

**MOVING TO THE COAST:
Internal Migration and Place Contestation in
Northern New South Wales**

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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July 2002

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ABSTRACT

The study of place was often divided between the spatial interests of geographers and local historians intent on constructing heroic lineages. In the period of accelerated globalization however, discrete discourses on time and space are no longer tenable. Histories of place engage the transdisciplinary approach of recent scholarship in understanding the complexities and fluidity of the world in which we live. Places are constructed out of the enmeshing of the material, social and cultural. The reasons why people migrate both within and to particular places are also critical to the ongoing perceptions of that place, and the dynamics by which local communities operate within global networks.

This thesis is an historical study of a recent sewage ocean outfall dispute between residents and the local council at Emerald Beach, in the Coffs Harbour region of New South Wales' Mid-North Coast. Alongside documentary sources, it uses oral testimony to examine the factors that contributed to people's understanding of their place, and the processes that resulted in the public contestation over that place. It argues that the positions taken in the sewage dispute cannot simply be perceived as a function of individual residents' responses within a bounded local context, but were a result of the complex processes of internal migration to the region since colonisation, and especially since the 1970s, that brought competing visions for the same place.

In exploring the historical traces of the dispute, the thesis examines the first wave of non-Aboriginal migration to the coastal hinterland before turning attention to the second intensive wave of migration in the postwar period. Attention shifted away from the hinterland to the coast, and the chapters examine competing uses for the coast as local born residents, tourists and the influx of new settlers from the 1970s brought diverse dreams for the warm North Coast. In particular, the sewage conflict that grew into the direct-action protests at Emerald Beach provides clear insights into the flows of migration and settlement that led to the particular mix of people who fought for their divergent conceptions of place as critical to their lifestyle and residency.

Without examining historical representations of places and events, conflict situations such as the sewage dispute at Emerald Beach cannot be fully illuminated. By demonstrating the force of internal migration on perceptions of, and contestation within place, this thesis provides one framework from which other places might be investigated.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics
- CHDLALC: Coffs Harbour and District Local Aboriginal Land Council
- CHHSM: Coffs Harbour Historical Society Museum
- DCLM: Department of Conservation and Land Management
- DEP: Department of Environment and Planning
- DL: Department of Lands
- DPW: Department of Public Works
- DUAP: Department of Urban Affairs and Planning
- EIS: Environmental Impact Statement
- LAMN: Look-At-Me-Now (Headland)
- LEP: Local Environment Plan
- NIMBY: Not In My Back Yard
- NPWS: National Parks and Wildlife Service
- PWD: Public Works Department (see DPW for footnote abbreviations)
- REP: Regional Environment Plan
- SPA: State Planning Authority
- SPCC: State Pollution Control Commission
- UNE: University of New England