

THE WHITLAM LEGACY – LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS

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WHITLAM/HAMER LEGACY: CHALLENGES FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIES

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MY INVOLVEMENT

1960'S AND 70'S

NATIONAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

ANU – URBAN RESEARCH PROGRAM

NATIONAL URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (LATER THE CITIES COMMISSION)

DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

1990'S

NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING AUTHORITY

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WHITLAM AND CITIES – THE BELIEF

In his *1972 election campaign speech*, Whitlam made it clear that cities were fundamental to the mission of his government –

‘.. increasingly, a citizen's real standard of living, the health of himself and his family, his children's opportunities for education and self-improvement, his access to employment opportunities, his ability to enjoy the nation's resources for recreation or culture, his ability to participate in the decisions and actions of the community are determined not by his income, not by the hours he works, but by where he lives. This is why Labor believes that the national government must involve itself directly in cities. Practically every major national problem relates to cities. A national government which cuts itself off from responsibility for the nation's cities is cutting itself off from the nation's real life. A national government which has nothing to say about cities has nothing relevant or enduring to say about the nation or the nation's future'.

Whitlam Insitute, Western Sydney University: https://www.whitlam.org/gough_whitlam/achievements/cities

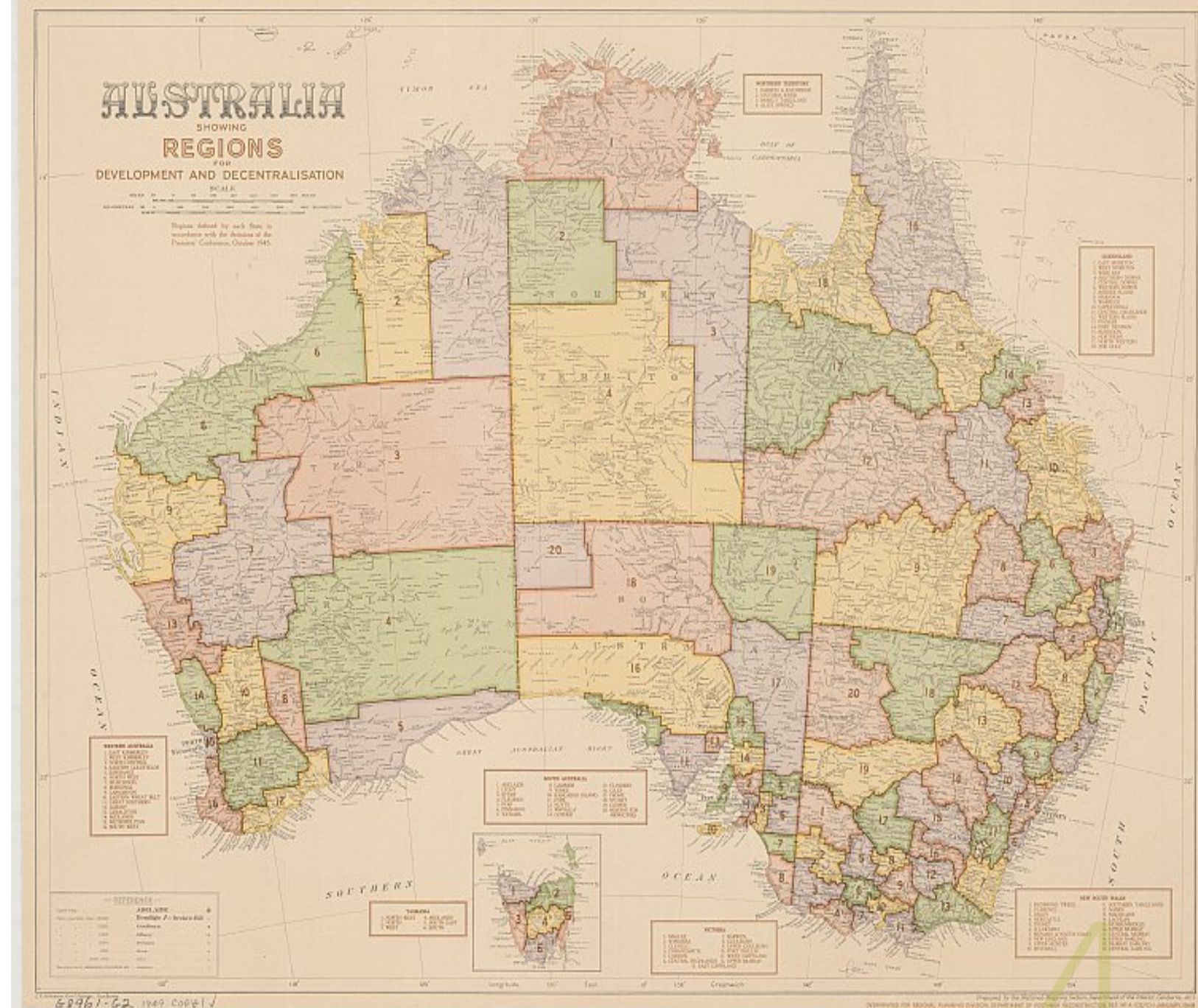
Commonwealth Department
of Post-War Reconstruction

FIRST SUBSTANTIAL COMMONWEALTH NATIONAL POLICIES ON URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

REGIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND DECENTRALISATION 1949

(Regions defined by each State in
accordance with the decisions of
the Premiers' Conference,
October, 1945)

PRIME MINISTER – HON JOHN
CURTIN
MINISTER : HON BEN CHIFLEY
(also Treasurer)



EARLY FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT

- The Department of Post-War Reconstruction engaged in
 - *promoting regional planning and decentralisation,*
 - *town planning for much improved urban living for all,*
 - *investment by governments in housing and welfare services, and*
 - *the development of State Planning Authorities, offering (from 1944) 50 percent of their operating costs for a 5-year period.*
- DPWR was disbanded in 1950
- The DURD years followed two and a half decades of Federal Government inaction on cities or regions under Menzies, with the exception of:
 - *on-going Commonwealth funding of the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement,*
 - *funding for roads,*
 - *the accelerated construction of Canberra as the national capital city, and*
 - *The creation of the National Urban and Regional Development Authority by PM McMahon in 1972*
- The 'long boom' of the 1950's and 60's continued nonetheless to create major challenges for the States in managing rapid urban growth and change. They did not do too well, although significant metropolitan plans for managing growth were prepared in both Sydney (1948) and Melbourne (1954).

METROPOLITAN GROWTH

CITY	1947	1961	1971
SYDNEY	1484	2183	2725
MELBOURNE	1226	1911	2408
ADELAIDE	383	508	809
PERTH	273	420	731

Source: Patrick Troy, "Australian Cities p 3.

ADVOCACY OF A ROLE FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Throughout the 1960's Whitlam progressively spelled out how and why the Federal Government, with its control over national taxation and its national political outlook should lead the overall planning of cities

- “A broad framework of Federal policies is essential as a guide to State and local development programs”
- “The financial hegemony of the Commonwealth has meant no significant innovations in the States can be undertaken without Commonwealth assistance”
- “Only the Commonwealth has the resources to meet the challenge of the cities.”
- “...the decay and desolation of inner-city life and the poor planning of community services in outer suburbs...could only be rectified through the active intervention of the Federal Government” The Whitlam Government p 373

MAJOR THEMES IN THE URBAN PROGRAM EVOLVED DURING THE 1960'S

- “...restore the quality of inner-suburban housing in Australia’s large cities...”
- “...relieve pressure on fringe building land...”
- “...grants to the States to enable them to acquire land for development and develop it at cost...”
- public acquisition of development land is necessary not only to reduce land prices and provide competition for developers, but to ensure the orderly and comprehensive development of large areas of land...”
- “The distinct advantage of decentralisation is in terms of decreased urban congestion.”
- “A successful regional development policy will only be achieved if we set out to develop selected provincial cities...”
- “...No other western nation has cities in which the incidence of urban sanitation is so primitive or so ludicrous as in the cities of Australia...We are the most effluent nation in...the free world...” The Whitlam Government pp373-6

EFFICIENT PROVISION OF URBAN SERVICES

- “In Canberra I was able to absorb the great advantages of a planned city, especially one built by a single authority under the control of the national government....
- During the rapid growth period of the 1950s and 1960s most of the amenities which the residents of Canberra took for granted were inexcusably absent in the outer suburbs of Sydney...” The Whitlam Government pp371-2
- Whitlam was determined to bring some of that Canberra experience to bear in other cities. He was also influenced by the post-war ‘new towns’ movement in the United Kingdom.
- His focus was reinforced by his life in the Sydney suburbs of Cronulla and then Cabramatta, where, as he said: “We have built two houses in them. We have never been connected to the sewer. ... My children have always had to travel 20 miles to a high school...” The Whitlam Government p372

IDEAS FOR A NEW DEPARTMENT

TO:

- Analyse, research and co-ordinate plans for each city and region
- Advise the Federal Government on grants for urban purposes
- Develop a national strategy for cities and regions
- Decrease regional equalities by advocating regional rather than State-based grants
- Establish and supervise land commissions to (develop urban land)
- Manage a national sewerage program
- Develop new cities
- Cooperate with other Federal agencies and with State and local governments
- DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CREATED DECEMBER 1972

The Whitlam Government p 381

DURD CHARACTERISTICS

- Meant to be an equal to Treasury, with a strong coordinating role
- Built by Secretary Bob Lansdown, a career bureaucrat from NCDC and Pat Troy, urban academic, engineer and planner from ANU
- Staffed with young professionals from around the world in many urban-related sphere, some very clever economists, and experienced Canberra bureaucrats
- Took about a year to set up, plenty of opposition from Treasury in particular (especially when DURD found a major 'hole' in Treasury calculations for the 1973-74 Budget!)
- Took on the Whitlam-Uren program with alacrity, vigour and commitment, and moved opportunistically to take up initiatives started by McMahon that fitted the agenda – growth centres, urban renewal in Sydney
- Annoyed other government agencies, as well as the States, with its 'pushy' directive style, its expertise and well-researched policy arguments
- Early program designs were crude, but effective, and improved over time
- Provided a deep research background to fill a broad national palette of thought, led by Strategy Division – eg: national settlement policy
- Strongly supported and defended by both Whitlam and Uren

KEY LEGISLATION

DECEMBER 1972	Department of Urban and Regional Development created in first Administrative Orders
APRIL 1973	Cities Commission Bill (reshaping National Urban and Regional Development Authority)
MAY 1973	Housing Agreement Bill
MAY 1973	Grants Commission Bill
SEPTEMBER 1973	State Grants (Housing Assistance) Bill
NOVEMBER 1973	Growth Centres (Financial Assistance) Bill
NOVEMBER 1973	Albury-Wodonga Development Bill
NOVEMBER 1973	Albury-Wodonga Development (Financial Assistance) Bill
NOVEMBER 1973	Land Commissions (Financial Assistance) Bill
DECEMBER 1973	Sewerage Agreement Bill
FEBRUARY 1974	Urban and Regional Development (Financial Assistance) Act 1974
1974	State Grants (Urban Public Transport) Bill
APRIL 1975	Home Savings Grant Bill

THE MAJOR PROGRAMS

- Growth Centres
- Land Commissions
- Sewerage
- Area Improvement Program
- Regional Organisations of Councils
- Urban Rehabilitation (Woolloomooloo, Glebe)
- Heritage
- Flood mitigation
- Darwin reconstruction
- Government Employment Relocation
- Housing support and public housing
- Public transport investment
- Urban roads investments
- National Gallery and High Court in Canberra
- Grants Commission reform

ABOLITION AND SUCCESSOR

- DURD was abolished by the Fraser Government after the November 1975 dismissal
- Reconstituted after the December 1975 election as the Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development, with Senator Ivor Greenwood as Minister
- Greenwood supported many of the Whitlam-Uren initiatives, and sought to convince Fraser to keep them in place. He partially succeeded but fell ill early in 1976, and then retired
- He was replaced by the newly-elected Member for Bass, Hon Kevin Newman, who proceeded as directed by Fraser to dismantle the DURD-era programs as quickly as possible – principally by savage budget cuts.
- No further new Commonwealth urban initiatives until the 1990's, when the Hawke Government through Deputy PM Brian Howe established the Department of Housing and Regional Development with a range of urban and regional programs including 'Better Cities'

WHAT LASTED OVER TIME

- Albury-Wodonga
- Government-owned Land Development authorities in a number of cities
- Sewerage program – backlogs largely eliminated
- A few Regional Organisations of Councils (eg WSROC in Sydney)
- Glebe, Woolloomooloo in Sydney, Emerald Hill in Melbourne, urban renewal areas
- Some community facilities funded under the Area Improvement Program
- A strong wariness in the Commonwealth Public Service about ensuring no Labour Government again created a determined and competitive Department like DURD

THE LESSONS LEARNED

- Effective engagement by the Commonwealth takes time and resources
- There has to be committed government, cooperative partners and patient capital to make things work
- A broad agenda that recognises that, to paraphrase Tom Uren, “Everything is connected to everything else” in cities, leading to flexible programs adaptable to differing needs and circumstances
- Collaboration and shared commitment with States, local government and especially the private sector is absolutely crucial (This is why the Better Cities initiatives, especially in the inner cities, have been so successful and are still going ahead today in Brisbane, Perth, Sydney, Adelaide, Newcastle, Launceston and Melbourne)
- A focus on outcomes rather than inputs eases concerns about Commonwealth intervention becoming too directive

THE TURNBULL AGENDA

- Innovation, Infrastructure and integration appear to be the themes
- Not much detail as yet
- Signs are not great – there is little evidence of a broad agenda
- Ministers Hunt and Briggs seem to focus solely on the 'infrastructure' component returning to transport projects (not in their portfolio) as the examples of Turnbull Government urban initiatives
- To meet anything like the Whitlam era or Better Cities benchmarks in policy or program delivery, they will have to do a great deal more
- Awaiting the Briggs-Hunt report to Cabinet on a new urban and regional program

WHITLAM'S LEGACY

“We achieved office because we raised expectations about what the national Parliament could achieve in Australia and convinced a sufficient majority that those expectations could be met”. Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972-75* p1

- Certainly the Whitlam Government *changed expectations* about what Australians should and could expect about the quality, character and management of our cities and towns.
- *It changed community expectations* about what state and local government should deliver for their communities and for the built environment
- Its efforts weren't sustained for a time sufficient to make it clear beyond doubt that Commonwealth engagement with cities was worthwhile and in the national interest.
- But Gough Whitlam certainly set the national urban agenda rolling with the initiatives of the 1970's, even if it is only revisited each 20 years!