

- <sup>2</sup> ibid
- ibid., p. 61
- <sup>4</sup> ibid., p. 52
- <sup>5</sup> ibid., p. 126
- <sup>6</sup> R. Stimson, S. Baum and K. O'Connor, *The Social and economic Performance of Australia's Large Regional Cities and Towns: Implications for Rural and Regional Policy*, 2001, Submitted for Publication
- <sup>7</sup> Salt, op. cit., p. 2
- <sup>8</sup> ibid., pp. 127-129
- <sup>9</sup> R. Stimson, J. Minnery, A. Kakamba, and B. Moon, *Sunbelt Migration Decisions: A Study of the Gold Coast*, Bureau of Immigration Multicultural and Population Research, Melbourne, 1996, p. 57
- <sup>10</sup> Salt, op. cit., p. 127
- <sup>12</sup> ibid., p. 127
- <sup>12</sup> R. Stimson, F. Shuab, O. Jenkins and M. Lindfield, *Monitoring Brisbane and the South East Queensland Region*, University of Queensland Press for the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.
- <sup>13</sup> D. Mercer, 'Tourism and the Coastal Zone management: the uneasy partnership', in K. J. Walker, and K. Crowley, (eds) *Australian Environmental Policy 2: Studies in Decline and Devolution*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1999
- <sup>14</sup> R. Green, 'Notions of town character: a coastal community responds to change', *Australian Planner*, vol. 37, 2000, pp. 76-82

## SHIFT SHAFT GETS SHORT SHRIFT

### ■ Bernard Salt

*In this article Bernard Salt responds to Kevin O'Connor's review of his thesis that there is a major cultural shift occurring in Australia, which is associated with settlement along the non-metropolitan coastline of Australia.*

The issue of where Australians are shifting to and why is an area of interest to all Australians. And it is for this reason that the release of, and the ideas within, *The Big Shift: Welcome to the Third Australian Culture* have been widely covered by the national — and some international — media. Kevin O'Connor's review provides me with a convenient platform to advance my views more specifically to an academic audience. My overall comment is that the issues as presented by O'Connor are clouded by the data he has selected to showcase. In this paper I provide a fuller picture of the data and of my interpretations as stated within *The Big Shift* which should enable him to form a more balanced view.

### THERE IS NO 'BIG SHIFT' TO THE COAST

Table 1 has been assembled from data provided in *The Big Shift*. It shows that between June 1976 and June 2000, the number of people added to our eight capital cities increased by 3.2 million or 35 per cent. It also shows that the number added to 123 non-metropolitan coastal municipalities with a frontage to the ocean was 1.4 million or an increase of 68 per cent over the same period. It also shows that the number added to all other parts of non-coastal and non-metropolitan Australia was 505,000 or an increase of 18 per cent. The 'compelling data' O'Connor refers to is the number of people in these areas (as defined) in 1901 as compared with the number in 2000.

**Table 1: Population levels by geo-cultural regions, 1901 to 2000, millions**

Region	1901	1976	2000	Change 1976 to 2000	
				Number (m)	Per cent
Metropolitan	1.560	9.094	12.290	3.196	35.1
Coastal	0.300	2.076	3.498	1.422	68.0
Inland	2.040	2.864	3.369	0.505	18.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.900</b>	<b>14.033</b>	<b>19.157</b>	<b>5.124</b>	<b>37.0</b>

Source: B. Salt, *The Big Shift: Welcome to the Third Australian Culture*, Hardie Grant Books, Melbourne, 2001, pp.2, 3, 58, 59, 182

The central claim of my book is that Australian cultural identity was dominated by ‘the bush’ at Federation when most people lived there, but that during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was a re-weighting of our population base in favour of metropolitan areas. And that with this shift came the rise of ‘suburban culture’, which I say is not surprising because that is where most Australians now live. I then say that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century also saw the rise of non-metropolitan coastal cities and that this shift has gathered momentum since 1976.

The key data supporting this position is provided below. This is a more thorough assembly of the data than that produced by O’Connor who omits the figures for inland Australia, which are required to show the contrast in growth rates between the bush and the coast since 1976.

#### PUZZLING CONTRADICTION

O’Connor asserts that my argument is both puzzling and contradictory: that on the one hand I am saying there’s a shift to the coast and on the other that the ‘main game remains in the city’. I will state this very simply: I say that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was only one Australian ‘bush’ culture; during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century a new concentration of Australians emerged in the city and this supported the rise and now dominance of suburban culture. But there is now a third concentration of Australians emerging in

non-metropolitan coastal areas, and that this shift supports a third Australian culture based on the beach. I argue that this third Australian culture has not yet exerted the influence over mainstream values that might be expected of 3.5 million people,

because the beach-dwellers are constrained by their geography (being a strip). It’s up to readers of my book to decide whether this position is puzzling and contradictory, or whether this is actually quite an interesting proposition that should be given due consideration by the Australian community.

#### NON-RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION

O’Connor explains argues that if there was were a ‘big shift’ to the coast, then surely it will would be reflected in the differential investment in non-residential construction as monitored by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. To test this view, O’Connor draws on data assembled by Monash University’s *Centre for Population and Urban Research* showing the value of non-residential construction (see his Table 3). These data are, in my view, entirely unconvincing. What O’Connor needs to do is to re-assemble this Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data by municipality, corrected for boundary changes, in each of the 642 local government areas comprising the Australian continent for every year between 1976 and 2000, and then make a comparison on the basis of my split of municipalities as shown in my Table 1. After all, this is the methodology that has formed the basis to my view on population change. Additionally, the timeframe offered (in his Table 3) side-steps the

gains made by coastal Australia in the 13 years to 1989 and in the two years since 1998, when comparing these figures with my figures in Table 1. In other words, my analysis compares population change over 24-years; O'Connor's covers a nine-year portion of this period. This is hardly an apples-with-apples comparison, and even then the coastal rural and remote municipalities captured 7.7 per cent of national investment whereas non-coastal rural and remote municipalities captured just 8.7 per cent. There is also the argument that investment in non-residential infrastructure on the coast actually lags demand. Again it is up to the reader to decide whether they are persuaded one way or the other on the evidence put forward.

#### **COASTAL COMMUNITIES HAVE LOW INCOMES AND HIGH LEVELS OF UNEMPLOYMENT**

O'Connor then re-assembles my data (his Table 4) to show that high levels of population growth are no assurance of a bright future in suburbia by the sea. At no point throughout my book do I assert that high levels of population growth in coastal areas reduce unemployment and/or increase average income levels. I do not use the phrase 'bright future in suburbia by the sea'. I make observations about the rate of growth and how I expect the rate of growth in these places to upscale even further in the future. I simply state that the shift is on, that it is underpinned by lifestyle factors, and that it reflects a value shift by Australians.

#### **CLUMSY SPATIAL UNITS**

In his note to Table 4 O'Connor makes a number of statements which show that he makes no concession to intended readership of the book, and that he is not quite on top of the way in which the Australian

Bureau of Statistics classifies urban centres. I also suspect that O'Connor has a limited grasp of the fine detail of the way in which coastal settlements spill across municipal boundaries.

O'Connor has assembled three columns of data derived from different parts of my book. Column 1 of O'Connor's Table 4 comprises the 20 leading municipalities by population growth in percentage terms between 1976 and 2000. He advises that one, Port Douglas, is in fact a town and not a shire. I am aware that the Shire of Douglas's correct name is in fact the 'Shire of Douglas'. I sometimes tag municipalities by the name of the largest and most easily recognised township in order to make the book more palatable to the general reader. Unlike an academic paper, my book is intended to communicate with 'middle Australia'.

In column 2 O'Connor reminds me that 'town' is not an official statistical unit recognised by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I headed this table 'towns' again for the convenience of the general reader, whom I assume has little knowledge of or interest in the official definitions. This list of 20 localities actually comprises a mix of 'municipalities' and 'statistical subdivisions' containing the main aggregations of the Australian people. If I were to solely rely upon statistical subdivisions, then any consideration of the largest non-metropolitan (or non-capital city) urban centres in Australia would exclude, for example, Coffs Harbour which is wholly contained within a single municipality (but which is acknowledged by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as both as 'municipality' and as an 'urban centre' in ABS Cat No 3101.0, Table 5).

O'Connor is greatly amused by my concept of Geraldton-Greenough: this 'is a creation of his own making'. This is

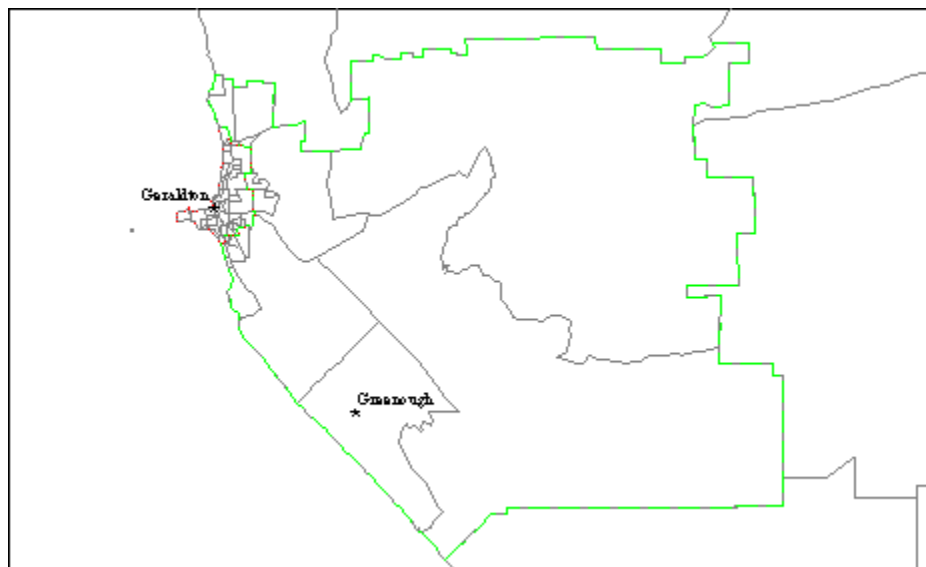
correct; I made this one up. And for very good reason. Figure 1 (below) shows the layout of the City of Geraldton and of the Shire of Greenough. The urban area of Geraldton overflows into the Shire of Greenough in the following suburbs (clockwise from the north): Waggrakine, Strathalbyn, Wooree, Narngarlu, Karloo, Wandina and Tarcoola Beach. At the time of the 1996 Census, 70 per cent of the population of the Shire of Greenough was clustered around the boundary of the City of Geraldton. My view is that the combined municipalities of Geraldton and Greenough contain a population base that is effectively driven by the economic, commercial and administrative functions contained within the 'Geraldton urban area' irrespective of the way the boundary falls between the two component municipalities. I also de-link the Bathurst-Orange statistical subdivision into 'urban Orange' and 'urban Bathurst' each comprised of a collection of whole and part municipalities, because I do not consider (and neither do the locals) that Bathurst and Orange function as a single urban entity.

## LIFESTYLE IS NOT A MOTIVATING FORCE IN MIGRATION

I argue that the reason why Australians have chosen to move in disproportionate numbers to the non-metropolitan coast is for lifestyle, and further that this reflects a value shift by the nation. O'Connor is not persuaded to this view. He quotes 1996 research by Bob Stimson who surveyed people moving to the Gold Coast. Stimson found that 42 per cent stated 'lifestyle reasons' as the motivating force. O'Connor considers this to be an unconvincing proportion, preferring instead another reason cited by respondents-employment. But Stimson's table shows that while 42 per cent stated lifestyle as the main factor causing them to shift to the Gold Coast, 23 per cent stated 'employment'. O'Connor does not see a problem in concluding that employment (at 23 per cent) is a more important factor than lifestyle (at 42 per cent).

He then claims that I have overlooked the contribution that tourist jobs have made to the rise of the Gold Coast. I am sure that O'Connor has overlooked page 54 where I cite, one by one, the

**Figure 1: Urban area of Geraldton spills across municipal boundaries**



commercial and tourist developments that have underpinned the rise of the Gold Coast over the last 25 years: Seaworld, Dreamworld, Movieworld, Jupiters Casino, Pacific Fair, Harbour Town, Robina Town Centre, Palazzo Versace, Sanctuary Cove and others. I also consider that if you asked any senior-year geography student to name one of the reasons why the Gold Coast has grown so rapidly over the last quarter of the 20th Century, most would suggest 'jobs in tourism'.

O'Connor then disputes my claim that intercity commuting has been one of the drivers of the rise of the Gold Coast over the last 50 years. He cites Stimson again with his work on the 1996 Census Journey-to-Work data, which shows that '86 per cent of the workers who live in the region also work in the region'. O'Connor doesn't expand upon this point, but I presume that what he means is that 86 per cent of the residents of the Gold Coast statistical subdivision also work within the same statistical subdivision. But the conclusion that O'Connor has drawn from Stimson's work does not sit well with the facts. If there is this high level of self containment in the Gold Coast labour market, why has the state and federal government squandered millions of dollars since 1996 to develop a light-rail link between Brisbane and Robina, and also to upgrade the Pacific Highway to eight lane status? Also, this proportion of self-containment has little weight unless compared another city. What, for example, is the proportion of self-containment in Canberra-Queanbeyan labour market? Is it similar to Stimson's 86 per cent for the Gold Coast, or is it much less? I suggest that O'Connor fly to Coolangatta, hire a car, and drive from Surfers Paradise to the Brisbane CBD on any weekday leaving at

7.30 am and return from Brisbane at 5.00 pm, and then re-consider the merit of my claim that intercity commuting has made a contribution to the development of the Gold Coast.

#### **ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE SHIFTS**

O'Connor then attempts to show an apparent mathematical anomaly in my rating of the importance of coastal growth. He explains correctly that I identify Busselton as a high-growth coastal town because it recorded a 5.7 per cent increase in its population base in the year to June 2000, and that Sydney increased its population base by a lowly 1.3 per cent over the same period. O'Connor calculates that the former percentage increase amounts to just 1223 people whereas the latter adds a whopping 53,634. Therefore, based on his interpretation, more people are choosing the big city rather than the coast. The point, however, of my comparison is the relative shift: a 5.7 per cent increase in the population base of Busselton is more than four times the proportional growth than is a 1.3 per cent increase. Most analysts understand, I think, the merits of growth measured in absolute terms and in relative terms. A 5.7 per cent growth rate places a greater strain on the local services base than does a 1.3 per cent growth rate. Again, I fail to see how O'Connor gets to his conclusion on this one.

#### **CONCLUSION**

O'Connor has based his views on an incomplete assembly and analysis of the key figures in my book. Table 1 should enable him to form a more balanced view. He also appears not to understand the fine detail of the geography of municipalities throughout Australia, as evidenced by his Geraldton-Greenough and 'clumsy spatial units' comments (and which should also

be directed at the ABS). He has relied on selected academic research to draw, in one instance at least, a conclusion that mathematically conflicts with his own tabled facts. And all of this is in addition to another of his criticisms which is quite at odds with what anyone would find to be intuitively right. He pooh-poohs what is really an innocuous comment that intercity commuting has made a contribution to the growth of the Gold

Coast; this reflects a narrow perspective to say the least, especially given new commuting infrastructure. I accept as the author of a popular and best-selling book that my views should be legitimately the subject of vigorous debate. However on this occasion I think O'Connor's review would have benefited greatly from a telephone chat beforehand, just to check off a few of the facts.