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For further information contact:  
Centre for Population and Urban Research  
P.O. Box 11A  
Monash University  
Clayton, Victoria, 3800  
Australia.  
Phone: 61 3 9905 2965  
Fax: 61 3 9905 2993  
[peopleandplace@arts.monash.edu.au](mailto:peopleandplace@arts.monash.edu.au)

## THE NORTHERN POPULATION DRIFT ACCELERATES — QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA'S GROWTH STATE

### ■ Ross Barker

*Queensland has been Australia's fastest growing State in percentage terms and often in numerical terms since the 1980s. This growth is largely driven by migration, both interstate and overseas. The 2001 Census revealed that, between 1996 and 2001, Queensland experienced an atypically low level of growth, largely as a consequence of a drop in net interstate migration, but the latest population estimates for 2003 show that growth has rebounded strongly, particularly in South East Queensland (SEQ). A key feature of the interstate migration pattern is the dominant role of New South Wales as the main origin state for migration to Queensland. Interstate movers are also relatively young; Queensland does not receive large numbers of aged persons.*

Since the early 1980s, Queensland's population growth has always been well above the Australian average and for most years Queensland has been the nation's fastest growing state or territory in percentage terms.

For the last two years, Queensland has also been Australia's fastest growth state in numerical terms as well.

Table 1 reveals that, in terms of overall growth over the period 1981 to 2003, New South Wales and Queensland have both grown by 1,452,000 people. Victoria was next with an increase of 970,000.

An analysis of Table 1 by average annual growth for each intercensal period

between 1981 and 2001 and for the last two years (2001 to 2003) shows that Queensland's average annual population change has ranged from 55,900 in 1981 to 1986 to 83,900 in 2001 to 2003, a 50 per cent variation. It also shows that growth in the last intercensal period, 1996 to 2001, was considerably lower (23 per cent) than the previous period 1991 to 1996, and substantially lower than the last two years 2001 to 2003 (30 per cent).

In the latest period analysed, 2001 to 2003, Queensland's growth exceeded that of any other state or territory, as was also the case in the 1991 to 1996 period. Victoria's current numerical growth is

**Table 1: Population change states and territories, 1981 to 2003, average annual change in thousands**

	1981-1986	1986-1991	1991-1996	1996-2001	2001-2003	1981-2003	Total Change 1981-2003
NSW	59.3	73.4	61.2	74.1	55.7	66.0	1,451,744
VIC	42.8	51.9	28.0	48.9	56.3	44.1	970,494
QLD	55.9	67.3	75.5	58.1	83.9	66.0	1,451,575
SA	12.8	12.7	5.6	7.5	7.8	9.5	208,721
WA	31.8	35.4	25.8	27.2	25.6	29.6	652,280
Tas	3.8	4.1	1.5	-0.5	2.6	2.3	49,794
NT	6.4	2.2	3.3	3.2	0.3	3.4	75,751
ACT	6.3	6.1	3.8	2.2	1.8	4.3	95,250
AUS	219.0	253.1	205.3	220.5	234.1	225.4	4,958,169

Source: Australian Bureau Statistics, *Australian Demographic Statistics*, Cat. no. 3101.0

higher than that of New South Wales, the first time this has occurred for at least 30 years.

Queensland's recent rapid rise in population growth is further illustrated in Figure 1. During the 1996 to 2001 intercensal period, Queensland captured 26.3 per cent of Australia's population growth, second after New South Wales (33.6 per cent) and ahead of Victoria (22.2 per cent).

In the year ending June 2003, Queensland's share of the nation's population growth increased to more than one-third (35.7 per cent) while New South Wales' share declined to 21.8 per cent (from 33.6 per cent in 1996 to 2001) and Victoria's share increased slightly to 25.0 per cent (from 22.2 per cent).

Figure 1 also shows that over the same period, SEQ (Brisbane and Moreton Statistical Divisions combined) has increased its share of national population growth from 21.4 per cent in 1996 to 2001 to 28.6 per cent in the year ending June 2003. In consequence, growth in SEQ for this year was higher than in either New South Wales or Victoria and also higher than for New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, ACT and Northern Territory combined.

Since the 1980s, South East Queensland has also captured a relatively high share of Australia's population growth. The 1986 to 1991 period accounted for 20.2 per cent of the nation's growth<sup>1</sup> rising to 28.3 per cent in 1991 to 1996.

Migration, both interstate and overseas, has been the more important component of Queensland's population growth for at least three decades.

Figure 2 shows that the contribution to total population from migration has fluctuated considerably since 1973, ranging from a low of 13,230 (35 per cent) in

1984 to a high of 68,840 (76 per cent) in 1989. The latest published figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show that net interstate and overseas migration combined contributed 61,150 (71 per cent) of the state's population growth during the year to December 2003.

#### **WHAT ARE THE SOURCE STATES FOR INTERSTATE MIGRATION?**

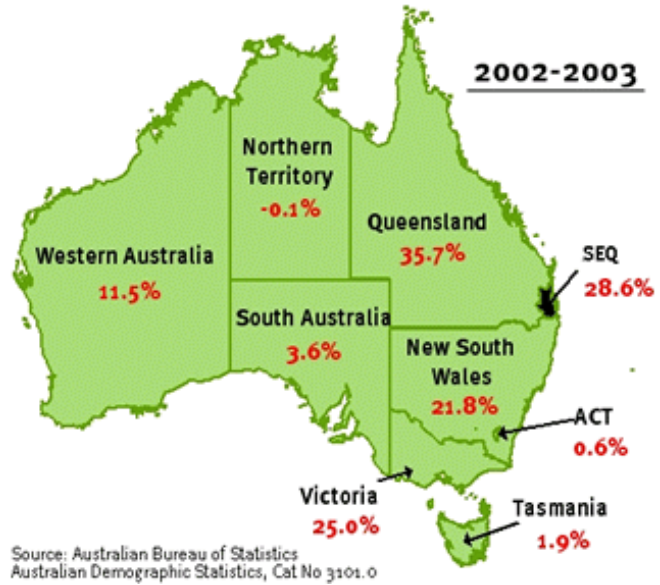
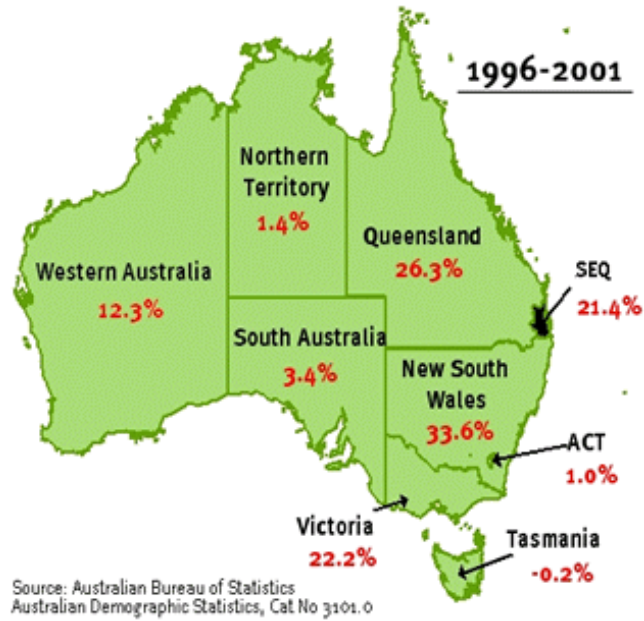
Interstate migration flows in Australia have been captured by the Census of Population and Housing data since the 1960s and, during that time, New South Wales has dominated both as a source of migrants moving to Queensland and as a destination for interstate migrants moving from Queensland. It also dominates the net interstate migration flows to Queensland.

An examination of migration data from the 1996 and 2001 Censuses, based on place of usual residence five years ago, shows that, in the 1991 to 1996 period, New South Wales contributed 44 per cent of net interstate migration to Queensland, followed by Victoria with 35 per cent. In the most recent intercensal period, 1996 to 2001, New South Wales' contribution to net interstate migration to Queensland increased to 64 per cent of the total net interstate migration, while Victoria's contribution declined appreciably to 13 per cent.

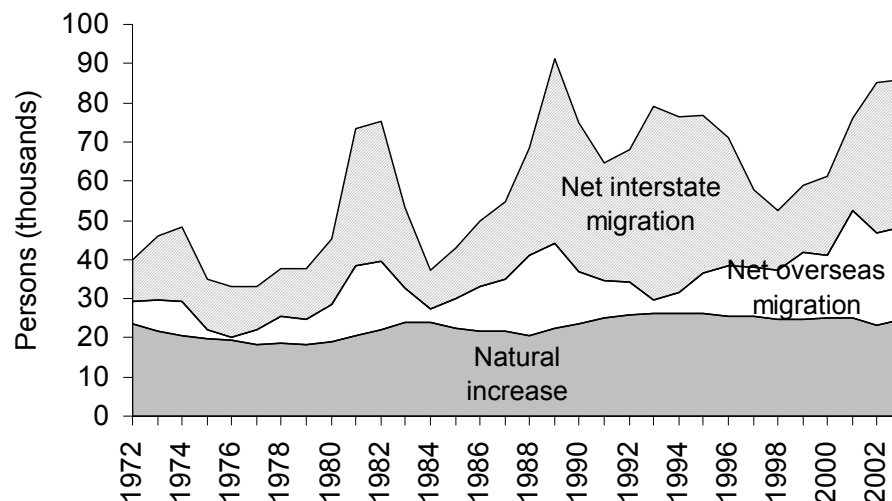
Table 2 shows interstate migration flows to and from Queensland for the period 1996 to 2001, with a regional breakdown for New South Wales and Victoria, the two key states contributing to population exchange with Queensland.

While it is commonly believed that Sydney provides the bulk of New South Wales' movements to Queensland, 2001 Census data do not support this belief. Table 2 reveals that the Sydney Statistical

Figure 1: State and territory share of national population growth, 1996 to 2001 and 2002 to 2003



**Figure 2: Components of population change, Queensland, 1973 to 2003**



Division (SD) contributed less than half, 45 per cent, of the arrivals to Queensland and 43.5 per cent of the net movement between the two states. It is noteworthy that Queensland has a net loss of people immediately over the border with New South Wales into the northern part of Tweed Local Government Area. This

indicates that the region is an attractive destination for people living in SEQ because of its proximity and its natural attractions of beaches and hinterland which are less crowded than those of the Gold Coast over the border in SEQ.

This finding supports analysis undertaken by Nugent<sup>2</sup> on interstate migration

**Table 2: Interstate flows to and from QLD 1996 to 2001<sup>(a)</sup>**

	Arrivals	Departures	Net
Sydney SD	55,204	32,486	22,718
Tweed (A) - Part A (Tweed Heads)	3,863	4,330	-467
Balance of Richmond-Tweed SD	11,034	6,165	4,869
Balance of NSW	52,390	27,321	25,069
NSW TOTAL	122,491	70,302	52,189
Melbourne SD	29,024	25,389	3,635
Balance of Victoria	18,844	11,722	7,122
VIC TOTAL	47,868	37,111	10,757
South Australia	15,047	10,307	4,740
Western Australia	16,152	13,660	2,492
Tasmania	10,269	5,272	4,997
Northern Territory	12,653	8,881	3,772
Australian Capital Territory	9,470	6,093	3,377
Other Territories	118	46	72
	234,068	151,672	82,396

<sup>(a)</sup> Excludes persons aged 0-4  
Note: SD stands for Statistical Division

for New South Wales between 1991 and 1996, which found that Queensland was by far the single biggest beneficiary of migration from both non-metropolitan coastal and inland New South Wales.

In the case of Victoria, the Melbourne SD accounted for 60 per cent of the arrivals to Queensland in 1996 to 2001 but only one-third of the net movement. Therefore, for both New South Wales and Victoria, more than 50 per cent of the net movement between these States and Queensland comes from non-metropolitan regions.

Based on Medicare change of address data, annual net interstate migration gains for Queensland from New South Wales, Victoria and the rest of Australia indicate that the net movement from Victoria peaked at 18,100 per annum in 1994, before declining to less than 1,000 in 2000 and subsequently rising to 5,600 in 2003 (refer Figure 3).

The increase in the early 1990s has been attributed to what is colloquially termed the ‘Kennett factor’. After the election of the Kennett Government in Victoria in 1992 there was a period of considerable job shedding in the public sector (and also in the private sector) following the rationalisation and

privatisation of a number of government services.

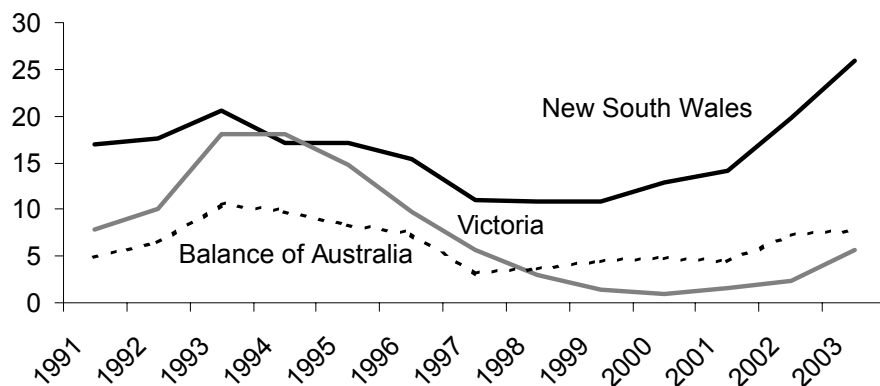
In consequence many Victorians moved interstate, principally to New South Wales and Queensland, seeking both employment and lifestyle changes. As the Victorian economy improved from the mid 1990s, its net interstate migration loss slowed markedly as a result of lower outflows from Victoria and of increased inflows from New South Wales and Queensland to Victoria.

New South Wales has always been the dominant state in terms of interstate arrivals from, departures to and net movement to Queensland. Net migration movements from New South Wales to Queensland were relatively high in the early 1990s at around 20,000 per annum, declined in the late 1990s to between 10,000 and 11,000, before climbing strongly to reach nearly 26,000 in 2003.

Since 1991, Queensland has also experienced a net gain through interstate migration with other states and territories. This movement has accounted for between 14.6 per cent and 26.3 per cent of Queensland’s total interstate migration.

In every year, Queensland has recorded a net gain through interstate migration with every state or territory

**Figure 3: Net interstate migration gain to Queensland, 1991 to 2003**



except with Western Australia in 1996 and 1997. Since 1998 the net gain to Queensland through interstate migration from South Australia and the Northern Territory has more than doubled, while the net gain from ACT increased by one-third. Tasmania has been the only state or territory to go against this trend, with the net gain declining from 1,400 in 1998 to 360 in 2003.

**AGE STRUCTURE OF NET INTERSTATE MIGRATION**

There is a popular misconception by many in the general public and the media that Queensland mainly attracts ‘older migrants’, particularly those who have retired or semi-retired.

Analysis of census data over the last 25 years for each intercensal period since 1976 shows that this belief is wrong.

People aged 60 years and over accounted for 11.6 per cent of net interstate migration gain to Queensland in the period 1976 to 1981, 12.5 per cent in

1981 to 1986, 12.9 per cent in 1991 to 1996 and 14.1 per cent in 1996 to 2001.

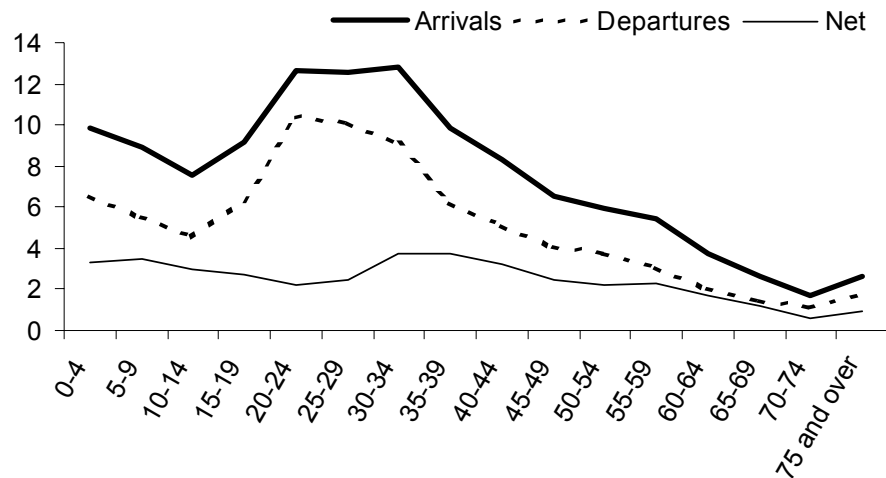
By way of comparison, 16.3 per cent of the State’s estimated resident population was aged 60 years and over as at June 2003.

The age profile of Queensland’s net interstate migration since the early 1980s has been dominated by children in the 5-14 year age group and adults in the 20-44 year age group, with a considerable tapering off as age increases.

It is important to note that the age profile of both inward and outward interstate migration flows is different from the age profile of net interstate migration to Queensland (see Figure 4).

Inward interstate flows are dominated by people aged 25-29 years, with the 20-24 and 30-34 year age groups also important. A secondary peak in age profiles occurs for children aged 5-14 years accompanying their parents. These peaks are consistent with the lifestyle events that influence migration.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 4: Interstate migration by age, Queensland, year ending 30 June 2003**



Source: Australian bureau of Statistics, *Migration Australia*, Cat. no. 3412.0

The age profile for interstate movers from Queensland is similar to the profile for people moving into Queensland, although the numbers of people in each of the age groups are lower.

Analysis of more recent migration data based on Medicare changes of address for the year ending June 2001 and June 2003 shows that the proportion of net migration aged 60 years and over has declined from 16.1 per cent in 2001 to 11.2 per cent in 2003.

An examination of net interstate migration by five-year age groups from this source shows that the patterns of movement result in a net gain dominated by people aged between 35 and 44 years and children, especially those aged less than 10 years.<sup>4</sup>

The age profile of the net interstate migration gain in the year ending June 2003 was markedly different to that for 2001 (Figure 5). In 2001, Queensland recorded a net loss of young people in the 20 to 29 age group. Over a two-year period, the net interstate migration for this age group changed from a net loss of 660 in 2001 to a net gain of 4,740 in 2003. The reasons for this turnaround from loss

to gain most likely relate to the strong economic growth evident in SEQ, particularly in the Brisbane metropolitan area. Increasing opportunities for employment and education, combined with wide-spread marketing of the lifestyle advantage that inner Brisbane apartment living has to offer to generation X, have no doubt played a key role.

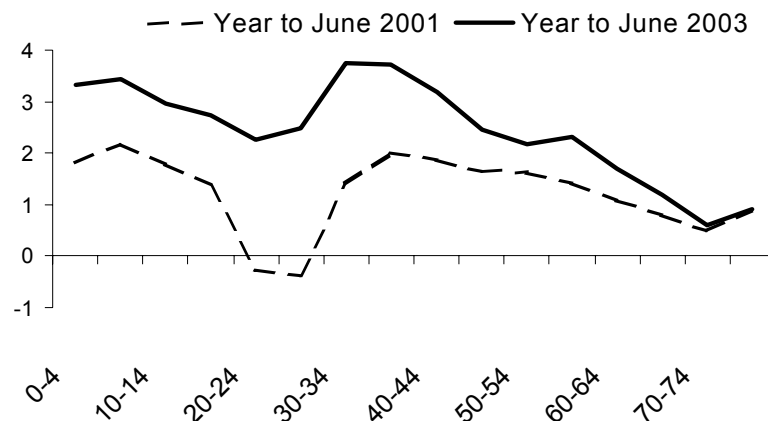
#### OVERSEAS MIGRATION

The contribution of overseas migration to Queensland's population has generally received less attention from researchers than has that of interstate migration.

While overseas migration has traditionally made a lower contribution to Queensland's population growth than has interstate migration, its role nevertheless has grown significantly in recent years to account for 27 per cent of the State's population growth in 2003.

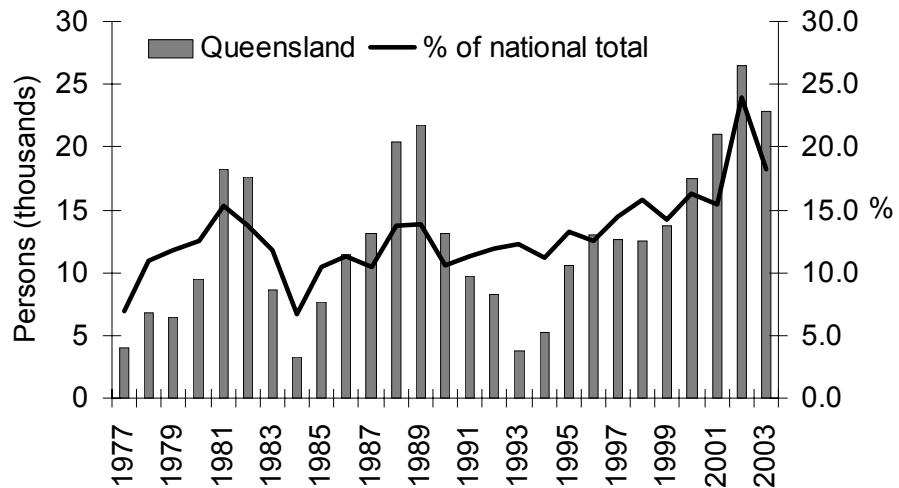
Figure 6 shows the level of net overseas migration to Queensland by year since 1977 together with Queensland's share of the Australian net migration flow. It reveals that Queensland never captured its pro rata share of the nation's net overseas migration until 2002, when

**Figure 5: Age profile of net interstate migration, Queensland, 2001 and 2003**





**Figure 6: Net estimated overseas migration, Queensland, 1977 to 2003**



its share jumped to 24.0 per cent from 15.5 per cent in 2001, then declined to 18.2 per cent in 2003.

The 2002 figure appears to be inexplicably high and is subject to revision by the ABS following on-going investigation by the Bureau into the reliability of the estimates for the components of net overseas migration.

**REGIONAL MIGRATION TRENDS, QUEENSLAND**

SEQ’s share of both Australia’s and Queensland’s population growth is currently at record levels. In the year to June 2003, numerical population growth in the region was higher than that of any state or territory in the nation (except for Queensland itself).

SEQ grew by 68,700 people in the year ending June 2003 compared with growth of 52,600 and 60,000 in New South Wales and Victoria and captured 28.6 per cent of the nation’s total growth for this period. (Refer Figure 1.)

Migration, both interstate and overseas, is driving population growth in SEQ as it has done for more than three

decades. Analysis of census based data for the 1996-2001 period for net interstate and overseas migration shows that SEQ has totally dominated net movement to Queensland.

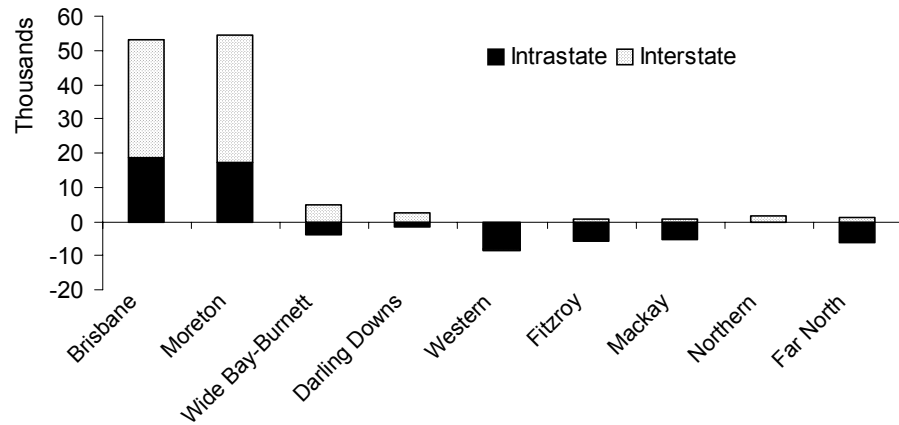
Figure 7 shows that, in relation to net interstate migration, SEQ<sup>5</sup> accounted for 86.2 per cent net movement to the State during this period.

Outside SEQ, the Wide Bay-Burnett SD (mainly the coastal areas of Hervey Bay City, Burnett and Cooloola Shires) captured 6.1 per cent of net interstate migration to Queensland followed by Darling Downs SD (mainly Toowoomba City and adjoining shires) with 3.3 per cent and Northern SD (mainly Townsville and Thuringowa Cities) with 2.1 per cent.

The remaining three coastal SDs, Far North (mainly Cairns City and Douglas Shire), Mackay (mainly Mackay City and Whitsunday Shire) and Fitzroy (mainly Livingstone Shire, Calliope Shire and Gladstone City) each accounted for less than two per cent of the State’s net interstate migration.

While the latest population estimates for 2003 indicate a growing level of

**Figure 7: Net intrastate and interstate migration to Queensland's Regions, 1996 to 2001**



Note: SEQ = Brisbane and Moreton Statistical Divisions combined

assumed net migration to coastal Queensland outside SEQ, the numbers are still relatively small in comparison with SEQ. It remains to be seen when baby boomers start retiring over the next two decades whether sizeable numbers will permanently move long distances to northern Queensland coastal areas when there are many alternative locations along the eastern seaboard closer to major centres of population.

By comparison, during the previous intercensal period, 1991 to 1996, SEQ accounted for 75.2 per cent of the State's net interstate migration, followed by the SDs of Wide Bay-Burnett (7.7 per cent), Far North (6.9 per cent) and Northern (2.9 per cent).<sup>6</sup>

In terms of net intrastate migration within Queensland during the 1996 to 2001 period, SEQ again dominated movements with Brisbane SD captured 18,800 followed by Moreton SD with 17,300.

All other regions in Queensland recorded a net loss to SEQ, indicating the strong attraction of the region in terms of employment, education and amenity/lifestyle factors.

There are some significant differences

in the magnitude of net intrastate movements between 1991 to 1996 and 1996 to 2001. Between 1991 to 1996 SEQ still accounted for the vast majority of positive net intrastate migration; Brisbane SD only accounted for 2,400 while Moreton SD recorded a gain of 21,700.

While in 1991 to 1996 Brisbane SD recorded a substantial net loss to Moreton SD of 14,000 people (principally to the Gold and Sunshine coasts), in the subsequent 1996 to 2001 period Brisbane's loss to Moreton had almost halved to 7,300. Breaking down the net movement by age groups shows that Brisbane SD recorded positive net migration in age groups up to 49 years, with the highest gain in the 15-24 year age group. There is still a net migration loss in the early retirement, retirement and post-retirement age groups (50 to 69 years).

During the 1996 to 2001 period compared with the 1991 to 1996 period, the net intrastate movement from coastal regional Queensland (excluding Moreton SD) to Brisbane SD increased by more than 8,000 people.

The growing attraction of the Brisbane SD for intrastate migrants can be largely

attributed to increasing education and employment opportunities combined with perceived lifestyle advantages of the metropolitan area.

In regional Queensland between 1991 to 1996, all SDs recorded a net intrastate migration loss except for Wide Bay-Burnett, which showed a gain of 3,200 from other areas of regional Queensland (See Figure 8).

The age structure of both net interstate and intrastate migration at the regional level shows some significant variations in comparison with the State level. Three regions have been selected to highlight these differences: Sunshine Coast (comprising Caloundra City, Maroochy and Noosa Shires); Wide Bay-Burnett SD, dominated in terms of migration flows by Hervey Bay City, Burnett and Cooloola Shires; and Far North SD, dominated by Cairns City and Douglas Shire.

In terms of net interstate migration for the Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay-Burnett SD, net gains were concentrated in the age range of 35-64 years and among children aged 5-14 years. The net gain for each five-year age group was remarkably

similar at around 1,000 people. The Sunshine Coast, therefore, can be regarded as attractive to people covering a broad range of ages.

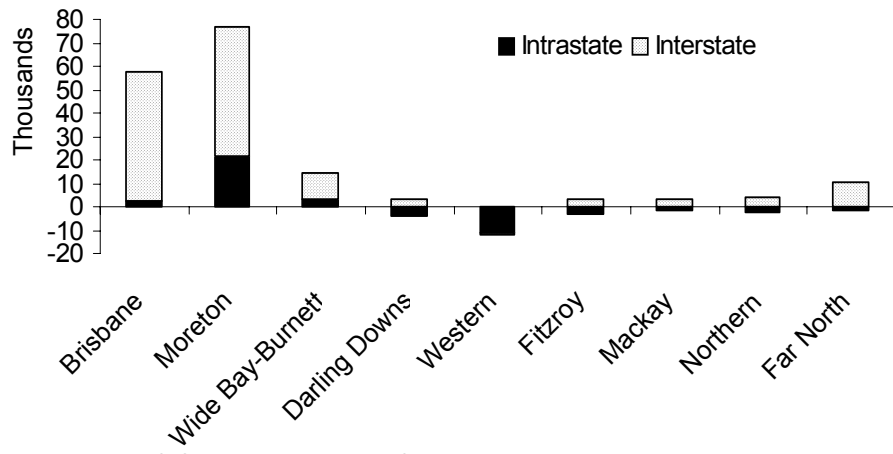
In comparison, Wide Bay-Burnett SD also recorded the highest net gain from interstate migration between 1996 and 2001 in exactly the same age ranges, 35-64 years and 5-14 years, though it did record a net loss in the age group 20-24 years.

In Far North SD, over the same time period, the situation was markedly different. In this region the highest gain from net interstate migration occurred in the age groups 10-14, 20-24 and 45-69 years. These age groups represented more than 100 per cent of total net interstate migration because of the sizeable net loss of adults aged 25-39 years.

In both Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay-Burnett SD there is no discernable peak in either the pre-retirement or early retirement age groups. Far North SD, however, recorded a modest peak in the 50-59 year age group between 1996 and 2001.

The age profile for net intrastate migration is much more pronounced. While

**Figure 8: Net intrastate and interstate migration to Queensland's regions, 1991 to 1996**



Note: SEQ = Brisbane and Moreton Statistical Divisions combined

the magnitude of the peaks in net intrastate migration are similar to net interstate migration, there is a measurable peak in the 55-59 age group for both Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay/Burnet SD in the 1996 to 2001 period.

In the case of Far North SD, over the same time period, all age groups showed a net intrastate migration loss with the higher losses occurring in the 30-39 age group and those aged less than 25 years.

There was also a substantial loss of young people aged 15-29 years between 1996 and 2001 with 2,100, more than twice the loss for the Sunshine Coast. This loss is representative of the loss for all regional areas of Queensland to Brisbane because of the 'pull factors' of the capital city in terms of education, employment, amenity and lifestyle.

### **THE OUTLOOK**

The concluding section of the *People and Place* article on '1996 Census Findings on Interstate Migration to Queensland' published in 1998 is still valid in 2004:

Despite extensive investigation into internal migration data from past Censuses, and other credible sources, analysis regarding the magnitude, composition and causes of past flows does not necessarily represent a reliable tool to facilitate the prediction of likely volumes of future flows.<sup>7</sup>

We can be sure of one aspect of migration movements: future flows will be volatile and difficult to predict accurately.

But despite this volatility, the following factors will influence future internal migration flows.

The pattern of migration from inland Australia to coastal areas could well change in the future. Past patterns of migration loss from inland areas have created an extremely skewed age profile with significantly fewer young people (15-24 years) compared with other age

groups. As young people exhibit the highest level of mobility of all age groups, past migration patterns cannot continue because of the shortage of young people remaining in many inland regions.

The 'sea change' phenomenon will no doubt continue to impact on coastal non-metropolitan Queensland, and elsewhere in coastal Australia, and deserves more rigorous investigation.

The baby-boomer generation is ageing. Baby-boomers do exhibit a relatively low propensity to move permanently over long distances but, because of the size of this cohort, as it ages it will result in significant population flows across Australia.

In addition, the Queensland Government is currently developing a Regional Plan for SEQ which will indicate the location of land available for urban development. This plan, once finalised by mid 2005, will be binding on State Government agencies and local governments and will influence the settlement pattern and hence the destination of future migration flows to the region.

The author eagerly awaits the 2006 Census results as these will shed more light on the latest trends in interstate and intrastate migration to and within Queensland.

### **Notes**

Calculations of internal migration derived for this paper from Census data are based on state-level source data. They exclude records for undefined areas, those with no usual address given in either 1996 or 2001, and the 0-4 years age group.

### **Acknowledgments**

My thanks to Jim Cooper for his assistance in compiling the data for this paper.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> R. Barker, G. Ward and I. Moore, '1996 Census findings on interstate migration to Queensland focussing on South East Queensland', *People and Place*, vol. 6 no. 4, 1998, pp. 16-17
- <sup>2</sup> S. Nugent, 'Why Sydney keeps growing — Trends in population distribution in New South Wales, 1991 to 1996', *People and Place*, vol. 6 no. 4, 1998 pp. 27-29
- <sup>3</sup> *Migration Queensland 1991-1996*, Queensland Department of Communication, Information, Local Government and Planning, Brisbane, 1999, pp. 29-34
- <sup>4</sup> *Population Growth — Highlights and Trends, Queensland 2004*, Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation, Brisbane, 2004, p. 17
- <sup>5</sup> SEQ; Brisbane and Moreton Statistical Divisions combined.
- <sup>6</sup> Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation, op. cit., p. 32
- <sup>7</sup> Barker et al., op. cit.