

4 Geographical Disadvantage – Profile of Places

4.1 Introduction

This section of the issues paper explores geographical disadvantage in Queensland. It brings a necessary spatial dimension into this profile. The research tool used for this purpose is the 1996 *Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage* (SEIFA). This index is used here to identify Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) of relative disadvantage in Queensland. The cut-off point chosen here are the first two deciles or 20% of the most disadvantaged SLAs ranked by the index. Once identified, they are presented in two maps and in a table.

An SLA is an area of either one or more Census Collection Districts (CDs). In aggregate, they cover the whole of the State without gaps and overlaps. There are approximately 450 SLAs in Queensland. This level of analysis was selected because, in many cases, the boundaries of SLAs correspond with Local Government Areas (LGAs) across Queensland. Consequently, this makes it easier to identify disadvantaged areas. The exception to this is with large LGAs such as Brisbane City, the Gold Coast and Townsville. Brisbane, for example, consists of 163 SLAs. However, in these cases, the SLA generally corresponds with suburban boundaries. This level of spatial analysis allows for identification of specific places.

This contrasts with the approach taken in *Drawing the Line on Poverty* (QCOSS 1995) which focused on CDs as the geographic level of analysis.

The 1996 *Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage* uses data collected from the 1996 *Census of Population and Housing*. Variables are subjectively selected and validated by various means to constitute the index. The benefit of an index such as this is that it uses a combination of variables that are normally recognised as contributing to socio-economic disadvantage. In this case, variables that make up the index include the following:

- persons aged 15 and over with no qualifications;
- families with income less than \$15,600;
- families with offspring having parental income less than \$15,600;
- females (in labour force) unemployed;
- males (in labour force) unemployed;
- one parent families with dependent offspring only;
- households renting (government authority);
- dwellings with no motor cars at the dwelling;
- persons lacking fluency in English;
- occupied private dwellings with two or more families;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- persons aged 15 and over who did not go to school.

These variables are given different weightings in the index but, when combined, they are used to calculate a score that can be used as a relative measure of disadvantage for an SLA. All the SLAs are then ranked according to the score they receive. It is then possible to identify the SLAs of greatest disadvantage from the ranking. Apart from the order, there is no other meaning associated with the scores ⁽³⁾.

Despite the value of this index for identifying geographically disadvantaged areas, it is important to note that it does not encompass every possible measure relevant to the phenomenon of socio-economic disadvantage. This is mainly because of the SEIFA's exclusive reliance on Census data. For example, the Census does not collect data on access to infrastructure such as schools, community services, retail outlets and transport services. Consequently, the index used here does not include these facets of geographical disadvantage in its calculations.

4.2 The Most Disadvantaged Places

In order to capture a sense of the geographical dimensions of relative socio-economic disadvantage in Queensland, the most disadvantaged SLAs calculated by the *Socio-Economic Index of Relative Disadvantage* are identified here. From a total number of Queensland SLAs (450 approximately) the first two deciles or the 90 SLAs of greatest disadvantage are identified, ranked and mapped. This is presented here in two parts:

- Analysis of the SEIFA maps
- Analysis of the SEIFA table

4.2.1 Analysis of SEIFA Maps

Map 1 (Queensland) and Map 2 (South East Queensland) show the geographical location of the SLAs of greatest disadvantage across the State. All the SLAs in the first decile are named here, that is the 10% most disadvantaged SLAs in Queensland. Only a few SLAs in the second decile are named – specifically those that extend down through Central Queensland.

Some distinct patterns emerge from the mapping of these SLAs:

- The ‘top end’ of Queensland includes some of the most disadvantaged areas of the State. This is the location of many Indigenous communities and it highlights the historical disadvantage suffered by these communities as a result of the colonisation process. Further, Indigenous people are significantly represented in other rural and urban disadvantaged places identified by the SEIFA index, such as Garbutt in Townsville (16.3% of population); Eidsvold (21.4% of population); Boulia (25.6% of population); Paroo (21.7% of population); and Inala (7.5% of population). *Drawing the Line on Poverty* found that Indigenous people were the most disadvantaged in the State (1995, pp.66-67). This geographical analysis does nothing to contradict this finding.
- A cluster of socio-economically disadvantaged SLAs exists in the Wide Bay-Burnett region. This is consistent with the figures on DSS dependency and levels of high unemployment identified in the recent studies discussed in 4.2.2 below. The situation in this region has been known for some time, so this is not a new revelation. The fact that it is re-affirmed here is an indication of longstanding disadvantage and that little impact has been made in addressing this.
- There are distinct clusters of disadvantage in the urban conurbation stretching from Caboolture to Coolangatta. Again, this is not new for many of the places identified here. Socio-economic disadvantage has been a longstanding phenomenon in many of these places. This historical legacy adds another critical dimension to assessing disadvantage. Namely, that in some places, disadvantage has deepened over time and now assumes inter-generational proportions. While this is not explored in this issues paper, it is acknowledged as a serious social concern.
- An arc of rural geographical disadvantage extends from Croydon in the north-west to Paroo in the south-west, highlighting the socio-economic vulnerability being experienced in many rural, remote areas of Queensland.

4.2.2 Analysis of SEIFA Table

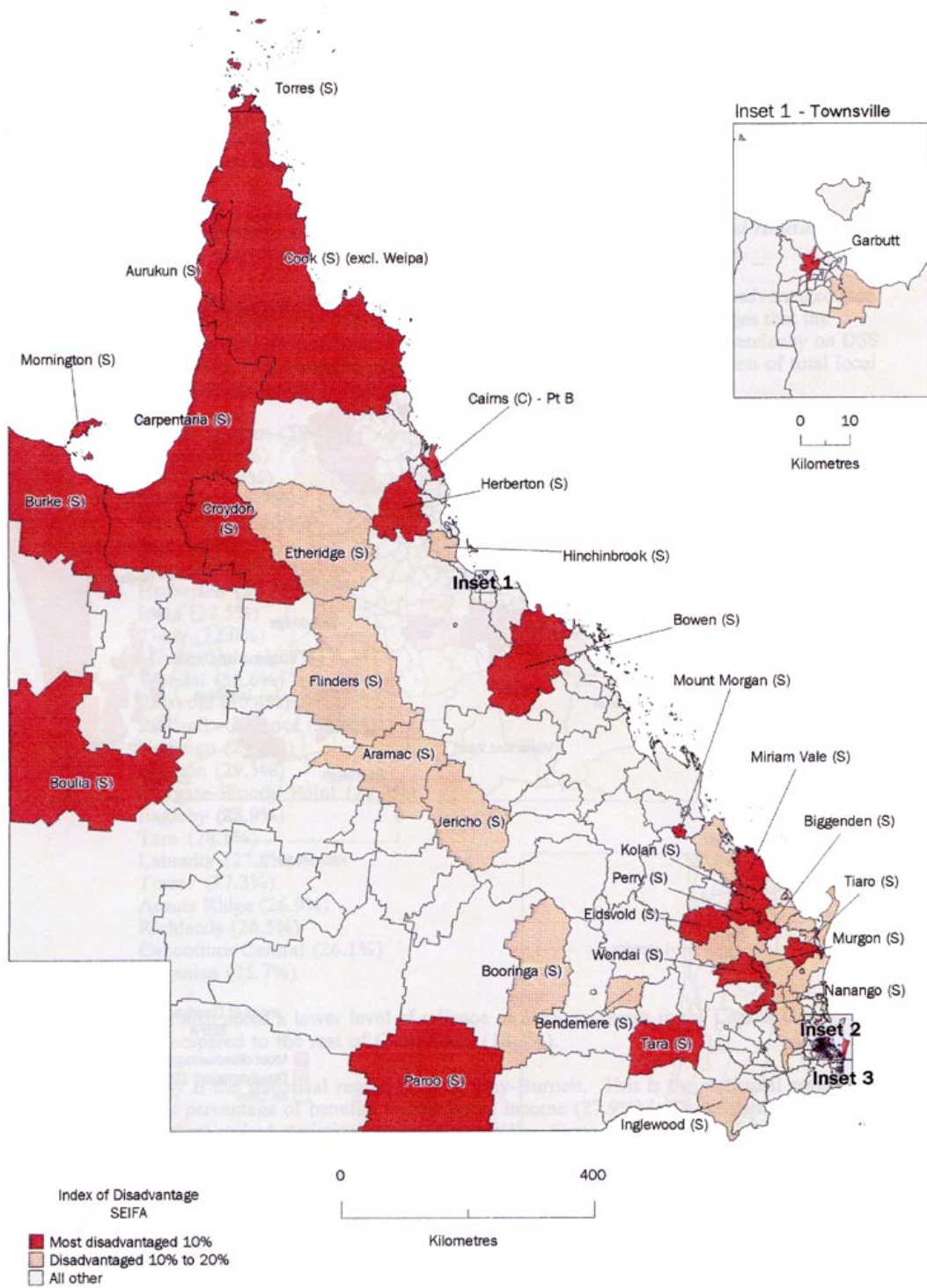
Table 6 identifies and ranks the 90 (20%) SLAs of greatest disadvantage in Queensland, ranked from 1 to 90 according to their SEIFA score ⁽⁴⁾.

The results of the SEIFA index are reinforced by findings in two recent regional studies.

Map 1

Areas of Greatest Disadvantage, Queensland, 1996

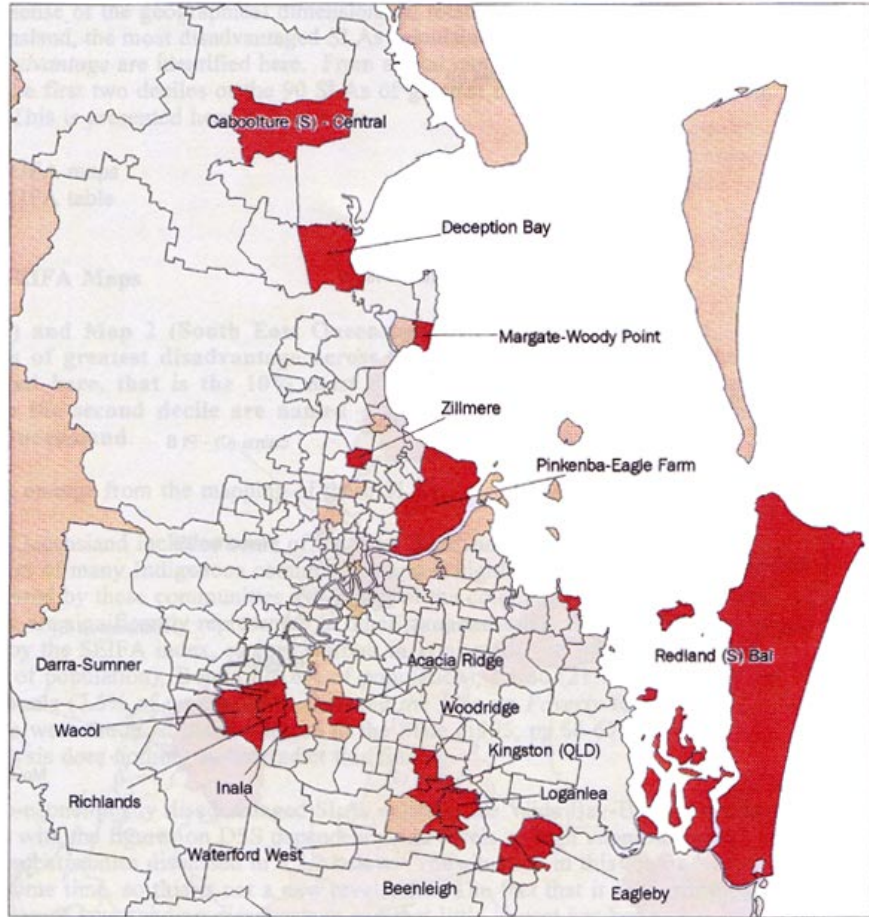
Statistical Local Area (SLA) by SEIFA Index of Disadvantage



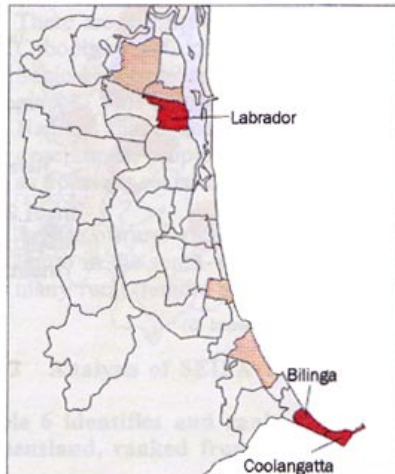
Areas of Greatest Disadvantage, S E Queensland, 1996

Statistical Local Area (SLA) by SEIFA Index of Disadvantage

Inset 2 - Brisbane



Inset 3 - Gold Coast



Index of Disadvantage
SEIFA

- Most disadvantaged 10%
- Disadvantaged 10% to 20%
- All other

Based on Statistical Local Area Boundaries 1996 Edition
Source: 1996 Census of Population and Housing
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- (a) In 1998 the Department of Social Security (DSS) released a paper entitled *The Contribution of DSS Payments to Regional Income*. This paper provides estimates of the extent to which DSS payments contribute to personal disposable income in an SLA and, therefore, estimates of how DSS transfers contribute to local economies and how local economies are dependent upon this income source. DSS income refers to primary payments and add-ons like the Pharmaceutical Allowance and the Disability Youth Supplement, rent assistance and family payment received by clients and spouse for all recipients in the area. The Appendix (A) provides greater detail about these payments. The paper did not include payments made by other Commonwealth Departments such as the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Data used in this study are derived from the 1996 *Census of Population and Housing* and the DSS. The study also incorporated SLAs as a geographic unit of analysis.

In comparing the places identified by the SEIFA index as the 10% most disadvantaged (see Table 6 – SLAs ranked 1 to 45) with the results of this DSS study, it emerges that the economies of twenty-five of these SEIFA SLAs have more than a 25% dependency on DSS payments. These SLAs and the percentage of DSS payments as a proportion of total local post-tax income are ranked below in order of DSS dependency:

Mount Morgan (58.4%)
Kolan (41.6%)
Wacol (39.4%)
Kingston (35.7%)
Woodridge (34.5%)
Perry (34.2%)
Biggenden (33.9%)
Herberton (33.8%)
Inala (32.5%)
Tiaro (32.0%)
Miriam Vale (30.7%)
Wondai (30.6%)
Eidsvold (30.4%)
Redland – Balance (30.2%)
Nanango (29.6%)
Murgon (29.5%)
Margate-Woody Point (29.2%)
Eagleby (28.9%)
Tara (28.5%)
Labrador (27.8%)
Torres (27.3%)
Acacia Ridge (26.9%)
Richlands (26.5%)
Caboolture Central (26.1%)
Loganlea (25.7%)

This paper also noted a lower level of reliance on DSS payments in the Capital City (14.5%) compared to the rest of Queensland (18.2%).

Noteworthy is the statistical region of Wide Bay-Burnett. This is the statistical region with the highest percentage of benefits to disposable income (27.9%) in Queensland and is the second highest ranked statistical region in Australia. Some of the shires (SLAs) in this region are included in the list above – Tiaro, Miriam Vale, Wondai, Murgon, Perry, Eidsvold, Kolan, Biggenden, Nanango.

- (b) A recent study of regional unemployment across Australia (Centre for Labour Research 1998) revealed that of the 40 SLAs of highest unemployment across Australia in March 1998, 20 were located in Queensland. Eleven of these ‘high unemployment’ areas are

included in the list of the 10% SLAs of greatest disadvantage identified by the SEIFA index. The SLAs and estimated rates of unemployment at the time are:

Mount Morgan (39.3%)
Kolan (28.3%)
Wacol (28.1%)
Perry (27.6%)
Miriam Vale (25.1%)
Nanango (21.2%)
Kingston (20.8%)
Inala (20.5%)
Woodridge (20.5%)
Bilinga (19.8%)
Tiara (18.0%)

These unemployment rates compare with the national unemployment rate at the time of 8.8%.

4.3 Conclusion

'Place' is a key factor in socio-economic disadvantage and is part of a growing social divide which is emerging in Queensland. An outline of this can be seen in what has been presented here. The SEIFA data demonstrates partly that development in Queensland is both uneven and unequal, giving rise to real spatial inequalities. This adds a significant dimension to the profile of disadvantage in Queensland. Growing disadvantage is about people AND places. A multi-dimensional approach is, therefore, required to address this increasingly complex phenomenon.

Table 6: Areas of Greatest Disadvantage, Queensland, 1996
(SLA by SEIFA *Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage*)

Ranking	SLA Name	SEIFA Index
1	Aurukun (S)	626.026
2	Mornington (S)	665.039
3	Inala	730.977
4	Croydon (S)	788.746
5	Torres (S)	797.463
6	Carpentaria (S)	814.23
7	Burke (S)	816.094
8	Mount Morgan (S)	821.037
9	Wacol	830.401
10	Eagleby	831.659
11	Woodridge	832.93
12	Garbutt	840.174
13	Kingston (Qld)	851.185
14	Cook (S) (excl. Weipa)	854.799
15	Murgon (S)	858.664
16	Perry (S)	872.38
17	Boulia (S)	873.59
18	Acacia Ridge	874.473
19	Vincent	876.907
20	Miriam Vale (S)	877.607
21	Nanango (S)	879.185
22	Eidsvold (S)	880.387
23	Kolan (S)	882.488
24	Bilinga	886.557
25	Beenleigh	887.56
26	Darra-Sumner	889.071
27	Coolangatta	889.469
28	Richlands	889.855
29	Tiaro (S)	893.349
30	Herberton (S)	896.268
31	Tara (S)	898.998
32	Waterford West	899.153
33	Caboolture (S) –Central	900.177
34	Paroo (S)	900.717
35	Redland (S) Bal	901.004
36	Margate-Woody Point	901.072
37	Zillmere	902.015
38	Wondai (S)	904.139
39	Cairns (C) – Pt B	904.271
40	Loganlea	904.843
41	Bowen (S)	905.037
42	Biggenden (S)	905.228
43	Pinkenba-Eagle Farm	905.576
44	Labrador	907.28
45	Deception Bay	909.626

(cont'd over)

Table 6 cont'd

Ranking	SLA Name	SEIFA Index
46	Archerfield	911.533
47	Caloundra (C) – Caloundra S.	912.942
48	Bribie Island	913.08
49	Isis (S)	913.581
50	Rocklea	913.838
51	Chermside	915.655
52	Hervey Bay (C)	917.432
53	Biggera Waters	919.329
54	Fortitude Valley – Remainder	920.485
55	Mundubbera (S)	920.501
56	Hemmant-Lytton	921.43
57	Palm Beach	923.726
58	Marsden	923.732
59	Maroochy (S) – Maroochydore	923.934
60	Gayndah (S)	924.052
61	Bundaberg (C)	926.465
62	Kilkivan (S)	926.767
63	Miami	928.246
64	Oonoomba-Idalia-Cluden	928.407
65	Stuart-Roseneath	928.576
66	Aramac (S)	928.885
67	Coombabah	929.554
68	Cairns (C) – Central Suburbs	930.305
69	Jericho (S)	930.911
70	Moreton Island	931.044
71	Deagon	931.164
72	Stafford	932.234
73	Willawong	932.309
74	Hinchinbrook (S)	932.68
75	Murarie	933.025
76	Kilcoy (S)	933.2
77	Woolloongabba	933.249
78	Inglewood (S)	933.35
79	Cooloola (S) (excl. Gympie)	933.402
80	Clontarf	934.204
81	Flinders (S)	934.511
82	Booringa (S)	935.109
83	Durack	935.485
84	Esk (S)	935.762
85	Laidley (S)	935.912
86	Cooloola (S) – Gympie only	936.467
87	Bendemere (S)	937.183
88	Calliope (S) – Pt B	937.226
89	Noosa (S) – Tewantin	938.015
90	Maryborough (C)	938.312

5 Conclusion

The HPL is an established measurement tool for estimating the rates and incidence of poverty. Applied here, HPL estimates from 1981-82 to 1995-96 reveal these trends about people:

- poverty has been increasing steadily in Queensland since 1981-82 so that, in the fourteen year period to 1995-96, the State's poverty rate almost doubled;
- in 1995-96, Queensland had the dubious honour of having the highest 'after housing' poverty rate of all the States and Territories in Australia;
- the poverty rate of single Queenslanders under 25 years is rising steadily so that in 1995-96 their 'after housing' poverty rate was 37.3%;
- single people of all ages are becoming increasingly vulnerable so that they now comprise 64.0% of the poor in Queensland;
- the material circumstances of low-income families with children have fluctuated over time with some improvement being seen in levels of child poverty;
- the 'before housing' poverty rate for children in Queensland in 1995-96 was 18.6% compared with 24.1% in 1989-90;
- sole parents continue to be the group most likely to be living in circumstances below the poverty line;
- there has been a rise in the poverty rate for aged singles and aged couples from 1989-90 to 1995-96.

The 1996 *Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage* (SEIFA), augmented by two recent reports (Bray and Mudd 1998; Centre for Labour Research 1998), reveals the following trends about places:

- distinct patterns of relative socio-economic disadvantage exist across regional Queensland;
- some of the areas of greatest disadvantage identified by the SEIFA index have experienced longstanding socio-economic disadvantage;
- some Queensland regions have some of the highest unemployment rates in the country, a significant contributing factor in both personal and geographical disadvantage.

This combination of demographical and geographical data presents a disturbing profile of growing and deepening disadvantage in Queensland.

These recent data reflect what was revealed in *Drawing the Line on Poverty* (QCOSS 1995). Now, as then, the task is to address this reality and move beyond description and analysis into an active response that will alleviate the economic hardship being experienced by a growing number of Queenslanders in many places around the State.

In the end, the poverty and disadvantage depicted here are the end result of structural arrangements that create this degree of socio-economic vulnerability. It is possible to address this if there is the will to do so. The reduction in poverty among children in recent years is evidence that it is possible to do so. We face many challenges as a society as we prepare to enter a new century and eliminating poverty and disadvantage is a major one.