



Australian Government

**Department of Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities**



Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities: An Overview

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



We are experiencing historic changes to the way we live and work. The resources boom mark II, the roll out of the National Broadband Network (NBN) and efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change will have profound impacts on Australia. These forces will shape population change and will in turn be shaped by changes in our population.

Population change is not only about the growth and overall size of our population. It's about the needs of our population, it's about the skills of the population, it's about how we live and importantly, where we live.

The needs of our population include the services, infrastructure and amenity that improve our quality of life. A skilled workforce gives people the opportunities they need to share our prosperity and provides the economy with the skills it needs to grow.

The challenge of energy and water efficiency and the promise of digital connectivity will shape how we live and work. Our patchwork economy makes where we live even more important. We need to support growth in areas where demand for skills is increasing, but also ensure pressure is eased in areas where growth has outstripped infrastructure.

The Sustainable Population Strategy, our nation's first ever, outlines the Gillard Labor Government's vision for a sustainable Australia.

A sustainable Australia is a nation of sustainable communities which have the right mix of services, job and education opportunities, affordable housing, amenity and natural environment that make them places where people want to live, work and build a future.

The *Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities* Strategy will enhance the wellbeing and opportunities of current and future generations through more effective anticipation, planning and responses to the impacts of a changing population on our economy, environment and communities.





Effort and coordination is required across governments, portfolios and sectors to secure our economic prosperity, improve the liveability of our cities, suburbs and regions, and protect our environment.

A changing population will present both challenges and opportunities for our nation. These challenges and opportunities will differ across and between cities, suburbs and regions. For too long we have failed to understand how our actions affect different communities in different ways.

The Government is already delivering on substantial reform to help meet the challenges we can anticipate:

- in health to relieve pressure on our system as our population grows and ages;
- water to ensure sustainable use for communities, industries and the environment;
- building the NBN to connect regional Australia to the economic capitals of this country and the world;
- skills, education and training to deal with structural economic shifts; and
- reforming our skilled migration system to restore integrity and get skilled labour to employers who need it.

However, it has become clear that there are a range of pressures that we are not as well placed to meet – pressures felt in the community and confirmed by the Sustainable Population Advisory Panels and public consultation process.

There are some parts of Australia with more jobs than homes leading to high rents, while in others there are more homes than jobs, leading to more traffic congestion. To support a sustainable Australia the Government needs to help get the balance right to meet Australia's future challenges.

The Strategy complements the Government's National Urban Policy and the Government's commitment to strengthening regional Australia. Through these initiatives the Gillard Government is enhancing urban liveability, promoting regional development and improving the way we measure and plan for change.







The National Urban Policy, the Sustainable Communities Package and reform of Infrastructure Australia will support the creation of jobs closer to where people live, improve amenity, develop high quality public spaces, and encourage greater interaction in suburban communities.

Among the most important things we can do to take pressure off our major cities is to ensure we are making regions more attractive places to live, work and build a future.

That's why we are making the most substantial investment in our regions for decades: over \$4 billion of investments in regional hospitals, health care, affordable housing, universities, roads, and improved planning – to lift living standards outside the big capitals, provide the best services, and help regional communities reach their potential.

One of the biggest challenges to improving our sustainability is getting an accurate picture of how we are tracking against the key factors that determine sustainable communities. This is why we're developing a set of national sustainability indicators that will for the first time tell us how different regions are faring.

The Government's existing agenda, bolstered by recent Budget initiatives, puts us on a path to a sustainable Australia. However, as our population changes so too will our responses. The Strategy provides an enduring framework to help better anticipate, plan and respond to change. Together, we can build an Australia where the strength of our economy supports a better quality of life across our communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Burke". The signature is stylized and includes a small cross at the end of the top line.

Tony Burke

Minister for Sustainability, Environment,
Water, Population and Communities



SUSTAINABLE AUSTRALIA – SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: AN OVERVIEW

Introduction

The sustainable population strategy outlines the Government’s framework for a sustainable Australia. It will help to ensure that future population change is compatible with the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of Australia.

Achieving a sustainable Australia means maintaining and improving the wellbeing and opportunities of current and future generations.

The *Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities* Strategy recognises that population change is not only about the growth and overall size of our population, it is also about the needs and skills of our population, how we live, and importantly, where we live.

It recognises that population change impacts different communities in different ways.

A sustainable Australia is a nation of sustainable communities which have the services, job and education opportunities, affordable housing, amenity and natural environment that make them places where people want to work, live and build a future.

The Strategy’s focus is ensuring that we have in place the necessary policy settings and governance arrangements which will deliver improvements in our wellbeing, at the local, regional and national levels into the future. It outlines the Government’s commitment to improving the liveability of our urban areas and building stronger regions.

In many cases population changes clearly benefit Australia. Increases in the size and mobility of our skilled, working age population (whether natural increase or through migration) enable us to take advantage of significant economic opportunities, while greater cultural diversity increases the vibrancy of Australian society and helps build our relationships with other nations.





These changes need to be well managed to avoid possible impacts on the quality of life in our communities, our economic prosperity and on our natural environment.

The Government's current broad-ranging policy agenda is an agenda for the sustainability of our environment, our economy and our social and cultural opportunities now and into the future.

In addition, the Government has outlined three key initiatives in the 2011–12 Budget that underpin its framework for a sustainable Australia. Through *Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities*, the National Urban Policy, and the Ministerial Statement on Investing in Regional Australia, the Government is working to achieve more liveable cities and stronger regional communities.

Objectives

The main objective is to ensure that future changes in Australia's population are compatible with the sustainability of our economy, communities and the environment. These three elements – economic prosperity, liveable communities and environmental sustainability – are the foundations of the nation's wellbeing. The interactions between these foundations of wellbeing are often complex, given that very few issues are confined to only the economy, the environment or communities. For example, when we have a healthy and resilient environment, our communities are more liveable as we can enjoy clean air and fresh water, and our economy benefits through industries such as agriculture and tourism that rely on natural resources.



SUSTAINABLE AUSTRALIA, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Objective: To ensure that future changes in Australia's population (size, growth rate, composition and location) are compatible with the sustainability of our economy, communities and the environment.



FOUNDATIONS OF WELLBEING



ECONOMIC PROSPERITY ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES



Goal: To improve the wellbeing of current and future generations through the more effective anticipation, planning and response to the impacts of population changes on our environment, communities and economy.



Current Australian Government Initiatives



Future directions

The impacts of population change are experienced differently by different communities, given the varying economic, environmental or social circumstances between them. For this reason, the concept of regional difference – that is, that population change manifests itself in different ways at the national, regional or local level – is central to building a more sustainable Australia, particularly through targeting policy or program responses to specific communities.





Principles

Six underlying principles frame the Government's commitment to the essential aspects of the Australian way of life and the benefits of our democracy. These principles will guide how the Government addresses population issues now and into the future:

1. *Freedom of choice*: Where to live; household structure and family composition; engagement with the community, economy and our institutions, and the use of government services and infrastructure are a matter of choice for individual Australians and their communities.
2. *Valuing diversity*: Recognising the benefits of diversity – in culture (including Australia's Indigenous culture), age, beliefs and lifestyle – within the broader objective of community harmony and national unity. Commitment to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society in which everyone can participate in the opportunities which living in Australia offers.
3. *Enhancing our prosperity*: Our capacity to provide the opportunities, benefits and investments expected by Australians depends on enhancing our prosperity and living standards, in real terms, into the future. This can only be achieved through investment in the long term drivers of economic growth and productivity.
4. *Good custodianship*: The protection of the natural and built environment; sustainable use of Australia's natural resources; and the conservation of biodiversity and our heritage is an essential responsibility we owe to past and future generations and the global community.





5. *Place matters*: Our quality of life and sense of community is linked to our physical location and shared experiences. The diversity of Australia's physical environments, both natural and built, give rise to a wide range of communities as expressions of the way Australians choose to live.
6. *Joint responsibility*: Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments all have particular responsibilities and must work together, including through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), to support a sustainable Australia. Further, many factors that support our population are rightly delivered through the private and non-government sectors.

Sustainable Communities

The Government recognises that liveable communities are those which effectively provide for and support high quality of life, wellbeing and health. Liveable communities have a sense of shared identity, history and connection. They provide ready access to employment and services, ease of connection with friends and family, and high environmental amenity.

The Government currently invests significantly in Australia's urban and regional communities through economic, transport and other infrastructure, health, education and training, housing, and social services and welfare. These investments, together with policies and regulatory activities, influence the way cities, regions and towns are planned, managed and developed.





Enhancing Urban Liveability

Historically, Australia has had high rates of urbanisation, with the majority of the population living in urbanised areas. This trend is expected to continue with several million more people coming into our capital cities over the next two decades. This presents a number of opportunities and challenges for the provision of social and economic infrastructure, the environment, transport and housing.

Suburban Jobs will provide \$100.0 million over four years to support local and state governments to plan and provide for increased employment opportunities outside capital city Central Business Districts, and to further support innovative projects to use the NBN to reduce workers' travel times.

To be eligible for Government assistance, local and state governments (including potentially in partnership with the private sector) will be required to demonstrate enduring improvements in the distribution of employment across metropolitan growth areas in our major cities. Funding will be directed to initiatives that have public good aspects and are linked to capital city strategic plans. In addition, funding will also be available for innovative use of the NBN to achieve the program's objective.

In addition to *Suburban Jobs*, the Government will provide a further \$81.4 million in new investments to help cities become more productive, sustainable and liveable. These commitments form part of the Government's down payment on the COAG reform process, and include:

- \$61.4 million for *Managed Motorways*, that allow more efficient use of our road infrastructure, bringing mums and dads home from work faster; and
- \$20 million for *Urban Renewal* to help improve planning and design of the outer suburbs and major regional centres that are experiencing population growth pressures and housing and transport affordability cost pressures. The program will seek to improve the capacity of regional cities to undertake strategic planning in line with the COAG agreed criteria.



Promoting Regional Development

Our regions will also face opportunities and challenges associated with a changing population. For example, a number of regions are already experiencing rapid growth, leading to greater diversity, availability of skilled labour and economic growth. This increase in population can lead to pressures on housing affordability and therefore liveability in these locations, while other regions are experiencing declining population growth.

The following new measures are designed to further support the liveability and sustainability of urban and regional communities across Australia.

The \$29.2 million *Sustainable Regional Development* program will build on the Government's existing program of strategic assessments under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* to provide the capacity for up to seven additional strategic assessments by the Commonwealth of sustainability plans developed by state and local governments for priority high growth areas. These plans will protect long-term sustainability and biodiversity values while cutting red tape.

Through the *Promoting Regional Living* program, the Government will provide \$11.5 million over four years to non-capital cities that can demonstrate the potential for future growth. These cities will be eligible for support to market themselves as good places to live, work and build a future.

Measuring and reporting sustainability

In order to have productive, sustainable and liveable cities that can support our changing population now and into the future, we need to ensure that the right planning is in place in relation to our environment, infrastructure and social services. Careful planning for Australia's future population will be central to future productivity growth. Additionally, well-planned and vibrant cities are important in attracting tourists and enabling the benefits from visitor expenditure to be realised by the wider economy.





In support of this, it is important to have the right information available to support decision makers. It is vital that we understand the impacts of future decisions as well as current policies and programs at both the national and regional levels, in order to direct investment and identify those areas of highest need.

To meet this need, *Measuring Sustainability* will provide \$10.1 million over four years to improve the availability of information and data relating to sustainability. Funding will allow for the development of headline Sustainability Indicators covering economic, social and environmental issues that are relevant to communities. Funding will also help the establishment of a Directory of Sustainability Measurement to support access to sustainability information at national and regional scale. Enhanced information on wellbeing will allow better decision-making on the costs and benefits of proposed activities.



Building on the Government's reform agenda

In addition to the above new measures, the Government also has an existing substantial reform agenda that supports the sustainability of our population. Through the 2011–12 Budget, the Government is delivering further policies in a range of areas that will enhance our future wellbeing, including housing supply and affordability and the COAG Reform Council's Review of capital city strategic planning.

Making our regions a more attractive place to live

The 2011–12 Budget highlights that the Government is making the most substantial investment in regions for decades, with \$4.3 billion of investments in regional hospitals, health care, universities and roads – to lift living standards outside the big capitals, improve services, and help regional communities to reach their potential.

To build a sustainable Australia and strong regions which have a greater stake in our economy, the Government will make the following investments.

- \$1.8 billion over six years to renew regional health infrastructure, expand regional hospitals and support training in regional hospitals, providing families in regional Australia with confidence they will be able to access the health care they need, when they need it.
- \$500 million over five years for investment in regional higher education and vocational education and training projects, providing a real choice to school leavers in regional areas on where they advance their education.
- \$109.9 million over four years for universities with regional campuses through increased and better targeted loading payments to regional areas.
- \$916 million for the first projects to be funded under the Regional Infrastructure Fund to help unlock the economic potential of our regions.
- \$974 million over five years through the Regional Development Australia Fund to finance infrastructure projects that best fit the economic and community needs of the region – from bridges, to child care centres to sporting facilities.





Regional migration

- The Government will specify for the first time 16,000 skilled migration places to the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) – a 60 per cent increase on 2010–11.
- Permanent residency will be fast-tracked for 457 visa holders who have spent two years in regional Australia and where their employer is continuing to sponsor them for a further two years.
- Regional Migration Agreements will be introduced to allow local authorities to negotiate and coordinate access to overseas labour for employers in the region.
- The introduction of Enterprise Migration Agreements (EMAs) will address genuine skill vacancies in major resource projects with capital expenditure greater than \$2 billion and a peak workforce of 1,500. Projects that utilise EMAs will be required to contribute to training Australian workers to address future skills needs in the resources sector.
- Priority processing will be provided for regional visa categories, that is, for visa applications made under RSMS and the Regional (Residence) visa.

Skills and participation

In the 2011–12 Budget, the Government announced the *Building Australia's Future Workforce* package, designed to ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to benefit from our strong economy by investing in skills and encouraging participation in the workforce.

- The Government is investing in training in order to help Australians get the skills which industry needs, focussing on a new partnership with industry to address skill shortages, whilst also delivering medium term reform.
- This investment will be important to maintain strong economic growth, especially in the context of skilled labour shortages and capacity constraints.
- The Government will undertake a range of measures to assist and encourage groups with typically low participation to enter into the workforce or to undertake activities that will improve their future employment prospects.





Digital Economy

The Government has indicated it will release a National Digital Economy Strategy, which will position Australia as a world leading digital economy by 2020.

- Ensuring Australia becomes a leading digital economy will contribute to Australia's productivity, maintain our global competitiveness, improve our social wellbeing and help ensure the sustainability of our communities. The Government's commitment to build the enabling infrastructure for the digital economy, in particular the commitment to build the NBN, is a key step to this vision.
- The digital economy goals set by the Government in its National Digital Economy Strategy will ensure services – including health, government and education – are more readily available online to all Australians no matter where they live, and that teleworking is accessible to more Australians. This will support a greater range of options for Australians in how they work and where they live.

Conclusion

The Strategy sets out a clear framework, demonstrating that a sustainable future for Australia must be achieved across all three foundations of the nation's wellbeing – economic prosperity, liveable communities and environmental sustainability. The Government's commitment to the objective and principles of the Strategy, together with its supporting initiatives and our reform agenda, will underpin the ongoing wellbeing of our population.

In making this commitment, the Government will ensure that, as a nation, we are better placed to anticipate, plan for and respond to changes in our population and the impacts of these changes on our economy, communities and environment.



IMAGE CREDITS:

Front Cover (L-R): affordable Housing, ACT (A.Zuk), Gladstone wharf, QLD (S.Cridland), train pulling out of the station, QLD (J.Tomkins), sustainable lifestyle, ACT (Studio 2point8 photography) & office Area, Vic (E.Lauthier)

P. 2 banner images (L-R): children's playground, WA (Silver Sun Pictures), Townsville (M.Mohell), sustainability curriculum framework (D.Markovic), affordable housing, ACT (A.Zuk) & office space, VIC (E.Lauthier)

P. 3 High-rise apartments, NSW (Silver Sun Pictures)

P. 8 Recreation area in housing development, WA (Silver Sun Pictures)

P. 9 Shopping centre car park, NSW (Silver Sun Pictures)

P. 12 Office Area, Vic (E.Lauthier)

P. 14 Alice Springs, NT (M.Mohell)

Back Cover (L-R): Recreation area in housing development, WA (Silver Sun Pictures), members of Elite Customer Solutions gathered for mulching activities, VIC (J.Baker), early morning peak hour traffic, ACT (A.Zuk) & high-rise apartments, NSW (Silver Sun Pictures)

