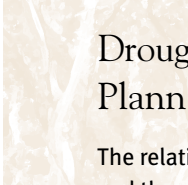




Editorial



Drought, Economic Growth and Planning for our Regions

The relationship between national economic growth and the well being of our regions has been brought into sharp relief by the drought affecting much of Australia, especially the eastern seaboard states. Government announcements and media reports have highlighted that the drought will reduce our national rate of economic growth because of additional government outlays in the form of drought relief, higher levels of unemployment in non-metropolitan regions, and reduced export earnings. A lower level of prosperity nationally reflects the real hardship confronting many involved in primary production, industries associated with the rural sector and the communities that live off the land. The drought has also emphasized the importance of planning: planning to adapt to the exigencies of Australia's highly variable climate; planning to diversify the economies of non-metropolitan regions; and planning to make the best possible use of all resources, including water resources.

The papers within this issue of *Sustaining Regions* reflect the need for planning. *Don't Cry for me Upper Wombat*, Gordon Forth and Ken Howell explicitly considers how we plan for the future of our country towns, and what policy frameworks and attitudes are most likely to lead to positive outcomes. This paper picks up on Gordon Forth's previous writings on the future of country towns, and makes a real contribution to this often lively debate.

Debate is a key element in Graham Apthorpe's paper on Enterprise Zones. Graham is an economic development practitioner from Cowra in the Central West of NSW and he responds to the article by Paul Collits in the last issue. Graham argues that Enterprise Zones do work, that they have a long history of success in the United States and that Australian governments need to implement Enterprise Zones in non-metropolitan Australia. It is, in many respects, planning by action.

Fiona McKenzie's paper draws upon her work on the *Regional Atlas of Victoria*. *The Regional Atlas of Victoria* was a major initiative of the Victorian Government and drew upon both conventional data sets, and data held by a range of government agencies. Fiona's paper highlights the important changes taking place in regional Victoria, with no indicator more brutally highlighting the nature and the extent of demographic and economic change in regional Victoria than the closure of football clubs.

Finally, John Martin, Patricia Rowe and Michael Christie present a paper on how local government's can plan for economic development. Their paper suggests that economic development efforts are most likely to be sustained when local governments look for both 'leaders' to promote their efforts, and create institutional arrangements that support the initiatives taken.

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