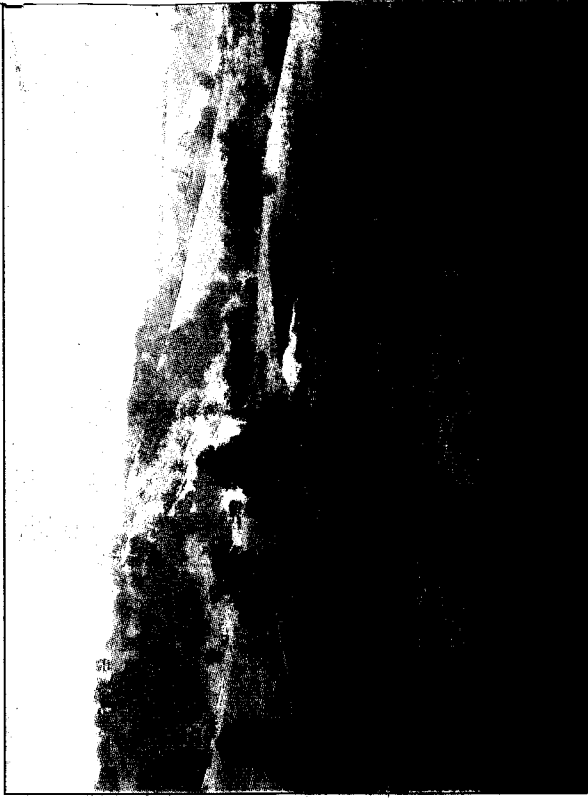


Bush retreats more popular



LAURA KEYS

Ever-increasing prices along WA's South-West coast are fuelling a shift in migration trends, as some lifestyle-seekers turn away from the beach and look to the trees.

The famous sea-change phenomenon, which has become popular in WA during the past few years, is no longer the only popular option. More people are seeking out a bush retreat, as the sea change makes way for the tree change.

Demographer Bernard Salt, who is said to have first coined the sea-change phrase, said the tree change had been a popular way of life in many Australian States but it was starting to catch on in WA.

"It's the green scene as opposed to the blue view," he said.

"WA culture is very much about the beach and people go up the coast or down the coast but very rarely do they choose the inland option.

"It's just not as much a part of WA's culture but that's not to say it doesn't exist."

While traditional coastal hotspots such as Busselton, Yallingup and Margaret River remain popular with sea-changers, skyrocketing house prices and tourist crowds are forcing some buyers to look elsewhere for a peaceful lifestyle.

Forested, inland areas of the South-West are reaping the rewards, as many homebuyers choose to settle among the trees. Nannup, Balingup and Donnybrook have leapt to the front of the pack, according to Real Estate Institute of WA South-West representative Ray Stocker.

Mr Stocker, also principal of Stocker Preston in Margaret River, said the tree-change trend was a relatively new one, primarily brought on by rising house prices on the coast.

"People are realising you don't have to be near the beach to have a good lifestyle," he said.

But the increased migration of people to inland towns is already pushing prices up in those areas.

Balingup's median house price rose 62.8 per cent in the past year and Nannup's increased by 47.3 per cent,

with 18 and 26 sales respectively. Donnybrook boomed with 69 sales, which pushed its median house price up by 38.5 per cent. But despite these town's popularity, all remain relatively affordable, with average house prices of less than \$300,000.

Recent advances in mobile phone and internet technology are making it easier for people to settle in outlying areas and keep in touch.

Hegney Property Group chairman Gavin Hegney said broadband internet was an important development which would increase the attraction of tree-change towns.

But Mr Hegney believes the tree-change trend will see people drawing away from the South-West and refocusing on areas closer to Perth.

"Many of those South-West towns are too far away for people to make good use of," he said. "They want something closer where they can do overnights." He named the Perth Hills areas as the next big thing because they offered a "green" lifestyle similar to that of the South-West.

A country lifestyle is more in demand.

'People are realising you don't have to be near the beach to have a good lifestyle.'

Managing director of property depreciation company DEPPRO Paul Bennion also had noticed a tree-change shift in the past year.

Mr Bennion said two years ago tree-change properties accounted for less than 5 per cent of property depreciation reports.

That had now jumped to more than 10 per cent.

"While sea-change properties located near the coastline still account for a significant proportion of depreciation reports prepared by DEPPRO, at more than 30 per cent, their growth has plateaued during the past year," he said.

Top 5 tree-change destinations

(Ray Stocker of Stocker Preston)

- Balingup
- Nannup
- Donnybrook
- Kirup
- Bridgetown-Greenbushes

Future top 5 tree-change destinations

(Gavin Hegney of Hegney Property Group)

- Darlington
- Karragullen
- Roleystone
- York
- Denmark