4 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

This chapter discusses different ways of approaching a geographical analysis. Then it focuses on the distribution of the homeless population in Tasmania.

4.1 NUMBERS AND RATES

There are two ways of approaching the geographical spread of the homeless population and both are important. First, there is the number of homeless people in particular communities on census night. This is the 'raw' count and policy makers always need to be aware of these figures.

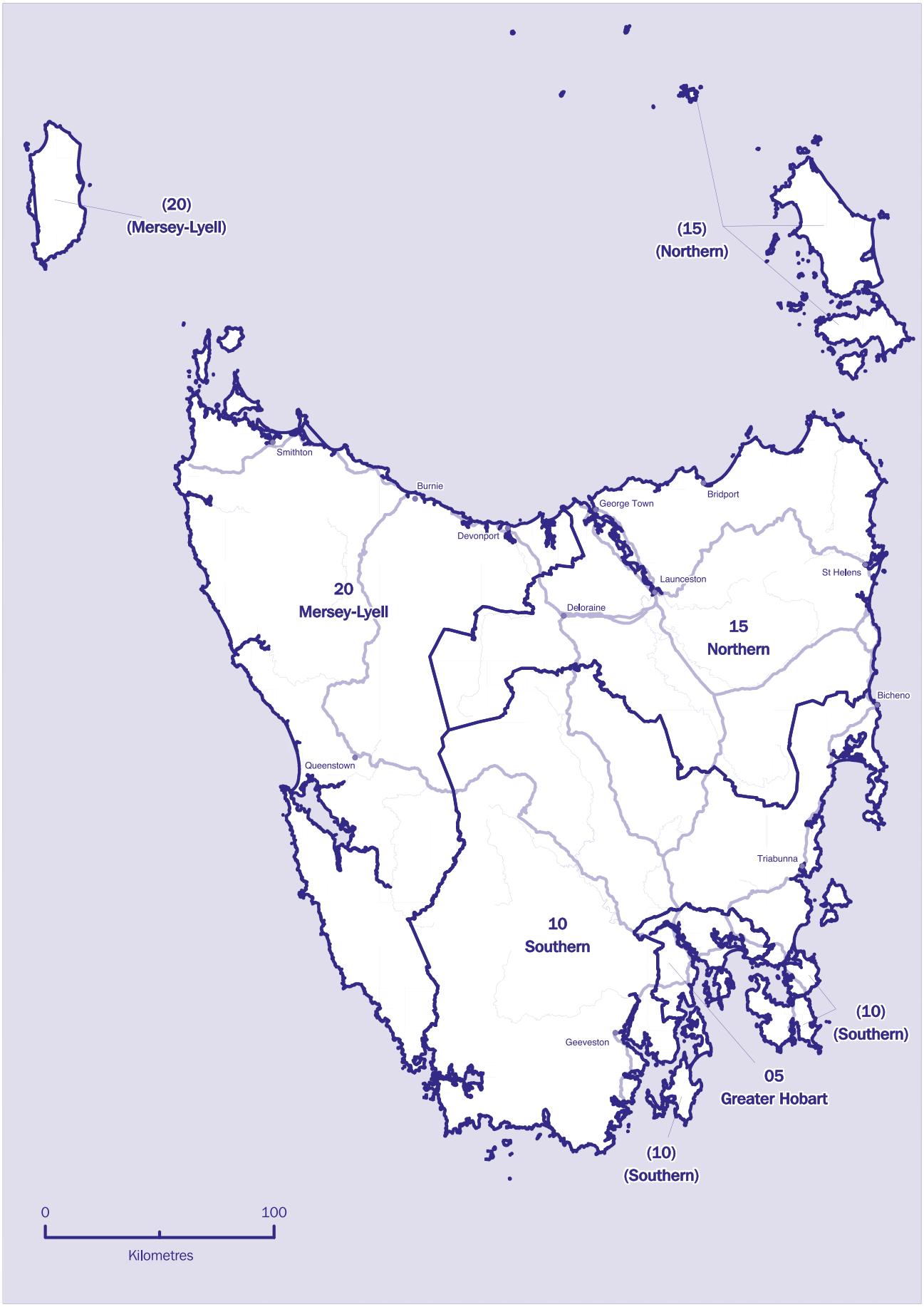
Second, homelessness can be expressed as a rate per 10 000 of the population. This statistic is required for comparing communities of different sizes. For example, the number of homeless people will always be greater in Hobart than in Smithton, because of the difference in population size, but the rate of homelessness may be the same in both communities.

However, it is important to be cautious when interpreting rates for two reasons. First, the rate of homelessness in a particular area does not tell us how many people in that community become homeless. For example, the rate of homelessness in Devonport quantifies the number of homeless people in relation to the Devonport population, but it does not tell us whether those people came from Devonport, other parts of Tasmania, or the mainland. Homeless people move around and the numbers in particular areas partly reflect the services that are available.

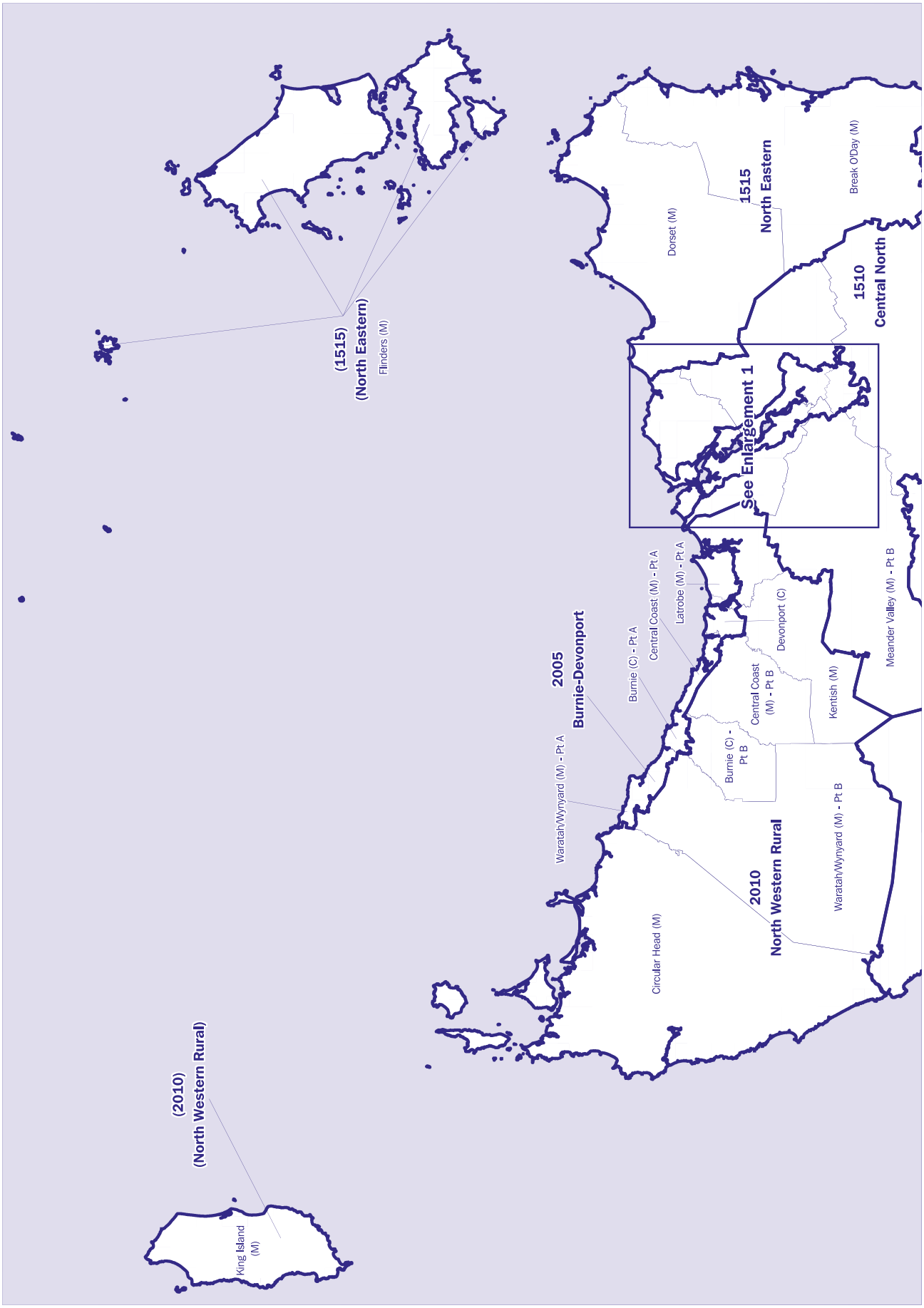
Second, it is important to be cautious when interpreting rates for geographical areas with small populations. Suppose that policy makers have the resources to fund one new SAAP service and they are evaluating the competing claims of two communities. In a small town of 2000 people the rate of homelessness was 100 per 10 000, whereas in a regional city of 30 000 it was 30 per 10 000. Should the resources go to the rural community or to the regional city?

In the rural community, there would have been 20 homeless people (20 x 10 000/2000 = 100 per 10 000), whereas in the regional city there would have been 90 homeless people (90 x 10 000/30 000 = 30 per 10 000). When policy makers

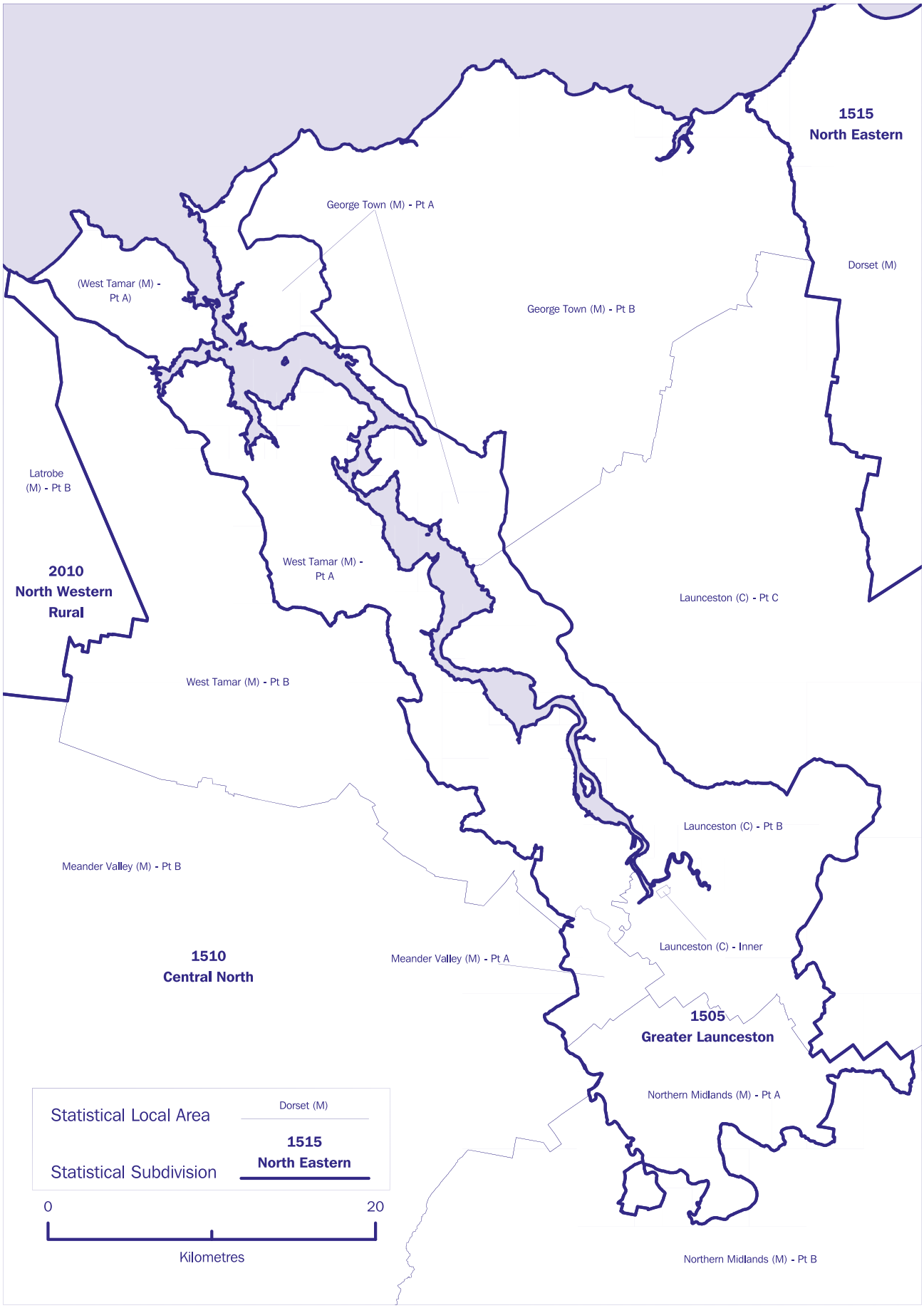
MAP 1: TASMANIA, Statistical Divisions



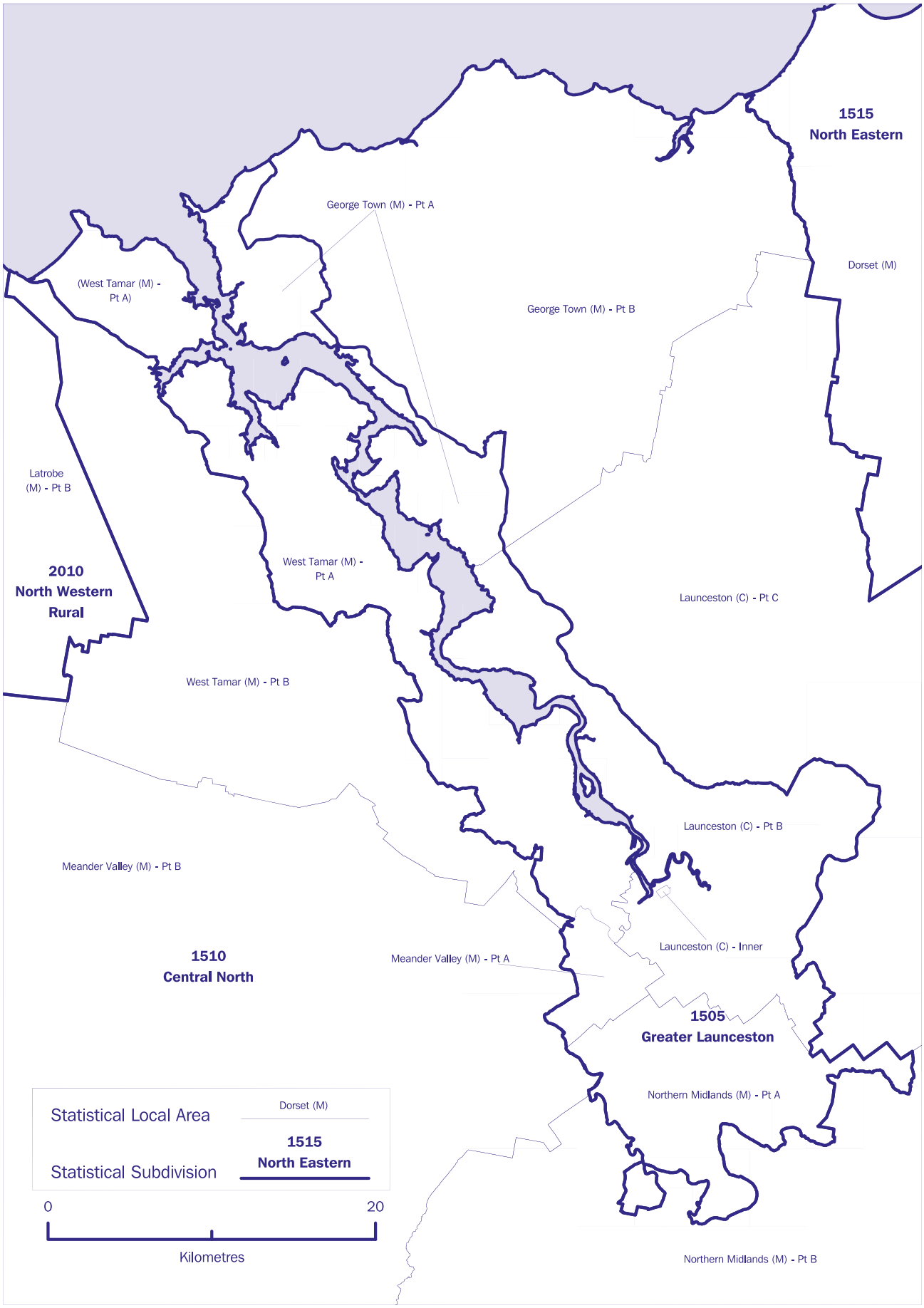
MAP 2: TASMANIA, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas



MAP 3: TASMANIA, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas: Enlargement 1



MAP 3: TASMANIA, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas: Enlargement 1



MAP 4: TASMANIA, Statistical Subdivisions and Statistical Local Areas: Enlargement 2

allocate resources, they have to consider both the number of homeless people in a community and the rate of homelessness, as well as local intelligence about what is happening 'on the ground', in order to match services with expressed need.

4.2 GEOGRAPHICAL CATEGORIES

There are a number of ways of approaching a geographical analysis. The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) for the collection and dissemination of geographically organised statistics (ABS 2006c). The ASGC provides seven interrelated classification structures which are designed for different practical purposes. This report uses the 'Main Structure' which covers the whole of Australia without gaps or overlaps. The Main Structure comprises five hierarchical levels: census districts, statistical local areas, statistical subdivisions, statistical divisions, and states and territories. This analysis uses statistical divisions and statistical subdivisions as the main geographical categories, because patterns can be identified more easily if larger geographical categories are used.

In each state and territory, the capital city is treated as a statistical division which includes the greater metropolitan area and any anticipated growth corridors for at least the next 20 years. The statistical division 'represents the city in a wider sense' (ABS 2006c, p. 15). Statistical divisions outside of the capital cities are 'relatively homogeneous region(s) characterised by identifiable … links between the inhabitants and between the economic units within the region, under the unifying influence of one or more major towns or cities' (ABS 2006c, p. 15).

Tasmania is divided into four statistical divisions (excluding off-shore and migratory). They are Greater Hobart, Southern, Northern and Mersey-Lyell (Map 1).

Statistical subdivisions are defined as 'socially and economically homogeneous regions characterised by identifiable links between the inhabitants' (ABS 2006c, p. 14). Most capital cities are divided into different statistical subdivisions, but Hobart only contains one statistical subdivision. In Tasmania, there are two statistical subdivisions which correspond to major regional population centres: Greater Launceston and Burnie-Devonport.

In other cases, statistical subdivisions cover non-urban areas. These are defined as rural areas which do not include cities with populations of 25 000 or above. These non-urban areas are said to have 'identifiable links between the economic units within the region' and there may be the 'unifying influence' (ABS 2006c, p. 14) of one or more country towns. In