

Urban Growth and Decline

The nature of Urban Growth and Decline

The issue of urban growth and decline is one that affects vast numbers of Australians. Australia has become an increasingly urban society. An **urban area** is a settlement in which residents are not directly involved in the production of food and raw materials. The growth of our urban areas is driven by a number of factors:

- ★ Most migrants want to settle in urban centres.
- ★ Increasing numbers of people are moving from rural areas into larger urban centres. This process is called **rural-urban migration**.
- ★ **Natural growth** is also an important factor and refers to the children of residents in urban areas.

The issue is not only how to best manage an increasing or decreasing urban population, but also how to ensure sustainability. Population growth in urban centres puts great pressure on infrastructure. Providing the increased population with water, electricity, telephone and public transport is very expensive. Often the expansion of urban areas into the surrounding rural areas (a process called **urban sprawl**) has led to car dependence because the state and federal governments have been unable to keep up with the expansion. As a result, people often spend significant amounts of time commuting to and from work.

Rapid urban growth has caused particular concern for a variety of groups. Commuters, for example, are troubled by traffic congestion on a daily basis. Residents in car-dependent suburbs are concerned about how a lack of adequate public transport and issues such as sustainability, in terms of water, energy and waste management, affect most people. Minority groups are also faced with gross inequality due to limited access to essential services, such as adequate health care.

On the other hand, however, the construction industry supports rapid population growth and provides employment opportunities in a range of areas.

As urban centres continue to grow, rural areas are faced with the challenge of significant population loss. In particular, large numbers of young people migrate to larger urban centres seeking jobs and an expanded social life.



WEB

Visit your local council's website to find the following information.

- a. What environmental issues appear to be of greatest concern for this area?
- b. What programs or methods do they have in place to manage these issues?
- c. What activities or programs can you become actively involved in to help protect or conserve the region's environment?
- d. Suggest improvements the council could undertake in terms of the environment (e.g. reporting data, greater promotion of current projects, or new projects).
- e. Find out the contact details that you would need to pass on this information.

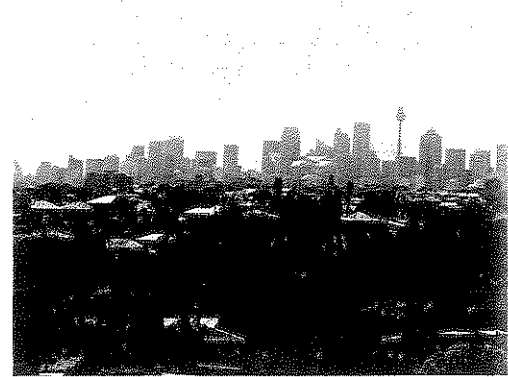


Fig 1.48 The suburbs of Sydney have rapidly expanded as Australia's population has increased



Fig 1.49 Commuters sitting in a queue of traffic.



Fig 1.50 Townhouses have allowed the growing populations to fit in a smaller space.

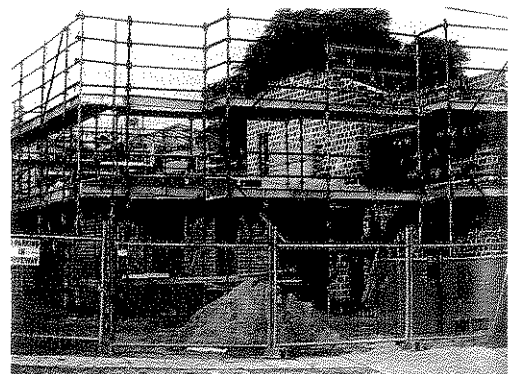


Fig 1.51 The construction industry benefits from the need to build new houses to fit growing populations.

The impact of Urban Growth and Decline

The impact of urban growth and decline is considerable. As the urban area expands, the first impact is on the natural environment in the surrounding vicinity. Habitats are destroyed. Ecosystems are disrupted. A range of problems develop around the issue of effective waste management, such as sewage disposal, access to fresh water, and sustainable energy.

As the urban area grows issues of social cohesion and equity become increasingly important. The quality of urban life can also deteriorate as issues such as congestion impact on the daily lives of many people. Others, particularly the elderly, are concerned with issues of crime and drugs.

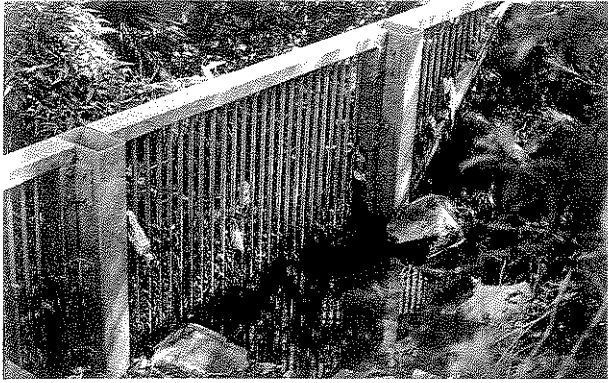


Fig 1.52 Litter traps collect the rubbish to prevent it travelling downstream.

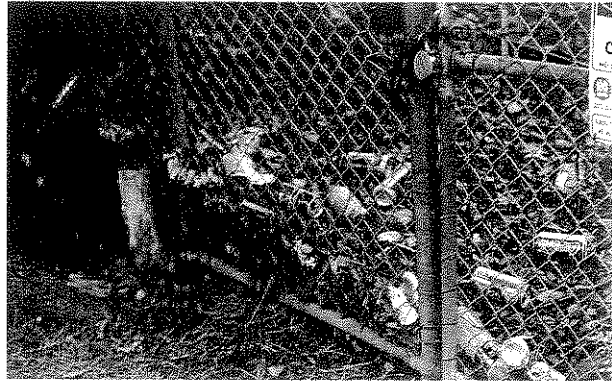


Fig 1.53 Drink containers are a large component of urban litter.

The responses of individuals, groups and government to the issue of Urban Growth and Decline

Individuals have responded to the typical urban growth issues in a variety of ways. People in car-dependent areas have joined together to form car-pools, which reduces the expense of commuting to work. Individuals have also acted to conserve water by installing water tanks. After the initial cost, tanks provide easy access to recycled water. The use of bicycles and/or walking as alternative forms of transport is also an increasing response to pollution.

The response to the issues associated with urban growth amongst key **groups** has been significant. For example, the National Road and Motorists' Association (NRMA) lobbies governments to address common concerns for motorists. In particular, they have been responsible for improving roads. The Public Transport Group lobbies for better public transport and a number of environmental groups advocate more sustainable water/energy use and better waste management.

The government response to the issue of urban growth and decline is considerable. **Local councils** develop environmental plans to manage the growth, **state governments** provide the infrastructure, and the **federal government** provides large amounts of funding.

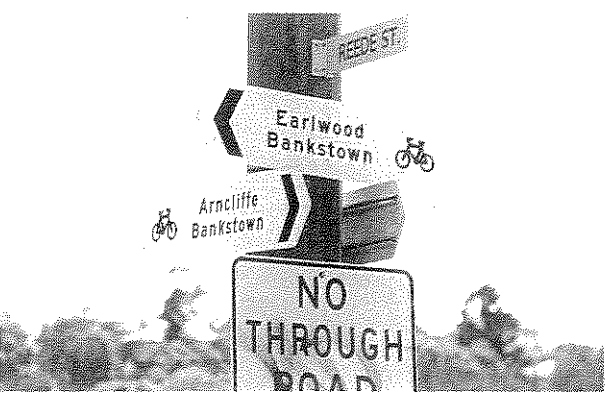


Fig 1.54 Cycleways encourage a more environmentally sustainable form of transport.



Fig 1.55 Designated bus lanes improve public transport services.

Worksheet 1.6 Urban Growth and Decline

