

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01AM Tuesday 23 JUNE 2026

Regional moves hit record levels as more Australians opt for life beyond the big cities

Australia's shift toward regional living has reached a record peak, with the latest Regional Movers Index (RMI) hitting its highest level in the March 2026 quarter.

The RMI is a partnership between the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA) and the Regional Australia Institute (RAI) that tracks population movements between Australia's capital cities and regions.

The Index was up 20.1 per cent on the December 2025 quarter and 4.7 per cent higher than a year earlier.

Capital city residents moving to Australia's regions outnumbered those moving in the opposite direction by 29.7 per cent, RMI data for the quarter showed.

RAI CEO Liz Ritchie said the record result confirmed the enduring and growing appeal of regional living and cemented the need for a co-ordinated national approach to population planning.

“This is the highest level of capital-to-regional movement the RMI has ever recorded. Australians are continuing to choose regional life in greater numbers, even as economic conditions shift. Across COVID, inflation, housing pressures and tight labour markets, the trend has been remarkably consistent - people are leaving capital cities for regions, and they're doing so at increasing rates,” Ritchie said.

Sydney and Melbourne continued to dominate regional moves in the March quarter, making up 55 per cent and 36 per cent of net outflows respectively. But their combined share is lower than a year ago, with Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide all recording an increased share of net outflows, indicating movement from capital cities is becoming increasingly broad-based.

The Sunshine Coast maintained its mantle as the most popular destination with an 8.8 per cent share of total net migration, again dominated by metro movers. Greater Geelong (VIC) remained in the top five, though its share eased to 5.3 per cent. Fraser Coast (QLD), Moorabool (VIC) and Lake Macquarie (NSW) rounded out the top five destinations.

Regional growth spreads nationally

Beyond these established locations, the RMI shows population growth emerging across a wider mix of regional communities, with growth hotspots now evident across most states.

The March quarter results highlighted Toowoomba's role as a major regional hub, with the Queensland centre recording the strongest year-on-year growth in net inflows from capitals of any local government area in Australia. Other regional destinations attracting city dwellers include Broome (WA), Townsville (QLD) and the Mid-Coast in NSW, home to Taree and Forster-Tuncurry.

Toowoomba's appeal is not limited to those relocating from capitals, with many regionally based movers also favouring the Garden City. Destinations seeing upticks largely from people moving between regional areas include Meander Valley (TAS), and new entries to the RMI including Douglas (Far-north QLD) and Central Goldfields (VIC).

"This data is extremely valuable and underscores the original purpose of the RMI," Ritchie said.

"We're not just tracking movement but providing early indications of where regional growth is emerging, so government, investors, industry and communities can respond before pressure builds. It helps identify the places that are emerging as hotspots that may need new thinking around housing and infrastructure."

What this means for regional businesses

CBA Regional and Agribusiness Banking Executive General Manager Kylie Allen said the record RMI result reinforced the long-term strength of regional Australia.

"This is a significant milestone, and the data shows Australians are making long term, considered decisions to build their lives in regional communities," Allen said.

"What stands out this quarter is the scale of movement we're seeing, both from capital cities and between regional communities. It reinforces the role that regional centres like Toowoomba play as important hubs, supporting surrounding towns through jobs, services and local business activity.

"For many regional businesses, this creates opportunities to respond to a larger and more diverse customer base. We're seeing that reflected in our business lending, with businesses investing to support larger populations and increased economic activity across their regions."

Key findings from the March 2026 RMI

- Capital to region movement hits highest level since RMI began with capital city residents moving to the regions outnumbering those moving in the opposite direction by 29.7 per cent.
- Sydneysiders remain the dominant city movers: accounting for 55 per cent of net capital outflows, followed by Melburnians (36 per cent).
- The Sunshine Coast continues to dominate share of total net migration but dipped slightly to 8.8 per cent this quarter.
- Toowoomba (QLD) was a favourite for metro movers this quarter, with a 236 per cent increase from the same time last year.
- Regional growth hotspots were spread across most states with towns including Meander Valley (TAS), Douglas (QLD) and Central Goldfields (VIC).

Access the latest Regional Movers Index March 2026 quarter report [here](#).

Media enquiries

Regional Australia Institute (RAI)
Amanda Barwick
E. Amanda.Barwick@regionalaustralia.org.au

Commonwealth Bank (CBA)
P. 02 9118 6919
E. media@cba.com.au