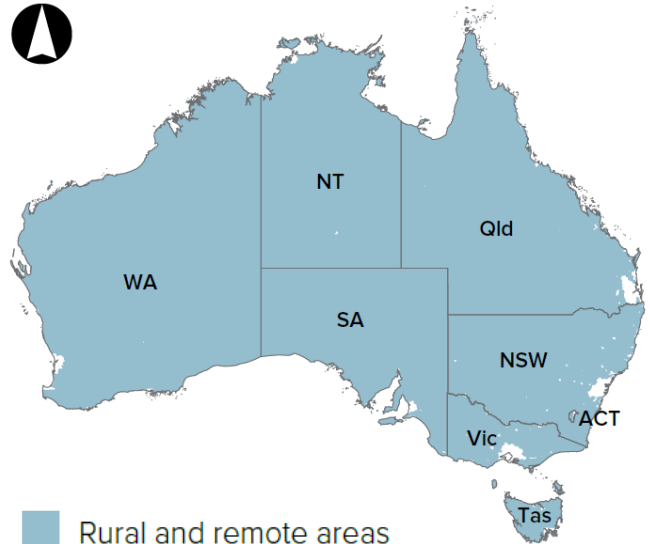


Small towns, rural and remote areas

Australian Infrastructure Audit

These areas cover most of Australia's land mass but have low populations and growth

- Infrastructure needs are vast and varied, and service quality is often poor.
- Many rural and remote regions have declining populations. Services often consolidate to larger regional centres.
- The needs, demands and planning for infrastructure in these areas are often unique.
- Investment faces distinct risks and challenges, due to population size, geographic isolation, economic modelling constraints, climatic events, high costs, reliance on dominant industry, and single assets
- Connectivity, both in a physical and digital sense, is perhaps the most critical issue to liveability and the economy.
- When supported, these communities can more successfully meet economic challenges and better adapt to structural changes, especially in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that face entrenched inequality.
- Access to water is an important component to the establishment of industry and population growth.



12%

of Australians live in small towns and rural and remote areas

Key Industries

- Mining
- Tourism
- Agriculture

Over one third

of remote housing is overcrowded



Death rates of people living in very remote areas are

2.5 times higher

than those living in major cities

75%

of the Australian continent has no mobile phone coverage

Infrastructure in our small towns, rural and remote areas

-  **Infrastructure for users:** Technologies can help to overcome barriers to service access, and bring economic and social opportunities.
-  **Industry efficiency, capacity and capability:** Project selection does not always align with quality of life outcomes.
-  **Passenger transport:** Regional road funding is inconsistent and lacks transparency. Without action, safety and productivity may decline.
-  **Freight transport:** Remote and regional supply chains are critical for industry and to supply communities with basic needs. However, local governments often struggle to fund and maintain critical freight transport infrastructure.
-  **Social infrastructure:** Low service densities can limit the provision of accessible, continuous and quality social infrastructure networks and services in rural and remote areas. Technology can help to overcome distance challenges for some services.
-  **Energy:** The costs of serving remote and regional areas remain high, with customers in those areas often receiving poor reliability outcomes. This undermines quality of life and opportunities for growth and investment.
-  **Telecommunications :** Prioritisation of population density mobile network upgrades creates gaps in crucial areas (productive land/transport corridors).
-  **Water:** Some remote communities do not have access to reliable and safe water and wastewater services. Monitoring is often inadequate.

Principle challenges and opportunities

Challenge: Infrastructure is more expensive to provide per unit of consumption in low population density areas, but communities and businesses in these areas are also more reliant on available infrastructure for their productivity and wellbeing. Poorer infrastructure services in small towns, rural communities and remote areas could lead to limited opportunities for growth and may undermine the long-term viability of some communities.

Challenge: Fluctuations in economic activity in regional industries make it difficult for infrastructure to efficiently and sustainably underpin long-term growth and development. Failure to keep pace with growth can reduce productivity and output during boom years, while underutilised assets raise costs in areas with declining populations, undermining the long-term social and economic viability of regional communities.

Challenge: Infrastructure can do more to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in remote communities and rural areas, and to underpin progress towards local and national objectives for improving quality of life. Failing to improve services for First Australians in remote communities and rural areas undermines potential improvements in quality of life and reinforces gaps in inequality and disadvantage.