

7 COASTAL QUEENSLAND

This chapter investigates the distribution of the homeless population in the five statistical divisions which stretch from the Sunshine Coast to the tip of Cape York (Map 1). We refer to them as ‘coastal Queensland’. The five divisions have a combined population of 1.02 million people and 26 per cent of the Queensland population lives here. Each statistical division contains either one or two major urban centres and a rural hinterland.

The Wide Bay-Burnett statistical division has a population of 255 000 and includes the cities of Bundaberg (population 60 000) and Hervey Bay (population 48 000). There is also a large rural hinterland called Wide Bay-Burnett SD Balance with a population of 147 000.

The Fitzroy statistical division includes the major regional centre of Rockhampton (population 69 000) and the industrial city of Gladstone (population 43 000). Fitzroy SD Balance has a population of 77 000 and includes the mining town of Mount Morgan.

The port city of Mackay (population 73 000) is the major urban area in the Mackay statistical division. It handles the output from the Central Queensland Coalfields. Mackay SD Balance (population 77 000) includes the sugar towns of Proserpine and Sarina.

The Northern Statistical Division has a population of 196 000. It includes Townsville and the satellite city of Thuringowa. They are both statistical subdivisions but they are contiguous urban locations and we treat them as one city (Townsville, population 143 000). Northern SD Balance has a population of 53 000.

Cairns is the major urban area in the Far North statistical division (population 123 000). Far North SD Balance covers a huge area of remote North Queensland (population 108 000).

7.1 OVERVIEW

In Brisbane, there were 7 996 homeless people and the rate of homelessness was 45 per 10 000. Table 7.1 shows that the five coastal divisions had 12 216 homeless people and the rate of homelessness was 120 per 10 000. In Wide Bay-Burnett, Fitzroy and Northern the rate was about 100 per 10 000. The rate increased to 134 per 10 000 in the Far North and to 167 in the Mackay statistical division.

7.1 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, COASTAL QUEENSLAND

	Wide Bay- Burnett	Fitzroy	Mackay	Northern	Far North	Total
Number	2716	1941	2506	1949	3104	12 216
Rate	107	103	167	99	134	120

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

There was also an 'urban' and a 'rural/remote' pattern. Table 7.2 shows that there were 5073 homeless people in the major cities where the rate of homelessness was 91 per 10 000, double the rate in the Brisbane statistical division. There were 7143 in the rural/remote subdivisions where the rate was 154 per 10 000, more than three times the rate in Brisbane.

First, we examine the seven coastal cities, then we examine the rural/remote subdivisions.

7.2 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000, COASTAL CITIES AND RURAL/REMOTE SUBDIVISIONS

	Seven major coastal cities	Five rural/remote subdivisions
Number of homeless	5073	7143
Rate per 10 000	91	154

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

7.2 COASTAL CITIES

The rate of homelessness in each coastal city was always lower than the rate in the corresponding rural/remote subdivision, but there were also significant differences between the cities. Table 7.3 shows that the rate of homelessness was 69 per 10 000 in Rockhampton and 74 per 10 000 in Bundaberg and Gladstone. The rate increased to about 90 per 10 000 in Hervey Bay, Townsville and Mackay, and to 113 per 10 000 in Cairns. There were 1391 homeless people in Cairns, 1329 in Townsville and 692 in Mackay, with smaller numbers in the other regional centres.

7.3 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, COASTAL CITIES

	Bundaberg	Hervey Bay	Rockhampton	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total
Number	443	426	476	316	692	1329	1391	5073
Rate	74	88	69	74	95	93	113	91

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

In all cities, there were substantial numbers of people staying temporarily with friends or relatives, including 637 in Townsville and 653 in Cairns (Table 7.4). In Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville and Cairns, between 45 and 48 per cent of the homeless were staying with other households, and in Gladstone and Hervey Bay it was about 60 per cent. Service providers reported 'lots of couch surfing'.

7.4 PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, COASTAL CITIES

Percentage

	Bundaberg	Hervey Bay	Rockhampton	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total
B. house	21	3	29	14	20	35	34	27
SAAP	29	11	8	6	19	11	13	13
Friends/rels	45	60	45	58	46	48	47	48
Improv. dwell.	5	26	18	22	15	6	6	11
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Number

	Bundaberg	Hervey Bay	Rockhampton	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total
B. house	94	15	138	43	138	470	478	1376
SAAP	126	45	40	18	128	138	181	676
Friends/rels	200	254	215	184	319	637	653	2462
Improv. dwell.	23	112	83	71	107	84	79	559
	443	426	476	316	692	1329	1391	5073

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

A significant proportion of the homeless were in boarding houses in Bundaberg (21 per cent), Rockhampton (29 per cent), Mackay (20 per cent), Townsville (35 per cent) and Cairns (34 per cent). Overall, there were 1376 people in boarding houses, including 478 in Cairns and 470 in Townsville. Service providers in Cairns and Townsville knew of 'lots of

boarding houses', including some that can accommodate 'more than 50 people'. Others reported that 'backpackers' lodgings are sometimes used as boarding houses'.

Overall, 13 per cent of the homeless were in SAAP, but the proportion ranged from six per cent of the homeless in Gladstone to 29 per cent of the homeless in Bundaberg.

In all cities except Bundaberg, there were a significant number of people in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough. There were between 79 and 84 people in the primary population in Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns. In Mackay and Hervey Bay, the number in improvised dwellings was 107 and 112 respectively. People in the primary population accounted for 11 per cent of the homeless.

Local service providers in Townsville reported that 'sleeping out happens all the time'. There are signs in major parks indicating that they are closed at night but 'the council does not enforce these rules'. Another informant commented that people in boarding houses 'sleep rough occasionally'. In Cairns, 'you see people in the parks at night and there are a number of camps around town'. In Cairns and Townsville, about half of those sleeping rough were Indigenous.

In Rockhampton, Gladstone, Mackay and Hervey Bay, the situation was different. In these communities, a minority of the primary population were sleeping rough or using vehicles as temporary shelter. The majority were in improvised dwellings that were either owned or being purchased. Most were living in sheds or cabins on bush blocks outside of town. Some were building conventional houses ('blockies'), but others were on low incomes and this dream had not been realised.

7.3 RURAL AND REMOTE

This section examines the number of homeless people in the rural/remote subdivisions. In Northern SD Balance, the rate of homelessness was 116 per 10 000 (Table 7.5) and in Wide Bay-Burnett SD Balance the rate was 126 (Table 7.5). The rate increased to 150 per 10 000 in Fitzroy and to 158 in Far North SD Balance. The rate was highest in Mackay SD Balance where it was 235 per 10 000.

7.5 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND RATE PER 10 000 OF THE POPULATION, RURAL AND REMOTE SUBDIVISIONS

	Wide Bay- Burnett SD Bal.	Fitzroy SD Balance	Mackay SD Balance	Northern SD Balance	Far North SD Balance	Total
Number	1847	1149	1814	620	1713	7143
Rate	126	150	235	116	158	154

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

In all rural/remote subdivisions except Mackay SD Balance, less than eight per cent of the homeless were in boarding houses (Table 7.6), and in all subdivisions except Fitzroy SD Balance, less than eight per cent were in SAAP. Forty-four per cent of the homeless were staying with other households (3154 people) and 40 per cent were in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough (2874 people).

There are some patterns in rural/remote subdivisions that need to be analysed. First, we investigate the accommodation of those in 'improvised dwellings and sleeping rough'. Then we ask why the rate of homelessness was so much higher in Mackay SD Balance.

7.6 PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION, RURAL AND REMOTE SUBDIVISIONS

Percentage

	Wide Bay- Burnett SD Bal.	Fitzroy SD Balance	Mackay SD Balance	Northern SD Balance	Far North SD Balance	Total
B. house	4	6	22	7	6	10
SAAP	7	17	1	4	3	6
Friends/rels	37	36	44	61	52	44
Improv. dwell.	52	41	33	28	39	40
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Number

	Wide Bay- Burnett SD Bal.	Fitzroy SD Balance	Mackay SD Balance	Northern SD Balance	Far North SD Balance	Total
B. house	72	67	393	44	106	682
SAAP	131	200	20	27	55	433
Friends/rels	675	408	800	377	894	3154
Improv. dwell.	969	474	601	172	658	2874
	1847	1149	1814	620	1713	7143

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

The ABS category ‘improvised dwellings, tents and sleepers out’ includes people sleeping rough, as well as people in huts, sheds, garages and humpies. In the five rural/remote subdivisions, most people in this category were not sleeping rough. About 60 per cent were in improvised dwellings that were owned or being purchased and another 10 per cent were in improvised dwellings that were rented. People living in improvised dwellings fell into three groups.

First, there were people who were building houses on land that they owned or were purchasing, but living in improvised dwellings (‘blockies’). One census collector encountered ‘several homes where the residents were living in sheds or caravans whilst building on the block’. Another shed had ‘electricity connected but no running water’ and one family was ‘living in a shipping container whilst building’. Under the cultural definition of homelessness, someone living in an improvised dwelling is homeless, even if they hope to have a conventional house in the future—but the policy implications are different in respect to this type of homelessness.

Second, there were households that may have intended to build houses on land they owned or were purchasing but were living in rural poverty. Census collectors in Wide Bay-Burnett SD Balance also encountered ‘homes where the residents were living permanently in sheds and there was no sign of building going on’. Local informants in Wide Bay-Burnett SD Balance also reported that there were ‘lots of shacks and sheds’ out in the bush. One informant said that families had moved into the area to buy cheap land with the intention of building houses, but ‘lots of people are on benefits’ and in many cases this dream had not been achieved.

Finally, 10 per cent in ‘improvised dwellings, tents and sleepers out’ were in rented accommodation. Most of this group were unemployed and nearly everyone was poor.

Overall, we can make two generalisations. First, in the inner suburbs of the capital cities, most people in the ‘improvised dwellings’ category were sleeping rough, living in cars or squatting in empty buildings. Second, in rural subdivisions people in this category were more likely to be in improvised dwellings, often living in rural poverty.

Next, we investigate why the rate of homelessness was so much higher in Mackay SD Balance (Table 7.5). Table 7.6 showed that in this subdivision there were 800 people staying with other households, 601 people living in improvised dwellings, tents and sleeping out, and 393 people in boarding houses, but hardly anyone in SAAP (Table 7.6).

There has been a major mining boom in the rural hinterland behind Mackay in the past few years and large numbers of workers have flooded

into the area to work in the mines and in the construction industry. The population in the Mackay statistical division has increased by 17 600 since the 2001, an increase of 13 per cent. This has put acute pressure on the housing market and many people are living in temporary accommodation.

Local service providers talked about ‘donga villages’ where ‘containers have been decked out as accommodation’ for transient workers. In other places relocatable units are used as temporary accommodation. Another informant talked about ‘hot-bedding’ where a unit is used by a worker when he is on site, but someone else takes his place when he has days off. Lots of people were staying temporarily with other households. Some people were camping out and others were living in improvised dwellings out in the bush. Local service providers talked about people coming to look for work but having nowhere to stay. Transience and housing shortages explain the higher rate of homelessness in Mackay SD Balance.

7.4 MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS

The other issue in Coastal Queensland was the large number of marginal residents of caravan parks. Table 7.4 showed that there were 1376 boarding house residents in the major regional cities of Coastal Queensland. There were also 1376 marginal residents of caravan parks in these cities: 84 in Townsville, 125 in Gladstone, between 232 and 253 in Cairns, Bundaberg and Hervey Bay, and 265 in Mackay (Table 7.7).

7.7 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND NUMBER OF MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, COASTAL CITIES

	Bundaberg	Hervey Bay	Rockhampton	Gladstone	Mackay	Townsville	Cairns	Total
Homeless	443	426	476	316	692	1329	1391	5073
Rate per 10 000	74	88	69	74	95	93	113	91
Caravan	245	252	172	125	265	84	233	1376
Total	688	678	648	441	957	1413	1624	6449
Rate per 10 000	115	141	94	103	131	99	132	115

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

If marginal residents of caravan parks are included in the homeless population, then the rate of homelessness increases significantly: from 69 to 94 per 10 000 in Rockhampton, from 95 to 131 per 10 000 in Mackay, and from 88 to 141 per 10 000 in Hervey Bay.

7.8 NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE AND NUMBER OF MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, RURAL AND REMOTE SUBDIVISIONS

	Wide Bay- Burnett SD Bal	Fitzroy SD Balance	Mackay SD Balance	Northern SD Balance	Far North SD Balance	Total
Homeless	1847	1149	1814	620	1713	7143
Rate per 10 000	126	150	235	116	158	154
Caravan	312	284	398	79	359	1432
Total	2159	1433	2212	699	2072	8575
Rate per 10 000	147	187	286	131	191	185

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

The issue of marginal residents of caravan parks is also important in the rural and remote subdivisions. Table 7.6 showed that there were 682 boarding house residents in these subdivisions. In addition, there were 1432 marginal residents of caravan parks (Table 7.8). There were 312 marginal residents of caravan parks in Wide Bay-Burnett and 359 in Far North SD Balance, and nearly 400 marginal residents of caravan parks in Mackay SD Balance. In these subdivisions, caravans are used as an alternative to boarding houses.

If marginal residents are included in the homeless population, then the rate of homelessness in Wide Bay-Burnett SD Balance increases from 126 to 147 per 10 000; in Fitzroy SD Balance, the rate of homelessness increases from 150 to 187 per 10 000; and in Mackay SD Balance, it increases from 235 to 286 per 10 000.

7.9 HOMELESS PEOPLE AND MARGINAL RESIDENTS OF CARAVAN PARKS, QUEENSLAND

	Brisbane	Seven major coastal cities	Five rural/remote subdivisions	Total
Homeless	7996	5073	7143	26 782
Rate per 10 000	45	91	154	69
Caravan	1694	1376	1432	6385
Total	9690	6449	8575	33 167
Rate per 10 000	55	115	185	85

Source: Census of Population and Housing 2006; SAAP Client Collection 2006; National Census of Homeless School Students 2006.

Table 7.9 compares the rates of homelessness in Brisbane, the major coastal cities, and the rural subdivisions, calculated using both the ABS and the broader definition of homelessness. The rate of homelessness in the major coastal cities was roughly double the rate in Brisbane, and in the rural/remote subdivisions the rate was approximately triple the rate in Brisbane.