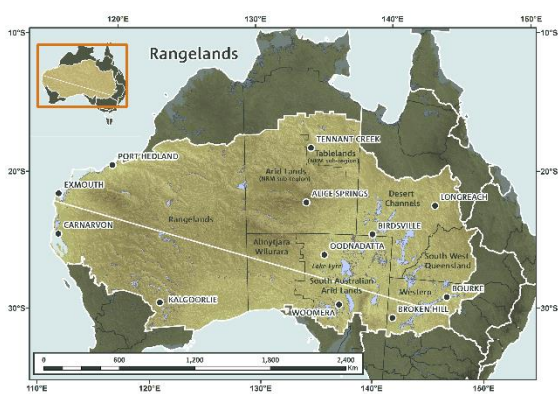


June 2019

## Rangelands – Context and Issues

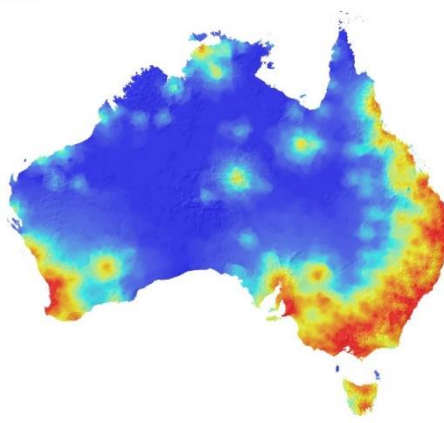
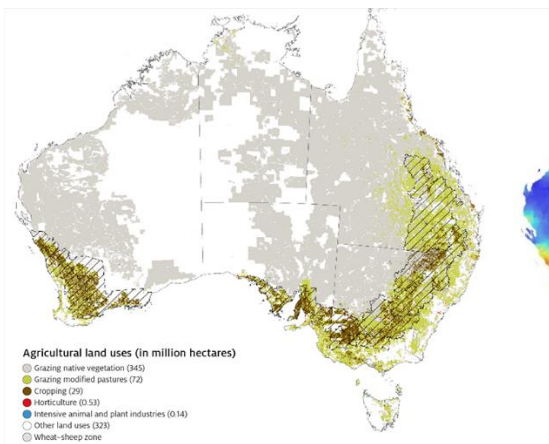
Main points:

1. Policy follows people, so
2. Need to bring people back into Rangelands, to do this it is essential to
3. Diversify beyond agriculture.



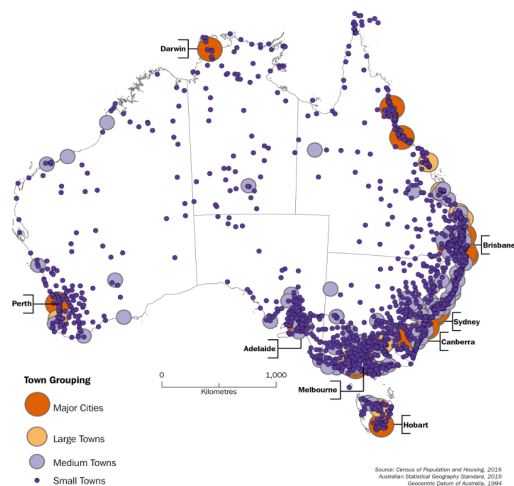
About 80% of Australia is remote or very remote. This vast area is commonly referred to as the Outback but also defined as rangelands or pastoral land<sup>i,ii</sup>.

Australian rangelands have diverse climates (monsoon, arid and semi-arid) and ecosystems (wetlands, savanna, woodlands, shrublands and grasslands). Poor soils and unreliable rainfall limit agricultural opportunities. The most productive agricultural land is limited to a small strip of land along the southeast and southwest coastlines<sup>iii</sup>. The remainder is mainly used for grazing<sup>iv</sup>.

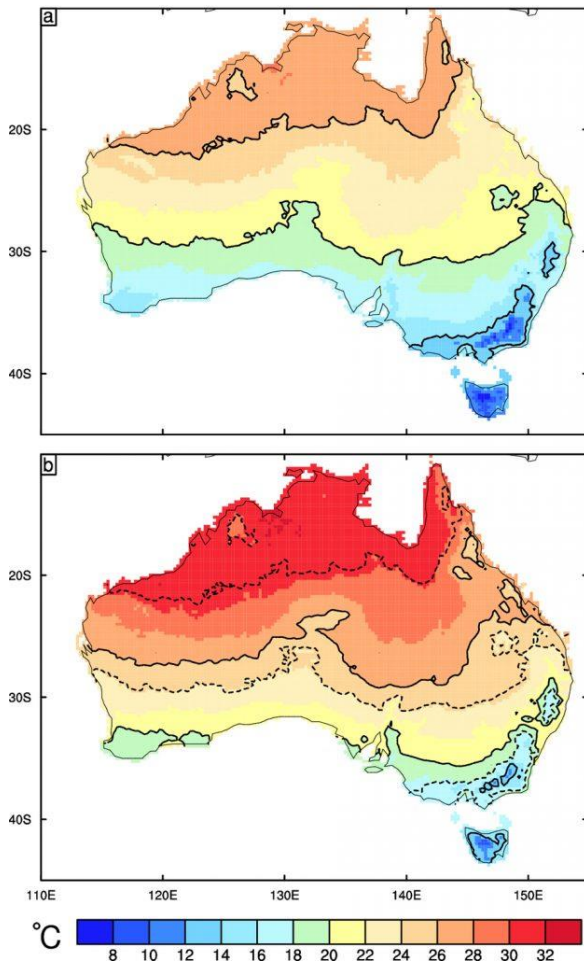


Average population density is 3.3 people per km<sup>2</sup> – but most people live in the productive zone<sup>v</sup>. The population is clustered in 5 capital cities (67%), 10 regional cities and numerous small towns <10,000 residents (9.7%) and a sparse remote population<sup>vi</sup>.

Indigenous people have the same pattern (79% in metropolitan areas, 14% remote).



The rural population is declining across Australia and the rural workforce is shrinking. Rural residents are mainly families with no children (47% cf 38% all Australia). Unemployment is much higher in rural Australia (14% outback Queensland) cf rest of Australia 5.1%<sup>vii</sup>. The agricultural workforce is older (median 49 years) cf Australia (40) and less skilled (33% have a post school qualification cf 55% all Australian). Agricultural work is lower paid with incomes 60% lower than all Australians, and 23% agriculture workers earning >\$1,249 pw cf 38% all Australians.



Climate change is having, and will continue to have serious consequences for this vast pastoral region of Australia. These two maps of the current mean temperature (a) and those in late 21<sup>st</sup> century (b) indicate the rapidly warming climate is unlikely to sustain current agricultural practices<sup>viii</sup>.

Rangelands contribute to Australia's economy. Most of the land (44.9%) is used for grazing on natural vegetation, but food produced only 11.6% of export value in 2017 *cf* mining (45.5%) and services (21.9% total, including education (7.5%) and tourism (5.8%)<sup>ix</sup>.

Rural life is an independent lifestyle. Rural people are resilient, have higher levels of volunteering and a strong sense of place *cf* urban populations. Yet overall wellbeing is less than urban populations, with higher mortality and morbidity rates<sup>x</sup>, and higher rates of accidents, suicide, depression, domestic violence etc. Concurrently, rural areas have inadequate access to trades and professional expertise and services including police, dental, legal, counselling, health specialists, NDIS, aged and child care. Remoteness in rural is exacerbated by limited access to media, ICT, education and skills which reduce access to information and ideas. At the same

time, remoteness reduces political visibility and influence. Together, these issues suggest a need for new thinking on future rangeland land use.

Any proposed change should be developed with consideration of:

- Strengths in the region e.g. resilience and commitment
- Existing resources e.g. space, sun
- Advancing overall wellbeing including quality jobs
- Increasing rural physical and social infrastructure
- Attractiveness to investors including governments, and
- Contribution to long term income producing capacity for the region.

Three possibilities that would offer significant benefits for remote Australia-

1. Solar energy – an obvious industry which will produce quality jobs and income
2. Strategic tourism could be expanded with government investment to create sequential participatory events through the cooler months. Music events, racing and ballooning have been successful and could be extended, along with other activities that will attract large crowds e.g. outback dining promoted as the largest table in outback Australia. A major Indigenous cultural centre would be very attractive to international tourists. A good airport and travel services would be essential. This would provide substantial income and seasonal employment for inland towns.
3. Education already provides significant export income, but existing Australian universities are all on the coast<sup>xi</sup>. An Inland or Outback University with a health faculty and associated hospital could bring students to rural Australia – an important consideration as students tend to stay after experiencing rural life. Studying in the outback could be highly popular with international students. Facilities like the Canadian University of the Arctic not only offer good quality jobs, they also provide a valuable site for regionally relevant research. Remote universities have been very successful e.g. University of Alaska offers 400 degrees to 30,000 students and the University of Tromso (Norway) has 16,000 students.



Cities with universities are all clustered along the coastline

Status: brief draft for Rangelands Seminar 1-2 July, 2019

Bio: Experienced social researcher, business academic, community development and health professional. Worked in all eastern mainland states, the ACT and Geneva.

## References

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- ii <https://www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au/en/impacts-and-adaptation/rangelands/>
- iii <https://www.graincentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/112317-ABARES-snapshot-map.jpg>
- iv <https://soe.environment.gov.au/theme/land/topic/2016/land-use-and-management>
- v <http://tldesigner.net/population-map-of-australia/>
- vi <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Small%20Towns~113>
- vii ABS May 2019
- viii <https://blog.csiro.au/climate-projections-show-australia-is-heading-for-a-much-warmer-future/>
- ix Austrade, 2017
- x <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/mort-books/contents/mort-books>
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