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Australia and Its Regions - People and Place

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Session 2: Australia and Its Regions - People and Place

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1.15 This discussion focuses on how regions are created in political, geographical and in social terms within Australia and whether regions matter and if regional governance is important.

Key data about regions

1.16 In almost every indicator regional communities are worse off than their city counterparts: domestic violence is higher; suicide rates are higher; computer literacy and usage is lower; unemployment rates are higher; and, incomes are lower.

- Today 66 per cent of people live in cities, a further 20 per cent in inner regional areas.

- At the beginning of last century 37 per cent of the population lived in cities and 54 per cent lived outside cities.

What is a region?

1.17 The three layers of government have different regional policies and define regions differently: regions can be defined by geography; by infrastructure and transport services; and administrative regions. Further divisions are related to other systems such as census divisions; radio regions; or electoral boundaries.

1.18 It is argued that although the different regional divisions create problems, the real issue is the different roles of the different governments. Boundary change may not necessarily resolve the disadvantages for regional communities. Rather the real need is to improve regional governance by improving constitutional arrangements; enhance mechanisms for capacity building; and properly resource the transition to regional management.

1.19 A distinction is drawn between “regionalization” in which Governments set up boundaries and “regionalism” that is a “grassroots” phenomenon whereby communities demand a greater say in the decision making processes that impacts on them.

Key tools for improving regions

1.20 Improving community trust in processes. There is a need to return to a genuine commitment to a justice or fairness orientation to offset the loss of trust and confidence:

- Providing procedural justice - whereby there is procedural fairness in communities rather than the traditional idea of distributional fairness, which in the reality of scarce resources, is unattainable.

- Also there is the notion of “group value” instead of self-interest in community decision-making. Tied to this idea is:

1.21 The importance of standing, that is each persons equal status in the group;

1.22 An unbiased and level playing field for the process; and

1.23 The trustworthiness of the policy makers.

1.24 Improving procedural and distributive fairness in regional communities is important to managing any initiatives for sustainability. If regional people are better involved in the process and governance structures of their regions then the location of boundaries is much less of an impediment.