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Measuring the Economic Wellbeing of Australia's Regions

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The regional research team of the BTRE investigates social and economic conditions in different parts of Australia. This paper will bring together the results of three BTRE research projects covering three key aspects of regional economic wellbeing — income, wealth and the cost of living.

- The *Taxable Income Database* provides detailed regional data on average incomes over an extended time period (1980–81 to 2004–05). The data is drawn from an administrative source, the Australian Tax Office, and was first published by BTRE in 2005. The *Taxable Income Database* is now used by practitioners and researchers alike as a tool to measure local incomes and economic growth over time.
- The *Household Wealth Database* is due to be released later this year and will provide detailed regional data on household wealth for 2003–04. This study uses small area estimation techniques to develop new estimates of average household wealth and its key components at a small area scale.
- The *Cost of Remoteness* study aims to compare the cost of living in different parts of Australia. Prices for a wide range of goods and services have been gathered from 128 towns and cities across Australia. In addition to comparing the economic costs of living between towns, qualitative information has also been collected on health services and educational opportunities available in a town with a view to gaining an overall picture of the different economic and social costs and advantages associated with a range of demographic and settlement patterns, including remoteness.

These three BTRE projects adopt quite different methodological approaches, but all seek to improve data availability and understanding of economic conditions in Australia's regions. The paper will outline the methodological and data issues confronted in the studies. However, the main focus will be on identifying spatial differences in economic wellbeing within Australia and their impact on economic and demographic change.

The paper will explore the relationship between regional income, regional wealth, and the cost of living in a region, with a view to identifying the circumstances in which these factors provide consistent or contradictory messages about regional economic wellbeing. The aim is to provide a more integrated assessment of economic wellbeing in Australia's regions, and to better understand the role of place.