DRO 5 Rural futures

Rural communities are strong and viable with sustainable economies, contributing to the health, character and liveability of the region

- Rural land
- Rural population
- Rural economy

The rural areas of SEQ cover approximately 1.9 million ha or about 84% of the region. Land use is a mix of agriculture (sugar-cane, horticulture, fodder, cropping and pastures), conservation, forestry and urban activities. Over 5500 agricultural businesses manage 65% of the land for animal and crop production. In 2006 the population of the rural areas and rural living areas was about 287,800 people (10% of the region’s population) and an additional 58,400 people (2.1%) lived in rural towns and villages scattered across the region outside the major urban centres.

Rural communities and industries are facing many challenges. Key issues affecting the rural sector in SEQ include increased global competition, the accessibility and cost of water, the availability and affordability of skilled labour, the price of land, uncertainty surrounding climate change and the ongoing availability of cheap oil.

SEQ’s farming and resource sectors employ around 1.8% of the region’s workforce, while the value of agricultural production accounts for just 1.2% of the gross regional economy. However, the total farm-dependent economy (including inputs, transport and processing) in SEQ is worth $8 billion, or 11.4% of regional Gross Domestic Product. SEQ’s agricultural economy makes up about 12% of the state’s agricultural economy and 3% of the national agricultural economy.

Agricultural production in the region includes broadacre cropping (cereals, sugar cane and other crops), horticulture (fruit, vegetables and amenity horticulture such as flowers, turf and plant nurseries), and livestock (pigs, meat cattle, milk cattle and poultry). As a result of the drought, total farm income has dropped and fewer people are employed in agriculture. The outlook for the future is also uncertain.

The area and volume of agricultural production in the region has declined during the period 2000–01 to 2005–06. The area planted for sugar cane in SEQ declined by 60% between 2000–01 and 2005–06, due primarily to the closure of the Moreton Sugar Mill at Nambour in 2002. There is a trend towards an increasing number of smaller enterprises operating in SEQ than in 2001.

There have been fewer subdivisions of rural land into smaller lots since 2004–05. This slowing trend suggests that the regulatory provisions restricting subdivision in the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area are taking effect, although ongoing monitoring will be required to confirm this trend.
Rural land
Extent of rural land sub-division within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area

Interpretation

Status assessment
Amber

Where do we want to be?
The goal is to slow and halt the fragmentation of land within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area through land sub-divisions and minimise the opportunities for incompatible land uses to impact on existing and potential areas of profitable and sustainable primary production.

What is happening?
Over many decades rural land has undergone progressive sub-division with little consideration of the long-term future of primary production within the region. In many cases the sub-division of agricultural land has been undertaken to accommodate residential development leading to land use conflicts including (amongst others):

- impacts on the profitability and viability of primary producers
- increased speculation on the price of rural land due to increased demands for residential developments
- impacts on people within residential developments neighbouring agricultural land
- increased regulatory burden on state governments and regional councils.

The data provide a snapshot of land parcel distributions from 2002 to 2007, including periods before and after the introduction of the SEQ Regional Plan. The regulatory provisions of the SEQ Regional Plan were enacted in October 2004 and came fully into effect in October 2006. The enactment of the regulatory provisions of the SEQ Regional Plan appears to have stabilised the number of land parcels within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area (Figure 5.1—Figure 5.5). This suggests the sub-division of rural land has been slowed. Additional years of monitoring are required to confirm this as applications for sub-division approved within the allowed ‘sunset’ period to September 2006 (or in the case of northern Beaudesert—March 2008) may not yet have been finalised.

Why is it happening?
The unprecedented population growth of SEQ is placing pressure on land resources for residential development and providing incentives for rural landowners to sub-divide and sell land.

Why is it important?
Controlling and coordinating new and existing residential development across the SEQ region through land use and infrastructure planning helps to ensure demands for essential services are met by state and local authorities. Without adequate planning and coordination the potential for inefficient residential development is increased and the productivity of rural land is diminished.

What does it mean for sustainability?
Maintaining and enhancing the profitability and sustainability of rural areas through detailed land use and infrastructure planning improves the economic, environmental and social sustainability of rural areas. Additionally, maintaining productive primary production areas close to urban areas minimises transport and handling times to maximise the quality and affordability of fresh produce for urban consumers.

Society’s response
The introduction of the SEQ Regional Plan in 2005 was designed to stop further sub-division of land below prescribed limits. In some local government areas these limits have been derived from planning schemes or from the SEQ Regional Plan <www.dip.qld.gov.au/regional-planning/seq-regional-plan-amendment-1.html>. The data suggests a stabilisation in lot sizes in the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area.
With the additional issues such as climate change and peak oil affecting the sustainability of rural and urban areas it is becoming more important for individuals and all level of government to implement strategies that maximise the efficiency of resource use including rural and urban land.

**Data**

![Graph showing number of land parcels within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area under 2000 m² per regional council area within the SEQ region from 2002 to 2007](image1)

**Figure 5.1:** Number of land parcels within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area under 2000 m² per regional council area within the SEQ region from 2002 to 2007

![Graph showing number of land parcels within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area between 2000 m² and 20 ha per regional council area within the SEQ region from 2002 to 2007](image2)

**Figure 5.2:** Number of land parcels within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area between 2000 m² and 20 ha per regional council area within the SEQ region from 2002 to 2007
Figure 5.3: Number of land parcels within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area between 20 and 100 ha per regional council area within the SEQ region from 2002 to 2007

Figure 5.4: Number of land parcels within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area over 100 ha per regional council area within the SEQ region from 2002 to 2007
Figure 5.5: Total number of land parcels within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area per lot size within the SEQ region from 2002 to 2007

**Indicator author**
Bill Macfarlane, Department of Infrastructure and Planning

**Related indicators**
Rural population, urban structure

**Other data and links**
Links to more detailed datasets or reports

**Source dataset**
Rural population

The resident population of rural areas in SEQ, including rural towns, villages and rural living areas

Interpretation

Status assessment

Grey

Where do we want to be?

Population is stable in rural areas or increasing in rural towns and villages at a similar rate to urban areas. It is desirable that most population growth that occurs outside of the designated urban footprint in SEQ is contained to rural towns and villages, rather than in the rural landscape or rural production areas.

What is happening?

At 30 June 2006 the estimated number of people living outside the major urban areas of the SEQ region was 346,245 or 12.5% of the regional population (ABS, 2008). Of this total, 30,634 (1.1%) lived in rural residential areas, 58,442 (2.1%) lived in rural towns and villages and 257,169 (9.2%) lived in the general rural area (Table 5.1).

Of the total rural population, 70% live on farms and allotments in the regional landscape and rural production area and 30% live in either rural towns and villages or in rural residential areas.

Why is it happening?

The SEQ region is currently experiencing unprecedented population growth. Part of the population growth is occurring outside the major urban areas in either towns and villages or in rural areas. Population growth that occurs outside of the rural towns and urban footprint is not necessarily due to inwards migration—there’s also a natural increase component from those already living in rural areas.

Why is it important?

An important principle in the SEQ Regional Plan is to achieve an efficient residential growth pattern through a compact urban form where infrastructure and services to the population can be provided efficiently and effectively. However, a proportion of the population growth will continue to be housed in rural areas either in existing towns and villages or on vacant allotments in rural areas. It is important to know where population growth is occurring to measure the achievement of this planning principle. Knowing the distribution of population growth is also important for the provision of services across the region.

What does it mean for sustainability?

A dispersed population across rural areas can reduce sustainability by increasing private transport trips resulting in high rates energy consumption and emissions of greenhouse gases. However, a stable or slightly increasing population in rural towns and villages is important to sustain rural communities and provide opportunities for value adding to rural businesses.

Society’s response

The introduction of the SEQ Regional Plan in 2005 was designed to achieve a compact urban form with the majority of population growth being accommodated within the designated urban footprint.

With the additional issues such as climate change and peak oil affecting the sustainability of rural and urban areas it is becoming more important for individuals and all level of government to implement strategies that maximise the efficiency of resource use including rural and urban land.
Data

Table 5.1: Population in regional land use categories in 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use</th>
<th>Population (2006)</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td>257,169</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural living areas</td>
<td>30,634</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural towns and villages</td>
<td>58,442</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban areas</td>
<td>2,456,096</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,802,341</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicator author
Mick Capelin, Department of Infrastructure and Planning

Related indicators
Rural economy, Rural land, Urban structure

Other data and links
SEQ Regional Plan—Regional land use boundary mapping layers

Source dataset

References
Rural economy
This indicator describes agricultural production within the rural economy

Interpretation

Status assessment

Amber: primary agricultural production overall is decreasing, but this is unavoidable in an urbanising/industrialising landscape.

Where do we want to be?

The volume of agricultural production should be maintained or increased, with profitable enterprises operated by a mix of full and part-time producers. Agricultural production should be based within healthy landscapes, with efficient and adaptive farming systems that manage uncertainty and variability, to assist rural communities to be viable. While accepting some conversion of land to purposes other than agriculture, this should only happen when it results in a genuine social gain. Transformation of the regional production system should reflect opportunities provided by the vicinity of markets, processing facilities, and availability of labour. Strong biosecurity systems are necessary to protect people, communities and agriculture from pests and diseases that threaten the safety and profitability of agricultural enterprises. Regional food production will be increasingly important if transport systems become constrained by rising fuel costs.

What is happening?

Agricultural production in the SEQ region includes broadacre cropping (cereals, sugar cane and other crops), horticulture (fruit, vegetables and amenity horticulture), and livestock (sheep, meat cattle, milk cattle and poultry). There were more than 5500 agricultural businesses in the SEQ region in 2005–06. Agricultural production in the SEQ region has declined overall during the period 2000–01 to 2005–06.

Figure 5.6 and Figure 5.7 show a decline in most cropping activities, with the most significant decline attributed to area planted and production of sugarcane. The area planted to sugarcane in SEQ decreased by 60% between 2000–01 and 2005–06 with an associated decrease in production. The decrease in area of cereal cropping for grain was compensated by an increase in area of cereal cropping for animal feed. Figure 5.8 also shows a reduction in the number of cropping establishments in SEQ, with the largest declines for grain cropping and sugarcane.

Figure 5.9 shows an increase in the area planted to cultivated turf and a decrease in area used for fruit, vegetable and nursery production in SEQ. The number of nursery establishments has decreased by 22%, resulting in a decrease in the total area of nursery production. The number of cut flower establishments has increased by 8% despite a 9% decrease in the area planted to cut flower production, indicating that there are a larger number of smaller enterprises than in 2000–01. Figure 5.9 also shows that the area planted to turf increased during the five-year period.

Figure 5.9 and Figure 5.10 show an interesting trend for the fruit and vegetable industries. During the period 2000/01 to 2005–06, the number of fruit and vegetable establishments has increased, while the area planted to fruit and vegetable production has decreased. This implies that there are a larger number of smaller enterprises operating in SEQ than in 2000–01. The main increases have been in strawberries, olives, macadamias, broccoli, lettuce and other exotic vegetables, while there has been a decrease in more traditional enterprises such as avocados, mangoes, papaya, watermelons, pumpkins, potatoes, onions and sweet corn. Growth in olives and macadamia enterprises has been fuelled by Managed Investment Scheme taxation advantages.

Figure 5.11 shows changes in livestock numbers between 2000–01 and 2005–06. Meat cattle numbers have increased by 13% during this period, while dairy cattle numbers have decreased by 30%. Pig numbers have decreased by 12%. These changes in livestock numbers are reflected by changes in establishments with livestock. There has been an increase in establishments running meat cattle and a decrease in establishments with milk cattle and pigs.

Figure 5.12 and Figure 5.13 show changes to the poultry industry in SEQ between 2000–01 and 2005–06. The number of egg production enterprises (chickens—layers) decreased by 30%, while the dozens of eggs produced has dropped by over 60%. This indicates that the remaining egg production establishments have reduced their production levels. Total chicken meat production has increased by 14% in SEQ. However, this increase in total chicken meat production shows a significant structural change in the industry. During this five-year period, the proportion of meat chickens grown by farmers on behalf of chicken meat processors has increased from 83% to 99%.
Table 5.2 shows irrigation water usage for the SEQ region for 2005–06. The largest user of irrigation water was for irrigated pasture production for grazing, using around 75,000 ML, followed by vegetables using 30,000 ML and lifestyle horticulture using 16,000 ML. Lifestyle horticulture is the largest water user per ha, with approximately 8 ML applied to each ha, while pasture production uses around 3.6 ML per ha and vegetables use around 3 ML per ha of production.

Why is it happening?

There are a range of factors influencing the decline in most agricultural commodities from the SEQ region. Until the SEQ Regional Plan came into effect, some agricultural land was subdivided and sold for urban or rural living lots. This has been exacerbated by the lack of inter-generational transfer of farm businesses as younger generations often do not stay in agriculture due to the choice of jobs in nearby urban areas. External factors such as decreases in commodity prices and drought have reduced profitability of agricultural businesses. The most significant of these pressures has been the prolonged drought during this period, which has seen all 11 local government areas in SEQ drought declared for at least some of this period, and facing reductions in annual irrigation allocations. However, other factors may change in the near future with growing international shortages of cereals and sugar, and an increasing Asian market for beef.

The decrease in sugar cane establishments and production is largely due to closure of the Moreton Sugar Mill at Nambour, although the other pressures of drought and lower sugar prices have also played a role. Drought conditions have also resulted in a smaller area planted to other broadacre crops.

The decrease in milk cattle and pig establishments in SEQ is also mainly a result of drought and commodity prices. The pig industry throughout Australia has been declining due to imported pork placing downward pressure on prices, which impacts on enterprise profitability. The increase in population living on rural living blocks has increased the number of meat cattle in the SEQ region but has also increased pressure on intensive animal production farms (poultry, pigs and dairy) through complaints over odour and noise associated with these establishments.

Why is it important?

Agricultural production in SEQ is important as it provides a local source of food, provides landholders with a source of income and assists in maintaining a range of landscape values through sustainable land management practices. SEQ has areas of good quality agricultural land that are able to support the regional economy. Associated value adding industries such as food processing also contribute to the regional economy and sustainability and character of rural communities.

What does it mean for sustainability?

Regional food production will become increasingly important as the cost of transport increases due to increases in fuel costs. Shorter transport distances also assist in reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions. Land that is no longer used for agricultural production may become degraded due to the lack of ongoing management, leading to a spread of weeds and pest animals. However, rehabilitation of unproductive agricultural land to native vegetation communities can contribute to increasing the biodiversity of the region.

Society’s response

The SEQ Regional Plan prohibits further subdivision of land within the Regional Landscape and Rural Production Area below 100 ha (except in approved rural precincts), which will reduce the loss of agricultural land. Consumer preferences may also drive an increase in local food production in SEQ, although the products produced may be different to those currently produced.

With appropriate policy settings, together with supporting research, development and extension, traditional primary industries can adapt to new conditions and new entrepreneurial rural economies emerge. A whole of government, industry and regional NRM group collaboration has been actively working on strategies to cultivate a sustainable future for agriculture in SEQ.
Data

Figure 5.6: Change in cropping area, 2000–01 to 2005–06

Figure 5.7: Change in crop production, 2000–01 to 2005–06

Figure 5.8: Change in number of cropping establishments, 2000–01 to 2005–06
Figure 5.9: Change in horticulture area, 2000–01 to 2005–06

Figure 5.10: Change in number of horticulture establishments, 2000–01 to 2005–06

Figure 5.11: Change in numbers of livestock, 2000–01 to 2005–06
Figure 5.12: Change in poultry production, 2000–01 to 2005–06

Figure 5.13: Change in number of livestock establishments, 2000–01 to 2005–06

Table 5.2: Irrigation area and usage in SEQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Area irrigated (ha)</th>
<th>Volume applied (ML)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle horticulture</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasture</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indicator author**

Miriam East, Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries
Related indicators
Area of grazing lands, Area of GQAL; Invasive plants and animals; Emissions to water; Land condition; Groundwater availability; Rural land, Rural population.

Other data and links

Source dataset
Custodian
Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
Source
Agricultural commodity statistics are collected by ABS every five years in the Agricultural Census. The most recent two censuses were in 2000–01 and 2005–06. The majority of data from these censuses is publicly available from ABS.
Data on area and production of broadacre crops and horticulture crops, and number of livestock is available in datacubes of the publication 7125.0—Agricultural Commodities: Small Area Data, Australia, 2005–06.
Data on the value of agricultural production will be available in May 2008 from ABS in publication 7503.0—Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced.
Data on total agricultural businesses and irrigation water use is available from 4618.0—Water Use on Australian Farms 2005–06.

References
Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008. 7125.0 Agricultural Commodities: Small Area Data, Australia, 2005–06.,
Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, 4618.0 Water Use on Australian Farms 2005–06.,