuation of commercial growth in the major shopping centres in the southern portion of the urban area, a relative lack of growth to the existing facilities of the northern ribbon, and the intensification of residential pressures on the aquatic environment of Lake Illawarra. Against these, however, must be noted the probability that in the immediate future the growth of population within the Wollongong-Shellharbour complex as a whole will be slow. To the extent that environmental deterioration follows from population growth, residential subdivision activity and the increased utilization of recreational resources, further pressures on resort areas such as Jervis Bay and Sussex Inlet may be anticipated. Serious planning and environmental problems in these areas, including sewerage disposal and the preservation of natural features from urban expansion, have already been recognized by public authorities (State Planning Authority of New South Wales, 1974, pp. 11, 21).

#### WIDENING THE CONTEXT

Post-war population trends in the Illawarra and South Coast regions fall into two distinct periods. In the first, which ended early in the 1960's, growth was heavily concentrated in the Wollongong-Shellharbour urbanized area and was fuelled largely by the in-migration of Australians from rural areas and of people from Europe. While Nowra and some of the newly-developing resort centres grew steadily, most of the smaller places south of the urbanized area showed only slow growth, and growth which derived from natural increase rather than from in-migration. Since the mid-sixties the position has been reversed. Wollongong's growth has slowed dramatically and net in-migration now contributes very little to the growth that does occur. Meanwhile the urban centres of the South Coast are experiencing very rapid growth on the basis of the in-migration of retired people. Between 1971 and 1976, net migration accounted for probably almost 90% of total growth in these places.

What is happening in the region is by no means unique: indeed the major trends of the past decade are well entrenched elsewhere in Australia and in other western nations. The phenomenon of inner city population decline coupled with outer suburban growth is very common in major cities. In Sydney, for example, most local government areas located within 15 kilometres of the CBD are experiencing losses of population, while rapid growth continues to characterize the outer fringe suburbs such as Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Penrith and Campbelltown. Comparable trends are common in the major cities of North America, where some commentators have suggested that the outflow of residents from inner areas is creating a 'doughnut effect' in which the urban cores are being denuded of residential populations. The upsurge of growth in the resort towns of the South Coast also has its parallels elsewhere. In the United States scores of small communities in the 'sunbelt' states of Florida, Arizona and New Mexico are currently undergoing rapid growth as a result of migration from the major industrial cities of the north-east and middle west. Closer to home, Sydney is now experiencing net out-migration as increasing numbers of its residents move away in search of environmentally more attractive areas. For both Australia and the United States, the drift of population away from the major cities represents a direct reversal of a long history of increasing metropolitan concentration.

The Illawarra and South Coast thus illustrate at the small scale two important trends which are becoming increasingly common in other areas and other countries.

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