

Chris Beer (M.Phil History)

Ordinary outliers: The suburbanisation of the Central Coast, 1946-2001

The Central Coast of New South Wales (Darkinjung country), which can be seen as both outside and within the metropolis of Sydney, suburbanised rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century. Over the course of five decades, pockets of small-scale farming, retirees, and holiday hamlets coalesced into a recognisably urban community of over 250,000 people. While large-scale outer-urban development was common across Australia (and globally) during the era, the Central Coast's experience is notable for its confluences of long-distance commuting, a sustained coastal land boom, and aesthetic and ecological environmental contestation. Planners and public policy throughout the era sought to build a contained local identity, but by the end of the period around a third of the region's workforce was regularly travelling at least 50 kilometres each way to the main body of Sydney.

The growth of the region can be understood in part as driven by households' interest in acquiring property (including second homes), but also their willingness to trade time for proximity to the ocean in keeping with the cultural currents of the era. Although the turnover of space into new property products – urbanisation in itself – became integral to the local economy, by the 1990s there was strong local opposition to further population growth. As elsewhere, the scale of development, as well as water management and biodiversity issues became flashpoints as domesticity and property processes became entwined with longer standing debates around urban sprawl and conservation politics.