Public Service Commission

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Regional profile of the public sector

Chapter 11, Workforce Profile Report 2021

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34.3%

of employees were located in regional areas at census date

40.9%

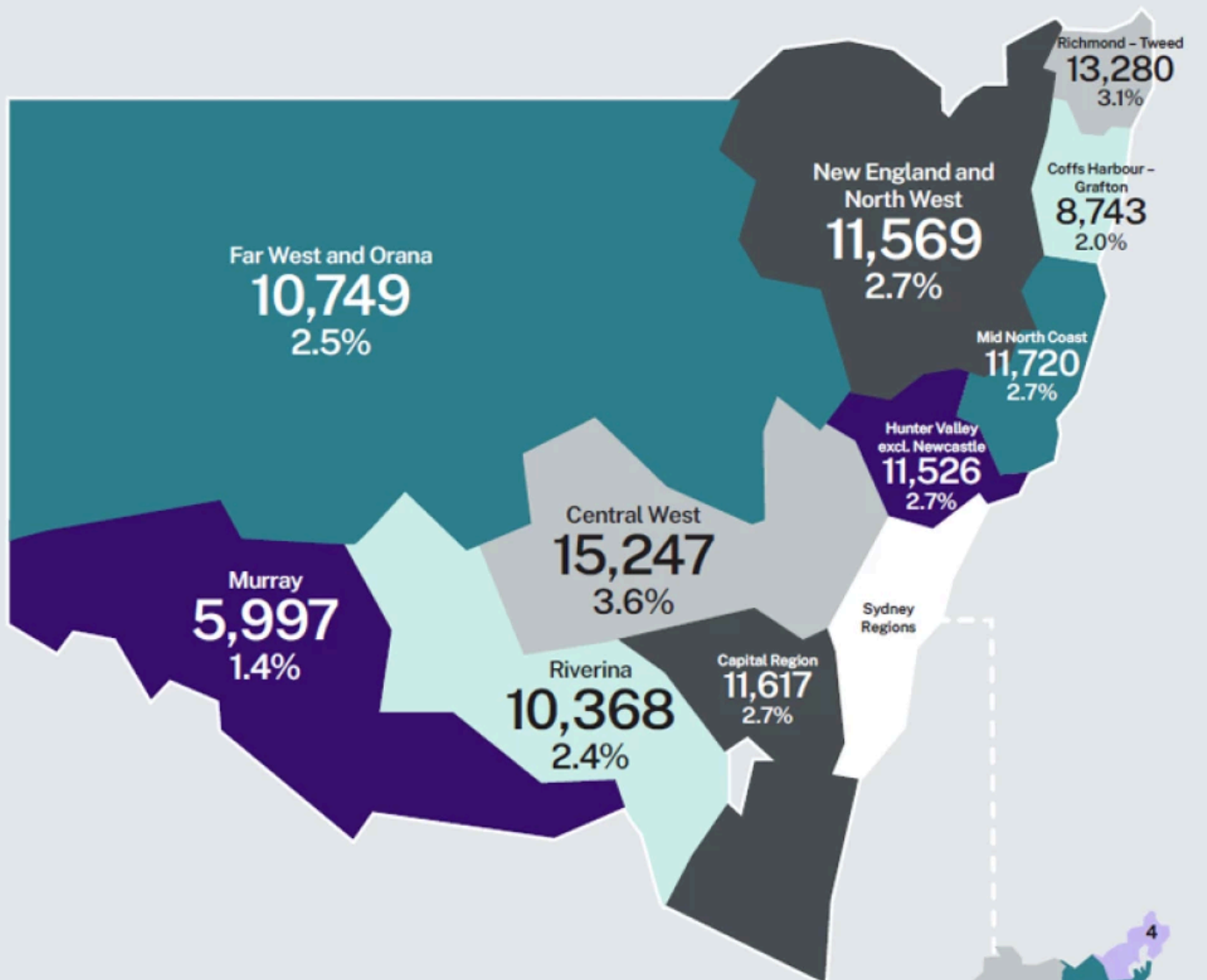of employees were located outside Sydney at census date

The NSW public sector is the largest employer in Australia, accounting for more than 10% of employment in the state. As such, it has a large impact on the NSW workforce. While most roles are in metropolitan areas, the NSW public sector provides a significant proportion of all employment in regional NSW.[1]

This analysis is based on employees' work locations in the Workforce Profile data submitted by departments and agencies. It does not reflect any work-from-home arrangements that were part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, 34.3% of public sector employees worked in regional areas, with all Sydney local government areas (LGAs) as well as Newcastle and Wollongong LGAs classified as metropolitan.

Comparing Sydney with the rest of the state,[2] 59.1% of NSW public sector employees worked in Sydney (see Figure 11.1, Sydney East and Sydney West combined). While most of the public sector workforce was located in Sydney, the proportion of public sector employees working outside Sydney was higher than the proportion of the resident population in these areas[3] (40.9% compared to 38.5%).

Figure 11.1: NSW public sector employees by region, census headcount, 2021

Richmond – Tweed
13,280
3.1%

New England and North West
11,569
2.7%

Coffs Harbour – Grafton
8,743
2.0%

Far West and Orana
10,749
2.5%

Mid North Coast
11,720
2.7%

Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle
11,526
2.7%

Central West
15,247
3.6%

Murray
5,997
1.4%

Sydney Regions

Riverina
10,368
2.4%

Capital Region
11,617
2.7%

Sydney regions

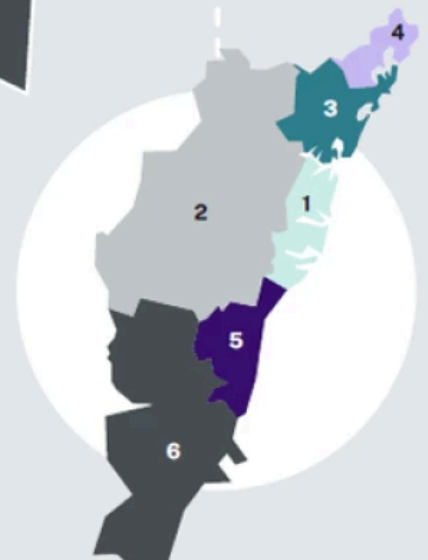| Region		Public sector employees, census headcount	Representation by region (%)
1	Sydney East	140,934	32.9
2	Sydney West	112,688	26.3
3	Central Coast	17,075	4.0
4	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	24,602	5.7
5	Illawarra	16,323	3.8
6	Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	6,491	1.5

Figure 11.1: NSW public sector employees by region, census headcount, 2021 - text version ⌄

NSW Regions

Region	Census headcount	Representation by region (%)
Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle	11,526	2.7
Mid North Coast	11,720	2.7
New England and North West	11,569	2.7
Far West and Orana	10,749	2.5
Coffs Harbour – Grafton	8,743	2.0
Richmond – Tweed	13,280	3.1
Capital Region	11,617	2.7
Riverina	10,368	2.4
Murray	5,997	1.4
Central West	15,247	3.6

Greater Sydney area

Region	Public sector employees, census headcount	Representation by region (%)
Sydney East	140,934	32.9
Sydney West	112,688	26.3
Central Coast	17,075	4.0
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	24,602	5.7
Illawarra	16,323	3.8
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	6,491	1.5

Regional profiles

Key statistics for each region are displayed in Table 11.1, which compares 2021 with 2020. The distribution of census FTE by region and service is shown in Table 11.2.

In 2021, regions outside Sydney accounted for 39.7% of FTE, while Sydney East and Sydney West together accounted for 60.3%. In line with previous years, the highest proportion of employees in the government sector working outside Sydney were in Teaching Service (44.2%) and the NSW Health Service (41.9%), followed by Other Crown services (38.8%), the Public Service (35.7%), the NSW Police Force (35.3%) and the Transport Service (21.9%).

Table 11.1: Key statistics by region, 2020-21[3]

Work region	Estimated resident population	Census period FTE 2020	Census period FTE 2021	Change census period FTE 2020 to 2021 (%)	Median age (years)	Median salary non-casual ($)	Median tenure non casual (years in agency)	Part-time non-casual (%)
Capital Region	232,799	9,082	9,341	2.86	47	88,449	8.8	34.19
Central Coast	345,857	13,715	14,008	2.14	44	90,394	9.4	33.51
Central West	213,714	12,243	12,571	2.68	45	87,157	8.8	30.66
Coffs Harbour – Grafton	142,570	6,966	7,120	2.20	47	90,394	9.2	37.23
Far West and Orana	116,440	8,968	9,036	0.76	43	82,573	7.4	26.11
Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle	285,141	9,140	9,381	2.64	44	87,157	9.2	33.27
Illawarra	317,988	12,914	13,209	2.29	44	90,394	9.7	33.55

Work region	Estimated resident population	Census period FTE 2020	Census period FTE 2021	Change census period FTE 2020 to 2021 (%)	Median age (years)	Median salary non-casual ($)	Median tenure non casual (years in agency)	Part-time non-casual (%)
Mid North Coast	224,808	9,285	9,658	4.01	47	90,394	9.7	34.63
Murray	122,056	4,581	4,694	2.47	46	88,416	8.5	39.05
New England and North West	186,312	9,339	9,460	1.29	45	86,862	8.6	34.81
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	382,537	19,633	19,855	1.13	44	90,394	9.4	35.83
Richmond – Tweed	255,304	10,214	10,492	2.72	47	90,394	9.4	42.51
Riverina	161,929	8,337	8,502	1.97	44	87,157	7.9	32.88
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	158,728	5,080	5,196	2.28	46	87,157	9.1	37.13
Sydney East	2,782,668	116,053	119,834	3.26	43	94,601	6.8	21.55
Sydney West	2,238,681	91,549	96,386	5.28	42	91,111	8.2	22.54

*0.4% of census period FTE is not mapped to any Australian Bureau of Statistics' Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) for NSW because of postcode and/or suburb data that is missing or outside NSW.

Table 11.2: Census period FTE by service and region, public sector, 2021

Work region	Public Service	NSW Health Service	NSW Police Force	Teaching Service	Transport Service	Other Crown services	External to government sector	State owned corporations
Capital region	1,964	2,994	685	2,198	201	960	0	340
Central Coast	2,108	6,191	781	3,225	140	1,562	0	0
Central West	3,214	4,140	576	2,397	237	1,596	0	412
Coffs Harbour - Grafton	1,141	2,659	289	1,469	414	845	0	303
Far West and Orana	2,134	2,815	580	1,723	273	1,124	4	382
Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle	2,506	2,177	503	2,708	62	1,276	0	149
Illawarra	1,636	5,409	647	2,983	466	1,989	0	80
Mid-North Coast	1,242	3,360	388	2,207	69	1,329	1	1,061
Murray	668	1,531	287	1,180	108	693	0	227
New England and North West	1,671	3,148	563	2,220	166	1,327	2	362
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	2,688	9,312	799	3,669	597	2,348	1	441
Richmond - Tweed	1,160	4,813	558	2,321	118	1,270	0	253

Work region	Public Service	NSW Health Service	NSW Police Force	Teaching Service	Transport Service	Other Crown services	External to government sector	State owned corporations
Riverina	1,409	3,141	397	1,772	302	1,096	3	382
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	972	1,795	249	1,432	40	689	0	19
Sydney East	24,516	41,192	6,767	18,320	9,516	17,065	1,096	1,361
Sydney West	19,675	32,821	6,613	21,476	1,849	11,474	3	2,476

NSW public sector relative to the NSW workforce

The NSW public sector accounted for 10.4% of the approximately 4,161,993 people employed in NSW at June 2021.[4] This is a slight decrease from 10.5% last year and is likely due to a return to the number of employed persons in NSW before the COVID-19 pandemic (214,861 more employed persons than in 2020 and 10,031 more employed persons than in 2019).

Analysis of the geographic distribution of NSW public sector employees (including casuals) relative to the overall workforce[5] shows where government employment contributed the most to local and regional economies. Figure 11.2 shows the percentage of employed persons who were NSW public sector employees ranged from 8.6% to 20% across the regions in 2021. In most regions, 10% to 15% of employed persons worked for the NSW public sector, with notable exceptions being Far West and Orana (20.0%) and Coffs Harbour – Grafton (15.6%).

Figure 11.3: Public sector employees as a proportion of NSW employed persons by region, 2021
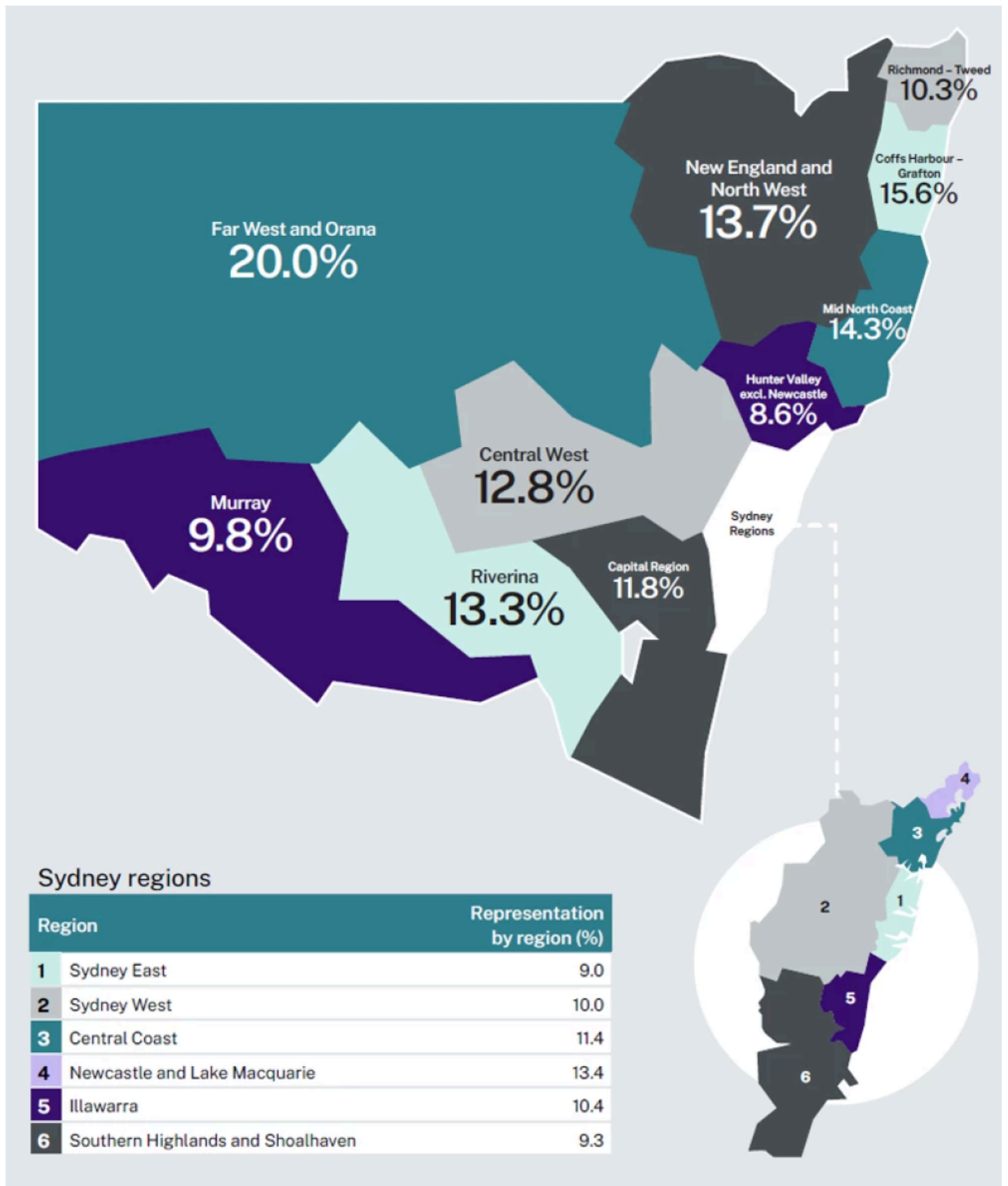
Far West and Orana
20.0%

New England and North West
13.7%

Richmond – Tweed
10.3%

Coffs Harbour – Grafton
15.6%

Mid North Coast
14.3%

Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle
8.6%

Central West
12.8%

Murray
9.8%

Riverina
13.3%

Capital Region
11.8%

Sydney Regions

Sydney regions

Region		Representation by region (%)
1	Sydney East	9.0
2	Sydney West	10.0
3	Central Coast	11.4
4	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	13.4
5	Illawarra	10.4
6	Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	9.3

Figure 11.3: Public sector employees as a proportion of NSW employed persons by region, 2021 - Text version

Region	Percentage
Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle	8.6
Sydney East	9.0
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	9.3
Murray	9.8
Sydney West	10.0
Richmond – Tweed	10.3
Illawarra	10.4
Central Coast	11.4
Capital Region	11.8
Central West	12.8
Riverina	13.3
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	13.4
New England and North West	13.7
Mid North Coast	14.3
Coffs Harbour – Grafton	15.6
Far West and Orana	20.0

Source: https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/reports-and-data/workforce-profile/workforce-profile-reports/workforce-profile-report-2021/regional-profile-of-the-public-sector
30 Apr 2024, 1:17 pm

Employees

The percentage of NSW public sector employees who work in a region other than where they live varies across regions (see Figure 11.4). In the Hunter Valley (excluding Newcastle), Illawarra, Central Coast, and Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven regions, between 30% and 40% of public sector employees generally work in a different region to their home location. In most cases, the normal work location is Sydney West or Sydney East. This reflects these regions' relative proximity to Sydney, where 59.1% of NSW public sector employees were located on the census date. In contrast, in the Far West and Orana, Murray, Riverina, and Richmond – Tweed regions, less than 10% of NSW public sector employees normally work outside their home region. This is likely to be due to the size of these regions.

Normal commuting profile of Sydney and surrounding regions

The employment catchment area of Greater Sydney (see Figure 11.5) has expanded over recent decades, with large numbers of employees normally commuting to and from the surrounding regions. Understanding commuting patterns can provide insight into the impact of work-from-home arrangements on regions and transport services.
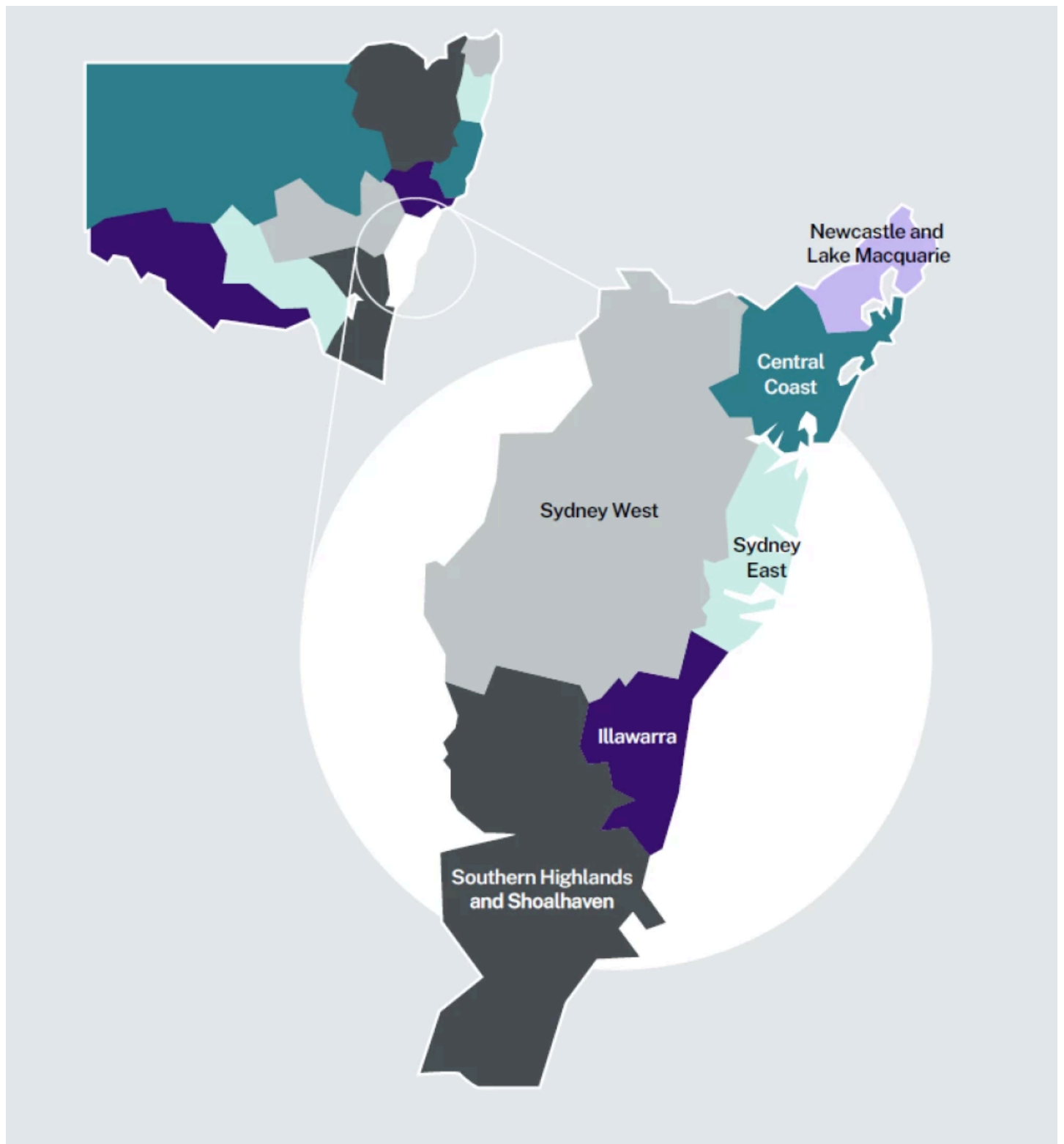
Figure 11.5: Greater Sydney area

Figure 11.5: Greater Sydney area - text version

- Sydney East

- Sydney West

- Central Coast

- Newcastle and Lake Macquarie

- Illawarra

- Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven

Table 11.3: Usual commuting profile of Sydney and surrounding regions, 2021

Work region	Sydney West	Sydney East	Central Coast	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	Illawarra	Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven
Sydney West	83,322	22,432	1,198	627	1,857	692
Sydney East	29,156	99,304	3,733	1,077	3,576	499
Central Coast	271	555	14,301	1,403	*	*
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	377	403	1,055	18,638	28	*
Illawarra	416	633	29	*	14,267	631
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	330	131	*	*	951	4,839

* Asterisks indicate data that was redacted due to a data quality issue.

Table 11.3 illustrates the number of NSW public sector employees (including casuals[5]) who generally travel between regions in and around Sydney for work. The largest proportion of commuting occurs between Sydney West and Sydney East. Around 21.2% of NSW public sector employees in Sydney East normally travel from Sydney West, and 20.4% in Sydney West travel from Sydney East. In total, just over 50,000 NSW public sector employees generally travel between these two regions for work.

Just over 10,000 employees normally commute from either the Central Coast or Illawarra regions to Sydney East or Sydney West. This constitutes around 25.3% of employees living in these regions. Far fewer employees travel from Sydney East or Sydney West to work in the surrounding regions (1,722 and 1,394,

respectively). This is consistent with the high concentration of NSW public sector employment in Sydney.

Table 11.4: Impact on regions if all Public Service employees work from home, census headcount, 2020-21

Region (ABS Statistical Areas Level 4)	Employees living in region	Employees working in region	Change if all employees work from home, 2021	Change if all employees work from home, 2020
Capital Region	2,721	2,392	329	495
Central Coast	3,732	2,464	1,268	1,081
Central West	3,964	3,842	122	156
Coffs Harbour - Grafton	1,534	1,392	142	50
Far West and Orana	2,464	2,602	-138	-105
Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle	2,597	2,977	-380	-268
Illawarra	3,378	1,968	1,410	1,334
Mid-North Coast	1,762	1,537	225	207
Murray	760	947	-187	-147
New England and North West	2,144	2,080	64	69
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	3,925	3,142	783	598
Richmond - Tweed	1,532	1,512	20	-4
Riverina	1,810	1,801	9	-52
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	1,379	1,170	209	126
Sydney - Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury	2,344	338	2,006	1,669

Region (ABS Statistical Areas Level 4)	Employees living in region	Employees working in region	Change if all employees work from home, 2021	Change if all employees work from home, 2020
Sydney - Blacktown	3,631	1,280	2,351	2,144
Sydney - City and Inner South	4,747	17,982	-13,235	-13,212
Sydney - Eastern Suburbs	2,432	1,757	675	1,084
Sydney - Inner South West	4,584	1,807	2,777	2,299
Sydney - Inner West	3,756	2,136	1,620	1,260
Sydney - North Sydney and Hornsby	3,544	2,097	1,447	1,259
Sydney - Northern Beaches	1,838	482	1,356	1,271
Sydney - Outer South West	3,170	1,416	1,754	1,627
Sydney - Outer West and Blue Mountains	4,513	2,785	1,728	1,588
Sydney - Parramatta	4,083	14,112	-10,029	-7,776
Sydney - Ryde	1,688	620	1,068	957
Sydney - South West	3,300	2,268	1,032	794
Sydney - Sutherland	2,610	536	2,074	1,899

In 2021, measures designed to limit the spread of COVID-19 led to a large proportion of NSW public sector employees working from home. There is insufficient detail available to accurately determine how many employees worked from home full time; however, Table 11.4 demonstrates the location shift if all Public Service employees were working from home. The Public Service was used for this analysis as it has the highest number of office-based employees who may be able to work remotely.

In this scenario, the regions with the largest decreases are Sydney City and Inner South (-13,235) and Parramatta (-10,029), which are the two main employment hubs in Sydney. The regions outside Sydney with the highest increases are Illawarra (+1,410), Central Coast (+1,268), and Newcastle and Lake Macquarie (+783). Within Sydney, the largest increases are in Inner South West (+2,777), Blacktown (+2,351) and Sutherland (+2,074).

More regions had a higher number of people living there than working there (23) than vice versa (5).

Notes

[1] Regional boundaries are based on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The work locations of 2,421 NSW public sector employees were unknown due to Workforce Profile data collection records missing a postcode and/or suburb name, or employees working outside NSW. These employees have not been included in denominators when calculating percentages.

[2] Statistical Area Level 4, Sydney SA4s grouped, excludes 'Unknowns' and 'Outside NSW'. See Regional reference table in **Chapter 12** for more detail.

[3] ABS (2018) 'Table 1: Population estimates by age and sex, regions of Australia (ASGS 2016)', accessed 1 November 2021.

[4] ABS (August 2021) 'Table 1: RM1 - Labour force status by age, labour market region (ASGS) and sex, October 1998 onwards' [time series spreadsheet], **_Labour force status_**, accessed 1 November 2021.

[5] Including casual employees gives a better sense of the number of people contributing to the NSW economy and travelling between regions for work.

Next chapter

Data sources, conventions and limitations

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