

BREWARRINA

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY CONDITIONS



Northern
Basin
Review



Brewarrina and surrounds, What the research tells us

- Population
- Education
- Employment
- Land use
- Water availability

Brewarrina and surrounds, From the locals' point of view

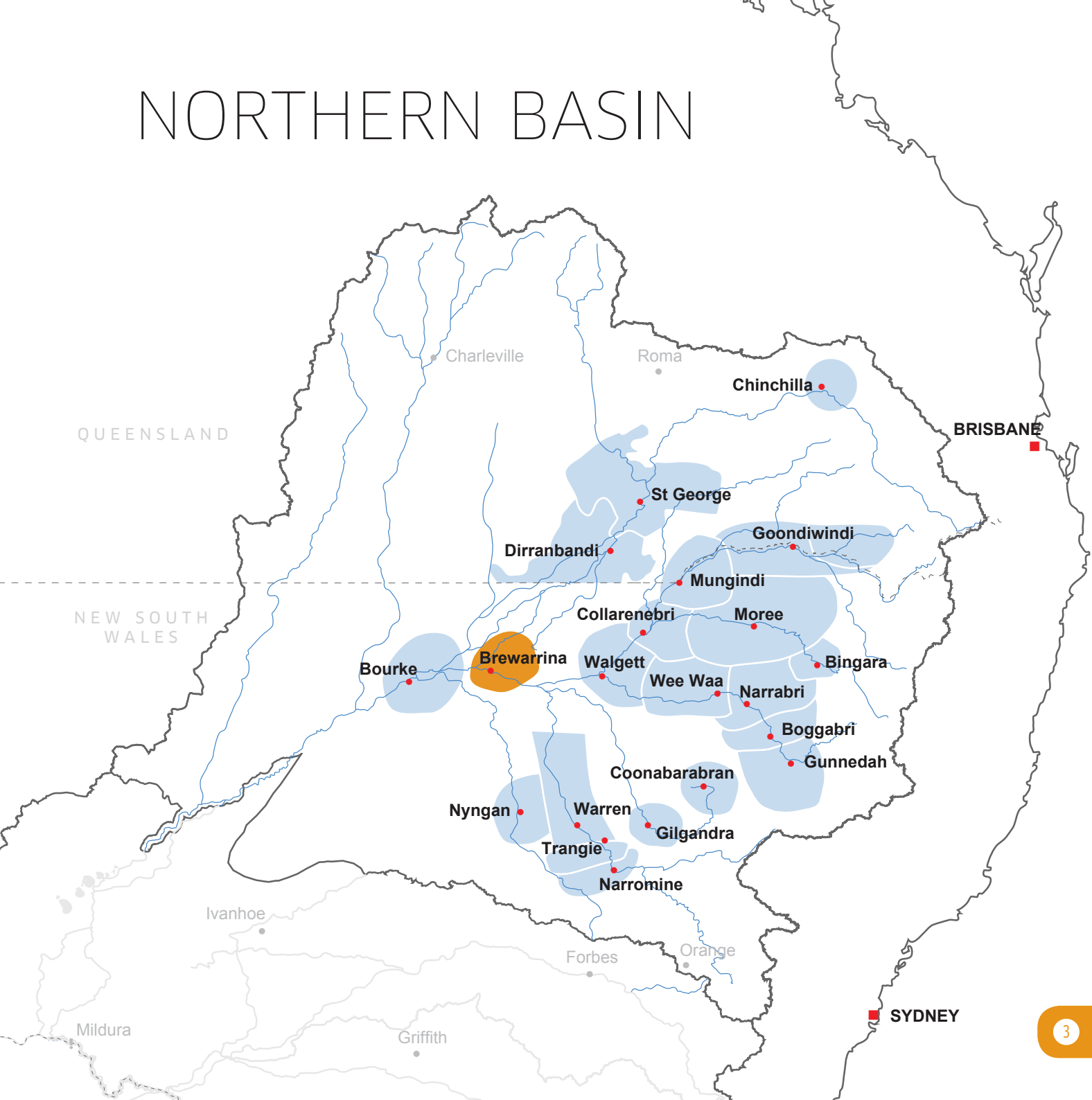
- Looking back
- Managing change
- What is happening

Brewarrina is a small grazing community in north-west New South Wales. Between 2001 and 2011, the Brewarrina community was severely affected by drought with large changes in population and employment, particularly in the town of Brewarrina. Most of these changes occurred between 2001 and 2006.

While the government services jobs have remained fairly constant since 2001, employment in the agriculture sector and non-agriculture private sector has fallen by over 40%. These long-term trends have been further influenced by the drought in 2014 and 2015.

Given the challenging social and economic conditions in the Brewarrina community, it will be difficult adapting to further, large changes. There is limited irrigation in the Brewarrina community and no water recovery is anticipated for this area.

NORTHERN BASIN





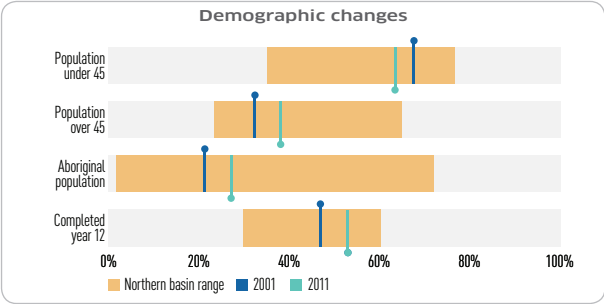
Brewarrina and surrounds

What the research tells us

POPULATION

	2001	2006	2011
Total area population	1,332	1,236	1,066
Total town population	1,200	1,120	924

Between 2001 and 2011, the Brewarrina community population fell by 266 people (20%). During this time, the town population fell by 276 people (23%). Most of these changes occurred between 2006 and 2011, with the change in population attributable to the town rather than the surrounding farming area. In 2011, 70% of Brewarrina’s town population identified as Aboriginal.



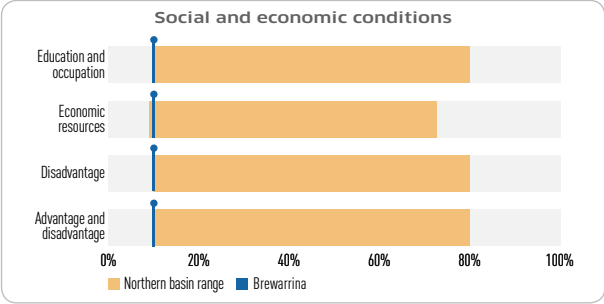
In 2001, 23% of the town population was 45 years or older. This increased to 35% by 2011. The change in population includes a 15% increase in the number of people aged 45 years or older and a 35% decrease in the number of people under 45. Most of this change occurred between 2006 and 2011.

EDUCATION

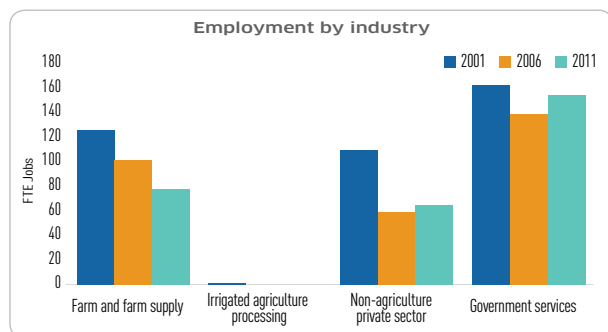
By 2011, 38% of the town population (aged over 15) had completed year 12 and 9% had completed some post-school qualifications. This is an increase from 17% in 2001.

In 2006 and 2011, Brewarrina had index scores of 1 for economic resources, disadvantage, advantage and disadvantage, and for education and occupation.

General social and economic condition



EMPLOYMENT



In 2011, there were 297 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs in the Brewarrina community (excluding seasonal workers). This represents a 25% (101 FTE) decrease in employment in the Brewarrina community since 2001. Most

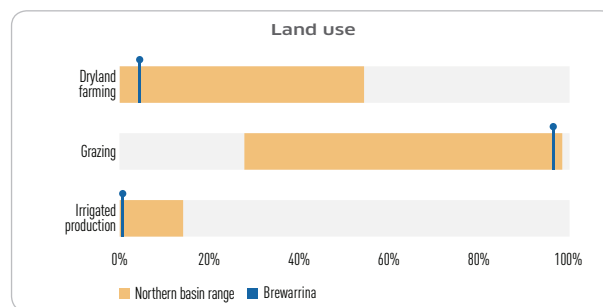
of this decrease occurred between 2001 and 2006. Unemployment in the town of Brewarrina was 13% in 2011.

The government services sector is the major employer in the Brewarrina community, representing 52% of all jobs in 2011.

Between 2001 and 2011, employment in the agriculture and agriculture supply sector fell by 38% (48 FTE). Employment in the non-agriculture private sector decreased by 46% (44 FTE) between 2001 and 2006 and stabilised between 2006 and 2011, while the government services sector jobs varied between 140 and 160 FTE during the 2001 to 2011 period.

LAND USE

Brewarrina's agricultural industry is based predominantly on sheep and cattle grazing, which accounts for 96% of the land use with 4% of the land area used for dryland farming. Irrigated production, whilst considerably larger in times past, is now quite limited. Only a small area was identified as potentially being used for irrigation for cotton or a small amount of irrigated pasture or lucerne.



IRRIGATION WATER AVAILABILITY

In the Brewarrina community, a small amount of entitlements are held for water from the Condamine-Balonne and Macquarie-Castlereagh catchments. In 2004, the *Water Sharing Plan for the Macquarie and Cudgegong Regulated Rivers Water Source* came into effect. One of the changes introduced was altered access to supplementary water.

To date, there has been no water recovery by the Australian Government from the Brewarrina community.





Brewarrina and surrounds

From the locals' point of view

Looking back

Brewarrina was settled by Europeans in the 1840s. By the 1860s, it was recognised as the furthest point up the river for paddle-steamers. This became an important port for settlers wishing to ship their wool to Adelaide via the Darling and Murray rivers.

A significant feature in Brewarrina is the Aboriginal fish traps. They may be the oldest human construction in the world. Historians assess the traps as at least 40,000 years old. Locals comment that when you stand looking at the fish traps, it reminds you of how important Brewarrina was and still is for the local Aboriginal community.

Floodplain graziers out here relied on low level flows from the river system to naturally 'irrigate' their grazing country and provide much needed feed for livestock running on these properties.

However, local farmer Ed Fessey told us that things changed here in the 1970s. He said the development of the irrigation industry upstream of Brewarrina altered how floodplain graziers managed the country.

'When development started, those regular low level flows, those small flows just disappeared. We needed bigger events to get flooding.'

Ed Fessey

'When water was disappearing, a lot of places got sold to a neighbour. There are 5 families around the district that have been here for more than 100 years and we don't see too many fly by nighters.' Mr Fessey said.

When Peter McSwan arrived at 'Brenda' in 2006, the flood records for this property showed that it had experienced 111 floods in the last 110 years. However, in the 10 years he has managed the property; it has only had 2 significant floods.

'I came here and knew it was a dryland place and knew it has lost its ability to flood.'
Peter McSwan

However, Mr McSwan said before irrigation, in a good season, 'Brenda' had the ability to run 50,000 breeding ewes and around 3,000 head of cattle. Now, the number of breeding ewes is down to 14,000 and cattle numbers have been cut in half.

Since 2000, local stock agent Brian Johnston says graziers out here have seen plenty of 'ups and downs' due to severe drought.

'You really have to take your hat off to the resilience of people out here who kept breeding stock alive. There was no fencing done and without sheep, there was no need for shearing. People just went into survival mode.'
Brian Johnston

Dryland cropping has been very opportunistic here, and a local farmer and Deputy Principal of Brewarrina Central School Kathryn Hertslet said they haven't had a crop for 5 years.

'We had such a bad run from 2010-12. Drought affects everyone in the community. But it doesn't matter how hard it gets, people out here just keep going.'
Kathryn Hertslet

A small amount of cotton is also grown in the district when water is available. These properties were developed in the 1980s. However, since mechanisation, people here in Brewarrina say that this industry contributes very little to the local economy.

Drought and the drop in population has been blamed for the closure of a number of stores in Brewarrina over the last few years. This town has also lost its local TAB, bowling club, Elders, hardware store, Retravisson and clothing store, among others.

Local Mayor Angelo Pippas said Brewarrina's kangaroo abattoir was a valuable source of employment in the town for about 30 years. It was a real blow for Brewarrina when it closed around 9 years ago.

But Mr Pippas said locals here love where they live. He says it's the greatest little town in the outback. 'If we could get some

employment for people, it would be the greatest thing of all time.’ Mr Pippas said.

Managing change – a business owner’s view

In Brewarrina, there are 2 grocery stores. Local man Max Jeffery is the proud owner of one of them.

While Max told us that it was only early days, he said things are going well. Since buying the store, he has focused on giving the people of Brewarrina more variety and has put \$100,000 worth of groceries on the shelves.

‘I wanted to improve things here and see if we can keep people shopping in Brewarrina.’

Max Jeffery

He has put on an additional staff member since he bought the business and hopes that numbers will also increase in coming months.

Max has lived around Brewarrina for more than 20 years. For most of that time he managed large agricultural properties in the district.

For many years, Shane Chapman drove out from Newcastle with his mate to go fishing around Brewarrina. He liked it so much that he decided to move out here 6 years ago and buy the local butchery with his wife Rebel and young daughter.

Since then, Shane told us they haven’t looked back. He said his family loves the lifestyle at Bre and enjoys all the outdoor activities this town has to offer – such as fishing and riding motorbikes.

Since taking over the business, Shane now runs a food and catering business as well.

While Mr Chapman said sales in his butchery have dropped by 20% over the last 6 years, the overall business has grown by around 50%.

‘The tourists come in and say wow, look what you have got here. We are out of the way, we are not on the main street but the caravans find us now.’

Shane Chapman

What is happening now?

After several severe drought years, graziers in the Brewarrina Shire saw much welcomed rain in April 2015. Locals in Brewarrina say the town is now starting to see the benefits that flow through a rural town when the season is good for people on the land.

The team at Shute Bell, the town’s local stock and station agency said they don’t have enough houses to rent in town at the moment and if they had 10 more, they’d still have people looking for somewhere to live.

Manager and agent, Brian Johnston, said that locals have been through some really

tough times, but things have just started to turn around.

Brian told us that record livestock prices are also helping to 'kick things' along.

'We are seeing a resurgence of the wool industry. Cash flow is coming in and we are seeing big fencing orders. As soon as the cockie has money, these little towns just bob along.' Brian Johnston

In town, there are two local schools. St Patrick's Catholic school said numbers dropped to 30 students around 10 years ago. Now it has 56 students.

Brewarrina's Central School has had a drop in numbers and both schools say they now 'compete' for students – that's a scenario that they haven't ever faced before.

Local residents in town are concerned that there are no employment opportunities in Brewarrina. Ellen Schlienzer works at the local school and says the population is dying.

'I have 4 kids and 3 of them have gone away. I have lived here all my life but will probably move to the coast in the next few years.' Ellen Schlienzer

While Brewarrina has seen some stores and services close over the last few years, there

are also a number of new businesses that have opened, including rural service supplier Macdonalds Rural CRT. The local Muddy Waters Cafe has also changed hands in recent years.

However, General Manager of Brewarrina Shire Council, Dan Simmons, said Bre is travelling well at the moment due to the good season graziers are experiencing.

He told us that he felt Brewarrina was lucky not to get the big irrigation development many other small rural towns experienced.

'It comes back to the fact we are pastoral graziers. We have a bit of farming going to the west of us. But people here realise we get droughts, we get through them and we go again.' Dan Simmons

Mr Simmons said the 2011 Census reported that Brewarrina had a drop in population of 2%. However, he feels that the latest census will show that this town has remained stable in terms of population.

He also told us that the spirit of Brewarrina is dictated by the state of the river and it is the lifeblood of this community.

'If it is low and not flowing, it is in a drought. If you see the river up, you know it is raining somewhere and the spirits of the town are high.' Dan Simmons

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getinvolved.mdba.gov.au



engagement@mdba.gov.au