



## Editorial

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How regions grow, and whether a region is likely to expand or decline, remains a fundamental concern for all Australians. For two decades Federal economic policy has been directed at opening up the Australian economy and creating a more productive society. This has meant that some regions and some industries have expanded rapidly – such as the financial and property services sector based in Sydney – while others have seen few development opportunities and declining prospects for their established industries. Regions have risen and fallen in line with international demand for their goods and services. Wool producing regions, for example, slumped through the 1990s as the price of wool fell but they may face a brighter future as international demand for wool has strengthened.

The tensions and uncertainties associated with such global economic processes found civil expression in the rise of alternative political parties – such as Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party – and the introduction of a number of programs directed at meeting the needs of 'regional' Australia. More recently, the processes leading to differences in prosperity and well-being have found a new focus with metropolitan, and especially suburban, regions the subject of renewed political interest. In South Australia for example, the outcome of the February 2002 election was determined by a single independent member based in the regional city of Murray Bridge and his agenda for change will probably have a profound influence throughout the life of the Rann Labor Government.

This issue of *Sustaining Regions* makes a contribution to the discussion of the future of Australia's regions. The paper by Philip Adams presents a forecast of the growth trajectories of all Australian regions and boldly predicts which regions are likely to lead the nation's growth and which will be laggards. The second article by Matthew Tonts and Alan Black, considers questions of sustainability and changing farm structure across Australia. This is an important issue for the future of agriculture. Finally Fiona McKenzie evaluates leadership programs in Western Australia and their capacity to generate a future for rural communities. Picking up on this theme, two of the books reviewed in this issue question the future confronting all or some of Australia's regions.

Clearly, a number of us have questioned where Australia's regions are headed and whether we can – and should – accept the economic, social and cultural landscape Australia is likely to have in two decades. In the Practitioner's Corner, James Rowe discusses the Sunderland Shire Council's approach to initiating local economic development. While this may not be an approach appropriate in all circumstances, I think we can all learn from the experiences of others.

Andrew Beer

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