

## **8 Downturn, depression and morale: qualitative change in rural life**

### **Aims of the chapter**

The previous chapter sought to identify and measure changes in attachment, openness, integration and satisfaction over the period of the rural crisis in terms of average values derived from aggregates of respondents. The results depict social change by comparing snapshots at points in time, without bringing us into direct contact with the lives of those affected, or capturing the highly varied and dynamic experiences at the level of individual and family. In the present chapter the focus shifts from outcomes to process, and from quantified indices to qualitative aspects of rural change at the level of the individual respondent, often speaking on behalf of his/her family. The intention is to reflect rural morale and attitudes at a time of deep trauma, and to provide an essential supplement, or counterweight, to the numerical approach of the previous chapter.

Specifically, the chapter aims:

- a) From a content analysis of the qualitative source material, to identify and outline the main categories into which the perceptions of rural life in South Australia fall;
- b) to illustrate some key qualitative aspects of South Australian rural community life both before and during the rural recession, and ;
- c) to relate the qualitative perceptions of social change to the observed patterns of demographic and socio-economic change discussed in earlier chapters; and
- d) using the deeper insights gained from the above, to summarise some likely long-term consequences of the rural recession.

### **The empirical material and its analysis**

The chapter builds on three main bodies of qualitative material: two sets of written responses to an open-ended invitation on the back pages of the 1982/83 and 1992/93 postal questionnaires respectively; and a set of submissions made during 1994 to a South Australian Parliamentary Committee investigation into rural poverty.

#### ***Qualitative material from the two postal surveys***

In the first postal survey, the following invitation appeared at the top of an otherwise blank page:

“Finally, if you think there is anything important about your local community as a place to live, and which is not covered in the questionnaire, please feel free to write about it on this page. We would be most grateful for your views”.

In 1992/93, the same wording was used, but the final sentence was extended to read:

“... grateful for your views, particularly about how your community has changed over the last ten years (since 1982)”.

Both sets of comments revealed a wealth of insight into rural social life, but the extension of wording in the second survey gave the 1992/93 material a different emphasis. Comments volunteered in 1982/83 focussed mainly on the status of local communities as they were then perceived, with many insights into variations in openness, integration and satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The 1992/93 comments focussed much more strongly on perceived recent change. The nature of the responses varies from just a few lines to lengthy letters far exceeding the space on the A4 page. In all, the 1982/83 survey elicited responses from 464 of the 1248 rural respondents, and a further 248 from the 608 responding residents of selected country towns. (The latter group is not included in the quantitative analysis of rural change given in Chapter 6). In 1992/93, 675 of the total of 1198 rural respondents provided qualitative comments on the back page.

### *Evidence presented to the Parliamentary Committee*

The material from the Committee report (Parliament of South Australia, 1995) consists of evidence submitted either in the form of written submissions, or as Hansard transcriptions of evidence given verbally at hearings held by the Committee, in person or by video-conference in the worst-hit parts of the State. Access was granted to peruse the original documents, held in the Parliamentary library. They consist of 38 written submissions by individuals, 30 more from various organisations such as hospitals, churches, charities (eg. St. Vincent de Paul Society), N.G.O.s and rural counselling services, and a further 30 from State or Local Government bodies. Because the Committee was specifically seeking 'hard' evidence of poverty and its impacts, the responses – particularly those from Government and semi-Government agencies – have a strong flavour of attempts to produce facts and figures. The Report itself, though comprehensive and sympathetic, seeks as far as possible to present an objective documentation of rural poverty. These quantitative aspects have been discussed rather extensively in Chapter 7 and are not further developed here.

Instead, the concern of this chapter is with the qualitative aspects of this evidence. Although frequently and somewhat pejoratively dismissed as 'anecdotal' in the Committee's proceedings, the texts of these submissions give much deeper insights into the impact of severe poverty than appears on the surface in the Report – an impact not only on the morale of the moment, but arguably affecting the underlying moral code and associated values and attitudes. In Bourdieu's terms, habitus as well as practice has probably been affected.

Some of the submissions, such as those by welfare workers in the front line of emergency service provision, are based on intimate contacts with the experience of a wide range of families. Although these experiences therefore pass through an extra perceptual filter, they have the advantage of distilling evidence from a large number of families, many of whom would never personally have given evidence. Complementing these synthesising statements are the unique insights that come from direct statements by affected persons and families. There were no restrictions on the length of written submissions.

From this bulk of evidence, after several perusals to identify, list and categorise the persistent themes that emerged from the material, I have selected a smaller number of insightful items for analysis. These include 21 written submissions and 34

transcriptions of interviews recorded as Hansard documents, the latter covering 69 persons' oral input. Given that the material from the two postal surveys consists of written statements by individuals, in the case of the Parliamentary inquiry I have concentrated a good deal on the transcripts of verbal evidence.

### *Method of analysis*

The qualitative software package 'NUD\*IST' was used to facilitate storage, retrieval and interrogation of what finally became a very large and complex volume of material. This software requires the text for analysis to be organised in documents, sections, and 'text units'. The latter are the smallest units for analysis; in the postal surveys they were defined as single sentences of text. In the Parliamentary evidence the Hansard stenographers had already structured the spoken evidence well, so that the text units were paragraphs. Each or any text unit can then be coded according to one or several qualitative categories (eg. 'Crime') according to the ideas it conveys. The categories, called 'nodes', can then be combined, split, or relocated in an index tree at any stage in the analysis, and the database can be interrogated according to any of 17 Boolean search operators – eg. the 'Intersect', 'Union' or 'Overlap' of sets of text units coded to specified nodes.

In the present case, a single index system was developed for all three sets of qualitative comments. However, because they were collected in different years, and for different purposes, the comments from the three data sets tend to cluster in different areas of the coding system. The index system itself (Table 8.1) indicates the very broad range of issues covered in the qualitative material. There is no pretence that these issues can be quantified, but Table 8.2 gives an idea of which index categories attracted most comment in the three different sets of evidence. It lists the twenty top ranking categories in each set by the number of text units coded to each.

In reporting on qualitative material, the question "how far is it representative of the whole population?" immediately appears. Bias and selectivity is of course inherent in the material from the outset, both from the incomplete response rate to the mail questionnaire, and from the limited number who provided qualitative comments. Even among these, many types of bias may be expected. For instance, the more educated and literate, and those with a particular concern – eg. threatened closure of a local hospital – will very likely be over represented. Nonetheless, the evidence which *has* been collected is a very rich and insightful material that adds greatly to the numerical data presented earlier. Many aspects of it are so pervasive and oft-repeated by widely-separated respondents that they have an unmistakable ring of truth and validity.

A significant decision is whether to cite responses verbatim, or correct spelling and grammatical errors (of which there are many) in the original, handwritten, material from the postal surveys. To avoid any impression of patronising or belittling the person cited, I have retained the respondents' exact words, but corrected any spelling errors. Inevitably, this procedure loses some of the poignancy and directness of the original message when sometimes laboured handwriting is presented as corrected prose set in 'Times New Roman' font. Care has been taken to avoid identification of any respondent; in some cases this has required the name of the particular town or community mentioned also to be kept anonymous.

**Table 8.1 Index to coding of qualitative data**

1 Feeling about direction of change	9 Social pathology
1 1 Growth feeling	9 1 Violence (inc. domestic)
1 2 Decline feeling	9 2 Crime
2 Countrymindedness	9 3 Racial/ethnic tensions
2 1 Attitude to rural life	9 4 Drug/alcohol abuse
2 1 1 Positive	9 5 Loneliness/social isolation
2 1 2 Negative	9 6 Disability problems
2 2 Attitude to city	9 7 Unemployment
2 2 1 Pro-city attitude	9 8 Women's work issues
2 2 2 Hostile attitude to city	9 9 Marriage/family problems
3 Farm trends	9 10 Poverty
3 1 Farm amalgamation/subdivision	9 11 Housing market problems
3 2 Farm incomes	9 12 Vandalism/antisocial behavr.
3 3 Farm managemt/generation shift	9 13 Feel abandoned
3 4 Farm jobs	9 14 Stress
3 5 Hobby farms	9 15 Decay of social life
3 6 Drought, recession	9 16 Hopelessness
3 7 Finance, banks	9 17 Impact on children
3 8 Overwork	9 18 Desperation/suicide
3 9 Safety, accidents	10 Isolation/distance
4 This community	10 1 Condition of roads
4 1 Openness	10 2 Remoteness
4 2 Integration	10 3 Small town bypassing
4 3 Attachment	10 4 Barriers to movement
4 4 Satisfaction	10 5 Fuel, freight cost
4 5 Leadership	10 7 Contact with city
4 6 Dissatisfaction	10 8 Poor/no public transport
4 7 Links to other communities	11 Perceptions of Government
4 8 Incomer personality factor	11 1 National policies
5 Transparency of rural life, gossip	11 2 State government policies
6 Community formative factors	11 3 Local government policies
6 1 Sport	11 4 Planning intervention/rules
6 1 1 Loss/decay of sport	12 Demographic factors
6 2 Church	12 1 Loss of young people
6 3 Pubs	12 2 Increase in retirees
6 4 Schools	12 3 Gender imbalance
6 6 History	12 4 Depopulation
6 8 Service clubs	12 5 Impact on social structure
7 Insider/outsider perceptions of community	12 6 Rate of population turnover
7 1 Insider attitudes to community	12 7 "Drawbridge" mentality
7 2 Newcomer attitudes to c'munity	13 Rural service access & quality
7 3 Urban refugees	13 1 Entertainment, culture
7 4 youth attitudes to community	13 2 Water, sanitation
7 5 Commuters	13 4 Higher cost goods/services
8 Apparent underlying values	13 5 Education, schools
8 1 Conservative/nostalgic views	13 7 Services - general
8 2 Gender related	13 7 1 Public serv. losses
8 3 Progressive/radical views	13 7 2 Private serv. losses
8 4 Family values	13 8 Medical, health
8 5 Agrarianism	13 9 Mental Health
8 6 Work ethic	13 10 Social security
8 7 Informal/formal sanctions	13 11 Rural counsellors
8 9 Pride, secrecy, don't want help	14 Environmental issues
8 10 Stoicism, low expectations	14 1 Environmental appreciation
8 11 Cosmopolitan	14 2 Environmental concern
8 12 Insularity	15 Non-farm economic issues
8 14 Civic pride	15 1 Rural businesses
	15 2 Tourism

**Table 8.2 Major issues arising from qualitative data for 1982, 1992 and 1994**

Rank	1982/83 postal survey	1992/93 postal survey	1994/5 Parliamt. inquiry
1	Community satisfaction	Growth feeling (near city)	Farm inheritance, managmnt
2	Community integration	Community integration	Urban refugee influx
3	Sport - social importance	Loss of young people	Pride, secrecy, hide problems
4	Community openness	Loss of public services	Access to social security
5	Contact with city	Community satisfaction	Impact of crisis on children
6	Newcomer attitudes to cm'ty	Farm amalgamation/subdivn	Stress severity
7	Local government policies	Urban refugee influx	Desperation, suicides
8	Links to other communities	Loss of private services	Hopelessness, apathy
9	'Insider' attitudes to com'ty	Sport - social importance	Women's work issues
10	Positive towards rural life	Decline feeling	State government policies
11	Leadership	Hostile attitude to city	Decay of social life
12	Condition of roads	Newcomer attitudes to cm'ty	Loss/reduction of sport
13	Environmental issues	Community openness	Unemployment
14	Higher cost of goods/services	Education, schools	Problems with banks/finance
15	Water, sanitation	Rural business problems	Poverty
16	Education, schools	Contact with city	Mental health problems
17	Unemployment	Health and medical issues	Abandoned by city/governmt
18	Tourism	Unemployment	Anti-social behavior/vandals
19	Health and medical issues	Farm incomes	Agrarian fundamentalism
20	Entertainment, culture	Drought and rural recession	Gender related issues

A more difficult problem is that of selection and interpretation. Any deeper understanding of social change requires that the people affected be given a direct voice – not as 'agents' or 'actors', but simply as people. Although wishing to allow the people themselves to tell the story, the analyst must personally choose which particular contributions to present, from a very large amount of material. In many cases I have sought to use particularly insightful comments to represent a broader category of response. In so doing, there is an obvious danger of selective use of the evidence to support one's own views. To guard against this, for some of the key categories I present a periodic sample of every *n*th response coded to that 'node' in the index system, rather than simply picking one or two responses subjectively. I trust this procedure will sufficiently establish my impartiality, as a formal sample of every node would mean excessive length. Even the material I have selected falls short, I believe, of expressing the full depth of privation, trauma - and yet resilience - which a full reading of the evidence conveys. However, for a geographer working with qualitative data, some sacrifice of depth is necessary to allow spatial variations in social change to be discerned through synoptic overviews.

### **Some community qualities emerging from the material**

By 1982/83 and indeed throughout the study period, despite ongoing changes, many features of traditional rural life remained in South Australia. The description by Epps and Sorensen (1993, p.3) of 'traditional' Australian rural life – already cited in Chapter 1 (p. 11) – seemed to imply that such a lifestyle was already a thing of the past. However, down to almost every detail, the characteristics mentioned crop up as 'nodes' (themes) in Tables 8.1 and 8.2. In 1982/83, in particular, Table 8.1 shows that Epps and Sorensen gave an accurate, though incomplete, thumbnail sketch of life in much of rural South Australia. Moreover, as we have seen in Chapter 7, most of the respondents were well satisfied with their local communities – despite their very common gripes about the inadequacies of their local Council's efforts, the state of

their roads, the high cost of goods and services in the country, inadequate water supply, and shortage of jobs and entertainment for young people in particular (Table 8.2).

### *Satisfaction with life in the local community*

To illustrate the actual expressions of satisfaction, a periodic sample (1:16) is taken from the 80 respondents included in this theme. Civic pride was very evident, and many provided long lists of their community's facilities; it was also common to temper enthusiasm with a few 'flies in the ointment'. Here, to save space, only the directly relevant parts of the comments are included. These sentiments were widespread throughout the State.

A 78-year old from Naracoorte in the Southeast:

There were no motor cars around Naracoorte in my early days, I remember when there were only four lamp posts on street corners, & I've seen bullock teams driving up the main streets. And now it has grown into as fine a country town, as anyone could wish to live in.

A 48-year old, living for 12 years at Cadell in the Riverland:

Cadell is a Soldiers settlement and a settlement of staff at the training centre. ... In times of trouble both Communities are one, the loss of a mutual friend is enough to bring them together. It is still one of the last places on earth where people are still people and we even know our neighbours and like it. Our football team played all games last year and won one. What better example of unity, determination and the spirit of survival - this is only common to country- People!

A 65-year old, resident 7 years in Balaklava in the Lower North:

It is a clean & tidy town, good climate, can get hot, but fortunately we get a lot of sea breeze in the summer months, generally a good town to live in.

A 67 year old lifelong resident of a small Yorke Peninsula community:

I may appear to be an enthusiast for this locality - I believe I am justified. Agriculturally - an extremely sound area Climatically - influence of the sea to advantage. Relative position to Adelaide - ideal. Close enough to be reached in about 2 hours by car. But far enough to be outside metropolitan influence.

A 39-year old with 33 years residence in Cowell, Eyre Peninsula:

Our district is exceptional in many ways for the people of this community are renowned for their friendship and hospitality and are always there when they are needed. The climate we have is of good Mediterranean with the sea close by for good fishing and relaxation. Our hospital and medical facilities are excellent with specialist coming from Adelaide to our own district. Our local Jade mine is world renowned and is a good tourist attraction.

### *Community integration, internal diversity and factions*

As would be expected from the previous chapter's discussion of integration within rural communities, these characteristics featured very strongly in the qualitative

comments in both postal surveys. Very many of the respondents described their community as 'close-knit' or 'friendly'. However, country communities by their very nature provide a small microcosm or transect of rural society, including farms and other businesses of varying size and prosperity, self-employed, white collar and manual workers and unemployed. Social homogeneity is likely to be substantially less than in a metropolitan suburb of the same population where in many cases the sorting mechanisms of the job and housing market and life cycle factors can produce quite distinctive social areas. Chapter 6 also showed that almost half of the sample perceived the presence of social classes in their community. However, in only a small minority of cases – as in this example from a small community in the mid-North – do perceived social classes appear to be based simply on wealth or income.

This local community has a handful of very social women (studbreeders wives & wealthy landholders). It would be very difficult for incoming women to be accepted by this handful unless she was one of the same type. The husbands of these wives are just the opposite, very friendly. On the other end of the financial scale this community has quite a number of financial battlers living in poor houses.

The qualitative comments cast some light on more widespread factors that do bring some diversity into the local social system, both within and between communities. Almost every farming community centres on a country town, and despite the social symbiosis this implies, there are differences in socialisation between townfolk and farmers. The examples below come from a 21-year old from Eyre Peninsula (a), and a 42 year old working on a sheep station near Tarcoola (b) respectively:

(a) I was fortunate enough to have been brought up on a 3,000 acre farm, where resources and imagination was limitless to amuse myself in my early years & early teens. Yet the "small town" kids haven't the advantage of a farm, nor the wide alternatives for activity in Adelaide. The youth, generally speaking, are constantly bored, and alcohol is much, much more accepted here, than in the youth from the farms. It is for this reason that people my age (20-25 - single) are hardened drinkers - much more so than the guys from the country farms. This is not to say that town's young people, and farming young people are set apart from each other - but it is just noticeable.

(b) I love this place, but would not enjoy living in Tarcoola at all. I love the station people but find the people in town basically dull. Being a railway town they talk a different language to station people. Most visiting and social activities are inter-station affairs etc.

Most country towns are dominated by tertiary industries serving a rural trade area, tourists or passing traffic. The presence in some cases of secondary industry or special non-local service activity like prisons, army bases etc. may also cause divisions, as in the perception of this 29-year old from Millicent in the Southeast:

Millicent has a small problem due to the conflict caused by 2 groups of people. The town has 1 heavy industry A.P.C.E.L. The men at Apcel work a 4 shift system which includes 5 days off & 1 days leisure time. The money earnt is huge compared to the every day jobs up & down the main street of Millicent, say bankers, shop assistants, etc. The men of Apcel admit their highly paid jobs entail hardly any qualifications and the work load is small & light. The conflict comes with the average person who cannot keep up with the purchasing power of Apcel people plus the hours of time off.

In the larger country towns, the divisions resulting from industrial wages are compounded or modified by the appearance of differentiated housing districts, as this comment by a 33-year old resident four years in Port Pirie suggests:

A person's social status in Port Pirie seems to be determined less by occupation and income than by his area of residence. Pirie can be divided into two sections - the old, relatively cheap and definitely down-market areas, and the newer, expensive and socially acceptable areas. This is to a large part due to the establishment of BHAS (the principal employer) in the early 1950's of a large housing development in which houses were built with the object of being sold to staff employees. This system still prevails, with the result that a clearly definable part of the town is occupied by BHAS foremen, clerical and administrative employees. A newer development, adjacent to the BHAS area, is occupied mainly by professional and business people, while the older parts of the town are occupied for the most part by manual workers. There is a certain degree of antipathy between the old and the new. The town's attitude to newcomers is similarly divided. The 'old' area tends to be slightly suspicious of incomers, while the 'new' area shows more interest, with different formal societies and informal coteries trying to attract the newcomers' support.

By 1982, many rural communities had already been infiltrated by newcomers dominantly from the city, in some cases creating or increasing factional differences within the host community. The point of view of a 40-year old environmentalist moving into a small Southeast community eight years previously (a), may be counterbalanced by that of a young farmer who had moved into Balaklava town in the Lower North (b):

(a) We find most of the people aloof and ignorant and strongly inward looking. ... While I am extremely attached to my tiny piece of non-wetting sand, I'm not at home in the local community, ie. xxx, but then I doubt I'd be at home in any Australian rural community because I don't have a 'if it moves, shoot it' mentality and try to run my farm organically. We are tolerated because we work hard and are far better educated than our neighbours.

(b) I am proud of the way I've set my house and yard up. There are 2 families, one next door, the other over the road. They are City Slickers from Adelaide. They think they own the town. ... If you get close enough to them they might say Hello. It is my opinion that people in Adelaide stay in Adelaide because they do not fit in with the happy go lucky life of the Country. A lot of country towns are having this problem. City Slickers bring crime and unhappiness to Country towns. All I need is 150 to 200 Thousand Dollars for machinery, sheds silos fences etc., and I go back farming tomorrow.

Even without the urban/rural divide, there is plenty of evidence of factionalism within rural communities; ethnicity provides one such focus, despite the relative ethnic homogeneity of much of rural Australia. Southern European migrants to the irrigation areas were considered to be somewhat set apart, for example, and friction was very noticeable in communities with a substantial Aboriginal population. To illustrate, four examples will suffice, one from a Victorian moving in to a small town in the Lower North (a), one from a Riverland irrigation area (b), one from Port Augusta (c), and one from a town adjacent to an Aboriginal settlement (d):

(a) The local people are very anti any strangers in the area, eg. Abos, Italians, (Germans still fighting 1939-45) Had a witness to a fight between a German storekeeper xxx born here and a drunk from the pub about Germans. The people outside the town hope that the district will change with the young kids of today. But they follow their fathers' likes and dislikes.

(b) There is a stronger influence by the Ethnic Community and more & more fruit properties are being purchased by these groups. The strongest ethnic community is Greek and because of their cultural background they are generally more ruthless, deceiving & self centred, compared to the more casual approach adopted by Australian and other ethnic groups. These people have different priorities and do not contribute in the main to community activities and fund raising.

(c) The biggest problem in this City is the Aboriginal situation. There is a lot of unrest because of Port Augusta becoming a centre for aboriginal people from all over S.A. and even N.T. The government seems to be encouraging this situation, and we have a bad alcohol



problem with them, as they are around the town centre drunk most of the day. They are all on pensions of some kind and on pension day there are brawls all over the street. This is making the local people angry, and prejudiced against all Aboriginal people, when its probably only half of them who don't try to help make this a better city to live in, in harmony.

(d) This town has a problem with Abos. Us white people aren't allowed to get pissed as farts in the main street of xxx (Aboriginal settlement) and abuse the Abos. But the Abos do it in yyy (nearby town).

The above are just some of the many factors that ensure that rural communities do not present as totally egalitarian, homogeneous groupings. The essence of 'integration', after all, is the drawing together of disparate entities through the operation of some binding mechanism or mechanisms. Some of the most important of these mechanisms are examined below.

### *Openness towards newcomers*

First, however, we turn to the perception by respondents of the degree of openness or receptiveness of their communities towards incomers. For this section, I have again taken a periodic sample of six cases from the 54 respondents coded at this node, rather than choosing subjectively, to give a fair indication of the general flavour of comments. The wide variety of comments show that there is considerable variation between communities - and/or the personalities of the incomers themselves. Many respondents pointed out that the onus is on the new arrival to make an effort to achieve acceptance, and there was also a widespread indication that acceptance had to be earned. There is clearly an important distinction, too, between mere acceptance and the granting of status as a true local with full, unquestioned and unreflected rights of belonging.

A 38-year old recent arrival in Gumeracha, an Adelaide Hills community:

Near future plans are to grow vegetables using organic methods. Breeding cashmere goats. Production of honey from 20-25 hives. All with a view to become & to live a more 'self-sufficient' lifestyle. The local community appears receptive to 'new' ideas and offer advice-assistance when it is sought. There does not appear to be a 'status' problem as in larger rural districts. EG the south east where I lived for 16 years.

A 40-year old lifelong resident of Millicent in the Southeast:

Questions relating to Social Status are difficult to answer due to the (Blue Collar) workers at the local Paper Mill earning more than Graduates & Professional people. However a bank manager entering the town is immediately invited into all homes and invited to join most organisations whereas a labourer would probably have to volunteer his services.

A 27-year old recent arrival in a small town in the Lower North:

I feel that the people of Tarlee are a warm & sincere group of people that made us feel at home from the moment we arrived in the community.

A 63- year old farmer retiring into a Mid-North town:

On moving into xxx I feel that I was not readily accepted, although I was President of the bowling Club here twelve months before leaving the farm, but have no worries now as only this year have been granted life membership of the Bowling Club at xxx. While on this subject I claim that the Bowling Club in a town like this is one of the best organisations in the town as it unites 150 people men and women and brings them together all on the same level socially

which is good in my opinion and any new arrivals to town would soon get to know the majority of people by joining the club.

A 66 year old British expatriate moving to a Lower North town three years previously:

Having spent my youth in an agricultural county in the 1930's, i.e. Suffolk on the E. coast of England, I find retirement in this area very satisfying. The people here, in the main, are very friendly but, like most small towns, everybody knows everybody else's business! Xxx appears to be a popular town for retirement; e.g. my two closest friends here are a retired squadron leader (R.A.F.) and a retired bank manager.

A 42 year old resident of 11 years in a tiny Upper North community:

My personal feelings on Pekina are that it is a healthy, safe and morally good place to raise a family. The community actively support their church and sporting bodies and are disciplined by the members of the community in doing what is expected of them. In many ways they are to be admired but at the same time, I also feel the community is bigoted and unaccepting of anyone with different values and views.

Generally speaking, this sample reflects a general tendency among all the responses for a more tolerant attitude towards incomers to be perceived among communities where urban in-migration was already very well established by 1982 - mostly relatively close to Adelaide - as against more traditional reserve in the outlying areas. The fact that there are noticeable differences between rural communities in their treatment of new arrivals was noted by a number of respondents, whose lives had been spent in several different towns. A good example is a 31 year old recently moving in to a small Hills town close to Adelaide:

The Xxxx community is quite different to the previous two Australian country communities I have experienced, one's special status or more to the point one's closeness to the norm seems to matter far less. One can be quite bohemian and live in all manner of dwellings, in fact quite different to the local population, and within a year find oneself on local organisations' councils and sports teams in positions of responsibility (relevant to '76 onwards). I moved here from Balhannah ('73-'76) where, excepting a few notable individuals, local involvement was governed by class or distinct social boundaries. eg. Farmers or Horse people or High School. One could possibly be accepted generally but it seemed to be restricted to specific social types. My first was in Moonta ('64-'65) which was clannish to the point of madness. Split internally on religious lines (Methodist or Pub) but united against all outsiders.

Many respondents pointed to the different levels of acceptance that were accorded to people, making it clear that tolerance and a 'live and let live' approach to new residents were common in many communities, but true belonging and full acceptance as 'one of us' were much harder to achieve even in the in-migration areas, as this example from a small settlement in the Adelaide Hills shows:

Although it is difficult and interesting to define a "local" ideally it is a person who combines length of residence with a contented life style, a steady work record, varied sporting interests & a resultant law abiding existence. "Rubbernecks" is a semi serious description given to all persons from outside areas who are regarded as disrespectful intruders until they prove themselves by friendly merging with the locals. "Transients" tend to be those with residential reasons other than love of the village eg financial investment or unemployment. While they are few they tend to be isolationistic and usually vanish as suddenly as they appeared.

The process of earning acceptance in a more traditional outlying rural community is very well illustrated by the experience of a Uniting Church minister giving evidence to the 1994 Inquiry into rural poverty:

... I remember going to my first appointment at Mxxx, and I thought people were friendly and country people were really great and really wondered about that when no-one came to see me or visit me. I failed to realise that yes, country people are friendly, but before that they are reserved. You have to make an effort to be part of that community. It took a very painful lesson over two or three years to learn what it means for a city boy to live in the country situation.

### **Institutional binding mechanisms**

Table 8.1 shows a number of 'Community formative factors' (heading #6) that are frequently mentioned in the qualitative material as binding communities together. Apart from the undefinable general community spirit, shared lifestyle and values clearly greatly valued by respondents, the most frequently mentioned institutional binding mechanisms are sport, the pub culture, church membership and service clubs such as Rotary, Apex, or Lions, and sometimes schools - in that approximate order of importance and volume of mentions, with sport being by far the dominant binding mechanism in most rural communities. In some small communities, these social functions are grouped around a key central facility, such as an area school or a social club, which forms the focal point of community activity. Elsewhere, pubs and licensed clubs are seen as one of the few, or perhaps the only, leisure time alternative to sporting interests - particularly for those not involved in church fellowships.

#### ***Sport: general importance***

Responses expressing general satisfaction with the local community nearly always list its sporting clubs and facilities, and pride in local achievement in building sporting facilities is frequently expressed. This applied right down to the smallest local communities, with a wide range of sports from Australian Rules football to lawn bowls, catering for all age groups. The critical social role of sport in these rural communities can hardly be overemphasised. The following examples are ranged in order from tiny neighbourhoods centring round just a few houses (eg. Wanbi in the Mallee, where the East Murray Area School is located, Wanilla, and Cockaleeche) through Coomandook (<200 people at the 1981 Census), Moorook (211), Cummins (797) and Balaklava (1306) to Bordertown (2138).

Most sporting & social activities are involved with the East Murray Area School which is the centre of a certain area. It has a good oval, tennis courts & swimming pool, provided by the education Department, which are hired by a football club & two tennis clubs.

Wanilla is a small community, and hence the only sport available is tennis. Therefore, we find our family travelling to Cummins, and in particular, Cockaleeche, to find regular cricket and tennis in the summer. Winter sport is found at Cummins, with away matches still further away, but it does offer good junior sport and provide a wide variety of friends.

Coomandook community is basically rural the people being free thinkers and independent in their own right. Their social standard is very good and their sports are foot-ball, tennis, bowls and golf, foot-ball and tennis being the main sports.

Moorook is a very small country town in which the population consists mainly of "Blockies" (fruit growers). Life in the town mainly revolves around the Moorook & District Community club, which is a licensed premises and works in conjunction with the sporting bodies such as Bowls; Football; Tennis; Netball Darts & 8-Ball Teams.

(We have) All sporting activities you want. eg. Golf, Bowls, footy, cricket, Baseball, hockey, swimming, basketballs, tennis. (hardcourt, lawn or in door). Racecourse, Hospital 3 Drs, Churches. (refers to Balaklava, 1981 population 1306)

I think the major thing about Country areas, especially Bordertown area is that if your family is sporting types, you will always feel welcome & make friends because most country area people love sports. The likes of a town like Bordertown has a tremendous range of sporting clubs, B'ktball stadium, 12 tennis courts, Bowling club, Football & Cricket Clubs, Gliding clubs etc. and most people of the community usually indulge in 2 or 3 of these sports thus if you just move here it is quite easily to make friends. If you aren't a sporty type, it is a little harder but there is still clubs like Lions, Apex, Lodge etc where you would also be made welcome.

### ***Sport and pubs as community entrance mechanisms***

The importance of the sport and pub culture is so great that people who do not indulge in them feel isolated, as the following two examples show - the first from a young respondent in a West Coast town heavily infiltrated by a 'Surfie' element (a), the second a 29 year old from Eyre Peninsula (b).

(a) I am a misfit in this community because of my disability to consume alcohol, being a social outcast doesn't allow participation in sporting events and social evenings. Being so few of us that have a mind of our own and won't be led along by the nose to the gaping crevasse of drug antics. Alcohol being second only to the heroin. Young people find first and foremost to reject organised dancing or concert evenings and relate to bush parties baggy women and fast cars. One family of nine, eight have overturned and wrecked cars, one boy has overturned nine times.

(b) Because I breed show & train horses I do not have time for normal sports such as football cricket tennis etc. and I do not frequent the hotels as I do not drink. This leaves me very much on the outside of the community. My parents started a business in xxx in 1961 ... and yet we are still not regarded as locals. However others can come into the community and be accepted straight away if they are keen sportsmen and it seems drinkers or socialites.

While non-sporting, non-drinkers feel left out, the way interest or ability in sports (preferably coupled with participation in the pub culture) can speed up acceptance into communities is mentioned time and again. The role of bowling clubs as an integrator has already been outlined above. Further examples come from recent arrivals in Padthaway in the Southeast (a), Cleve on Eyre Peninsula (b), and a small locality in the Upper Southeast (c):

(a) Ability or leadership in sport is a very big lever to being accepted and getting to know and understand people here. Sport can break down social barriers. E.G. millionaire farmers or close to, are not uncommon around Padthaway where I coach a football side. However, the contributors to such clubs tend to be the "local battlers". ... It is a very socially conscious area. When I came here 1 1/2 yrs. ago, had I not held an Adelaide education (which obviously means more to some others than to me) and my sporting interests, acceptance & getting to know anyone would have been very difficult.

(b) I feel to live in this community to be one of the (boys), you must first be a drinker because all facets of life seem to rotate around the bars of this town. I am not a teetotaller I like a beer but unless you are prepared to put time in a hotel or club it is hard to be accepted.

(c) To be a successful long term person you must become one of them & spend your leisure time watching football or attending a football function & dipping into your pocket for the same club.

### ***Christianity and the role of the Church***

Compared with sport and pubs, the other binding factors receive less comment in the qualitative material, but this is not to imply that other community interests and

functions are unimportant. Religion tends not to be overtly proclaimed in the rural culture, but the role of the Church as a focus for people's lives comes out in a subdued way in many of the comments, and locally is obviously very important. Because South Australia has a range of different denominations, each with their own different parish or other territorial divisions and administration, none of them have had a dominating formative effect on the social landscape. A partial exception is the Lutheran faith dominant in the Barossa Valley and surrounding regions, parts of the Murray Mallee and Upper Southeast. This is strong and pronounced enough to attract many comments from both established and new residents, the former finding strength in it, and the latter finding that Lutheran church membership is a great advantage in quick acceptance, and non-membership a disadvantage. The following citations illustrate the underlying Christian values, more overt statements of values, and comments on the stamp the Lutheran church has set on some localities.

I think people all over need timely reminders of the reasons and forces behind the current position - economic & social. Not enough people realise that not one of us is in this life for him or her self. For he who would be greatest among you must be the Servant of All.

The most important building in Sedan is the church where we can worship and praise God for his great love for mankind. It is this appreciativeness of God's grace to us that responds in the community, to work together for the good of each other. This is what makes Sedan a pleasant place to live, in spite of dust storms while the drought is on.

Whilst my wife and I have only been here 2 years we feel quite comfortable in our immediate area xxx but have found it a little difficult to make friends in Eudunda our nearest town centre. We've found that unless you were born in Eudunda or surrounding areas and/or you are of the Lutheran faith, it is harder to feel welcome in the local town.

While there is really no class distinction in the district I feel it is hard for new comers to become accepted in the district unless they become involved in some organisation or belong to the main church in the district (Lutheran). People who belong to the church seem to become known and accepted quicker. The locals seem to always talk to the people they know rather than make the effort to talk to a newcomer.

Religion can thus be both a unifier and a divider in rural communities, and have a decided impact on migration. In some cases, urbanites wanting a secure rural environment to bring up their families, or to retire to, appear to deliberately choose locations with a reputation for strong Christian values even if they themselves are not church members, as in the following case in the Barossa Valley:

My wife and I commute to Adelaide daily to work. We chose Tanunda as a place to retire because it is a clean, pleasant community with a strong church background (although neither my wife nor I have any religious beliefs).

### *Stoicism and resilience*

The much-touted Australian 'battler' syndrome of stoicism, resilience, low expectations and acceptance of hardship are strongly represented in my qualitative material, mostly implicit and not overtly stated in the responses of long term residents, but commented upon by incomers. Without such qualities, rural families would scarcely have been able to carry on through more than a decade of privation. One comment by an outside observer (a), and one by an unemployed, locally born female worker (b) giving evidence to the Parliamentary Committee will illustrate the point:

(a) My working life was spent in Adelaide as a tradesman & later operating my own business. The most outstanding feature about farming people in business, as it is a business, is their lesser levels of expectancy to their city counterparts. Most people will work for you as a contractor for \$10-\$12 hour. With machinery \$25-\$30 hr. They are thoroughly conditioned to being price takers. The gap is quite wide & its sad to see it getting wider. The rural community have actually got it right, they don't have to modify their standards for economic recovery of the Country whereas City people will consider they are suffering enormous hardship ...

(b) What people in Adelaide may consider as a hardship or deprivation, to plenty of people here in Peterborough, they consider it just a fact of life. That may be something to take into consideration when talking to people, that many people would not consider that they are under hardship.

This common type of attitude ties in strongly with the widespread adherence to the work ethic and the belief that one must face up to hardship, be equal to a challenge without whingeing, bludging or asking for help. Failure to run a farm or business successfully or to be able to provide for one's family is seen as personal defeat and attracting social stigma, that must be concealed from the community as much and as long as possible. These attitudes pervade the qualitative data for 1992/93 and the 1994 Parliamentary Inquiry evidence. The following description, from a 60-year old farmer near Mount Gambier, neatly summarises a groundswell of comments from a variety of respondents.

Because we have a sizeable mortgage, high interest rates & government charges have ensured that this year we will make our fourth consecutive loss. We just don't spend money in the community as before, so we mend, make do, go without, barter. The community in general (which is not entirely rural) has no idea of the hardship. Not one person from our church to which we have belonged all our lives has ever said "How are things?" or similar. Of course it's our problem too because we don't talk about the difficulties. The rural counsellor is excellent as a resource person & we have used her services, but in general in this area farmers have occupied a high social standing & find it difficult to admit to a problem. They therefore have two problems. 1. Financial problems. 2. Admitting that they need help.

### **The rural crisis years and qualitative social change**

Whereas most (not all) of the citations used so far are taken from the 1982/83 material, I pass now to examine the effects of the crisis years as reflected in the comments ten to twelve years later. The material shows that a great many families held stubbornly to the attitudes outlined by the Mount Gambier farmer just cited. But the costs of this stoicism rose to sometimes unbearable levels. For too many families the resilience was, in the end, replaced by apathy, hopelessness and in some cases despair. Yet these experiences never seem to have extinguished the basic attachment of rural people to their lifestyle and communities, as discussed in Chapter 7.

#### ***The limits to pride***

The pride which stops rural people from accessing social security services and their fear of being considered bludgers is remarked upon by very many social service providers and rural counsellors. The very term of reference of the Parliamentary inquiry – to investigate the effects of rural poverty – was reported by witnesses to have put many people off from appearing before the Committee. To quote three different Rural Counsellors in succession (representing widely different regions),

Many of my clients would not identify themselves with the label of rural poverty. To them it would have the connotations of regarding themselves as helpless victims in need of charity, whereas most of them still have a strong will to overcome their financial problems and are willing to keep working enormously long hours and to make all sorts of sacrifices in the hope of keeping the family farm.

Basically the attitude of the farmer is "Lace curtains in the window; do not let anyone know what is going on inside". That must be borne in mind when you are talking about poverty.

I am in a unique position in that I go on to the farm and see how they live. I am utterly disgusted and the people treat it as normal. ... The house is not painted, there are no floor coverings, the furniture is broken. This is the area in which they go without just to continue to buy food. ... We have to try to access social security benefits if we can. If we cannot we have to go back to the bank to ask for an extension of the overdraft. As you would have found, farm families do not come forward and talk about their problems. They are proud people and by coming forward and seeking help they are admitting defeat ... they say that there is always someone more needy than they are.

This reluctance to seek help was made worse by the transparency of social life in rural areas, and several care providers gave evidence of the need to camouflage social security provision in such a way that privacy (and secrecy) were maintained. This was more easily achieved if the service provider could be a trusted local person by personal visit; approaching clearly labelled Social Security premises would be seen as disgrace. One highly respected, totally committed social worker on Eyre Peninsula in very perceptive evidence, pointed out how the local community efforts to present a positive regional image to the world - a kind of economic whistling in the dark, to try to attract new investment or avert disinvestment - made it even harder for the economic casualties in the system to seek handouts. In certain areas, these stricken people on scattered farms were able to form mutual support groups. But elsewhere, she points out that such groups fail because one person respects another's privacy so much that they are wary of approaching their friends directly about their difficulties. Instead, they phone the social worker and request that 'so and so' be visited because of their fears about them 'being down' or withdrawing from the community. Then, as she said, "They just about want you to come in the dark and make sure no-one sees you come". To quote her further:

There are two levels that operate across Eyre Peninsula. One is a level where towns are trying to survive, trying to encourage tourism, trying to create a positive atmosphere, an attitude towards the survival of their communities. On the second level we find families who are experiencing financial difficulty and think they are out of step with the general trend ... They feel rejected by the level of positiveness and do not feel they have permission to talk ... That level of people is retreating and closing off from communities.

The equivalent problem of the visibility of perceived defeat is even greater when it comes to visits to offices in the local town, so that sorely needed services are not accessed. As a church minister from Peterborough said in evidence:

One of the real problems in small country towns is that not only is the grapevine good but people do not want to be seen going to the FACS office; they do not want to be seen because they are afraid that Mrs. so and so will tattle to their next door neighbour ...

Because many of the rural counsellors are themselves local people, many committed well beyond the call of duty, and because they proved so successful in mediating a path between the farm or rural business person and the bureaucracy, there is evidence that by the mid 1990s the stigma attached to drawing on their particular services had been largely removed.

*Access to social services: a two-edged sword*

Pride notwithstanding, the privations suffered by farm people in the worst hit areas of the State were such in the crisis years that not only overt lobbying for support for the farm businesses (legitimised within the local agrarian discourse), but also access by the farm household to social security funds, simply to put bread on the table, became absolutely necessary for many families. Farm families in particular had difficulty in accessing social security because despite low or negative incomes, the paper value of their land, stock and equipment ensured that they failed assets tests for assistance. This problem is not rehearsed here, since it was dealt with at length in the Report of the poverty inquiry (Parliament of South Australia 1995, pp 51 ff) as well as, at the national level, by an almost simultaneous Senate inquiry (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994, 1995a, 1995b). What is significant in the present context is that these extra difficulties redoubled the mortification that many farm families felt in seeking unfamiliar assistance. The near-collapse of the established, unwritten moral code on self-reliance was noticed by several witnesses to the inquiry and comes through also in some of the responses to the 1992/93 survey. A school teacher in the Murray Mallee:

I have been in the district for eight years, and when I arrived here I was personally amazed by the resilience of people, how they could work for a whole year and make nothing, or even worse, make a loss over that period. That was not something I had personal experience of ... In the past few years I have seen that resilience disappear.

The written submission to the poverty inquiry by a farm wife with three children gives some idea of the distress accompanying the collapse of that resilience. After years of working ever harder on the farm, and pleading with bank managers for enough cash to barely survive, she realised that like many other farm wives that she qualified for JobSearch allowance - notwithstanding the almost total absence of any jobs to seek within travel range. She wrote:

1993 was the worst year being on unemployment benefits. Having to deal with the Berri social security and CES offices, where some attitudes of the personnel, and difficult system, stereotype its clients as bludgers and unworthy citizens. I was under incredible stress and pressure, and thoroughly frustrated by the endurance of eight years of hardship. ... I couldn't care less whether I lived or died. ... The fortnightly job search forms came in. I took another emotional breakdown, another pounding of guilt. I hated receiving those benefits. Relying on this support and not having earned the money.

The alternative to accepting social security payments, for those who could get it, is off-farm employment, or pluriactivity. The reality behind this neutral and clinical term is illustrated in a somewhat extreme form by a farming couple with a small arable acreage which they were unable to expand due to the provisions of the Native Vegetation Clearance Act. To make ends meet they both managed to find part time work. The husband writes:

At the time of writing my wife holds a part time five day a week job in a nearby town and we both clean offices on weekends. In order to reduce travelling costs and make it easier on our children we rent a house in the town. My wife and children live in this rented house while I live 30 Km. away on our farm. We are fortunate if we spend two nights a week together as a family and we blame this for developing behavioural problems in our son. We find it difficult to comment on the effect of rural poverty on our local community because, simply, we are separated from it by our poverty. To a large extent we live a hermit like existence and attend few social events.



The privations of families not on social security and unable to obtain off farm jobs were extreme for farmers carrying a debt, as the following example from northern Eyre Peninsula illustrates:

We are wool growers and still keeping up with our one farm bank loan repayments only because we are prepared to cut costs by spreading half our yearly fertiliser quota, not updating machinery or equipment, buy second hand clothes and go without holidays. We still eat healthy meals and make our own entertainment. We do not qualify for any DSS payments except family payments. Our average income for the past three years has been \$4,000 per year. ... Without the rural counsellor we would not have survived emotionally as well as with all other advice given.

On other farms beyond the range of local off farm work, the husband had to move away to find temporary work elsewhere, leaving the wife and children to cope with the farm, as the following example from the Streaky Bay district shows:

If someone had said to me ten years ago that I and my children would be working, doing so much manual labour for no or little return, I would have said 'rubbish'. We have four children aged 13, 11, 10 and 8½. My 10-year old stayed at home today so I could come (to the hearing) because we are shearing, and I normally have to work in the shed. Our 13 year old does more physical work than most of his city counterparts could even imagine, as well as keeping up with his school work. You would no doubt be shocked and horrified if I told you some of the jobs we do, and so you should be. ... In a third world country we would be classed as slave labourers, but what the hell else can we do?

This contrast between the minimal financial rewards of such extreme effort, and the fortnightly arrival of unearned money from social security, is the source of the heavy guilt feelings by rural families like that of the lady referred to above. Comparing \$776 per fortnight she received (from a combination of Jobsearch allowance and family income supplement) with the roughly \$600 per fortnight taken home after arduous toil by many employed people she knew, she explained that:

The problem with being on social security is the number of people on social security compared with the number that are employed. People who are employed are prejudiced against them because of the amount of benefits and support they get: the health care card, hospitalisation, doctor's visits you get for nothing; you can also get a reduction on electricity and telephone bills.

There are many other examples in the material showing how the effects of social security increased disparities between families, and caused bitterness and tension within communities – for example, a case of a milk vendor who sold his round due to ill health and went on to a pension, which brought him in substantially more than the new operator could earn for a week's hard work. The rural counsellor from Yorke Peninsula, in a perceptive comment to the poverty inquiry, sums the situation up thus:

It appears that my area is in the middle of a social revolution, because old values and traditions are being changed and threatened, but they are not being replaced with any valuable traditions that people find acceptable. For example, the single-income parent and the scenario of mum at home looking after the kids is tending to be replaced by single parent families, long-term unemployment and a dependence on welfare services.

### ***Stress within the family, inheritance and generational changes***

Not surprisingly, given the hardship, stress and tension endured by households trying to conceal the extent of their problems, the impact on family and marriage relationships is severe, and social workers reported a substantial rise in both domestic

violence, marriage breakdowns, suicidal tendencies and developing antisocial behaviour among children. The top category of comments in the 1994 column of Table 8.2 is labelled “Farm inheritance, management” and deals with a range of issues surrounding one of the most central issues in the family farm psyche – that of passing on the farm, the land, the skills and the lifestyle with its bundle of values, to the next generation. The dice were heavily loaded against a smooth succession by the stringent rules that applied: persons (including farmers) who gave away capital assets (eg. a farm) which they could theoretically have sold to someone else (eg. a son or daughter) could not draw an age pension for five years. Two senior officers of the CWA (Country Women’s Association) explained to the Parliamentary committee in a nutshell: if the old couple make over the farm to their heirs at age 60, their former income is gone, so for five years the young couple has to keep them. Many farms just could not support two families, and in any event the money so spent was not available to employ another worker, or improve the farm. But if the farm is not handed over, the younger generation must somehow find alternative sources of income. The result has been a major delay in the generation shift of farms, increased average age of farmers, exacerbated by both social stress in farm families, and institutional change in society. Thus an officer of the Department of Primary Industries told the Inquiry that

With the new divorce laws there is a reluctance towards splitting family assets and handing too much over to the young married, traditionally a son and non-farm bride, because if after two years they find they are incompatible there is a divorce and half the farm goes out the door. You only need one or two cases like that and it goes through the rural network like lightning and hardens attitudes even more. ... It gets to the point where there is quite improper maintenance of asset ownership and ... someone eventually is going to take over the cheque book for the first time in their lives at age 60.

Even without this overt fear of divorce, economic hardship and intra-family stresses were destroying the goal of handing on the farm. One female farm partner from the Murray Mallee wrote:

Families are living under tremendous stress. Some adults have increasing problems with alcohol, which also affects children. Many people stay together because they cannot sell a farm to enable them to leave. Half of nothing is nothing. We hear of violence in families due to alcohol or stress. Wives are doing the work of the son who is not home. We are doing physical work that Health and Safety officers would strike over. No-one says we cannot lift over 10 Kg. of anything, we do it because we have to. Men in their 60s are trying to do the heavy work of a man in his 20s. How long can this go on, we have Senior Citizens working into the grave.

In some cases the strain is too much. As the Mid and Upper North rural counsellor reported:

The query is: who is going to run our farms in the future? Last year I visited a family in a good area to do a cash flow budget and I returned this year. That particular family consists of Mum, Dad and their (married) son and it lives on \$1000 a month. So, two families live on \$1000 a month. I asked this family, “how do you cope on that amount of money?” They said “well, we are used to it. We were brought up to live on nothing”. However, I noticed that the second time I returned this year the wife was no longer there - she had left.

For the sons who have remained on the properties, life is bleak. A wheat/sheep farmer in the upper South East, generalising the situation in his district, wrote:

Most young males who have remained on farms have remained unmarried and have little prospect of supporting a wife and family financially. Most young males are providing labour

to farming properties for very small cash rewards, just pocket money ... and many will seek another vocation when employment prospects improve. Waiting to inherit the family farm is no longer a sensible option because it can no longer provide a satisfactory income for the owner.

On the level of one's own family, a farmer near Karoonda reported:

My son is working at home. There are very few people who come home. He is finding it very hard at 20 years of age. ... We will do this or that, and it is very hard on his morale not to have anything to do socially. He has football at Murray Bridge for six months of the year. That gets him away with a different set of people to talk to, but it is very difficult for him emotionally at the moment.

Concerns about the unlikely transfer of the farm to the next generation appear time and again in the responses. To quote an example from southern Yorke Peninsula:

In my time, especially the last ten years, I have visually witnessed and taken much notice of the stress people and families are under. Pride has been lost and this depresses me greatly. Our wage earner friends have it far too easy these days, as is so obvious with their life style. ... I feel especially in the Mallee there will be no farmers left in ten years if this is to continue. My children have no future on the land and I wish only for their education and a good job. Even without a job they are better off on social security than on the land as a slave.

This depression among the young on the farms is reflected in a rather different but no less destructive way in the country towns, especially those which have lost former major employers and suffer above average unemployment – as in Peterborough, which had lost many former jobs in the railways and the Pipelines Authority of South Australia. A Peterborough witness told the Poverty Inquiry:

They find that their children have despair about their own future. They find they are very easily bored. They struggle to entertain themselves. They do not feel happy in themselves, so we have young people walking the streets at night, not knowing what to do with themselves. We have them being open to drug abuse, alcohol abuse, a whole lot of social ramifications that would be solved in many ways if young people felt that there was something useful for them to do.

As well as behaviour problems in and out of school, youth suicide was a serious worry at the High School, and another witness from the town told the Inquiry that

... we have seen an increase in the number of boys who engage in risk taking behaviour. Farmers' sons in this area have always used alcohol and driven fast on country roads - it is part of what they do. There has been a marked increase in their doing things like chasing other vehicles to try to crash into them or taking more risks than they usually would or using drugs and alcohol that they would not usually use.

Enough evidence has been presented to make it clear that there has been a severe reduction in rural morale, particularly but certainly not exclusively in the wheat/sheep belt. The finding in Chapter 7 that satisfaction with one's community had dropped sharply is highly consistent with the qualitative material being presented here. But it must also be stressed that only a few of the respondents blamed their community, or any members of it, for their ills; and in the face of the overwhelming evidence presented above it is surprising how small was the drop in community satisfaction – while most remained very much attached to their community and locality.

### **Spatial dimensions of social change**

Even more than the numerical data discussed in Chapter 7, the qualitative material shows pronounced spatial differences across the State. Indeed, in the midst of the recession, Table 8.2 shows that the most commonly expressed theme in the 1992/93 postal survey was actually a feeling of *growth* in the local community – but this feeling appears in a very distinctive spatial pattern, which appears to be formed mainly by distance from metropolitan Adelaide, but modified by ‘age of settlement’ zone. Tables 8.3 and 8.4 indicate the distribution of selected qualitative responses by driving time and age of settlement zone respectively. Each row on the Tables shows the distribution of responses coded under a particular category (“node”) as listed on Table 8.1, and the nodes are arranged in the Tables in order from highest to least concentration within the most accessible spatial zone.

**Table 8.3 Distribution of selected categories (‘nodes’) of qualitative comments, by zones of driving time from Adelaide**

Settlement zone Occupied by Europeans (time)	Core zone Pre-1869	Intermediate 1869-1895	Outer zone Post-1895	Total	
				N	%
Presence of commuters	86.8	7.9	5.3	104	100.0
Hobby farmer presence	87.5	12.5	0.0	32	100.0
Feeling of growth	74.0	14.4	11.5	38	100.0
Incr. in drugs & alcohol	50.0	28.6	21.4	56	100.0
Public services lost	46.3	41.3	12.5	37	100.0
Increased crime	45.9	35.1	18.9	14	100.0
Urban refugees present	44.6	39.3	16.1	85	100.0
Private services lost	38.7	41.9	19.4	47	100.0
Increase in retirees	38.3	36.2	25.5	80	100.0
Loss of young people	21.2	31.8	47.1	62	100.0

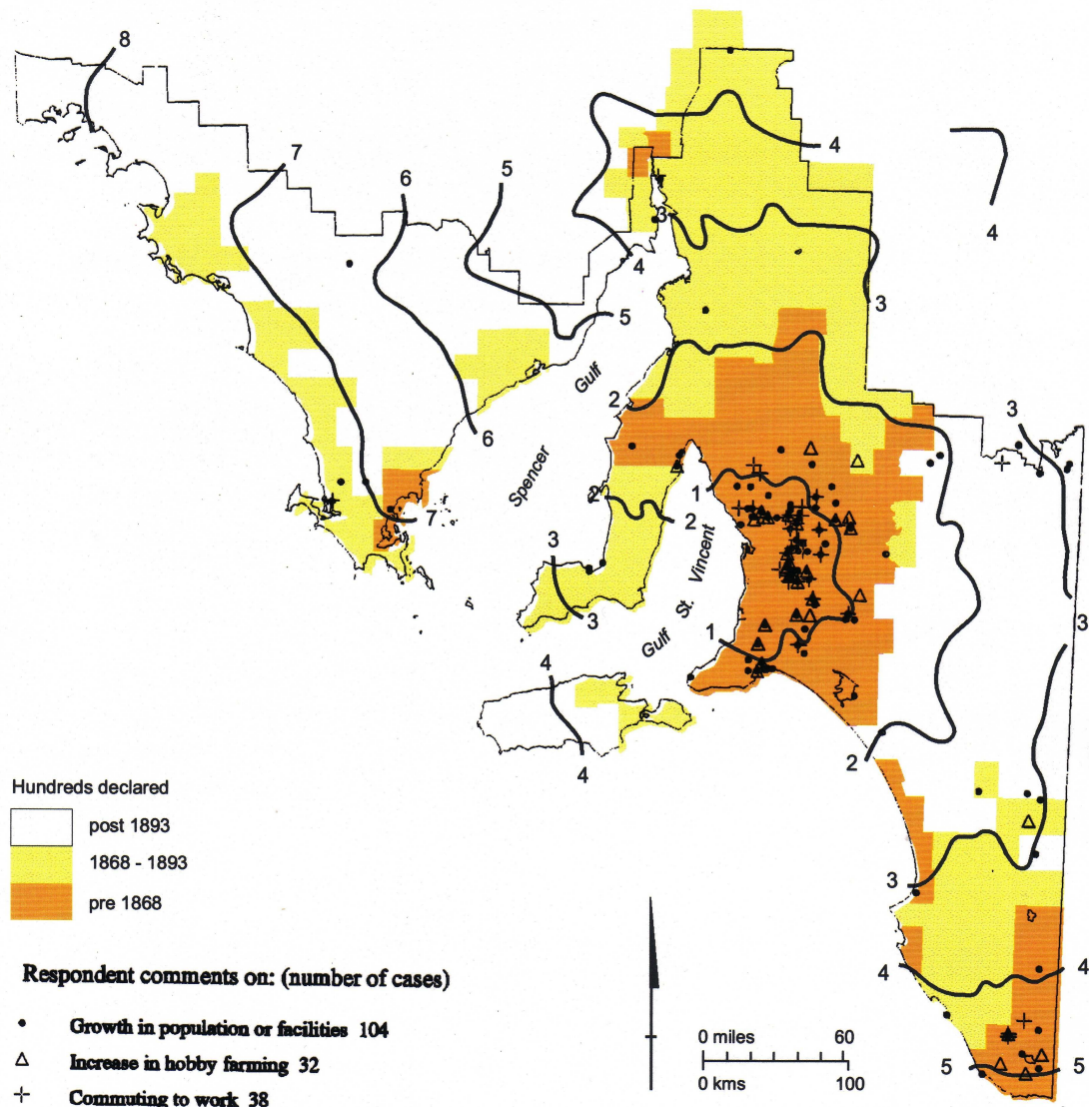
**Table 8.4 Distribution of selected categories (‘nodes’) of qualitative comments, by settlement zone**

Driving time zone from Adelaide (hours)	0-1	>1-2	>2-3	>3-4	>4-5	>5- 6	>6-7	>7	Total	
									%	N
Presence of commuters	63.2	23.7	2.6	0.0	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	104
Hobby farmer presence	58.1	22.6	6.5	0.0	12.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	32
Feeling of growth	50.0	23.1	10.6	3.8	6.7	1.0	2.9	1.9	100.0	38
Increased crime	15.8	31.6	18.4	2.6	7.9	5.3	5.3	13.2	100.0	56
Urban refugees present	11.1	40.7	31.5	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	1.9	100.0	37
Public services lost	9.2	34.2	31.6	14.5	2.6	0.0	2.6	5.3	100.0	14
Incr. in drugs & alcohol	7.1	42.9	21.4	7.1	0.0	0.0	14.3	7.1	100.0	85
Increase in retirees	4.3	52.2	26.1	0.0	6.5	2.2	8.7	0.0	100.0	47
Loss of young people	3.5	29.4	25.9	16.5	2.4	4.7	15.3	2.4	100.0	80
Private services lost	3.4	37.3	27.1	10.2	6.8	3.4	3.4	8.5	100.0	62

Source (both Tables): qualitative responses to author’s postal survey, 1992/93

The first three nodes (rows) listed on Tables 8.3 and 8.4 appear in identical order, and all associated with high accessibility and demographic growth. Comparing results on the two Tables, though, shows that the dominant influence of Adelaide is supplemented by similar but much more muted growth around the outlying centres of the early-settled zone, notably Mount Gambier and Port Lincoln.

**Fig. 8.1 Distribution of respondent comments associated with perceived growth in their community, 1992/93**



Complementing the above Tables are Figures 8.1 to 8.4, which show the actual distributions of the selected nodes in map form. I deal first with the responses characteristic of this growth zone.

***Rural dilution in the inner growth area: commuters, hobby farmers and rural retreaters***

An important aspect of social change (affecting both the growth and intermediate settlement zones) is what was first referred to by Vince (1952) as 'rural dilution' - the advent of mostly ex-urban new population settling among rural dwellers and bringing

their own sets of values in to form a much more complex social tapestry, as discussed in earlier chapters. The qualitative evidence brings out some of the attitudinal changes involved in this movement, and also introduces a qualified note of renewed optimism in the growth area. Fig. 8.1 shows the distinctive spatial distribution of distribution of three closely associated 'nodes': comments on the incidence of commuting to work, on the presence of hobby farming, and on a general feeling of growth in the respondent's community, in that order of spatial concentration. The overwhelming concentration of these observations are within 60 to 90 minutes' drive from central Adelaide, but they are also noticeable in a smaller cluster around Mount Gambier in the Southeast, and to some extent in the Riverland. Elsewhere, feelings of growth occur only in scattered locations associated with some particular local circumstance - the cluster in the Upper Southeast is associated with employment provided by a substantial meatworks, and growth in scattered coastal locations is mostly associated with retirement and tourism in holiday home colonies and small resorts. The map shows that the hobby farming belt around Adelaide overlaps, but extends beyond, the main commuting belt of urban growth.

Within the core area growth zone, the social landscape is a kaleidoscopic mix of varied rural and ex-urban population elements, retirees, hobby farmers, welfare recipients and traditional ruralites. Although not to be compared with the London "cocktail belt", the area bears some resemblance to the dispersed city first described by Pahl (1966), and subsequently borne out by many writers, eg. Coppack (1988, 1990), Beesley (1988), and Walker (1991).

In the most accessible or popular areas, the older social structures may be almost irrelevant to the newcomers. The visually 'rural' environment is often much appreciated, but socially many new arrivals may retain strong ties with the city, and within the local area are most likely to develop common interests with other new arrivals. As one example from a young recent arrival in a 'rural living' farmlet subdivision on the Northern Adelaide Plains, about an hour's drive from central Adelaide:

I do not fit. A town boy doing his thing on 5 acres. This region is being transformed, from traditional rural to semi-rural. My only social involvement with the local community has been to oppose Draconian actions of the local Council based in Mallala. In this we semi-rurals quickly found common ground with each other, and opposition from older residents who expect us to buy the land they choose to subdivide, and then shut up. This is a transitional zone.

Newcomers can also form the dominant social group, even at greater distances from the city, in popular coastal areas for in-migration. A Victor Harbor retiree, resident for six years comments:

The influx of hundreds of retirees in recent years means that the town is now fairly lively all the year. ... Once I heard it said that newcomers found it hard to break into the local society, whereas now the newcomers have swamped the locals to form their own associations. Probus, for example, being almost entirely retirees, all extremely happy with the area as a place of retirement.

The views expressed by established residents subjected to a barrage of new arrivals in this zone vary from bitter resentment (as in the case of this central Adelaide Hills fruit grower about 40 minutes' drive from the city) to resigned acceptance.

We have been inundated with two-income public servant households that don't try and integrate in the local community. Their only interest is to impede horticultural and agricultural practices that have been in place for over 100 years. The fact that these people can afford to own areas of arable land and commute to the city daily to work surely shows the over-affluence of many public sector employees.

Another central Adelaide Hills resident, about 45 minutes' drive from the city, comments on the impact of rapid expansion of public housing in his community centre:

The way ... is going, within a few years it could become the leading SA centre for drugs, etc. It has a hard core local business community and a hard core local trust home community. It's difficult to say which one is the most villainous. My two grown children went to school in ... but the place has deteriorated. It is rumoured that 80% of the high school students are on drugs.

In less accessible or popular locations, where the new residents and the old-established ruralites are more equal in numbers and the rural social structures have been modified but not destroyed, most of the new residents are very happy with their new lifestyle, and many make an effort to be involved. A young mother, newly resident on a rural holding in the central Adelaide Hills, about 50 minutes' drive from Adelaide provides a good example:

We find that all of our friends here are also originally from Adelaide, like us. We would probably have to live here for five generations to be really accepted by the locals - the locals are friendly but there is no acceptance into the local Social fabric. We are also regarded with suspicion because we are Organic in our methods as far as possible, and we PLANT TREES! Shock, horror! I feel that the town of Birdwood has livened up in the last 10 years, with increased small businesses, increased tourism, more things going on, but maybe the "locals" resent this, even though they use these same facilities. We try to shop in our local area when possible, but being a very small community that is not always feasible. This Community works together wonderfully for large events such as the farm-day fundraising for Birdwood Primary School, or in disasters such as the August and December floods. We now find ourselves "piggy-in-the-middle" - we feel "local" ourselves compared to newcomers, but not against the long-time residents. In spite of all this we are very happy to live here!! Before the baby, when we belonged to local sporting groups etc, we certainly "belonged" much more - we probably have to make more efforts ourselves to fit into this community.

The longer-established residents in this zone tend to be ambivalent. The new population makes local services more viable, but this does not necessarily translate into full participation in the established community structures. Thus a Northern Adelaide Hills resident, about 75 minutes' drive from the city, comments:

At one point the local primary school was on the point of closure, but a large portion of country was divided into small hobby farms and young couples with families have moved in, hence an increase in overall population ... In the last 15 years or so the local population would have doubled as a result of this. The only drawback of outsiders coming in is the apathy shown towards most community activities, apart from those involving the school.

However, most established farm households share a general antipathy towards hobby farming and the way it has taken land out of productive agriculture, and displaced many professional farmers through rising land prices. Thus a 19-year-old respondent from the northern Adelaide Hills comments:

My community is between the Barossa Valley and the city. My parents bought their farm twenty two years ago for a tourist development, planning to bring up their family in a cohesive

rural community with local off-farm work opportunities. In the last ten years nearly all the farmers have moved further out, and the last are about to do so. Their land has been bought by hobby farmers and retired people and is being share farmed by the last of the farmers. When they move the community faces great problems in finding rural labour to control weeds and maintain properties. The village has more than doubled in size, mainly serving as a dormitory area for the city and nearest large town. We are now the longest inhabitants of the district. The German character of the district has gone, the local Lutheran church is no longer the social heart of the district and the local school also suffers because many new residents send their children to private schools elsewhere.

Somewhat further from the city, beyond easy daily commuting range for most people, the new arrivals from the city mostly form a minority, and have to take the local social structure much as they find it. Many replies were received from ex-urban residents moving out to adopt a new lifestyle, with a great variation in attitudes ranging from a frankly isolationist attitude of pursuing individual lifestyle whims, to a whole-hearted attempt at commitment to a new community as well as environment. To quote an example from the Barossa Valley (fruit grower resident 14 years, 70 minutes' drive from the city):

The 'old ways' of doing things are starting to get over-ruled which is for good! It is also much easier for people to be accepted. My wife grew up in the Barossa but when she came back with a different name we were not accepted until people found out about her background and family history. Generally it is thought that the Barossa is a 'close community' but we feel it is a 'closed community' but thankfully it is changing.

From the Lower North, about 90 minutes drive from the city on a 50 acre holding:

I moved to the area 3 years ago from Adelaide with my youngest son ... My property is share-farmed for me by a local farmer ... I do not mix very much locally ... The farmers I have met living near me are all quite friendly and helpful with information as I know very little about farming ... I moved here as firstly I wanted to live in the country, and I've always wanted to own land and grow as much of my own food as possible.

Although, as appears from the above, there are recent arrivals for whom community involvement is postponed, or almost irrelevant, and lifestyle is a personal and family matter only, there are also examples both of people successfully finding and becoming part of their ideal "village in the mind", and others who bitterly regret their move and feel aliens to their new environment. To give two extreme examples of this: A farmer moving in seven years ago to the growth zone from further out, now located 1 hour 45 minutes SE of Adelaide:

"We were quickly accepted by the community and on only the second night in our new house we were made welcome by our new neighbour. During our time here we have become involved in the community with my wife working at the school library, myself involved at the Golf Club, and our son with the C.F.S. (Country Fire Service) ... We plan to spend the rest of our lives with the community of the progressive, happy and growing town of ...".

By contrast, a female resident 5 years in a town 90 minutes' drive north of Adelaide:

"I despise this town, I consider it as the arsehole end of the earth. It makes you wonder what you ever did to have to put up with what goes on here. It's a closed-net Lutheran town so it makes it easy for things to be covered up. Some of the things we've found here are people look down on you when they have no reason to. They seem to make you feel like an intruder ... The best advice I can give you for this town is a bomb to blow the shit out of it, we don't need people like this in the world. Desperate to get out of here for my children's sake".



Although these represent the two ends of the spectrum of experience of new arrivals in the growth zone, there is no doubt that communities in and on the edge of this belt do have different social attitudes and degrees of receptiveness to newcomers. Some tentative findings from the many replies from this zone may now be summarised.

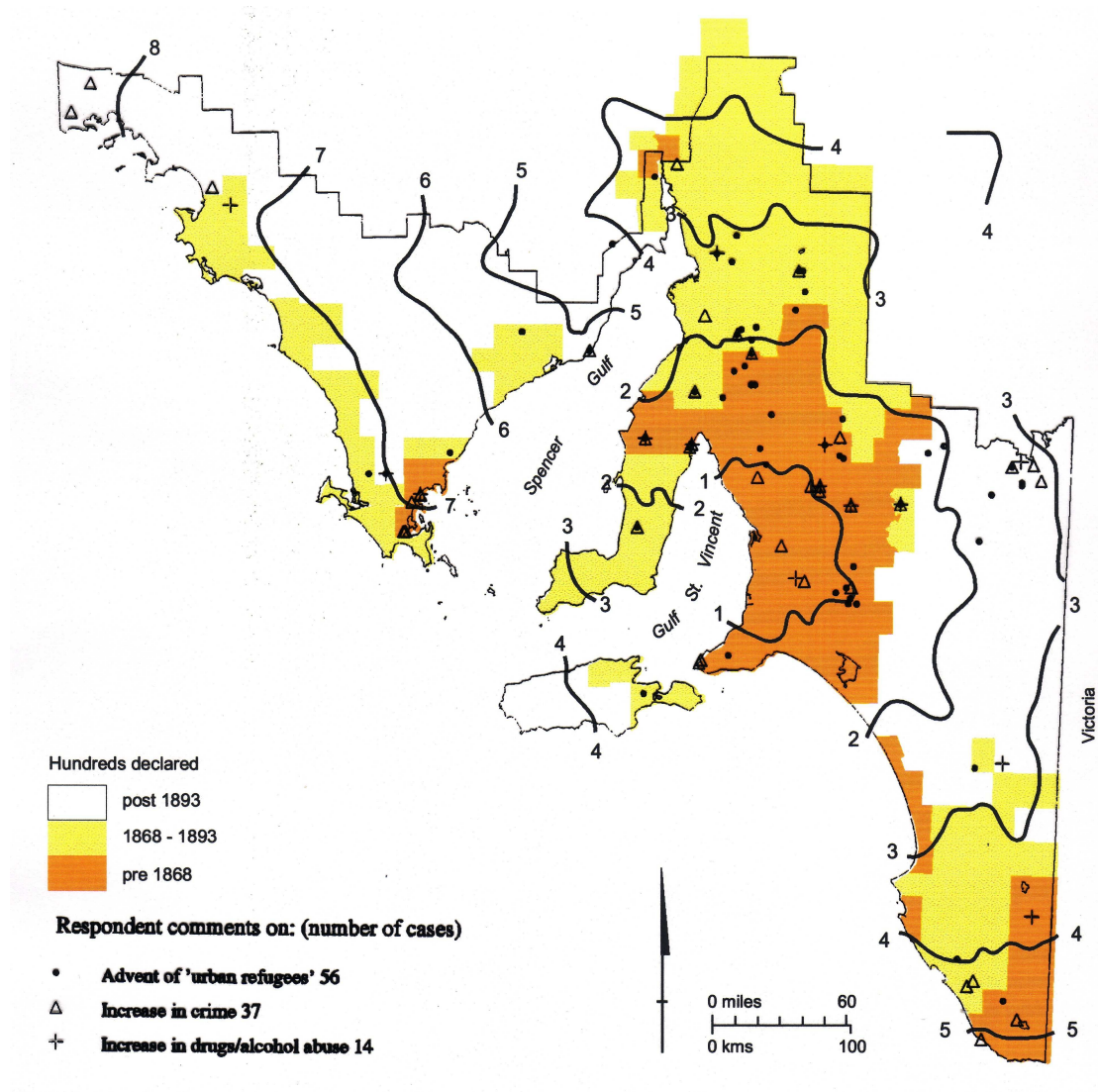
- 1) In the immediate commuting zone, up to about 1 hour's drive from the city, new arrivals are so numerous, and distance to the former social network in Adelaide so small, that, they can live "like an Adelaide resident with a big back yard" as one respondent remarked. Residual rural community residents are swamped and tend to share physical but not social space with the newcomers, only a minority of whom are interested in assimilating into pre-existing social structures.
- 2) In rather less accessible areas, newcomers and established residents are more equal in numbers and a considerable potential for friction exists, with some established residents resentful of intrusion - particularly where newcomers are seen as making little attempt to take a share in maintaining local facilities or in shopping locally. Hobby farming, while now an accepted phenomenon, is regarded as a nuisance by most established farmers who responded, and there is frequent resentment of the perceived high incomes of commuters.
- 3) On the outer fringe of the growth area, where new residents are still in a minority, they are forced to fit into their adoptive communities on local terms, and there is evidence of sharp contrasts in aspects of the local social structures. Much of course depends on the new arrivals' own personalities and efforts, but there do appear to be substantial differences between the perceived conservatism of, for example, the Barossa, and the perceived openness and success of other places in the southern Adelaide Hills. The great majority of respondents, however, both established and "new" residents appear happy with their natural and physical environment.

The growth zone around the metropolitan area, then, is clearly in a state of major social change. Such change, though, has been in progress in many countries and for many years, and has been widely studied. In South Australia it is clearly not a product of the rural recession, although farmers in the growth zone have certainly not been immune to it, and it has probably increased the rate of social change.

***Changes in the core and intermediate settlement zones: urban refugees and 'Welfare-led' social change***

Beyond the inner parts of the early-settled core zone, particularly from about 90 minutes to 3 hours' drive from Adelaide, the character of the qualitative comments changes. A more recent, unwelcome but equally significant social change which *has* occurred during the rural recession - also a form of rural dilution, linked to urban-rural migration - has been the arrival of numerous ex-metropolitan 'urban refugees'. This new migration flow has penetrated far into the rural heartland, well beyond the commuting zone. (Fig. 8.2) Attention was drawn to this phenomenon in South Australia in an earlier study centred some 50 Km. north of Adelaide (Smailes, 1992).

**Fig. 8.2 Distribution of respondent comments associated with perceived unwanted urban influences, 1992/93**



Urban refugees include groups of unemployed young people, impoverished families of the long term adult unemployed, single mothers with children, disability pensioners, battered wives escaping domestic violence, petty criminals on the run, or others dependent on some form of welfare. Importantly, as coded and defined in this project they do not include 'ordinary' old age pensioners. A study by Bell and Hugo (1998), building on earlier work by Wulff and Bell (1997) and Budge et al. (1992), draws attention to the total portability of welfare benefits in Australia, and postulates a 'welfare-led' hypothesis as a partial explanation for the qualified continuation of the Australian population turnaround. The data presented by Bell and Hugo concentrates mostly on the period 1986 to 1991, but shows that the proportion of Australians over 16 reliant upon some form of Commonwealth transfer payments began a sharp rise in

the mid 1970s, from 12.5% in 1973 to about 22% in 1983. Recovering slightly up to 1989, by 1995 it had reached a new peak of over 23%. (Bell and Hugo 1998, p.113). The results of the two postal surveys show that the perception of ex-urban welfare recipients as a social problem is very much a feature of the rural recession. In 1982/83, urban refugees ranked 30th in the list of coded themes, and only 8 respondents out of 712 who gave qualitative comments mentioned them. In 1992/93, however, the theme ranked seventh, and was brought up by 56 out of 675 qualitative responses. In the 1994 evidence to the Parliamentary inquiry - admittedly subjectively selected by me - it moves up to second place in the rankings.

In the present study the perceived problem of urban refugees overlaps but dominantly lies outside the main growth zone, but is rarely found in the remoter settled areas (Figure 8.2). Mostly it lies between 1½ to 3½ hours' drive from Adelaide, though even Eyre Peninsula has scattered mentions. Such a location is logical for the main attraction is the cheap housing - in some cases even free - to be had in small, declining townships, larger towns like Peterborough hit by industrial change, or scattered dwellings rendered surplus by farm amalgamation. Witnesses to the Parliamentary Inquiry cited house prices as low as \$15,000 to \$20,000 in Peterborough, for example, or even less in nearby Terowie, and house rents about \$30 to \$50 in the Mallee. In the immediate peri-urban growth zone, housing is much more expensive and in greater demand, old cottages or even ruins with any character being snapped up for renovation.

Because this movement is so significant, four randomly selected comments from the 56 on this node are provided to give a general idea of the material, and represent its spatial scatter.

(Loxton) Influx of welfare recipients. Higher unemployment, yet harder to get contract workers. General lower standard of living throughout the community. Except possibly the highest stratas.

(Mypolonga) Many orchardists at Mypolonga have bought the orchard next door, and rent the now un-used house. Because it is out of Murray Bridge, the rent is cheaper, and there are quite a few unemployed families moved in. The local orchardists can rarely get enough workers to pick fruit, etc, and there is some tension between those looking for workers, and those who won't work. The school has a social justice policy & on-going programme to help cope with this.

(Jamestown) Population is steady but there has been an increase in people seeking cheap housing & single parent families in the towns. Young people seem to be the ones leaving Jamestown to find employment or further education.

(Eudunda) Another factor dealing with the social structure ... is the floating population who live or purchase in cheap rental houses (unused farm houses etc) and have no intention of seeking work and live in a general sub-standard manner. This may sound "elitist" but is a concern to the stable or regular population as drugs etc are often involved. The close proximity to Adelaide is also a contributing factor.

Though mostly brief and cryptic, the above sample includes mention of the most common concerns, including the lowering of community standards, the conflict between the strong rural work ethic and perceived idleness of the 'dole bludgers'. It also highlights the fact that a steady total population masks a severe change in the population composition, with true locals - particularly the younger generation - being replaced by uncommitted floating population. Rightly or wrongly, urban influence is blamed for the importation of crime and drug taking, and the failure of the new

arrivals to take their share of community responsibilities or support institutions, or even take an interest in the local community. The fact that so many respondents named this influx as a major change in the community over the preceding ten years (some narrowed it down to five years) again emphasises the recency of the phenomenon. A small number of the respondents expressed a degree of sympathy and tolerance for the newcomers, but most clearly regarded them as undesirable, some in vehement terms. A 47-year old from Watervale in the Clare Valley wrote:

Each community, and town is growing in numbers with deliberate dole bludgers, deliberate unmarried mothers, deliberate social lice & parasites with no intention of aiding the social structure of any community, in any fashion. There are, unfortunately, too many people who wish to move into country areas to escape employment and commitment, looking for handouts, and too willing to blame the rest of the world for all reasons for someone else's good fortune, when they alone are prepared to do absolutely nothing.

Unfortunately I am unable positively to identify any welfare clients among the responses, so they cannot be given a 'right of reply'. Another feature of the influx not covered in the random sample of responses is the perception that the State government, through the S.A. Housing Trust, is deliberately dumping welfare clients in some towns with surplus housing stock, such as Whyalla, Peterborough, Murray Bridge and Millicent. These towns, particularly those with few significant local employers, then become stigmatised as 'welfare towns' and their misfortune begins to feed on itself. The following accounts come from (a) a Murray Bridge business owner and (b) a Commonwealth public servant giving evidence at the Parliamentary Inquiry:

(a) Murray Bridge has a high dependency population in particular to the dole, single parents, pension & like. It was regarded as a "dumping ground" by SAHT in late 70's early 80's for single mums, unemployed etc. The town now has a very high unemployment rate, youth crime rate, "Black & White", and very apathetic attitude. It appears to be a population of "I'm O.K. Jacks" and fails in community spirit and involvement. Recent newspaper articles regarding "Scum of earth, alcoholics in street" etc are not necessarily without some accuracy but vastly exaggerated. I have to buy in Murray Bridge because I have my own store. But, Yep, I like it!

(b) I know that if someone in Adelaide goes into the Housing Trust and says they want a house they will put up on the screen where they can get a house and they may say 'You have got a two year wait if you want to live in Elizabeth, but if you want a house now, you have to go to Peterborough'. A single mother with nowhere else to go will move there and there are no services. It is complete isolation in most cases. Most people who have spoken to me about moving here have said that is all they have had. They have never been out of Adelaide. All they knew was *A Country Practice*, and they thought that is what it would be like.

There are several examples of people - eg. retirees from farms - rejecting such welfare towns for smaller places nearby, which then 'capture' their neighbour's share of local retirees. The impact of welfare recipients on the host community varies according to population size, location and the relative proportion of newcomers. Some coastal centres, which attract holiday home owners, tourists and 'normal' retirees as well as urban refugees have major changes to their quality of life, but their survival is not threatened. Many of the welfare clients, however, have chosen small inland towns that are basically struggling small service centres suffering badly from the farming recession. The following examples are from a coastal holiday town in north-eastern Yorke Peninsula (a), and Wirrabara, an inland town in the Upper North (b).

(a) Unemployed persons often move to Port Clinton, Price, Kadina Moonta & Wallaroo because houses can be obtained here from \$40,000-\$65,000 and weekly rentals are well below Adelaide figures. The other factor, of course, is a shortage of jobs, partly attributable

to a long-term downturn in farm commodity prices (versus costs). With an increasing number of out-of-work people and low-income invalid pensioners and aged pensioners moving into this town and district, the "atmosphere" of the town has changed. "Crimes" such as burglary and drug-selling are on the increase and it is now necessary to be security conscious. There are now a lot of heavy drinkers here and the result - fights, noisy parties and cars roaring around the town at all hours. However it is still safe for a woman or child to go out at night - most of these rowdy and riotous people happen to be my friends and things are not too bad.

(b) The community at Wirrabara is a small community with ever increasing aged people. The town has little to offer the younger generation eg. 18-40 apart from sport & drinking, everything is alcohol related and the problem is getting worse. In last 5 years there has been an influx of people into town who are either unemployed or on disability pensions, they seem to be on the edge of the community as they shop elsewhere & don't support the community at all ie involvement in sport, religion, social groups, general involvement. The main reason for their shifting to this location is cheap rental and they are quite content to simply live their lives without involvement or wanting integration. The recession and to a smaller extent government has caused a (flow) to major cities of youth because of employment prospects and to a lesser extent social activities the town as a community no longer bands together as strongly as in the past because of the quite defined age differences and the need for the youth to travel elsewhere for entertainment, up to 3 hrs each way. I am concerned for the town & community as I feel it is dying and it is one of many.

The latter description is all the more poignant because offered by a 30-year-old lifelong resident. It encapsulates the rural dilution process leading to demographic type 3 described in Chapter 6: the urban refugee inflow has exacerbated a situation where net migration shows only a small loss, but gross migration is high, with an outflow of youth and an inflow of retirees. The addition of a new inflow of urban refugees with no commitment to the community greatly exacerbates the social situation, and corrupts not only the traditional rural work ethic but many other standards of behaviour and social mores. Thus a woman from a small town in Eyre Peninsula writes:

A younger generation have got government assistance to buy first home loan houses, thats OK. But most are not married to each partner & continue having child after child. Some of the men have never worked & when asked to help at working Bees don't even turn up & on a pension or dole day quite frequently have a booze up. We have accepted this. But it makes me too cross to know we, my husband & I, have worked hard to save & bring our family up he a shearer & I house cleaned, because he is now self employed & cannot when things are tight get unemployment benefits we live very frugal.

The recency of the urban influences, and the fact that changes in social norms are occurring rather rapidly, is illustrated by several respondents from the rural heartland of the Mallee and Eyre Peninsula as yet little penetrated by urban refugees. These respondents draw comparisons between desirable traits in their own local neighbourhoods, and perceived moral shortcomings in larger or more urbanised places such as Murray Bridge or even the Barossa towns. For example, the eldest daughter of a farm family from a very small Mallee neighbourhood was unable to complete her schooling in the small local school. Her mother told the Parliamentary Inquiry

She has had to move away to Tanunda. That has put great stress on our income and on the family unit. Not knowing what she is doing during the week is hard, but that is where lots of trust and talking needs to go on, although in some ways it has been good for her, because she is witnessing a lot of drug problems and marriage break-up problems that we do not see out here. She is seeing a lot of social problems different from those that the xxx (home) area has.

### *Social impacts of demographic change in the intermediate and outer zones*

Apart from the innermost area within an hour's drive from Adelaide, the feeling of the development of an unbalanced and unhealthy age structure, with increasing numbers of elderly occurs throughout the settled areas (Tables 8.3, 8.4; Fig. 8.3). As we have seen, this results partly from ageing in situ, and partly from the active in-migration of the older age-groups to the more attractive coastal locations, along the Murray River or in the higher rainfall country. The heavy concentration of observed retiree increase round the entire Yorke Peninsula coast from Port Broughton to Port Clinton is particularly striking. This perception of demographic ageing includes, but extends beyond, the area penetrated by urban refugees. It corresponds closely with the distribution of those reporting increased unemployment over the past ten years. Perceptions of the loss of young people are also widespread, but more heavily concentrated in the intermediate and outer settlement zones (Table 8.4).

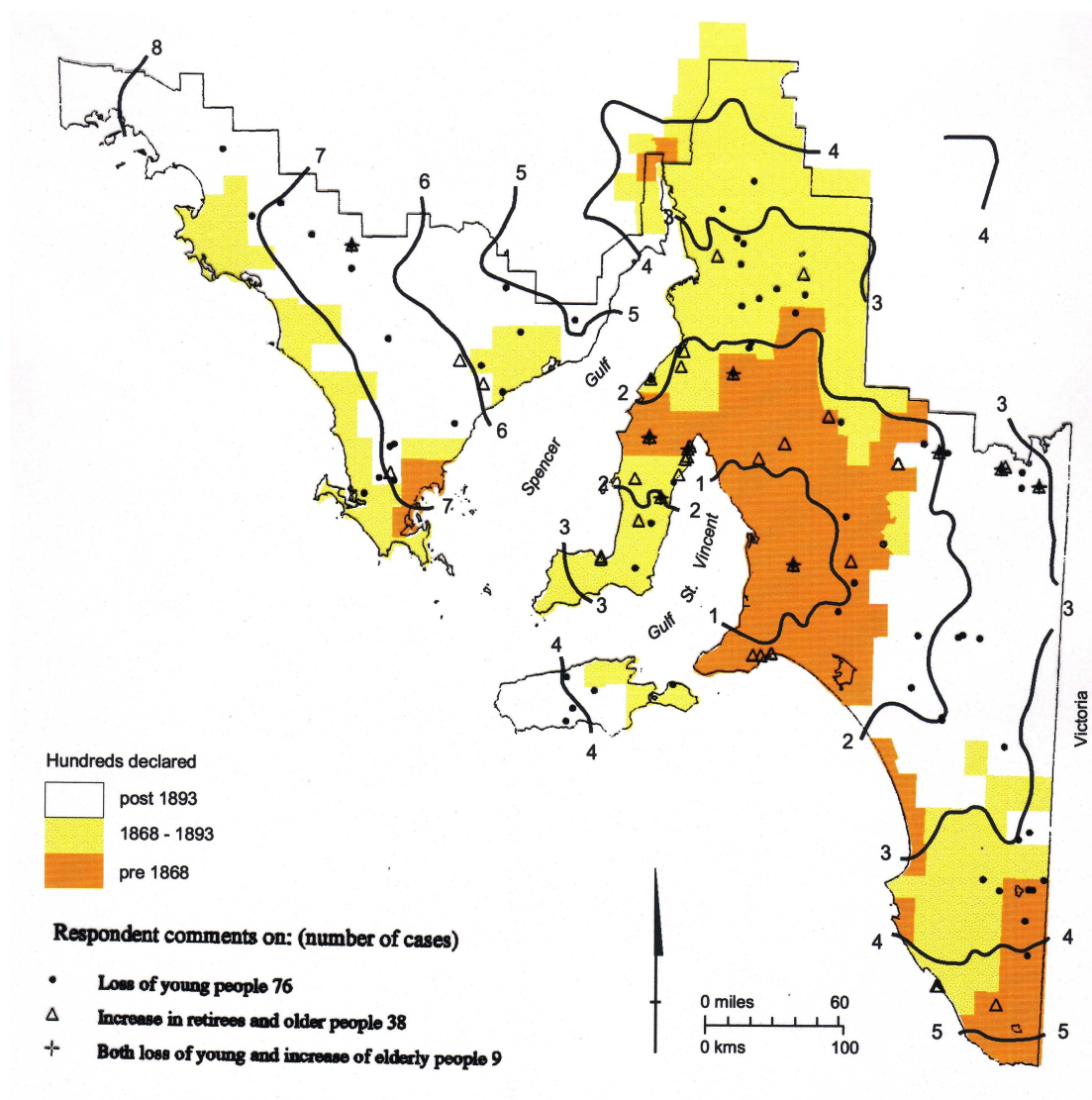
Until the current crisis, although a proportion of family farms even in the 1970s and early 1980s could barely, if at all, support two families (commonly the main farm family plus a married son/daughter and family), they nevertheless managed to retain a proportion of young people on the farms. This was done by a variety of means, including paying sons only a small cash allowance plus keep, by finding casual work for small or seasonal jobs such as shearing, or short term contracts, by the availability of some off-farm work such as silo operator, by the availability of land for share-farming, and so on. Thus young men both from farms and non-farm households could eke out a living and maintain the social infrastructure of sporting teams and social events (dances, cabarets, picnic race meetings, etc) so significant to rural communities. The near-destruction of this system is pointed out by many respondents. One of the most significant consequences is the great increase in farm women obliged to seek off-farm jobs to increase the family income, and/or to replace the missing son in farm work. This example is from Upper Yorke Peninsula, 2 hours from Adelaide:

Over the past 10 years farming incomes have fallen and many women in the area have had to find full-time or part-time work in local towns. Young people have left the district in search of jobs and education. This has caused shortages in sporting teams and the folding of teams.

Many farm families admitted that off farm income earned by the wife was all that kept food on the table, often at the cost of enormous strain on relationships, and drawbacks such as long travel distances and expenses, or behaviour problems in older children. Another hazard was exposure of young children to dangerous machinery because Dad had to mind them during the day. Yet having the off-farm income offered a measure of security and avoided the shame of having to apply for social security. Most of the responses emphasise the negatives in these changes in work relationships, rather than the chance it may give for greater self-fulfilment among farm women, but there are a few exceptions. This male farmer from the Mallee illustrates several aspects of the changing gender relationships:

I am lucky because my wife is employed at the school as a school assistant. It is part time, the equivalent of 35 to 40 weeks on full pay. In some ways I am embarrassed about that because she has the skills and the job. I am lucky that I have the insurance of some off-farm income. Regardless of how I manage the farm, whether it is up or down or whether or not it rains, we have \$X coming in. ... Because my wife is not at home being the typical wife who works ever so well with her husband, never having an argument, ... there is an employment trade off. I am employing a lot more casual labour than I otherwise would. That is good. My wife is much happier working at the school than working with me, there is no doubt about that.

**Fig. 8.3 Distribution of respondent comments associated with perceived ageing of local community**



The unhappier side effects of the move of farm women into a shrinking job market in rural towns also feature strongly in the qualitative comments. As well as the stress from overwork within farm families, a nexus is seen between the increase in married women in the workforce and the disappearance of jobs for school leavers (particularly girls), forced outmigration of the young to find work, and the deterioration of social life. Looming large in this deterioration is the collapse of sporting teams and facilities, and withdrawal of voluntary labour needed to keep social life going. A female 44- year-old from Balaklava writes:

Due to economic situation many (or a large percentage) of farmers wives are working in a variety of different positions. Some professional, other roadhouses, self employed, TAFE courses etc. This extra commitment makes them extra busy, trying to keep up with house

duties etc. Therefore they let their social contacts go & aren't available for the numerous committees etc & these small groups are folding or finding it very difficult - eg. School committees, church fellowship, Netball coaches, basketball, Swimming pool roster, School canteen etc. The dedicated few are feeling the stress!

The absence of a successful younger generation of established households in the 20s and 30s removes role models for teenage children still at school. Many respondents link the difficulty of handing over the family farm (discussed earlier) with the shortage of marriage partners, forced absence of prospective heirs because the farm cannot support two families - even if they wish to carry on farming. The following examples come from the central Murray Mallee (a), and Minnipa on Eyre Peninsula (b):

(a) The drift of our younger people to the larger centres, mostly Adelaide, to find employment, has been high in this area. One in four (my approximation) are staying in this district after leaving school. Many of the kids leaving are from families with existing businesses, farm or otherwise. This will create ageing problems in future years, with less younger people to carry on farming and other support businesses... One of the casualties of the loss of younger people in the last decade has been sporting clubs, especially larger team sports e.g. football. Difficulty in maintaining teams and numbers has seen football fall from 8 teams to 5 ..."

(b) As more married women enter the workforce our teenage girls leaving school are forced to get employment in Adelaide or elsewhere. The consequences of this will become more dramatic as time goes by. Young males leave for company. Older persons will ultimately follow to be near their children. With less young married couples children will decrease, school numbers decline and it will become less desirable to live here. The opportunities to create employment are limited especially with low farm commodity prices. The community has formed a "Directions Group" to attempt to cope with the problems but the future will be difficult.

Efforts of rural society to maintain its fabric involve excessive input by those remaining and efforts to encourage young people working or studying in Adelaide through the week to return to their home town at weekends to play sport or take part in social events. Both the 1992/93 postal survey and the evidence given at the Parliamentary inquiry show the distress caused by the decay of sport, and the desperate efforts to keep it going. A farmer representing the Peterborough football club (quoted below) told the Parliamentary Inquiry that due to amalgamation, they now had to travel 120 Km. to play the most distant team in the league (Port Broughton). Team recruitment for Australian Rules football is particularly difficult due to the large number of players needed per team. Unlike cricket, its robust body contact nature makes it difficult to make up a team from mixed age groups. Once beyond school age, B grade teams were difficult to find, both because few 18 year olds remained and because of the dollar cost of travel to matches and training. The Peterborough farmer commented:

The financial restrictions are preventing people from playing sport. ... in the country areas sport is a vital part of your community. It is a way of just letting everything down for one day. In the case of football, you let everything go by the way and it is a change from the environment that you are in and it is important that it try to be retained.

The loss of young people has also resulted in a shortage of competent labour for the few farm jobs that are left. Many respondents pointed out how farmers were engaging in reciprocal work-sharing to avoid paying hired help, and employment of full-time staff is out the question for most. As one farmer wrote, the hired man on award rates would take home substantially more than the farmer. As a further shrinkage in business opportunities, respondents noted that more and more farmers are doing their



own mechanical repairs, sometimes as a result of training by T.A.F.E. to do so. The increasing average age of farmers, and the loss of community leaders among those who leave are very apparent, and rising apathy and resignation is apparent among those who are left.

***The withdrawal of essential services from the outer and intermediate settlement zones***

It has previously been shown (Smailes, 1991) that in the early 1990s about one-third of all employed people in small South Australian country towns tended to be in public sector jobs; these positions have regular drought-proof incomes which greatly help to dampen seasonal fluctuations in rural business turnovers. Hospitals, education, road maintenance, electricity and water supply, local government and other public functions are vital components in the service infrastructure. Their presence provides a significant element of the market for private businesses - e.g. accommodating travelling public servants, servicing government vehicles, casual work such as cleaning, etc. The depression of the early 90s caused cuts in public spending throughout the nation, but was greatly exacerbated in South Australia by the collapse and subsequent Government bail-out of its State Bank. Complaints about the withdrawal, or threatened withdrawal, or deterioration of public services are one of the most common spontaneous responses (Fig 8.4). For example, a case from the South-East, 4 hours from Adelaide:

Our latest concern is a move by the present Government to close the Government Experimental Farm, which over the years has provided limited employment for locals and a very valuable service not only to local farmers but State-wide ... It has also been a source of students for the local primary school, which if the numbers drop much lower, would be in danger of closing.

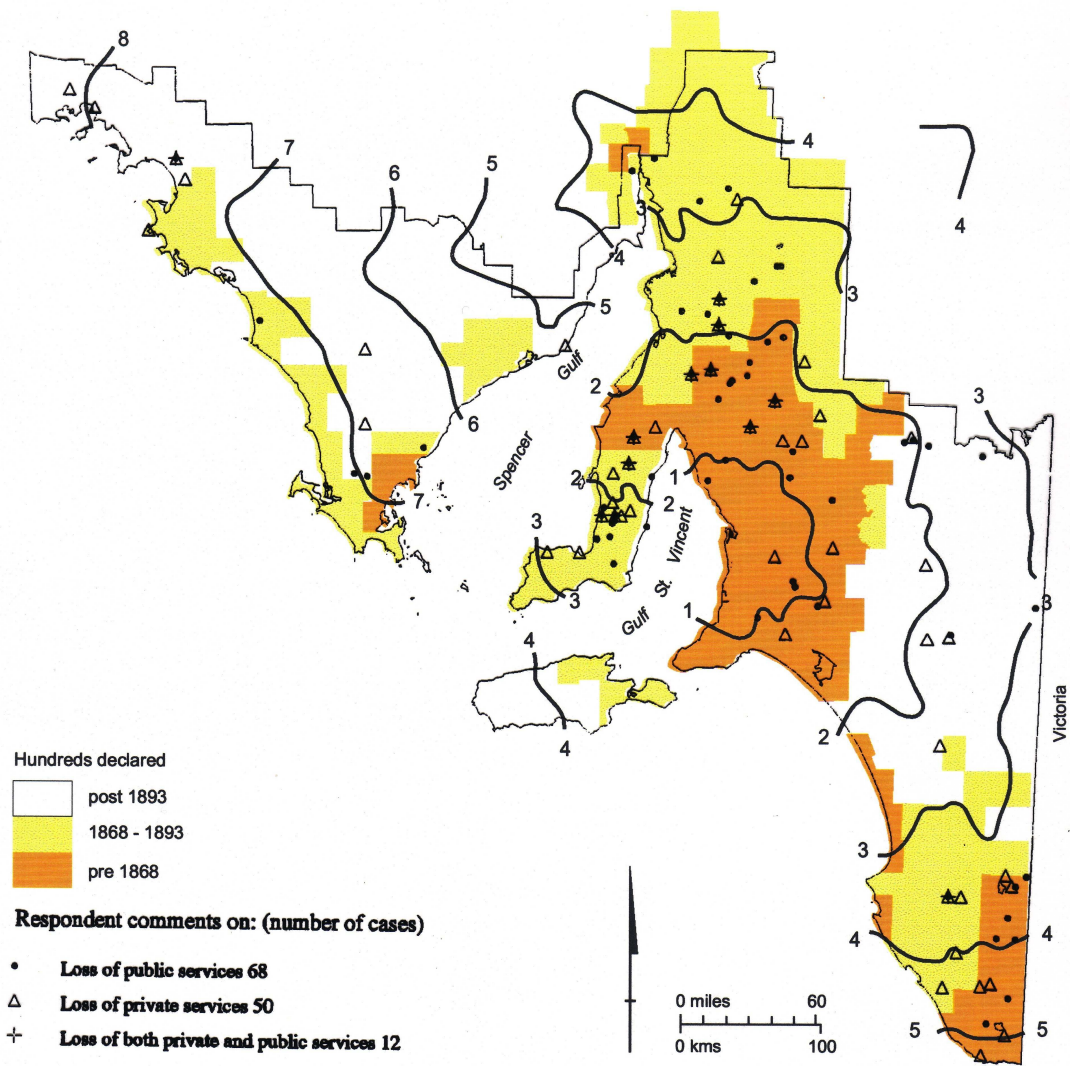
South Australia, like other Australian states, has several towns formerly heavily dependent on particular public service functions, such as the railways, power stations, prisons, etc. An example from a coastal retiree shows the impact of their closure:

I lived in Gladstone for nearly 40 years. When I first went there it was a thriving town. Then silos came in and people lost jobs, the Prison closed and 33 families left the town. Army camp closed down - more families lost. S.A.R. (South Australian Railways) reduced staff drastically, Telecom closed.

The most emotive issues for country people, however, are school and particularly hospital closures, as striking at the heart of the community's security, public involvement, employment provision, and attraction or retention of residents. These sentiments, and the inter-town rivalry for retention of increasingly scarce public sector resources, are aptly summed up by respondents from southern Yorke Peninsula:

Our government has seen fit to close down our local hospital from a very good, well-run unit to a short stay hospital. This has caused us to lose 3 full-time, very good doctors who had a very thriving practice. Our hospital is being partially closed down and an old folks' home is to be built. ...When this takes place the community will greatly change as already some people are choosing not to live here because of it. This will greatly affect health, business, valuations of properties.

**Fig. 8.4 Distribution of respondent comments associated with perceived loss of essential services**



Further from Yorke Peninsula:

Three doctors 1991. Zero doctors in permanent residence now. Waiting time for consultations 1991: max 24 hours, now up to 14 days. Health Commission's hope that all of community would support Yorketown has no basis in reality or community loyalty. Most of the community disasters can be put down to bureaucrats drawing lines and circles on maps instead of find out our community loyalties and ties some going back 100 yrs. Ardrossan has gained lion's share of health care ... an inept district council and hospital board were caught flat-footed.

Many respondents over the whole state complained of both the closure of schools, the reduced size of those remaining, and the rate of turnover of teachers and the inadequacies of the Open Access system of learning. These have of course been

familiar problems for much longer than the duration of the current recession, but the problems of decline appear to have increased sharply in the crisis period. For example, some Area Schools on Eyre Peninsula are placed not in towns but in the open countryside on the border between adjacent L.G.A.s, to cover a wide area. As well as a shrinkage of student numbers, such a location places an extra burden on the family travel budget for single-trip attendance at school functions. The extra travel, much higher costs of petrol in the country than the city, and poor state of roads are mentioned by a number of respondents.

A farmer from near Minnipa, central Eyre Peninsula, writes:

Karcultaby Area School is situated between the towns of Minnipa and Poochera, neither of which have schools. This means that all the children travel to school by bus. For us this means a lot of extra travelling, as trips to the school can't be combined, from our situation, with shopping in Minnipa for food, etc. The biggest disadvantage of our situation is the amount of travelling, 45 Km round trip to Minnipa (food and mail, church and sport), 60 Km round trip to school. All over unsealed rough roads, dusty in summer and muddy in winter. Vehicle purchase, maintenance and fuel cost are a major expense for us.

The impact of numbers decline and cost cutting on the quality of education in rural high schools is well summed up by a teacher from the South-East, traditionally a relatively prosperous area:

My youngest daughter has just completed Year 12 and because of the lack of staff had to study Maths II by correspondence - this was a disaster. Each year more senior students are having to use the Open Access mode of instruction - rarely do they excel. This year we are one student short of the number required in Year 11 - therefore we lose .6 of a staff member. This would not affect a large school very much but with a staff allocation of 18 the loss of .6 makes a very large difference to the curriculum offered.

In addition to the decline in numbers at the larger High and Area schools (e.g. Ceduna reported drop from 900 to 600 students; Kimba from 450 to 245), the complete closure of many small primary schools strikes a blow at the entire range of services in many smaller centres throughout the State by removing the need for daily visits to the town to pick up children or attend functions.

Government cutbacks, or interference even with publicly supported voluntary services such as St. Johns Ambulance or the CFS (Country Fire Service), are greatly resented. A Karoonda farmer told the Parliamentary Inquiry that

Our rights as an individual community have been taken away. With respect to St. John, we were doing our own thing, but St. John tried to amalgamate all their units under one body. ... We either amalgamated or we did not get a licence. That is one item we have lost control of through our local community. I am not affiliated with the CFS. I am only going on what I hear in the media as to fires and equipment, and I believe most of that is co-ordinated from Adelaide. That is not fair. You cannot have some wanker from Adelaide trying to run a fire down here in the scrub. It is not practical.

The litany of comments on the withdrawal of public sector services of all descriptions over the last ten years has its counterpart in the loss of private sector businesses (Fig. 8.4). Fairly clear hierarchical levels may be recognised among South Australian country towns, with the most significant community services, local government, hospitals, area schools and the like being provided in the standard country towns with town populations varying from about 500-600 in the marginal cereal/pastoral country, up to 2000-2500 in irrigation and higher rainfall country. Below these is a layer of

smaller neighbourhood centres with much social importance and convenience-type services. The withdrawal of economic functions from these smaller centres, reported elsewhere for the Eyre Peninsula (Smailes, 1991), is strongly corroborated by responses across the state. To some degree, this upward displacement of functions assisted the survival of the standard country towns through the 1980s, but during the crisis even here very many business closures were reported, including those most needed by farmers. The closure of farm machinery dealers and new car suppliers in the wheat-sheep belt was widespread, and few farmers could put aside money in depreciation accounts to replace work machinery. Many have survived by 'living on depreciation', cost cutting by purchasing second-hand machines at clearing sales and so on. One farmer in the far West Coast reported:

We are one of the few families that has sons on the farm. The only reason we can do this is that we haven't any great machinery. We have 5 Headers, value of \$5,000 each perhaps. Same with sowing equipment, only combines with one for each member.

Many depressing lists of private business closures were reported; e.g. a farmer from central Yorke Peninsula reports:

In the past 10 years many agencies important to the farming community have been either closed or down-graded in my local business towns: e.g. Elders, Massey Fergusson, Shell Co, C.B.A. Bank, Bennetts Farmers, Horwood Bagshaw, David Shearers, International. There is no proper outlet to purchase (and service) electrical goods. There is no shoe store as such - only an offshoot of a general store ... Most existing agencies have been semi-abandoned by their parent groups, and survive only by virtue of whoever runs the business.

One result of this is inability to get vital service and spare parts for old (or new) machinery in a hurry, as this response from eastern Eyre Peninsula indicates:

Spare parts for farm machinery entails a wait for the parts to be sent from Melbourne. I recently had to wait for three weeks while all interstate dealers were checked for the part.

From a surviving local business viewpoint, obtaining parts for customers from metropolitan dealers is not easy either. As a Naracoorte business respondent (South-East, 4 hours' drive from Adelaide) reports:

Various large businesses in the city tend not to make country orders a priority - often businesses in small communities have to make numerous phone calls, repeated re-orders, etc to get the parts that a customer may need ... city businesses mail correspondence and expect a reply from the country person within a couple of days. Mail can take up to a week to get to us here in Naracoorte.

### **Agrarian fundamentalism; hostility to politicians and city people**

Not surprisingly, the privations experienced by rural people exposed to the impact of the recession have engendered a very strong anti-urban reaction. In the qualitative material considered here, this reaction is coded on three closely interrelated nodes each with a slightly different emphasis, but with much overlap. The three are first, a hostile attitude to city people, city political power, and city attitudes and values; second, the display of respondents' own fundamentalist agrarian views; and third, a feeling of abandonment by the broader society in which the small rural communities and their way of life are embedded. Such attitudes, often collectively termed 'country-mindedness' (Share 1995) were also found in the 1982/83 study, but to a

much lesser extent. An important point made by Halpin and Martin (1996) in their assessment of the current strength of this agrarian ideology in Australia is the way that the official farmers' professional organisations in Australia have gradually distanced themselves from these attitudes, moving towards a more hard line economic rationalist stance. This positions agriculture as a 'sector' rather than a group of farmer members, and farming as a business rather than a way of life. Among the survey respondents themselves, however, the latent feelings about their unfair treatment in a dominantly urban society had become heavily reinforced over the ten year crisis. As this is a significant attitudinal shift, four comments are randomly selected from the total of sixty responses.

A 43-year old farmer from Cowell, Eyre Peninsula:

Government seems to ignore the plight of our country towns even though primary industry is the main exporters in the state. Our roads are falling apart, but the country people feel that government don't care about any-one that lives past Gepps Cross. Our children still are able to play in their front yards and walk down the streets without fear, but the prospects of employment when adults has diminished.

A 49-year old from Wirrula, northern Eyre Peninsula:

It is my opinion that the deregulation of the banking industry in 1984 by the world's greatest treasurer has put great amounts of pressure on this community. Financially it has ruined a lot of people and in turn these people have left the district, leaving the ones left to shoulder more responsibility in the running of the community. I think people in the area have become very cynical of banks and governments, and do not trust either group much at all.

A 54 year old from Mount Gambier:

Politicians seem to think South Australia stops at Murray Bridge a good four or five hours drive from here. A lot of business now has to be done on the phone as a lot of government departments are only operating from the city especially to do with compulsory insurances etc to do with employment. As a whole this is a great area as long as politicians remember we are a part of this state as services are getting less and less. If the next ten years go on as the last ten then we may be a non existent community.

A 43 year old recently returning to his birthplace (Millicent)

We have a unique lifestyle in this area, which has changed little that I can see, but in the last 10 yrs we seem to have been overlooked by Govt., also bureaucracy make decisions in the city which affect us greatly, with little or no regard for our views or the effect their decisions have on us. The most noticeable changes in our community have been caused through the uninformed policies of city bureaucrats. Most, especially with social welfare implications, have not improved the quality of life here.

This random selection shows a number of very commonly expressed feelings, including a strong tendency to blame the Labour government of the day and its leaders, particularly Paul Keating, for engineering the recession. It illustrates the common view that both the politicians who make the laws and the bureaucrats who administer them are untrustworthy, ignorant of rural conditions, enforce rules made in Adelaide or Canberra uncaringly, with no regard to the consequences for country people, and ruthlessly withdraw or 'regionalise' essential local services. In many cases these views are expressed much more vehemently than in the random selection above.

## Summary and conclusions

### *Insights into community satisfaction, attachment, openness and integration*

The qualitative material brings to life the meaning of the above four concepts in a way that numerical indices cannot accomplish. The 1982/83 responses illustrate a widespread level of satisfaction and pride in the local communities, and provide a base against which the later severe stress put on the system can be compared. They identify some of the key factors which divide communities into status groups and factions (ethnic conflicts, particularly black/white friction with Aboriginal and ethnic minority groups; inequality of income between highly-paid blue collar mill workers and low-paid service jobs; divide between farm and town residents; differential residential suburb status in the larger towns; old-established residents versus newcomers; and in some cases religious denomination membership). Equally, they illustrate the importance of the factors which integrate rural communities. The extraordinary importance of sport as an integrator can hardly be overstressed, often closely associated with the pub, club and alcohol culture to the point where those who do not take part may experience isolation or exclusion. Of significant but lesser importance are the roles of church, service clubs and school boards. The very wide range of experiences reported by in-migrants shows something of the requirements set by different communities for acceptance, and the differing periods of time before it is granted. Some communities were repeatedly seen as relatively 'closed', others 'open'.

### *Stresses on family farm and the farm family*

For farm families in particular, the crisis brought four levels of stress. First, they had to accept that they could not survive on their properties despite extreme privation and self-exploitation; in their own minds they had failed as farmers. Second, they had to face the mortification of admitting they needed help – something they were deeply reluctant to do, even to their close neighbours, let alone welfare agencies. Third, even once the problems were divulged, in many cases income-poor but supposedly asset-rich male farmers were unable to access welfare payments due to the paper value of the land and equipment. Ownership of these assets also prevented early retirement; and this, along with the inability of the farm to support two families and the fear of losing half the farm through divorce settlements, was preventing generational succession on family farms. And fourthly, to put any food on the table the above situation put the onus upon wives or female partners to obtain 'Jobsearch' payments through humiliating regular applications for scarce or non-existent work, thereby competing for the few available jobs with non-farm women and school leavers. Deeply-held values, self-images and priorities were violated. Women who were successful in obtaining work or welfare payments often became, at least temporarily, the main income earner. Almost certainly, these experiences will have raised the long-term role and status of women in farm households. Many farm families will continue to need off farm income to survive, and female contributions are likely to become more important both on and off the farm.

### *Spatial aspects of change*

Differentiation of the social organisation of space within rural South Australia increased sharply during the decade of rural crisis, and was accompanied by a differential impact on morale. In the growth area within about 60 to 90 minutes' drive

from Adelaide, and to a much lesser extent around Mount Gambier and even Port Lincoln, the process of counterurbanisation continued in the more attractive and accessible rural areas. Here, the development of a complex social fabric with a permanent new, exurban population layer grafted onto the existing network of communities has produced a distinctive social pattern similar to that studied in many parts of the world. Even in this area, the 'old' rural population did not fully escape the thinning effects of the general rural crisis, while the 'new' population continued to increase in number and stamp its varied character on the social landscape. In this area, too, the possibility of diversification, entry into more intensive forms of landuse such as viticulture, and the greater chance of off farm work, introduced a new element into agriculture, with many of the new arrivals taking part in it as hobby farmers, while traditional farmers sold out for capital gain and retired or moved further out. Most of these changes would have occurred even in the absence of the rural crisis: they have been speeded up, but not initiated by it. The large number of comments from both old and new residents in this area demonstrates a wide variety of views but a lively interest in community life. A new form of rurality is being forged.

In the intermediate zone ranging from about one hour to three hours' drive from Adelaide, beyond that affected by counterurbanisation, major changes occurred (and are still occurring). Rural dilution is taking place through three major processes - (a) the continued in-flow of retirees to coastal and riparian or similar tourist/holiday/retirement settlements, which adds to the ageing *in situ* of the local population; b) the out-migration of the young; and (c) the inflow of urban refugees, whose age structure is closer to that of a 'normal' population, but whose attitudes and values are fundamentally different from those of the host population. The arrival of these people, who are perceived by locals as a group of social isolates, or a subculture outside the host rural culture receiving them, camouflages the extent of demographic decline in the traditional rural population. Respondents to the survey distinguished clearly between the inflow of retirees, which includes many inland rural people retiring to the coast, and was not perceived as a threat to local culture on the one hand, and the arrival of urban refugees, which was greatly resented, on the other.

Beyond, or overlapping with this zone lies a belt in which out-movement of youth, ageing *in situ* and temporary out-migration of sons and husbands to get supplementary employment has greatly weakened the rural population demographically, but left its cultural traditions less impacted by outside 'subversion'. While the loss of public and especially private services has affected the whole rural area, its impact has been greatest in this outer zone of lowest initial population density and most recent European settlement.

### ***The rural recession in relation to dominant discourses***

It must be recognised that rural people's claims for public policies to ease their predicament are contested by other, competing viewpoints with very different priorities. Palmer (1997), building on earlier work by Apfel Marglin (1990) and Appadurai (1990), identifies four principal discourses from an analysis of selected rural periodicals over a period of one year. They are labelled 'Traditional farming', 'Self-sufficiency', 'Permaculture' and 'Agronomic' respectively, the last-named incorporating the economic rationalist, agribusiness view of farming. The discourses are understood as "institutionally based ways of thinking, talking and feeling drawing upon historically bound systems of knowledge" (Palmer, 1997, 27). Each one has its

values, technology, environmental stance, economic stance, influences and origins, relationship to science, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, and ‘episteme/techne’ (scientific versus tradition-based ways of knowing).

The challenge for the ordinary people quoted in this chapter is to make their voice heard in the dominant discourse. Unfortunately most (not all) of the voices in this chapter can most appropriately be seen as an outpouring of pain and resistance from the ‘traditional farming’ discourse – which is not likely to carry much longer-term weight in a neoliberal regime. The ‘permaculture’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ discourses have a limited exposure in the qualitative material, almost entirely from the more intensive, better rainfall areas infiltrated by exurban environmentally conscious newer land holders. This is not to say that consciousness of environmental damage and feeling of stewardship are absent in the traditional farm responses - just that there has been no financial scope to consider them.

The ‘Agronomic’ discourse characteristic of neoliberalism has few representatives in the material. Indeed, it is represented more by the questions put by the Parliamentary Inquiry committee members to people making oral submissions, than in most of the submissions themselves. This is evident, for example, in an exchange between the Committee members and representatives of the Catholic Church, the two respectively taking a sector-oriented and people-oriented view of appropriate rural policy. While the nature and circumstances of the evidence considered here carries a very strong bias toward the traditional farming view point, it is well to recall its contested nature, even at the height of the rural crisis. This was clear to many of my respondents. They distinguished very clearly between on the one hand the welcome and important help they received from the rural counsellors, who were seen as ‘one of us’ actually helping farmers to improve their viability, and on the other the attitude of the State and Commonwealth governments bent on restructuring farming as an industrial sector, and thus getting rid of marginally viable farms.

### *Changing occupational identity and gender roles*

The qualitative material includes much insightful comment on the changing roles of both rural women and men, even though gender was not a major focus of the two postal surveys. Changing gender roles in rural areas, and particularly in farming, has been the subject of a huge research effort in Australia (e.g. Alston, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2005; Argent, 1999; Bryant, 1999; Dempsey, 1992; Liepins, 2000). Of particular interest in the present context is Bryant’s (1999) typology of changing male and female occupational identities in a sample of South Australian farmers. The identities recognised include those of manager, subordinate manager, entrepreneur and identities forged outside of farming. However, by far the most important change revealed was the move from ‘traditional farmer/farmer’s wife’ to ‘new traditional farmer’. The former was still numerically most important, but the emerging group of ‘new traditional’ farmers is significant for the present chapter. In Bryant’s words (1999, p. 245), the ‘new traditional’ farmers share similar meanings associated with work and the farm with the ‘traditionals’, but differ in that identity is built less on ascribed gender roles, and is open to change. For women the partnership of marriage is extended to a partnership of work relations, self-identifying and being identified as an active and equal farm partner. In the evidence to the Inquiry, there were few strongly



feminist submissions<sup>1</sup>. Indeed the social worker from Eyre Peninsula quoted earlier stated the frankly traditional dominant motivation and basic values from her wide experience on Eyre Peninsula thus, in a letter to the Committee of 30. 10. 94:

It is important to emphasise that with a farm family, the man's priority goal is the farm and entwined with this, is his ability to provide for his family through the produce and profit of the farm, whereas the woman supports her man in his goal, she has the man's welfare and that of the family as her first, priority goal.

However, the forced imposition on farm women (and children) of a greatly expanded role on the farms is highly likely to have a lasting impact on how both genders see female roles, value and prestige, even though at the height of the crisis the traditional attitudes were still strongly dominant. A very perceptive comment on the impact of the crisis on farm *men* was given by the concerned church minister from Peterborough, quoted earlier in another connection:

I want to highlight the effects of hopelessness and despair, especially among male farmers. At the very root of their life, what they have seen as important to their farming and the provision of the economy and the provision of their family, which is so rooted in their own self-esteem, has been wiped away from them. We struggle to help farmers, especially male farmers, to understand the social and emotional impact happening to them. They do not have the language or the total understanding to speak out. They know deep down inside something is affecting them. Unfortunately, when the bank loan gets larger and larger, and the income is getting less and less, we are seeing people snap. Those decisions made about the economy which happened way (up) there still have those ramifications down here.

### ***Rural social life - temporary low point, or permanent change?***

Throughout this chapter, the stoicism, resilience and determination of rural people, particularly farm families, has emerged from the data, with a strong suggestion that these qualities have in some cases not been equal to the exceptional privations brought on by the rural crisis years. The question remains whether the material presented, strong though it is, expresses a major long term change, or a fluctuation in an ongoing homeostatic cultural system whose resilience is great enough to bring it back - almost - to the *status quo ante*. To state the main conclusion first, I believe that the changes to morale and basic attitudes and values among rural people have been more than just a dose of temporary misery.

### ***Why are the changes likely to be ongoing?***

This was an extreme low point, on a par with the severe depressions of the 1890s and the 1930s. Leske (1992, 16-17) shows that the material hardships in the Great Depression of 1930-31 were probably more severe than those of 1991-92. What makes the latter different is that it occurred in the midst of a period of delayed adjustment to radical changes in technology, mobility and competition. In the 1930s people had some hope of a return to a more or less familiar past; not so in the 1990s. Even more than with these earlier events, substantial, permanent adjustments and changes are inevitable. This does not mean total collapse, however. Morale will certainly recover (and is recovering) to a substantial degree. The need for the local will remain, and the urgency of promoting a regrouped social organisation of space is

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<sup>1</sup> A notable exception is a submission from a new women's network in the Mallee.

re-emphasised by the findings of this chapter. I suggest three more specific reasons why the impact of the crisis is likely to be long-term.

First, although belief in the traditional agrarian and other rural values is highly unlikely to disappear among rural people, this ideology has been left without an obvious political home and institutional support base for resistance. The rural crisis, as we have seen, coincided with a period of major change in the national political economy, and reorientation to a globalised world. At the time of the 1992/93 survey Labor was in power at both the State and Commonwealth levels. The fact of having a perceived common political "enemy" to blame assisted somewhat in "hanging in", but the two major national parties - Labor and Liberal - were both agreed on the need for radical tariff reductions, and on radical cuts in government expenditure likely to impact on rural areas. Thus the election of Liberal governments at both the State and Federal levels in the mid 1990s did not produce the expected level of political support for the bush, but rather a renewed dose of neoliberalism, placing family farm voters in a paradoxical situation. Their support for the free trade, tariff reduction, free enterprise and market-oriented philosophy traditionally associated with the Liberal/National coalition has become complicated by the rise of agribusiness, corporate farming, cheap foreign food imports, the unforeseen results of bank deregulation, and the US-EEC trade war, so that much of the above philosophy is now against the interests of small family farmers. This has left country people vehemently against the former State, and current national, governments - but to some degree without an obvious alternative political home. This situation encouraged efforts by rural populist groups to launch new farm-based radical political movements grounded in the Action Groups which reached a peak of activity in the early 1990s (see Chapter 6), but have not resulted in a permanent institutional base to support agrarian ideals. Green (2001) has described the decline of the National Party. Despite its ongoing efforts to modify the stance of its Liberal partners, its supporters are thinning out – in Green's words (2001, 71) "no longer do they believe that the National Party has the mortgage on serving their local needs". The same can be said of the largely discredited One Nation party. The Democrats have never had much rural support, and are seen as a spent force, while the Greens are perceived to prioritise the natural environment ahead of rural people's livelihoods. The emergence of the new conservative Family First party has thus far not concerned itself with rural issues.

Second, in the rural cultural heartland the reservoir of traditional rural cultural attitudes has been thinned, weakened and infiltrated by different values. Just as cultural features such as the Welsh or Irish languages survive best in areas not affected by heavy in-migration, so too with all local cultural traits that depend on a vigorous and locally hegemonic population of culture bearers. The loss of a large part of a younger generation of these bearers of traditional culture, leaving a severely ageing rump population, is bound to reduce that local hegemony of values, especially where urban refugees have moved in. In the evidence given to the Inquiry, nobody put their views on both the erosion of rural values (and also the political homelessness referred to above) more passionately than a female farm partner from Geranium in the Mallee. Explaining why the new Liberal State government's efforts to help young farmers were inadequate, she asked the Parliamentary committee

Is the Liberal government genuine in this? That is what I want to know. If it is, why does it not do it because Australia is its land and we are the custodians of that. If these young farmers are not looked after and allowed to continue on their farms learning their father's skills which you cannot get out of a book, they will leave. This knowledge is a sixth sense, when you know

you can take a punt if it is slightly out of season. It is inbred. ... These young farmers have experience. It is in their blood. They have learned it from the cradle. They are needed to continue this farming. If we do not get guaranteed prices and a decent incentive to start, it will turn into a degraded mess. We are supposed to be nurturing Australia for future generations. We will lose 50 per cent of our export industry and South Australia will collapse totally without a rural sector.

Evidence from the qualitative material also suggests that the invasion of urban values into rural areas through in-migrants is in fact an active diffusion process, dating back perhaps fifteen years and still in progress. Even though it is possible that the urban refugees may disappear as quickly as they came, at least some of the value changes they represent may live on after them.

Thirdly, we have seen that traditional gender roles were thus very heavily impacted by the rural crisis, and it appears highly likely that the enforced detraditionalisation of women's roles which it generated will result in a permanent rise in the status, role and perceived identity of farm women in relation to men. This is likely even in the rural heartland, both within the farm household and wider rural community, reducing the traditional male dominance so convincingly demonstrated by writers such as Dempsey and Alston, cited above. The rise of organisations such as 'Women in Agriculture' (Liepins 1995) together with the weakening of the traditional 'Country Women's Association' (Teather, 1992) marks a significant change. In the in-migration zones where communities are infiltrated by ex-urban outsiders bearing broader societal values, change in gender roles and expectations will be further altered over time.

### *The spiritual dimension: despair or resilience?*

A factor in the crisis that emerges only dimly if at all from the responses to my questionnaires and the official Hansard evidence, and yet underlies both the experience of suffering and the human response to it is the spiritual dimension. Although it does not readily yield to the measurements or testing of social science, its importance is too fundamental to be ignored or brushed off as irrelevant in this account. Country people do not wear their religion, or interior spiritual values on their sleeve. They are, as earlier citations have shown, extremely private people, unwilling to reveal their innermost selves. Yet in a period of extreme stress, many of them drew not only on the relief that came from being able to share their sorrows with a trusted other, outside their normal daily circle.

For some, this purging experience was enough. People who fulfilled this role were not only priests and ministers of religion, but others in trusted, respected positions whose integrity and silence could be relied on. I have spoken to accountants, doctors, social workers and rural counsellors as well as clergy, who have vouched for the reality of this help to the despairing, particularly in Eyre Peninsula. Something of this despair comes through in the evidence given by the church minister from Peterborough cited above (page 256). In many cases the real help came not from the professional role that provided the initial occasion for the visit, but from the spiritual strength many were able to impart, over and above their 'official' function, to help release their 'client' from an unbearable burden. The rural counsellors were in a special position to do this as they were themselves 'of the people', helping fellow farmers with financial expertise and in almost all cases giving far beyond the call of duty or monetary payment. They won the right to enter the most private spiritual

centre of a despairing persons psyche, and often did so. During the crisis, a small book 'Voices of Hope in the Rural Crisis' published by the Lutheran Publishing House circulated widely through rural South Australia (Pfitzner 1992). It contains articles by a farmer, an economist, a psychiatrist, a doctor, several counsellors, and ministers of religion, all seeking to help rural people understand what was happening to them. Kathy Ottens, the rural counsellor for the Mid and Upper North, was one of the writers. After practical advice on conducting an interview with the bank manager, she writes

As a Christian I believe that no situation is hopeless; there is always light at the end of the tunnel, even though the tunnel may seem to be endless. It is a matter of trusting the Lord to hold your hand or to be beside you as you travel through the dark tunnel. The trouble is that we tend to let go of the guiding hand of God as we go through the tunnel, and we give in to despair. (Ottens 1992, 87)

Few people are willing to speak plainly about such matters in official fora. However, the rural counsellor from Eastern Eyre Peninsula, also a committed Christian and a man of immense integrity and empathy, pointed out in his evidence to the Poverty Inquiry that the outcome of the struggle between human despair/suicide and resilience/renewed hope (on or off the farm) very often reaches beyond the material to the spiritual level. He told the Committee that increasing the number of counsellors is not the answer:

...care workers and counsellors will require the gifts that recognise the real problems, because these problems are of a spiritual nature they can be dealt with only in that particular realm. ... Unfortunately, governments of the day do not deal with or recognise spiritual problems. If these spiritual problems are not dealt with, you can have 50 counsellors running around the country, and most people will go away with a vacuum that has not been filled or met. I believe that there is only one way to deal with spiritual matters and that is with the word of God. When people have lost control of their own life, that is the only way they can get control.

Is this just a case of another drag of "opium for the people"? Among social scientists such matters are often either ignored or assumed away as self-deception. If spiritual phenomena help, it is put down to other more tangible factors, co-incidence, or psychosomatic suggestion. But not everything will yield up its essence to the 'outsider, looking in' – some phenomena, like deep belonging, 'country', losing a child, or the slaughter at Paschendale can only be truly known through experience. Spiritual help received and given could not prevent all the suicides, family breakups and retreat into alcoholism during the crisis. However, I believe it is a real factor that helps substantially to explain why so little subsumption occurred, so many who contemplated suicide desisted, and so many were able to let go the bitterness and start afresh.

On this intangible note, I conclude the qualitative insights from this chapter. I believe that the evidence given suggests that permanent change in attitudes and values will undoubtedly occur as a result of this period of trauma, but that the resilient and deeply entrenched traditional value system will move some steps towards the centre (national, society wide norms) rather than collapsing