

Central Queensland Service Improvement and Innovation Forum

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ABSTRACT

“Population Growth, Regionalisation, Economic Development and Some Implications for Service Delivery”

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Not long ago, the Queensland Government announced it will design a new strategy for stimulating population in regional areas to help alleviate growth pressures in the state's south-east corner.

This strategy resonates with the case for 'sustainability' over a 'big Australia', an issue that received plenty of attention during the most recent Federal election campaign and which will surely feature prominently at the next State election.

The two most talked-about levers for attracting population and investment in regional Queensland can be labelled (1) 'capacity-building' initiatives, like investment in strategic infrastructure and community facilities and (2) 'artificial attractors' like financial incentives for businesses to relocate to regional centres or a boost to the First Home Owner Grant for those who buy in the bush.

This presentation will consider the pros and cons of both approaches and argue that offering incentives will have negligible benefits without effective land use planning and infrastructure investment.

It will also consider what regionalisation might mean from a wider (State) perspective, with particular reference to infrastructure provision, service delivery and economic development. For example, a 10% increase in population across the whole of regional Queensland excluding the south-east corner, would equate to just 5% of SEQ's current population – a start but hardly a solution to south-east Queensland's ever-mounting population pressures.

So what should be done? To encourage sustainable growth that is smart, prosperous and liveable, we need to not only support investment in our regions, but also recognise the potential gains from a bigger but more productive Australia, where the principal drivers of economic growth are embedded in the efficiency of our rapidly growing capital cities.

But as the regions get bigger, new methods of service delivery will need to be explored and ultimately implemented. How this happens will need to have regard for governments' role as an efficient, cost-effective provider of services as well as its role as a sphere of governance with a mandate to serve and develop the community.

Using intelligence gathered through recent studies and investigations, the discussion will conclude with some considerations for future service delivery in broad terms with reference to centralised vs. decentralised approaches and the complementary role of technology.