

## Rural and Regional Legal Practice

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### Introduction

There are many distinctive aspects to practising in rural and regional communities. This chapter is designed to build on Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 to explore some of the ways in which this distinctiveness shapes the legal practice experience. It begins by highlighting the diversity within and across rural and regional contexts, and the significance of this diversity to effective legal practice. In particular, it considers how these differences can impact the types of services needed in a community as well as the nature of the lawyer's role and the particular skills that are required. It explores the opportunities and challenges of rural and regional legal practice, as well as the nature of the legal issues and clientele that are present. It concludes with a discussion of the central role that local networks and relationships play for the effective functioning of the rural and regional lawyer.

### Diversity of Legal Practice Contexts

There is a tendency to think about rural and regional communities in fairly simple, homogenous terms. However, as we saw in Chapter 1, great diversity exists both across and within communities, including distinct landscapes, economic activity, demography and cultural diversity. Contemporary research has increasingly sought to emphasise the complexity and diversity of rural and regional areas, pointing out the significant variations within and across communities.<sup>1</sup> While it may seem self-evident to say that no two communities are exactly the same, it is helpful to look more deeply at the ways in which rural and regional areas differ from one another, and what these differences might mean for the legal professional context and the delivery of legal services to these communities.

Let us take an example and consider the two communities of Armidale and Inverell, both of which are located in north-western New South Wales.

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1 Institute for Regional and Rural Research, *Defining the Focus on 'Rural' and 'Regional' Research* (University of Ballarat, 2004) 3.

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