Public Service Commission

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Regional profile of the public sector

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34.3% (same as 2021)

of employees were located in regional areas at census date

40.9%

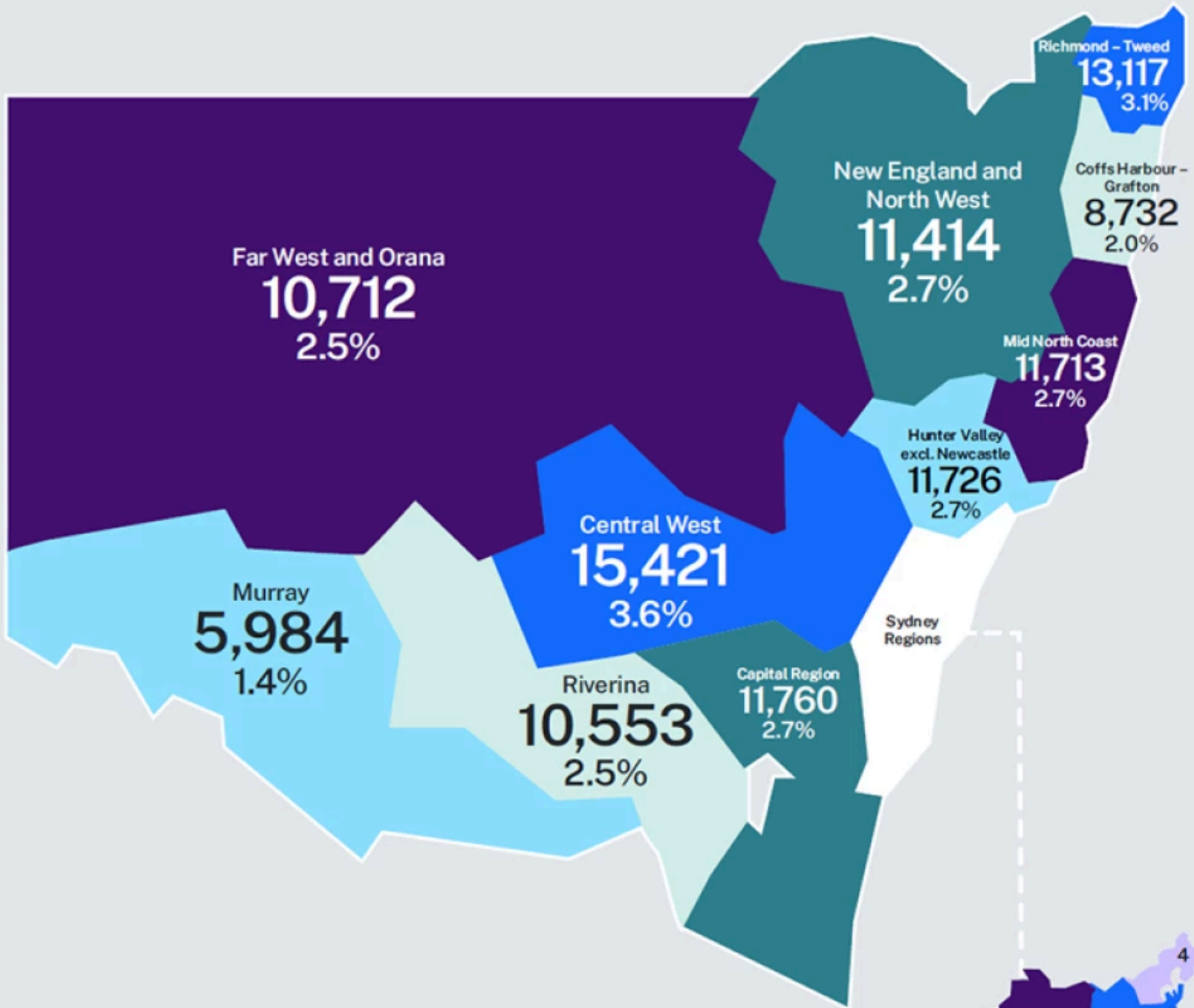of employees were located outside Sydney at census date

The NSW public sector is the largest employer in Australia, accounting for more than 10% of employment in the state. While most roles are in metropolitan areas, the NSW public sector provides a significant proportion of all employment in regional NSW.[1]

This analysis is based on employees' work locations in the Workforce Profile data submitted by departments and agencies. It does not reflect any work-from-home arrangements that were part of the response to the pandemic.

In 2022, 34.3% (+249 headcount) of public sector employees worked in regional areas. All Sydney local government areas (LGAs) as well as the Newcastle and Wollongong LGAs are classified as metropolitan.

Comparing Sydney with the rest of the state[2], 59.1% of NSW public sector employees worked in Sydney (see Figure 11.1, Sydney East and Sydney West combined), a decrease of 0.1PP in 2022 (59.2% in 2021). While most of the public sector workforce was located in Sydney, the proportion of public sector employees working outside Sydney was higher than the proportion of the resident population in these areas (40.9% compared to 39.3%) and has increased since 2021 (+0.8PP from 38.5%).[3]

Figure 11.1: NSW public sector employees by region, census headcount, 2022

Source: https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/reports-and-data/workforce-profile/workforce-profile-reports/workforce-profile-report-2022/regional-profile-of-the-public-sector
30 Apr 2024, 1:18 pm

Far West and Orana
10,712
2.5%

New England and
North West
11,414
2.7%

Richmond – Tweed
13,117
3.1%

Coffs Harbour –
Grafton
8,732
2.0%

Mid North Coast
11,713
2.7%

Hunter Valley
excl. Newcastle
11,726
2.7%

Central West
15,421
3.6%

Murray
5,984
1.4%

Riverina
10,553
2.5%

Capital Region
11,760
2.7%

Sydney
Regions

Sydney regions

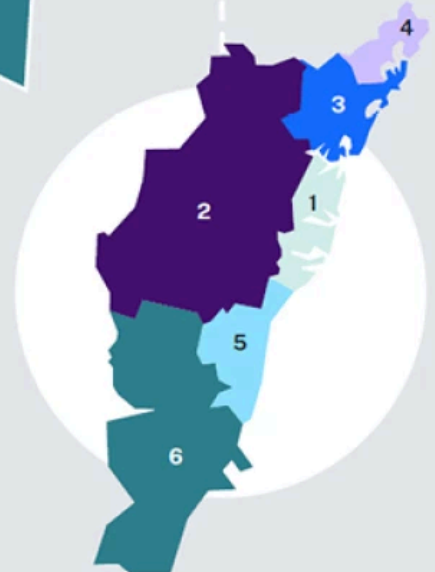| Region		Public sector employees, census headcount	Representation by region (%)
1	Sydney East	139,141	32.4
2	Sydney West	114,540	26.7
3	Central Coast	17,044	4.0
4	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	24,649	5.7
5	Illawarra	16,480	3.8
6	Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	6,485	1.5

Figure 11.1: NSW public sector employees by region, census headcount, 2022 – text version⌄

NSW Regions

Region	Census headcount	Representation by region (%)
Hunter Valley exc. Newcastle	11,726	2.7
Mid North Coast	11,713	2.7
New England and North West	11,414	2.7
Far West and Orana	10,712	2.5
Coffs Harbour – Grafton	8,732	2.0
Richmond – Tweed	13,117	3.1
Capital Region	11,760	2.7
Riverina	10,553	2.5
Murray	5,984	1.4
Central West	15,421	3.6

Sydney regions

Region	Public sector employees, census headcount	Representation by region (%)
Sydney East	139,141	32.4
Sydney West	114,540	26.7
Central Coast	17,044	4.0
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	24,649	5.7
Illawarra	16,480	3.8
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	6,485	1.5

Regional profiles

The distribution of government sector census period full-time equivalent (FTE) by service and region is shown in Table 11.1. Regions outside Sydney accounted for 39.7%, while Sydney East and Sydney West together accounted for 60.3%. In line with previous years, the highest proportion of employees in the government sector working outside Sydney were in the Teaching Service (44.2%) and the NSW Health Service (42.4%), followed by other Crown services (39.7%), NSW Police Force (35.3%), Public Service (34.7%) and the Transport Service (22.5%).

Table 11.1: Census period FTE by service and region (government sector), 2022[4]

Work region	Public Service	NSW Health Service	NSW Police Force	Teaching Service	Transport Service	Other Crown services	Total government Sector
Capital Region	2,026	3,100	663	2,203	179	983	9,154
Central Coast	2,206	6,207	759	3,227	146	1,562	14,107
Central West	3,297	4,246	560	2,348	273	1,601	12,325
Coffs Harbour – Grafton	1,190	2,689	279	1,448	420	838	6,864
Far West and Orana	2,098	2,933	582	1,648	271	1,160	8,691
Hunter Valley exc. Newcastle	2,475	2,324	504	2,735	57	1,315	9,409
Illawarra	1,687	5,579	647	2,982	360	2,035	13,289
Mid North Coast	1,260	3,490	395	2,144	62	1,338	8,689
Murray	674	1,522	291	1,172	118	722	4,499

Work region	Public Service	NSW Health Service	NSW Police Force	Teaching Service	Transport Service	Other Crown services	Total government Sector
New England and North West	1,669	3,226	551	2,184	156	1,373	9,158
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	2,784	9,669	775	3,712	301	2,326	19,565
Richmond – Tweed	1,136	4,832	537	2,322	120	1,281	10,228
Riverina	1,430	3,285	396	1,748	321	1,127	8,306
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	949	1,804	240	1,437	46	730	5,206

NSW public sector relative to the NSW workforce

The NSW public sector accounted for 10.1% of the approximately 4.3 million people employed in NSW at June 2022.[5] This is a 0.3pp decrease from 10.4% last year and reflects the larger rate of growth in employed persons in NSW following its contraction in the earlier stages of the pandemic. In 2022, there were 134,448 more employed persons than in 2021, and 349,309 more employed persons than in 2020.

Analysis of the geographic distribution of NSW public sector employees (including casuals) relative to the overall workforce[6] shows where government employment contributed the most to local and regional economies. Figure 11.2 shows that the percentage of employed persons who were NSW public sector employees ranged from 8.5% to 18.6% across the regions in 2022.

Figure 11.3: Public sector employees as a proportion of NSW employed persons by region
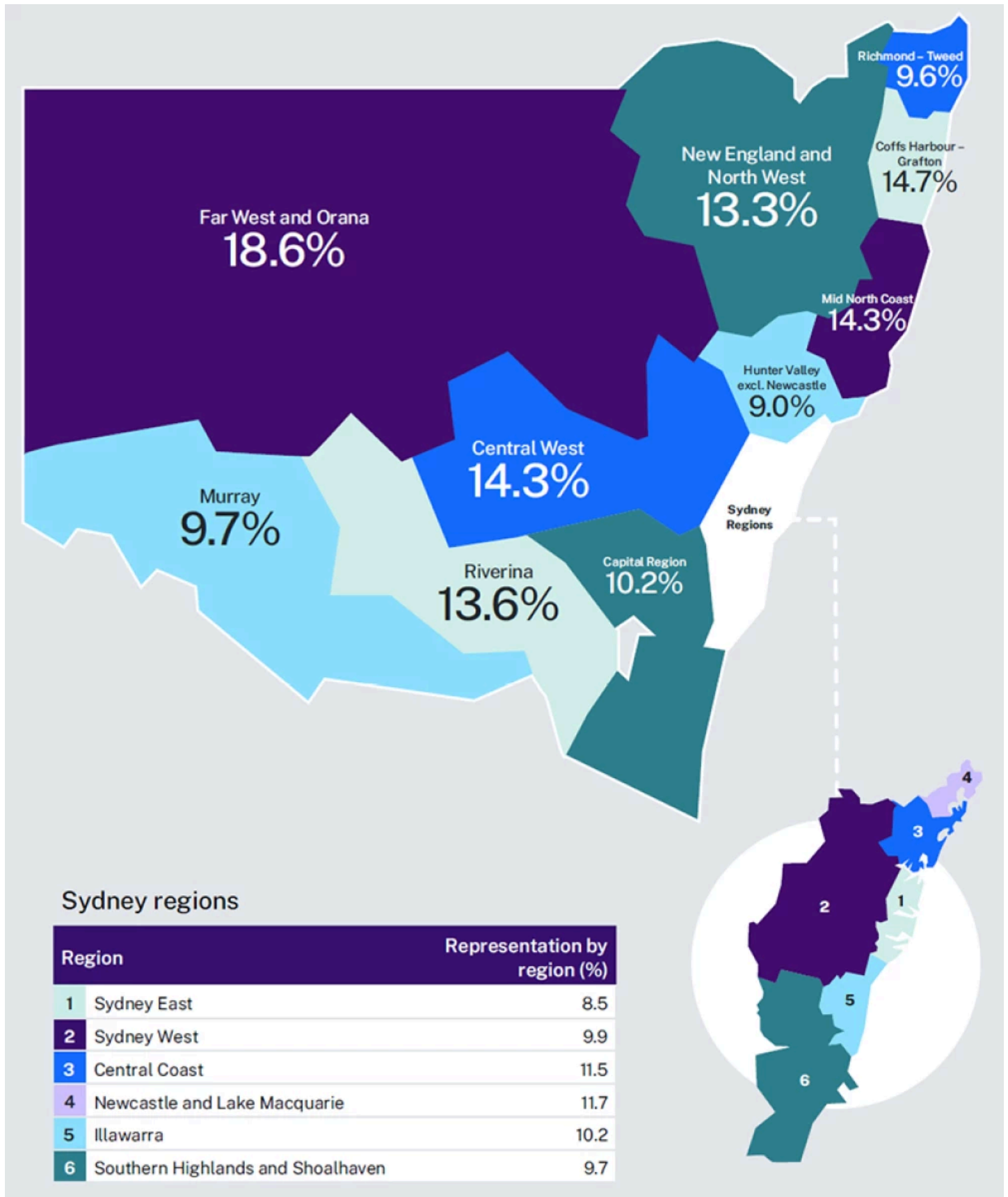
Far West and Orana
18.6%

New England and North West
13.3%

Richmond – Tweed
9.6%

Coffs Harbour – Grafton
14.7%

Mid North Coast
14.3%

Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle
9.0%

Central West
14.3%

Murray
9.7%

Sydney Regions

Riverina
13.6%

Capital Region
10.2%

Sydney regions

Region		Representation by region (%)
1	Sydney East	8.5
2	Sydney West	9.9
3	Central Coast	11.5
4	Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	11.7
5	Illawarra	10.2
6	Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	9.7

Figure 11.3: Public sector employees as a proportion of NSW employed persons by region – text version

NSW Regions

Region	Percentage
Hunter Valley exc. Newcastle	9.0
Mid North Coast	14.3
New England and North West	13.3
Far West and Orana	18.6
Coffs Harbour – Grafton	14.7
Richmond – Tweed	9.6
Capital Region	10.2
Riverina	13.6
Murray	9.7
Central West	14.3

Sydney regions

Region	Percentage
Sydney East	8.5
Sydney West	9.9
Central Coast	11.5
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	11.7
Illawarra	10.2
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	9.7

Employees

Table 11.2: Impact on regions if all Public Service employees work from home, census headcount, 2022

Region (ABS Statistical Areas 4)	Employees living in region	Employees working in region	Change if all employees work from home, 2022
Capital Region	2,704	2,524	180
Central Coast	4,019	2,584	1,435
Central West	4,120	4,021	99
Coffs Harbour – Grafton	1,632	1,471	161
Far West and Orana	2,469	2,553	-84
Hunter Valley exc. Newcastle	2,987	3,033	-46
Illawarra	3,623	2,057	1,566
Mid North Coast	1,878	1,600	278
Murray	786	957	-171
New England and North West	2,234	2,045	189
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	4,228	3,310	918
Richmond – Tweed	1,598	1,498	100
Riverina	1,861	1,840	21
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	1,488	1,168	320
Sydney – Baulkham Hills and Hawkesbury	2,516	323	2,193

Region (ABS Statistical Areas 4)	Employees living in region	Employees working in region	Change if all employees work from home, 2022
Sydney – Blacktown	3,905	1,247	2,658
Sydney – City and Inner South	5,007	18,893	-13,886
Sydney – Eastern Suburbs	2,472	1,705	767
Sydney – Inner South West	4,757	1,851	2,906
Sydney – Inner West	3,876	2,191	1,685
Sydney – North Sydney and Hornsby	3,613	2,095	1,518
Sydney – Northern Beaches	1,821	411	1,410
Sydney – Outer South West	3,309	1,428	1,881
Sydney – Outer West and Blue Mountains	4,676	2,925	1,751
Sydney – Parramatta	4,305	15,933	-11,628
Sydney – Ryde	1,722	732	990
Sydney – South West	3,555	2,231	1,324
Sydney – Sutherland	2,713	564	2,149

In 2021, Public Health Orders designed to limit the spread of COVID-19 led to a large proportion of NSW public sector employees working from home. Increased levels of working from home continued into 2022, both in the public and private sector. There is insufficient detail available to accurately determine how many employees worked from home full time. However, Table 11.2 demonstrates the location shift if all Public Service employees were working from home. The Public Service was used for this analysis because it has the highest number of office-based employees who may be able to work remotely.

In this scenario, the regions with the largest decreases are Sydney City and Inner South (-13,886) and Parramatta (-11,628), which are the main employment hubs in Sydney. The regions outside Sydney with the highest increases are Illawarra (+1,566), Central Coast (+1,435), and Newcastle and Lake Macquarie (+918).

Notes

[1] Regional boundaries are based on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The work locations of 4,419 NSW public sector employees were unknown due to Workforce Profile data collection records missing a postcode and/or suburb name, or employees working outside NSW. These employees have not been included in denominators when calculating percentages.

[2] Statistical Area Level 4, Sydney SA4s grouped, excludes 'Unknowns' and 'Outside NSW'. See Regional reference table in Chapter 12 for more detail.

[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) 'ERP by SA2 and above (ASGS 2021), 2001 onwards' Data by Statistical Area 4 , [ABS. Stat Explorer], accessed 29 September 2022.

[4] 0.8% of census period FTE is not mapped to any Australian Bureau of Statistics' Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) for NSW because of postcode and/or suburb data that is missing or outside NSW.

[5] Australian Bureau of Statistics (August 2022), 'Table 1: RM1 - Labour force status by age, labour market region (ASGS) and sex, October 1998 onwards, [time series spreadsheet], **_Labour Force, Australia, Detailed_**, accessed 29 September 2022.

[6] Including casual employees gives a complete picture of the number of people contributing to the NSW economy and travelling between regions for work.

Next chapter
Data sources, conventions and limitations
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