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1982

# A dissection of settlement change in New South Wales: cases and implications

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## Publication Details

This report was originally published as Keys, CL, A dissection of settlement change in New South Wales: cases and implications, Wollongong Studies in Geography No.9, Department of Geography, University of Wollongong, 1980, 4p.

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# A dissection of settlement change in New South Wales: cases and implications

## **Abstract**

The previous paper in this series identified the emergence of an apparently new pattern of settlement in New South Wales. A drift of population away from the major urban areas of the central coast during the nineteen-seventies contributed to a renewal of population growth in several parts of the state which had experienced long periods of relative stagnation and decline, and to a dramatic fall-off in the growth rates of the big cities. The present paper examines this trend in more detail, focussing in particular on those non-metropolitan areas which have experienced either a turnaround from decline to growth in recent years or an acceleration of their rates of growth (Figure 11. Three sets of issues are addressed. First, an attempt is made to assess the extent of "demographic revival" outside the metropolitan core. Second, the various new settlement forms are described and attributed to the particular groups of people whose activities have created them, and, finally, an examination is made of the implications for society of the new forms of development described.

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### A DISSECTION OF SETTLEMENT CHANGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES: CASES AND IMPLICATIONS

C. L. Keys

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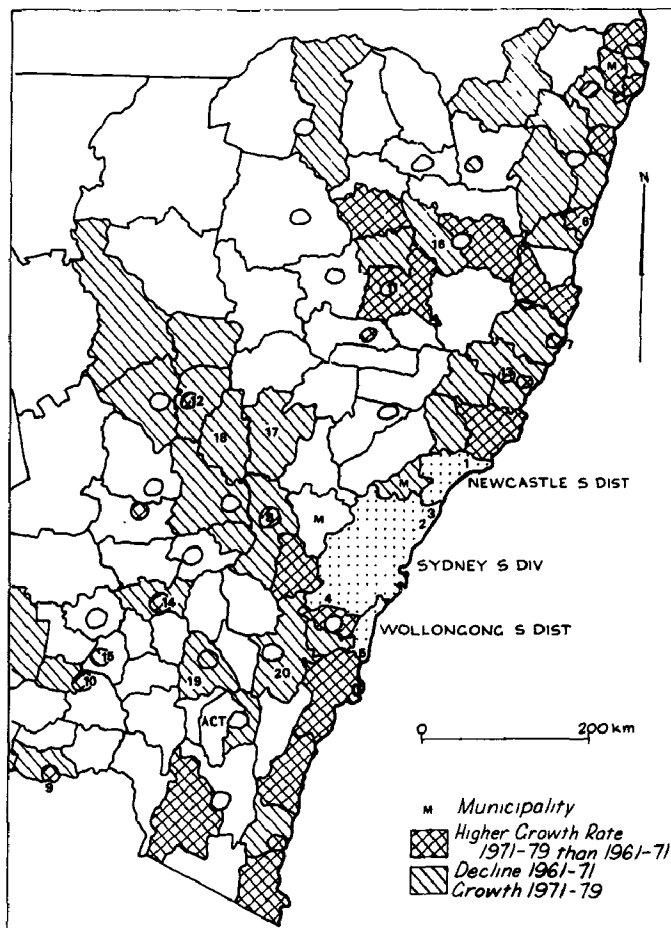
The previous paper in this series identified the emergence of an apparently new pattern of settlement in New South Wales. A drift of population away from the major urban areas of the central coast during the nineteen-seventies contributed to a renewal of population growth in several parts of the state which had experienced long periods of relative stagnation and decline, and to a dramatic fall-off in the growth rates of the big cities. The present paper examines this trend in more detail, focussing in particular on those non-metropolitan areas which have experienced either a turnaround from decline to growth in recent years or an acceleration of their rates of growth (Figure 1). Three sets of issues are addressed. First, an attempt is made to assess the extent of "demographic revival" outside the metropolitan core. Second, the various new settlement forms are described and attributed to the particular groups of people whose activities have created them, and, finally, an examination is made of the implications for society of the new forms of development described.

#### HOW MUCH REVIVAL?

During the ten years to 1971, non-metropolitan New South Wales as a whole experienced, as it had for much of the century, a very slow rate of population growth. A rough estimate of the magnitude of the revival which occurred during the seventies can be obtained by projecting forward to 1979 the rate of growth which had applied between 1961 and 1971. Such a projection produces an 'expected' 1979 population (based on a continuation of previous trends) which can be compared with the actual population for that year. For that portion of the state located outside Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong the projection of the 1961-71 average annual growth rate of 0.48 per cent produces an 'expected' 1979 population of some 1,181,350. The actual population in that year, however, was 1,274,800 - some 93,450 over and above the projected value (Table 1). This figure represents approximately two thirds of the total growth recorded for non-metropolitan New South Wales during the eight years to 1979. In fact, this is probably best regarded as a minimum estimate of the extent of the demographic revival, since the metropolitan core as defined in Table 1 includes some peripheral areas which experienced, in addition to considerable suburbanisation in the traditional Australian mould, an influx of hobby farmers, retired people and others attempting to escape from suburbia and the big city. These latter developments are relatively new, and have occurred in the Port Stephens area north of Newcastle, around Gosford and Wyong to the north of Sydney, as well as in the Wollondilly shire on Sydney's southwestern fringe and in the municipality of Kiama to the south of the Wollongong urban area. The edges of the metropolitan areas contain, then, the familiar forms of settlement (suburbanisation) in addition to the newer forms of development. In essence the rural-urban fringe continues to act as a buffer and 'grey zone' between the truly metropolitan and non-metropolitan realms, and new settlement within it takes various shapes.

#### COMPONENTS OF REVIVAL IN NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS

Two forms of settlement dominated country areas in New South Wales in the past. The open countryside itself was given over to commercial farming and was, for the most part, settled at low densities of population. To serve the needs of the farm population and



LGAs REFERRED TO IN TEXT	
1 PORT STEPHENS	11 TAMWORTH
2 GOSFORD	12 DUBBO
3 WYONG	13 WINGHAM
4 WOLLONDILLY	14 YOUNG
5 KIAMA	15 JUNEE
6 COFFS HARBOUR	16 URALLA
7 PORT MACQUARIE	17 MUDGEE
8 BATHURST	18 WELLINGTON
9 ALBURY	19 GOODRADIGBEE
10 WACCA WACCA	20 MULWAREE

Figure 1: Local government areas experiencing demographic revival during the 1970s.

to process farm products for shipment to markets, towns of various sizes developed. With the exception of a small number of mining and resort centres, most urban centres operated as central places with minor industrial roles.

During the late nineteen-sixties and the early seventies, new forms of settlement began to take hold. Along the coast the small resort towns began to grow at unprecedented rates and new ones were created. Much of this growth resulted from the influx of retired people from the metropolitan centres - hence the weighting

TABLE 1: METROPOLITAN AND NON-METROPOLITAN POPULATION CHANGE, 1961-79

	Population				Growth Rate (% per year)	
	1961	1971 <sup>a</sup>	1971 <sup>b</sup>	1979	1961-71	1971-79
	New South Wales <sup>c</sup>	3,906,173	4,594,998	4,672,750	5,071,850	1.64
Sydney Statistical Division	2,390,535	2,935,937	2,977,300	3,193,300	2.08	0.88
Newcastle Statistical District	308,476	351,536	355,700	379,800	1.32	0.82
Wollongong Statistical District	150,387	199,048	202,800	223,950	2.84	1.25
Total Metropolitan	2,849,398	3,486,521	3,535,800	3,797,050	2.04	0.90
Non-Metropolitan	1,056,775	1,108,477	1,136,950	1,274,800	0.48	1.44
'Expected' Non-Metropolitan				1,181,350		
Actual minus 'Expected' Non Metropolitan				93,450		

a. Population as enumerated in the 1971 census. Calculations for 1961-71 are based on these values.  
 b. Population as adjusted for undercount in the 1971 census. Calculations for 1971-79 are based on these values.  
 c. Excludes Lord Howe Island.

Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 1961 and 1971, Estimated Population of Municipalities and Shires, New South Wales, 30 June 1979.

of the age-sex profiles of many coastal towns towards the older age groups (Keys, 1978, 3). The retired, freed from the constraints of work which previously bound them to the city, appear to be exercising a choice for uncrowded small-town environments such as can be found in many locations on both the north and south coasts of New South Wales. Those who move out of Sydney can also take advantage of the opportunity to escape high rates and to exchange a high-priced dwelling for a lower-priced one, the difference representing a nest-egg which helps to finance a comfortable retirement (Murphy, 1981, 302).

Not all the growth in places such as Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie and the dozens of smaller coastal towns derives from retirement migration. Some is the result of a boom, which began in the sixties and intensified later, in the construction of seaside holiday homes and weekend cottages. The build-up of permanent, holiday and tourist populations along the coast greatly stimulated the construction industry in towns such as Port Macquarie and Nowra, and created demands for services as well. Some working-age people were encouraged to leave the city and to create caravan parks, shops and other community facilities. As populations grow in the small communities such as those surrounding Jervis Bay on the south coast, thresholds are achieved for the establishment of more and more businesses and social amenities.

Urban growth has also been revitalized in parts of inland New South Wales. The reasons for this are diverse, varying from place to place. Of the regional centres Bathurst and Albury have benefitted from having been designated as growth centres under State and Federal decentralisation policies initiated during the early seventies. Both have experienced strong growth in government, manufacturing and private-sector service employment. Wagga's accelerated growth during the seventies resulted from the expansion of manufacturing (particularly in food processing), services, and enrolment at the Riverina College of Advanced Education, while Dubbo's rapid growth derived primarily from expansion of commercial and service employment (Porter, 1980). To some extent, no doubt, the speeding-up of growth in regional centres has occurred at the expense of smaller places nearby. Nevertheless some sub-regional central places - including Wingham, Young and Junee - also experienced a quickening of growth during the seventies.

Again, migration from the metropolitan core plays a part in the explanation of this growth. Some employers have been attracted to country towns by subsidies offered to decentralising industries. Some city businessmen and professionally-employed people have quit the city, often in middle age, for less demanding lifestyles and jobs in regional centres and smaller towns. Often these 'organization men' (Nelson, 1977, 318) have revived failing businesses or created new ones. In doing so they have created new job opportunities for younger people who in earlier periods might have had to migrate to Sydney in search of work.

Some rural areas have also experienced demographic revival. Hobby and weekend farming, insignificant in the rural landscape until the late nineteen sixties, boomed in several parts of the state during the first half of the seventies as city-dwellers in considerable numbers sought to purchase small rural holdings. Numerous such holdings were created as land under crown leasehold was converted to freehold and as commercial farmers subdivided and sold portions of their properties (Keating, 1976, 15). Major advertising campaigns

conducted in the metropolitan press fuelled the demand, and by the mid-seventies hobby farms - most of them less than twenty hectares in size - numbered in the thousands in rural New South Wales. Their distributional pattern is instructive: the highest densities of these sub-commercial rural holdings are to be found encircling the larger inland towns (Figure 2) and around the metropolitan core. This pattern is an expression of the fact that many hobby farmers are, as the name implies, part-time ruralites who work in urban areas during the day and spend their nights and/or weekends on their country properties. Most are relatively young - generally younger than the commercial farmers who surround them - and of urban middle-class origins. They seek the recreational benefits and work satisfactions of rural life, and are

often able to take advantage of flexible time schedules in their normal work to pursue their hobby farm interests. Widespread interest in rural living has, in recent years, stimulated the publication of a number of 'textbooks' on hobby farming (Boddy and Beckett, 1980; MacKenzie, 1978) and magazines such as *Grass Roots*, *Simply Living* and *The Owner Builder* which offer advice - much of it unconventional - on gardening, animal husbandry, house construction and the harnessing of energy sources.

In those areas in which significant numbers of hobby farmers live on their properties, appreciable population growth has occurred since 1971. In some shires, in fact, a turnaround from decline to growth appears to have occurred almost entirely as a result of the influx of such people. Cases include Uralla in New England, Mudgee and Wellington in the central west, and Goodradigbee and Mulwaree further south (Figure 1).

Less widespread, and not as significant in the revival of rural populations, is the development of a number of communes and land co-operatives associated with the 'counter-culture' movements which took root in Australia a decade or more ago. The participants in these communes seek a return to the simple life of farming and craft production, largely outside the market economy. Like the hobby farmers most are young, well educated and of urban origins: their lifestyles are, however, more distant from the urban mainstream and imply a more deep-rooted rejection of material culture. The most publicized endeavour in this field is the Tunttable Falls Land Co-Operative at Nimbin, but several other commune-type developments were initiated elsewhere during the seventies. Unconventional building materials (especially stone and mud-brick) and shapes (geodesic, pyramidal and hexagonal) are common in these areas and have considerably modified the visual appearance of small parts of the rural landscape. Only on the north coast, however, have communes created any appreciable demographic impact.

#### THE KIAMA CASE

One of the most rapidly-growing local government areas in the state during the seventies was the municipality of Kiama. Most of the growth occurred in the main urban centre of Kiama, a service-come-resort town and dormitory suburb of Wollongong, but two smaller towns - Gerringong and Gerroa - also grew quickly, largely because of influxes of retired people. Some 24 per cent (compared with a national average of 13 per cent) of Gerringong's population was aged over 60 in 1976. Jamberoo, a smaller centre which has experienced a surge of growth since the mid-seventies, also has a relatively high proportion of its population in the older age groups.

In the rural areas of the municipality hobby farms have proliferated over the last decade, as have one-acre blocks. Most of the latter are to be found on the hillslopes overlooking the Minnamurra River and its tributaries (Figure 3). Some are owned by speculators, but increasingly the owners of these small lots are building and living on them and commuting to Wollongong to work. A rural building boom has developed since 1979, as the data on applications for new dwellings illustrates (Table 2): on the slopes around Jamberoo brick homes are mushrooming and creating a virtual suburbanisation of the landscape. Elsewhere in the municipality, too, the pace of construction activity is quickening.

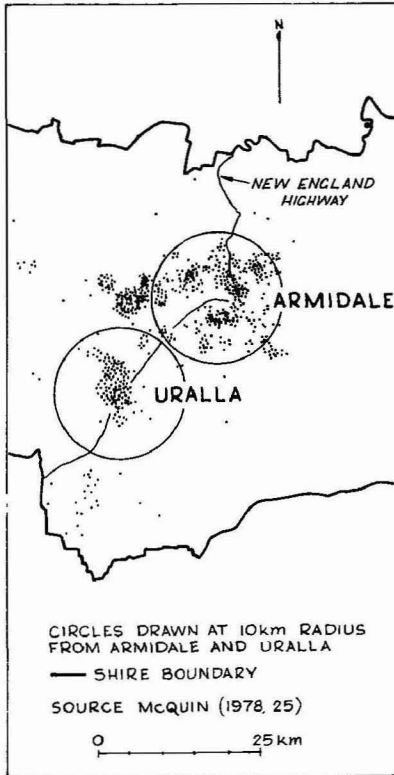


Figure 2: Holdings of 2.025-100 hectares, Armidale and Uralla areas, 1975.

**SOME IMPLICATIONS**

What are the problems and potentials associated with the new forms of settlement? Clearly there are some positive features of the renewed population growth which characterizes several urban and rural areas outside the large cities. For one thing, the fact that substantial numbers of people have been able to fulfil their desires to live in non-metropolitan areas is presumably to be applauded: it means, after all, that people are achieving their ambitions and that the range of available lifestyle choices is being expanded. Secondly, several small-town economies which have been depressed for some time have been revitalized by the recent inflows of people and money. And thirdly, the lowered growth rates of the metropolitan areas may allow the cities breathing space to catch up on the provision of such things as transport, community and sewerage facilities. Often in the past the rapidity of population growth in the major cities has not been matched by the creation of amenities such as these.

But there are problems as well, and these will become more evident as populations continue to increase in the country areas of New South Wales. Some of the problems relate to questions of land utilization. In the Jamberoo area there is pessimism that the dairying industry will be priced virtually out of existence by rising land values before the end of the century. Here and elsewhere, residential development is beginning to intrude on open-space resources, threatening the amenity value of scenically and/or environmentally valuable areas (Figure 4). It is possible that population growth will disrupt the very attractiveness which the 'rural retreaters' seek and which the longer-term residents seek to protect. Conflicts between farming, residential and wilderness uses may be paralleled by conflicts between long-term residents and newcomers, as has occurred between commune-dwellers and commercial farmers at Nimbin, and between full-time and weekend farmers in other areas. The new forms of settlement may create financial problems as well.

TABLE 2: APPLICATIONS FOR NEW DWELLINGS (EXCLUDING FLATS) – KIAMA MUNICIPALITY, 1961-81

Financial Year	Kiama	Gerringong	Gerroa	Jamberoo	Rural	Total
1961-62/1970-71	798	137	100	24	34	1093
1971-72/1980-81	1327	280	146	84	187	2024
1971-72	141	17	9	1	4	172
1972-73	146	37	20	5	14	222
1973-74	144	29	18	14	14	219
1974-75	70	16	14	9	5	114
1975-76	71	13	11	13	5	113
1976-77	80	27	11	10	6	134
1977-78	87	15	7	7	15	131
1978-79	120	33	19	8	23	204
1979-80	215	49	18	3	48	333
1980-81	253	44	19	14	53	383

Source: Municipality of Kiama, records of building applications

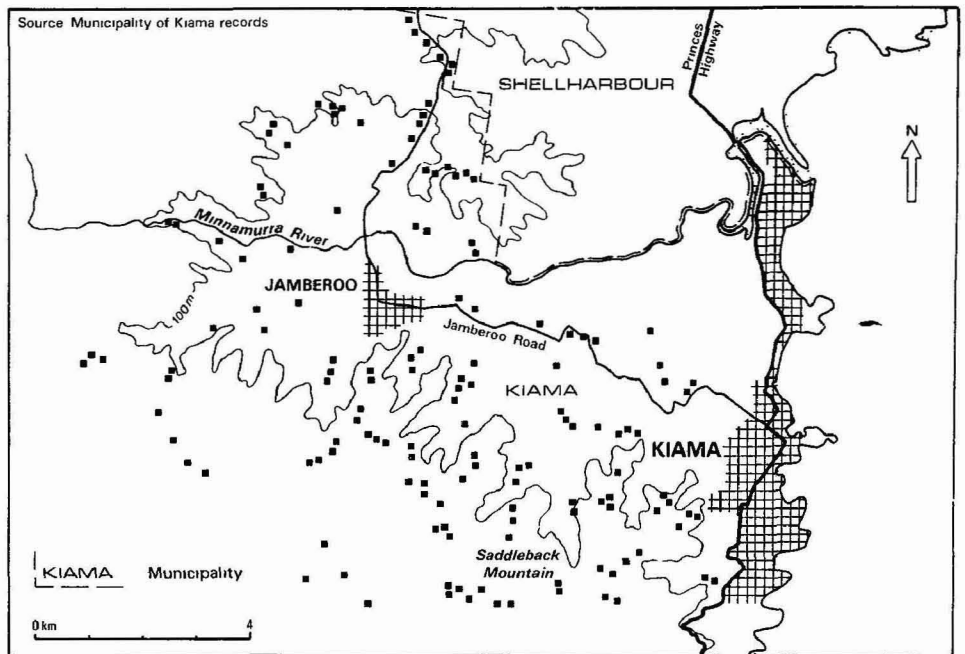


Figure 3: One-acre blocks in the north-east portion of the Municipality of Kiama, 1981.



Figure 4: Rural suburbanization south-west of Jamberoo.

Residential development in some near-city rural areas is occurring at densities which are high by rural standards but very low by traditional suburban standards: this development will be costly to service. To keep the suburbanisation of the slopes of the Minnamurra valley in check the new Kiama planning scheme, which came into effect in August 1981, has instituted stringent controls on future subdivision activity and housing development.

## CONCLUSION

A decade ago, widespread concern about the problems of Australia's major cities stimulated the development of a number of government-sponsored programmes aimed at improving the quality of the metropolitan environment and encouraging the decentralisation of people and jobs to growth centres and other areas outside the large cities. These programmes have since been wound down or discontinued, but an appreciable volume of decentralisation has occurred nonetheless. Significantly, only a small proportion of this has accrued to the designated growth centres. On the north and south coasts growth rates are higher than formerly they were, and several urban and rural areas elsewhere in New South Wales are also attracting higher rates of growth than previously. The expansion of the populations of these areas appears to owe much to the disenchantment of many metropolitan residents with big-city life.

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