Shifting demographic structures of Australian agricultural regions

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Presentation to ‘Healthy Farming – Stronger Communities Workshop, Institute of Agriculture, University of Western Australia, 31 July 2009
Shifting demographic structure and their implications for agricultural regions...

- New perspectives on agricultural and rural change in Australia

- Demographic and structural change in the agricultural heartlands: A WA case study

- Conclusion
New regional trajectories and ‘social landscapes’ for rural Australia

• Barr’s three social landscapes:
  ▫ **Agricultural production**; **Rural transitional**; and **Rural amenity**
  ▫ Driven by a range of factors and processes:
    ▫ **Productivity** *(terms of trade)*
    ▫ Largest 10% produce 50% of EVAP for all of Australia
    ▫ **Long term decline of staple industries, search for viable diversification, cheaper land attracts new interests**
    ▫ **The search for amenity + need for off-farm income**

Source: Barr, 2005, 1.


Source: Barr, 2004, 33, 40, 41.
Demographic implications of new trajectories and landscapes

• **Production landscapes:**
  - ‘inevitable population decline’ and ageing in situ, driven mainly by youth net migration loss. Declining density. Decline in farming but dominant industry. Ongoing heavy dependence on farming. Scarcity of women!

• **Rural transitional**

• **Rural amenity**
  - Increasing density – more farms! Population growth, triggered by in-migration, but ageing too (net migration and fertility led). Little dependence on farming. High levels of commuting.
Change in the workforce employed in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industries, 1981 - 2001 (%)
Industrial Diversity Index scores, 2001.
Total population change (%), 1981-2001

Legend
-45 - 0.00
0.01 - 22.17
22.18 - 63.64
63.65 - 117.36
117.37-226.73
Percentage change in the elderly population (65 years and over) in South Eastern Australian rural communities, 1981-2001.
The WA Wheatbelt – Midland SD: A productivist heartland?

Total farmers:
2006 4517
2001 6821
2006 masculinity ratio = 105.52 (i.e. over 105 men to 100 women)
2006 masculinity ratio = 107.30
For 15-24 yos, = 126.83

Source: ABS 2008
Legend

Wheatbelt_SLAs
out-migration % of inflows 15-24

-477.777778 - -408.582834
-408.582833 - -339.387891
-339.387890 - -270.192947
-270.192946 - -200.998004
-200.998003 - -131.803061
-131.803060 - -62.608117
-62.608116 - 6.586826
SSD07aAUST_region_Clip
Ageing of the wheatbelt population?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>% aged over 65 years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia 2001</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia 2031 (proj.)</td>
<td>c. 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avon SSD 2006</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moore SSD 2006</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campion SSD 2006</td>
<td>13.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beverley SLA 2006</td>
<td>19.0</td>
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Conclusion

- Impossible to generalise about the demographic future of a rural Australia: complex economic, demographic, social forces playing out at regional and sub-regional scales
- Nonetheless, ‘productivist’ regions face increasingly aged populations and workforces, diminishing in size (and possibly skill base). Fertility to provide natural increase for some time yet. Social networks strained. Service provision problems/challenges/opportunities
- On the positive front, food scarcity, ongoing revaluation of rural lands, a carbon neutral economy??!!
New regional trajectories and ‘social landscapes’ for rural Australia

• Debate across western advanced countries over the future of rural societies as productivist agriculture is supposedly over-run by ‘consumption’ interests.

• This formulation doesn’t fit well with the more varied environments, forms of resource use/extraction and settlement patterns. Holmes’ modes of occupance.

• Balance between production, consumption and protection