The 1996 Census of Population and Housing reveals that between 1986 and 1996 Queensland recorded the major share (31.2 per cent) of Australia's overall population growth, followed by New South Wales (29.3 per cent) and Victoria (17.4 per cent). The authors estimate that, in this period, there was a net interstate movement of some 426,000 persons, with Queensland accumulating 90.5 per cent of all net interstate movers. This paper explores some of the demographic consequences of this movement for Queensland. The coastal centres are attracting a wide age-spectrum of movers. On the other hand, Queensland's declining regions are losing young people at a faster rate than the general statewide decline in the proportion of young people. However, it appears that older people are remaining in Queensland's declining, rural areas, or at least are not leaving at the same rate as young people.

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to a recent volume of papers on population mobility in Australia, Newton and Bell\(^1\) make the following observation:

As Australia makes its transition from an industrial to an informational society it is experiencing new patterns of population movement which reflect the changing needs of industry and households. In this process there is evidence, documented in [the] volume, of clear winners and losers — among individuals, firms and regions — ...

The release of the 1996 Census-based estimates of resident population (ERP) in July 1997 provides an excellent opportunity to examine population shifts in Australia, and to identify the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in relation to population change. This paper represents a preliminary analysis of the release of 1996 Census-based ERP by examining regional population shifts and components of population change in Australia between 1986 and 1996. In this paper, regions are defined by Statistical Division (SD) boundaries unless otherwise specified.

With particular reference to Queensland, this paper also examines changes in the age profiles of regional populations over the decade to June 1996. Changes in the population structure of Queensland’s growth regions are compared with those of regions experiencing population decline.

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

Between 1986 and 1996 Australia’s population increased by 2.29 million persons (an average of 229,310 persons, or 1.3 per cent, per annum) to reach 18,311,500 persons by June 1996. In rank order, Queensland’s growth (714,500 persons) represented the major share of the nation’s growth over this period, followed by New South Wales (672,400 persons) and Victoria (399,900 persons). Figure 1 shows each state’s share of the national population at June 1996 and the relevant share of the nation’s population growth between 1986 and 1996.

In relation to average annual rates of growth between 1986 and 1996, Queensland (2.4 per cent),
Western Australia (1.9 per cent), the Northern Territory (1.7 per cent) and the Australian Capital Territory (1.8 per cent) recorded rates exceeding the national average of 1.3 per cent per annum. At the other end of the scale, both South Australia and Tasmania recorded below average annual growth rates of 0.6 per cent per annum over the period 1986 to 1996.

These differentials in population growth resulted from a combination of the following events. During the decade, 2,548,200 people were born in Australia and 1,218,500 people died. Of Australia’s 18.3 million people at June 1996, 2,311,500 people moved to Australia on a permanent or long-term basis, while 3,437,100 Australians moved to a different state over the same period. Based on quarterly estimates published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), more than seven million people (including both overseas and internal moves) changed their place of usual residence between 1986 and 1996.

**Figure 1: Proportion of national resident population at 30 June 1996 and share of national population growth for the decade ending 30 June 1996**


**COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE — STATES AND TERRITORIES**

While natural increase varies according to the size of each state’s population, the influence of overseas and interstate migration differs markedly between states (see Figure 2). As expected, New South Wales and Victoria tend to capture the majority of permanent and long-term overseas migrants, followed by Queensland and Western Australia. In contrast, both New South Wales and Victoria recorded significant losses of population to other states in Australia (principally Queensland) over the decade to June 1996 (Figure 3). Indeed, as shown in Figure 2, Queensland, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory were the only areas (states or territories) to record net interstate...
migration gains between 1986 and 1996. These three areas attracted a net gain of 426,000 people from the remainder of Australia. Queensland accounted for 90.5 per cent of this gain, followed by Western Australia with seven per cent and the Australian Capital Territory with 2.5 per cent.

**Figure 2: Components of estimated resident population change, states and territories, 1986-1996**


**Figure 3: Average annual net interstate migration flows, 1986 to 1996, states and territories, Australia**

Over the latest intercensal period (1991 to 1996), Queensland further strengthened its prominent position as the nation’s preferred destination for interstate migration, accounting for 93.6 per cent of total net interstate migration gains to the three areas that recorded gains.

The relative importance of interstate migration in Queensland’s population growth is evident in the fact that 52 per cent of the state’s population increase between 1986 and 1996 was the result of population gain from other states or territories in Australia, compared with a figure of 8.9 per cent for Western Australia and 21.7 per cent for the Australian Capital Territory.

In contrast, New South Wales recorded an average annual net interstate migration loss (-19,251) for the period 1986 to 1996, only just exceeding a corresponding figure of -18,550 persons for Victoria.

During the decade 1986 to 1996, New South Wales was the major source of interstate migrants to Queensland, supplying just over 50 per cent of Queensland’s net interstate gains. Victoria contributed just under 32 per cent, followed a long way back by South Australia (seven per cent) and the Northern Territory (four per cent). Over the decade, interstate migration flows to and from Queensland have not varied significantly, except in relation to Victoria. Victoria contributed a net share of more than 35 per cent of Queensland’s net interstate migration between 1991 and 1996, compared with a net share of 27 per cent for the earlier intercensal period between 1986 and 1991.

The relatively high average annual net flows to Queensland from all states and territories between 1991 and 1996 are a reflection of record levels of net interstate migration to Queensland in two particular years: 1992-93 (53,800 annual net interstate gain) and 1993-94 (49,000).

It is not expected that these relatively high levels of net interstate flow to Queensland will continue. Indeed, the figure estimated for 1995-96 was 37,500, which is a little under the average (38,500) for the decade. Preliminary figures for 1996-97 indicate that the level will be below 28,000, the lowest figure since 1987-88. In the light of the recent resurgence of the Victorian economy, and the economic activity associated with the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000, it is expected that average annual net interstate migration gains to Queensland will range between 25,000 and 35,000 persons over the period 1996 to 2001. However, if hosting the Olympic Games in Sydney results in marked increases in property values, past evidence suggests that this could coincide with relatively higher levels of interstate migration from Sydney to Queensland. It is also likely that further restructuring in the manufacturing sector of the Australian economy could lead to more job losses in the southern states. These could result in a resurgence of population outflow from those states, as occurred in the early 1990s, although the extent of internal migration flows to Queensland could also depend on available employment opportunities.4

**REGIONAL GROWTH — REGIONAL DECLINE**

Mapping population growth and decline at the regional level within Australia achieves two objectives. First, it reveals the marked variation within states and territories in relation to population change between 1986 and 1996 (Figure 4). For example, based on the information supplied above, it would be easy to assume that all regions within Queensland recorded population growth over the decade, when in fact most inland areas of the state recorded population declines.

**Figure 4: Average annual population growth rates, 1986 to 1996, Statistical Divisions, Australia**
Second, with the exception of Sydney, Brisbane and Darwin SDs, population growth over the decade has resulted in increasing concentrations of population in the metropolitan capital-city SDs in each state or territory. In every state or territory, regions adjacent to the capital-city SD recorded high rates of population growth between 1986 and 1996 (for example, Illawarra in New South Wales and Moreton in Queensland). Furthermore, along Australia’s eastern seaboard, significant growth has also occurred in regions such as the Mid-North Coast and Richmond-Tweed in New South Wales and Moreton, Wide Bay Burnett and Far North in Queensland.

It seems clear that the relative popularity of regions adjacent to the eastern seaboard supports the assertion by Maher and Stimson\(^5\) that these regions are amenity rich and owe much of their growth to ‘the development of tourism and retirement migration’. This is not to say that internal migration to these regions is dominated by relatively older people, although there is past evidence to suggest that persons aged 60 years or more have contributed disproportionately to population growth.

Based on the data shown in Figure 4, there is little doubt concerning the attraction of Queensland and New South Wales coastal regions to migrants. Of the top dozen SDs in Australia in relation to average annual population growth between 1986 and 1996, all are located along the nation’s coastline, with four located on Queensland’s coastline, viz. Brisbane, Moreton, Far North and Wide Bay Burnett. Although all of the Northern Territory is shown as rapidly growing in Figure 4, much of the growth in this Territory-wide SD has been in areas adjacent to Darwin SD. Ranked in terms of average annual growth rate between 1991 and 1996, the same four regions in Queensland appear in the list of top ten growth areas in Australia between 1986 and 1996. In these four major growth regions within Queensland, much of the population increases are attributable to net migration (Figure 5), principally from interstate.\(^6\)

**Figure 5:** Components of population change (average annual figures), Statistical Divisions,
In the absence of 1996 Census data for either labour-force status or occupational categories (Release 2 data were not available at time of writing), it is difficult to know whether the population shifts discussed above have been associated with changes in the size and composition of the labour force in different regions in Australia. Although it is known that persons outside the labour force tend to be over-represented among movers (especially interstate movers), it is not clear whether regional population change in Australia over the last decade has been associated with change to the size, composition and characteristics of the labour force. Changes in the nature of the labour force and industry will be examined in a second paper as soon as the remaining data from the 1996 Census are released.

In the interim, one data item that is currently available following the first release of the 1996 Census data, is the age distribution of regional estimated resident populations.

**POPULATION SHIFTS AND THE CHANGING AGE STRUCTURE OF REGIONAL QUEENSLAND**

In recent years much has been written about population mobility in Australia. In twin publications (based on 1991 Census data) dealing with regional growth and regional decline, the implications of population shifts within Australia are discussed in some detail. However, relatively little information appears to be available in relation to the age profile of regional populations. Maher and Stimson make reference to demographic change in relation to the ageing of the baby boom generation, and the relationship between patterns of ‘retirement, tourism and leisure-oriented settlement’ and areas of ‘high physical amenity’. Focussing on areas of population decline, McKenzie examines the relationship between population decline and economic restructuring, the labour force, and the demographic composition of the population.

There is little doubt that much of the population growth in many of Queensland’s coastal regions between 1986 and 1996 can be attributed to ‘retirement, tourism and leisure-oriented settlement’. It is also true that many migrants are attracted to these regions (and indeed to the New South Wales...
coastline) because they are rich in ‘physical amenity’. However, it would be unwise to assume that such population shifts are dominated by relatively older migrants. By examining five-yearly migration data from the 1991 Census, Ward demonstrated that migration to the coastal parts of south-east Queensland was not dominated by relatively older people, but rather by people aged in their 30s and 40s with dependant children.

The release of age-profile data from the 1996 Census provides an ideal opportunity to examine the relationship between population shifts and changes to the age profile of regional populations. Whether the relatively significant regional population shifts that have occurred within Queensland between 1986 and 1996 (see Figure 4) have been matched by significant changes to the age profile of the population is examined in the following section of this paper.

**Changes in the proportion of persons aged 0 to 19 years**

All of the state’s SDs experienced a decline in the proportion of persons aged 0 to 19 years, with the greatest declines being recorded in North West, Mackay, South West and Far North respectively (Figure 6).

**Changes in the proportion of persons aged 20 to 39 years**

Overall, Queensland experienced a decrease in the proportion of persons aged 20 to 39 years, with all SDs except Far North also recording proportional declines. Other regions to record marginal proportional declines of persons in this age group include Brisbane and North West. It is likely that employment opportunities (information and tertiary industries in Brisbane, tourism in Far North and mining and exploration in North West) in these regions kept the proportional declines in this age group below the state average.

**Changes in the proportion of persons aged 40 to 59 years**

All of the state’s SDs experienced an increase in the proportion of persons aged 40 to 59 years, with the greatest increases being recorded in Mackay, Wide Bay Burnett and Moreton SDs (Figure 6). It is likely that these proportional changes are linked to the ageing of the ‘baby boom’ generation. Most of Australia’s ‘baby boomers’ are aged in this category, and many of them are reaching stages in their life cycles that are prompting life-style changes. It is possible that proportional growth in this age group in regions such as Moreton and Wide Bay Burnett are linked to persons seeking semi- or early retirement, with part-time or casual employment being found in the tourism or informational sectors.

**Figure 6: Changes in the proportion of age groups, Queensland Statistical Divisions, 1986 to 1996 (Queensland SDs ranked in terms of average annual population change 19986 to 19996)**
Changes in the proportion of persons aged 60 years or more

The proportion of persons aged 60 years or more increased in all SDs except Far North, Moreton and Brisbane, with the greatest increases being recorded in the three western regions of the state, which also happened to experience the greatest population declines between 1986 and 1996. The fact that Moreton (the region housing both the Gold and Sunshine Coast areas) recorded a slight decline in the proportion of relatively older people confirms Ward’s analysis of 1991 migration data. This showed that the majority of internal migrants to Queensland’s sunbelt are persons aged in their 30s and 40s with dependant children, and underlines the danger in assuming that migrants attracted to Queensland’s sunbelt areas are principally retirees or persons approaching retirement age.

Queensland’s western regions do have an older age profile, but this is not because older people are being attracted to these regions. Rather, migration data suggest that older people are not leaving at the same rate as young people. Over the ten years to June 1996, the proportion of young people leaving the western, rural regions has been relatively high, and this has had the effect of increasing the proportion of older people. Indeed, a striking feature of Figure 6 is the decline in the proportion of young people and the increase in the proportion of relatively older people in Queensland’s sunbelt areas.

Figure 7 reveals two separate examples of how regional age profiles have changed between 1986 and 1996. The age profile for the South West SD shows the effect of the loss of teenagers and young persons aged in their twenties. The general ageing of the ‘baby boom’ generation is also evident, as is the fact that many persons aged 60 or more years have chosen to remain in the region. The profile for the Sunshine Coast region (comprising Caloundra, Maroochy and Noosa local government areas) shows very clearly that sunbelt migration is only partially comprised of retirees. The increase in the proportion of persons aged between 40 and 60 years is a function of both the ageing of the ‘baby boom’ generation, plus the fact that many ‘sunbelt’ migrants are part of this age group.

Figure 7: Age profile of resident population, South West region and Sunshine Coast region, 1986 and 1996
Shifts in the age structure of the population of Queensland’s regions recorded for the period 1986 to 1996 may be indicative of longer term trends. If this is so, then it is likely that many of Queensland’s western, rural areas are going to experience relatively low proportions of young people and, conversely, relatively high proportions of older people. Such a possibility takes on particular significance in an economic and political climate where local communities seem powerless to prevent the loss of essential infrastructure and services in regions undergoing population decline. On the other hand, while the number of relatively older people is increasing in many of Queensland’s ‘sunbelt’ LGAs, so is the number of people in other age groups, the result being a relative balance between young and old people. The significant change in the age profile for the Sunshine Coast between 1986 and 1996 was in the group aged 40 to 60 years. This signals the fact that, as the ‘baby boom’ generation ages further, Queensland’s ‘sunbelt’ regions will inevitably feel the effect.

**SUMMARY**

With the exception of Sydney, Brisbane and Darwin SDs, estimates of the resident population based on the results of the 1996 Census reveal that population shifts in Australia are continuing to result in increasing concentration of people in capital-city SDs. But, while not every capital-city SD grew, the areas adjacent to them did. In every state or territory, high rates of population growth between 1986 and 1996 were recorded in regions adjoining the capital city SD. Furthermore, along Australia’s eastern seaboard, significant growth has also occurred in regions such as the Mid-North Coast and Richmond-Tweed in New South Wales and Moreton, Wide Bay Burnett and Far North in Queensland.

Significant interstate flows to Queensland, particularly in the last five years, have tended to result in much attention being focussed on south-east Queensland’s sunbelt areas, principally the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. In these two areas, the average annual growth rate between 1986 and 1996 was 3.8 times that experienced by the state as a whole.
While this focus of attention is clearly justified, it is equally important to examine changes that are occurring in regions throughout Australia which are experiencing population decline. This paper has shown that Queensland’s rural regions are experiencing not only population decline, but also a marked shift in their population age structures. If the shifts that have been identified for the period 1986 to 1996 continue, then governments will increasingly need to focus attention on rural social policy.

References

1 P. Newton and M. Bell (Eds), Population Shift: Mobility and Change in Australia, Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS), Canberra, 1996, p. 12

2 These births, deaths and migration figures are published quarterly in Australian Demographic Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Catalogue No. 3101.0. Migration numbers are estimates.

3 Based on estimates of interstate migration published quarterly by the ABS, ibid.


11 C. Maher and R. Stimson, 1994, op. cit., p. xiii

12 F. McKenzie, 1994, op. cit. See p. 47 for the relationship between population decline and economic restructuring; p. 51 for the relationship between population decline and the labour force; and p. 57 for the relationship between population decline and the demographic composition of the population.

13 These are mainly interstate migrants, but they also include movers from intrastate and overseas.