



# MEASURES OF AUSTRALIA'S PROGRESS

IS LIFE IN AUSTRALIA GETTING BETTER?



# 2010





## Is life in Australia getting better?

Measures of Australia's Progress (MAP) presents a suite of indicators to help Australians determine whether life in Australia is getting better.

This brochure summarises the 17 headline dimensions of progress which cover major facets of Australian life.

To enable people to quickly assess whether life in Australia is improving, a dashboard display using 'traffic lights' has been provided (see overleaf).

This shows at a glance whether progress or regress has been made in each key area compared with 10 years ago. The subsequent pages explore in more detail the headline indicators for these areas on which the 'traffic lights' are based.

For more detailed information about any of the headline indicators and supporting material, visit the Measures of Australia's Progress website at [www.abs.gov.au/about/progress](http://www.abs.gov.au/about/progress)

Alternatively, join our blog conversation on what progress in Australia really means to you at [www.abs.gov.au/about/progress/blog](http://www.abs.gov.au/about/progress/blog)



## The dimensions of progress - at a glance

### Society

- ✓ Health
- ✓ Education and training
- ✓ Work
- Crime
- Family, community and social cohesion
- Democracy, governance and citizenship

### Economy

- ✓ National income
- ✓ National wealth
- ✓ Household economic wellbeing
- ~ Housing
- ~ Productivity

### Environment

- ✗ Biodiversity
- Land
- Inland waters
- Oceans and estuaries
- ✗ Atmosphere
- Waste

#### Legend

- ✓ Progress has generally been made in this headline indicator compared with ten years ago
- ✗ This headline indicator has generally regressed compared with ten years ago
- ~ There has been no significant movement in this headline indicator compared with ten years ago
- There is either no headline indicator for this area of progress or no time series

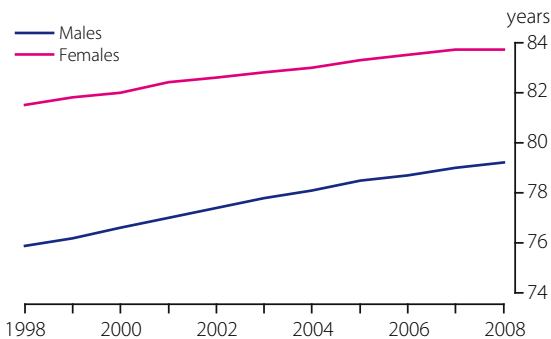


## Health

Good health directly and indirectly improves the wellbeing of individuals and the broader community. For an individual, good health means a life free of the burdens of illness (such as pain, social isolation, financial costs, and restrictions to lifestyle choices). For the nation, a healthy population is more able to contribute to society in various ways such as through participation in employment and education.

- Australian life expectancy at birth improved during the decade 1998 to 2008. A boy born in 2008 could expect to live to 79.2 years, while a girl could expect to reach 83.7 years.
- Over the last decade, life expectancy at birth has increased slightly more for boys (3.3 years) than for girls (2.2 years).

### ✔ Life expectancy at birth



Source: ABS Deaths, Australia, 2008  
(cat. no. 3302.0)

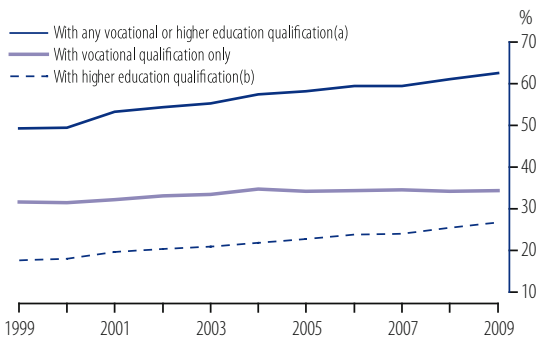


## Education and training

Education and training help people to develop knowledge and skills that may be used to enhance their own wellbeing and those of the broader community. For an individual, education is widely regarded as a key factor in developing a rewarding career. For the nation, having a skilled work force is vital in supporting ongoing economic development and in improving living conditions.

- The proportion of 25–64 year olds with a vocational or higher education qualification increased from 49% in 1999 to 63% in 2009.
- The proportion of people with a higher education qualification increased from 18% in 1999 to 27% in 2009, while the proportion of people whose highest qualification was a vocational qualification was 34% in 2009, a slight increase from 32% in 1999.

### ✓ People aged 25-64 with a vocational or higher education qualification



(a) Includes people with a qualification which could not be categorised into either vocational qualification only or higher education qualification

(b) Some of these people may also have a vocational qualification

Source: ABS data available on request, Survey of Education and Work; Transition from Education to Work Survey

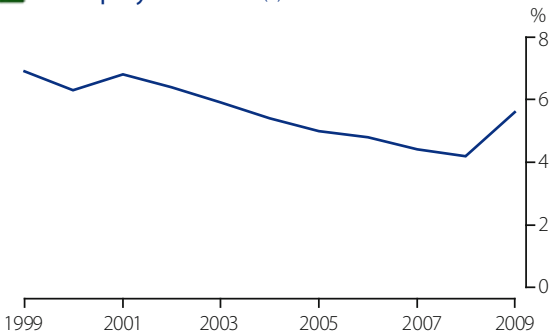


## Work

Paid work is the way in which most people obtain the economic resources they need for day to day living. People's involvement in paid work also contributes to economic growth and development. Once in paid employment, there are many aspects of work that affect people's wellbeing, such as the hours they work, their levels of remuneration, job satisfaction and security, the opportunity for self development, and their interaction with people outside of the home.

- Over the last decade the annual average unemployment rate for Australia has generally decreased, from 6.9% in 1999 to 5.6% in 2009.
- Between 2008 and 2009, the unemployment rate increased 1.4 percentage points reflecting the recent economic downturn.

### ✔ Unemployment rate (a)



(a) Annual averages

Source: ABS Labour Force, Australia  
(cat. no. 6202.0)

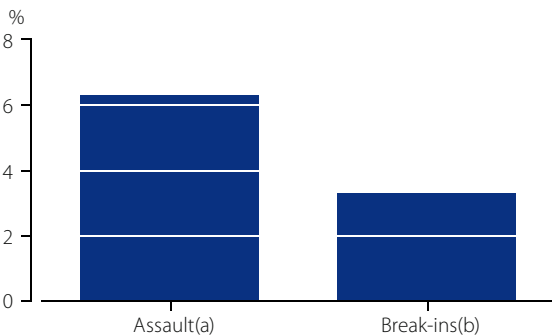


## Crime

Crime takes many forms and can have a major impact on the wellbeing of victims, their families and friends, and the wider community. Those most directly affected may suffer financially, physically, psychologically or emotionally. Fear of crime can affect people by restricting community engagement, reducing levels of trust and impacting on social cohesion. Due to a change in data sources, comparisons to previous years are not available for this indicator.

- In 2008-09, 6.3% of all Australians aged 15 years and over were victims of at least one assault in the 12 months prior to interview.
- Over the same 12 month period, 3.3% of households were victims of at least one break-in.

### Victims of assault and break-ins, 2008-09



(a) Proportion of people aged 15 years and over who reported experiencing a physical or threatened assault in the 12 months prior to interview

(b) Proportion of households who reported experiencing a break-in in the 12 months prior to interview

Source: ABS Crime Victimization, Australia, 2008-09 (cat. no. 4530.0)





## Family, community and social cohesion

Family and community are important aspects of Australian life. People are social beings. They require love, companionship and engagement with others to flourish.

The absence of family, friendship or other caring or cooperative social relationships at any stage of life, but particularly when people are least able to care for themselves, can have a serious impact on personal wellbeing as well as on wider social cohesion.

Currently, there is no one summary measure that adequately captures the way that family and community contribute to progress, nor an agreed summary measure of social cohesion and as such there is no headline indicator for this dimension.



## Democracy, governance and citizenship

The wellbeing of a society depends not only on that of individual citizens, but also on the quality of their collective public life: on factors such as the fairness of the political system, the health of a democracy, and the participation of citizens in public life.

While democracy, governance and citizenship is one of the headline dimensions for assessing whether life in Australia is getting better, it is difficult to find a single indicator that adequately captures this very wide dimension of progress, and consequently there is no headline indicator.

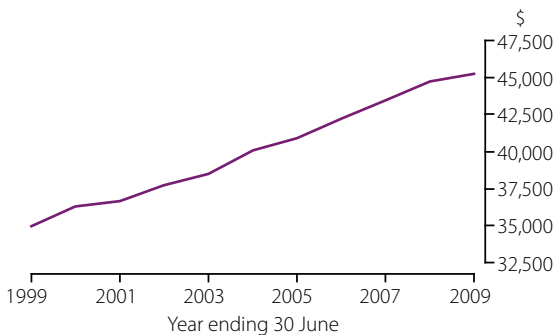


## National income

National income is an indicator of Australians' capacity to purchase goods and services for consumption. It is a determinant of material living standards and is also important for other aspects of progress such as national wealth and household economic wellbeing.

- Between 1998-99 and 2008-09, real net national disposable income per capita grew by 2.6% a year, from \$35,000 to \$45,300. This was appreciably faster than during the preceding ten years, when it grew by 1.5% per year.

### ✔ Real net national disposable income (a) per capita



(a) Reference year 2007-08.

Source: ABS Australian System of National Accounts, 2008-09 (cat. no. 5204.0)

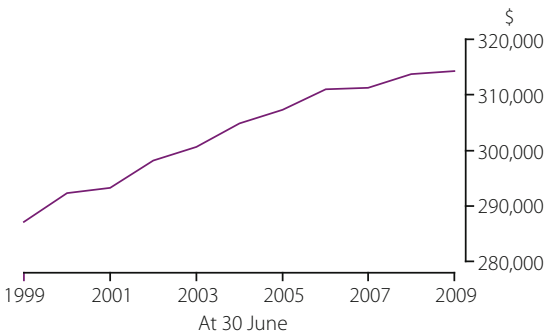


## National wealth

A nation's wealth, along with the skills of the workforce, has a major effect on its capacity to generate income. Income that is saved, rather than spent on current consumption, allows the accumulation of wealth that may generate income and support higher levels of consumption in the future.

- Between June 1999 and June 2009, Australia's real national net worth per capita rose from \$287,100 to \$314,200, at an average annual rate of 0.9%.
- Australia's real national net worth per capita grew by an average annual rate of 0.4% in the three years to June 2009, while the growth rate for the previous seven years to June 2006 was an average of 1.1% per year.

### ✓ Real national net worth (a) per capita



(a) Reference year 2007-08

Sources: ABS Australian System of National Accounts, 2008-09 (cat. no. 5204.0); ABS Australian Demographic Statistics (cat. no. 3101.0)

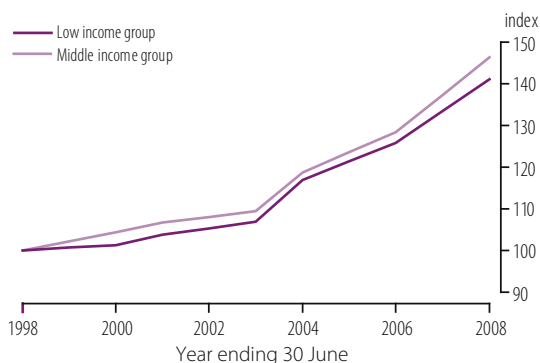


## Household economic wellbeing

Household economic wellbeing relates to a household's ability to maintain a minimum material standard of living. People living in households with low income may be less likely to have sufficient economic resources to support an acceptable standard of living.

- In the decade to 2007-08, the average real equivalised disposable household weekly income for people in the low income group increased by 41%.
- Over the same period, the average real equivalised disposable household weekly income increased by 46% for people in the middle income group.

### ✓ Average real equivalised disposable household weekly income (a)(b)



(a) Base year is 1997-98 and equals 100

(b) Data has been interpolated for 1999, 2002, 2005 and 2007

Source: ABS data available on request, Survey of Income and Housing



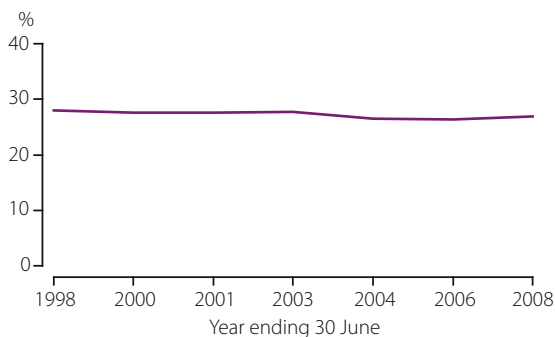
## Housing

Housing provides people with shelter, security, and privacy. Having an adequate and appropriate place to live is fundamental to people's wellbeing. Improvements to the overall accessibility of appropriate housing for Australians is important in determining whether life in Australia is getting better.

Most Australian households are able to exercise a significant degree of choice over housing when making their decisions about the cost of living, savings and investment. But for many low income households, renting is often the only affordable option, and suitable rental dwellings can become less affordable when rents rise faster than income.

- Rental affordability for low income households has remained constant over the past 10 years (28% in 1997-98 and 27% in 2007-08).

### Low income rental affordability (a)



(a) Housing costs as a proportion of gross household income for low income renters

Source: ABS data available on request, ABS Survey of Income and Housing

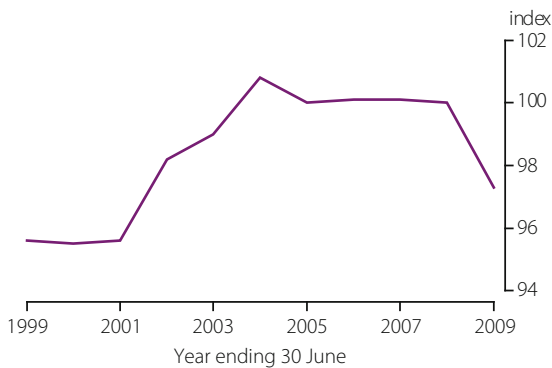


## Productivity

Productivity is the efficiency with which an economy transforms inputs into outputs. Improved production efficiency can generate higher real incomes and lead to long term improvements in the living standards of Australians.

- During the early part of the decade 1999-2009, Australia experienced improved productivity.
- Recent years have seen Australia's productivity index plateau, and in 2008-09 productivity fell 2.7% compared with the previous year.

### Multifactor productivity (a)



(a) Reference year for MFP indexes is 2007-08 = 100

Source: ABS Australian System of National Accounts, 2008-09 (cat. no. 5204.0)

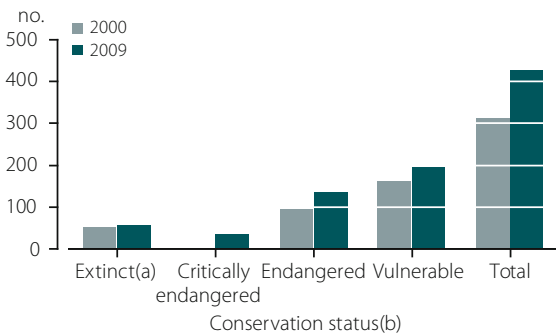


## Biodiversity

Biodiversity is essential to the wellbeing of Australia and Australians. Native plants, animals and other organisms contribute to a healthy environment through the maintenance of clean water, clean air and healthy soils. They also provide significant economic benefits, for example, through tourism, agriculture, and a range of cultural and recreational services.

- Over the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of threatened fauna species from 312 in 2000 to 427 in 2009.
- Of the list of threatened fauna species in 2009, just under half (46%) were listed as vulnerable, around two-fifths (41%) were listed as endangered or critically endangered, and just over one in ten (13%) were listed as extinct.

### Threatened fauna species



(a) Includes the category 'extinct in the wild'

(b) The conservation status category, 'Conservation dependent' is not shown as this category did not exist in 2000 and only had three species in 2009

Source: Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts 2010, EPBC Act List of Threatened Fauna, 2010





## Land

The land on which Australians live is essential for their wellbeing. It provides the foundation for animals and plants to flourish, with functioning ecosystems providing clean water, clean air and healthy soils as well as maintaining our unique biological diversity.

There is currently no headline indicator for the land dimension that adequately summarises landscapes, biodiversity and ecosystem services.



## Inland waters

Water is fundamental to the survival of people and other organisms. Apart from drinking water, much of our economy (agriculture, in particular) relies on water. Furthermore, the condition of freshwater ecosystems has a critical impact on the wider environment.

Fresh water is a finite and scarce resource in many areas of Australia. Consumption of fresh water potentially depletes water storages in dams and reduces river flows, which can be environmentally and economically detrimental.

There is currently no headline indicator for the inland waters dimension that takes into account the quantity and the quality of water available, and the health of Australia's inland water ecosystems. Measuring inland water use is also problematic due to fluctuating weather patterns and resulting inconsistent user demands.

For this reason there is no headline indicator for this dimension.



## Oceans and estuaries

Australia's oceans are diverse, ranging from tropical seas, through temperate to polar waters; and from shallow coastal waters to ocean trenches. This diversity is reflected in the variety of marine life that live in Australian waters.

Despite its importance to Australia, there is no comprehensive and nationally consistent system for measuring the condition of Australia's ocean and coastal ecosystems.

For this reason there is no headline indicator for this dimension.



## Atmosphere

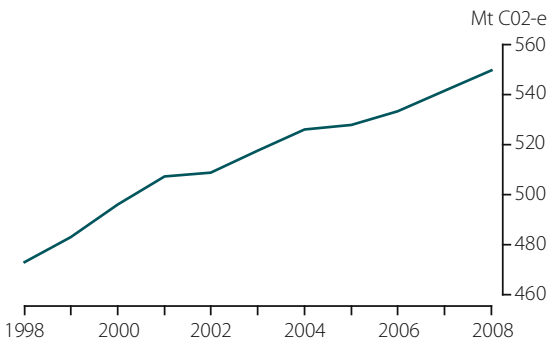
The atmosphere is an essential component of all ecological systems on Earth. The atmosphere plays a critical role in regulating global, regional and local climate and is essential to supporting life on Earth.

Oxygen is required for life, stratospheric ozone protects us from harmful solar radiation, and greenhouse gases help to maintain a temperature range suitable for life.

Human activity is increasing the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

- Australia's greenhouse gas emissions increased by 16% over the last decade from 473.0 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent gases in 1998 to 549.5 million tonnes in 2008.

### Net greenhouse gas emissions (a)



(a) Excludes emissions from 'Land use, land use change and forestry'

Source: Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, National Greenhouse Gas Inventory, May 2010



## Waste

Waste generation accompanies all human activities in the form of solid, liquid and gaseous waste and comes from households, building and demolition sites and the industrial sector.

Waste is expensive to deal with and has a damaging impact on the environment, affects people's health and can even influence trade in the economy.

The volume of waste that a society produces is an indicator of resource use and of the by-products of consumption, determined by production and consumption patterns.

No headline indicator is available for this dimension.

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[abs.gov.au/about/about/progress](https://abs.gov.au/about/about/progress)

