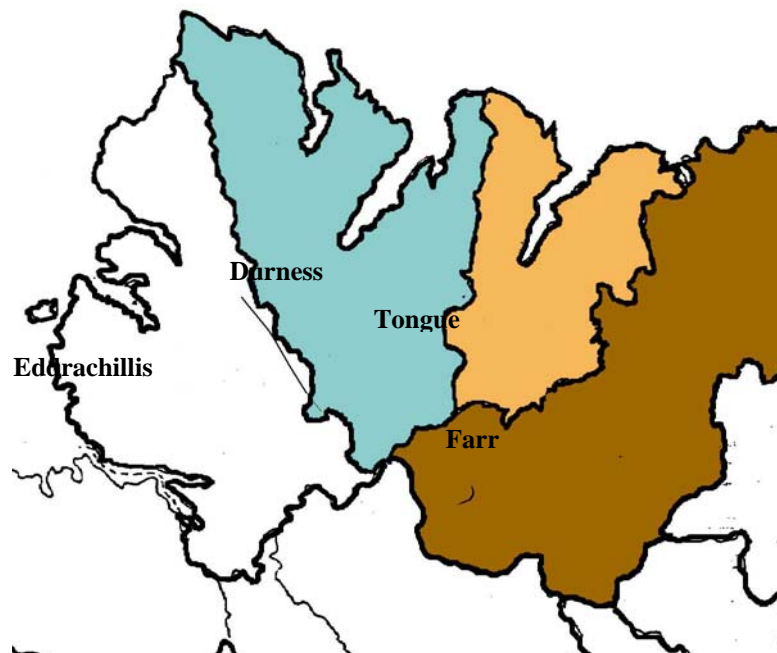


The civil parishes which constitute Mackay Country have great variety in terms of geology, economy and communities but also share much. This is a place often characterised as ‘remote’ and ‘fragile’. For those for whom Mackay Country is ‘home’ it is Central Scotland and London which are remote and not vice versa. In the past the sea was the great motorway carrying goods, ideas and people between the Mediterranean, the African continent, Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. In those days Mackay Country was very clearly on the ‘main drag’. Today transport and communications methods have changed and it takes much longer to reach these places. New technologies have shrunk the world in some ways but also made areas which are physically peripheral – on Europe’s coasts and edges – socially and culturally peripheral. Nonetheless small communities like our own are very clear about what is good, strong and valuable about local ways of life in the midst of the challenges of globalisation and very keen to encourage other people to see and understand the value of these places, cultures and ways of life.

The area stretches along the alternately sandy, rocky coast from Kylestrome in the Southwest to Cape Wrath and Durness in the northwest to Melvich (Dromholstien) in the east and southwards down the fertile Straths Halladale and Strathnaver to Altnaharra, and west to Merkaland south of Achfary covering approximately 1,200 sq.km. The Mackay land covers some eighty miles in length, by some eighteen to twenty miles in depth.

Northwest Sutherland is the emptiest county in the UK and you do not have to go far from the main road to find large tracts of uninhabited spaces. This is a huge land with a small population. This area has a population density of less than 1 person per km² and second to the people its the unspoilt nature and diversity, the wealth of flora and fauna in the area; the natural environment, that is one of the Mackay Country’s greatest strengths.

PARASHES OF MACKAY COUNTRY



Eddrachillis Parish, 226 square miles, is bounded on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by Durness, southeast by Lairg and Creich, and south by Assynt. The coast, much indented by fiord-like lochs, consists of precipitous cliffs interspersed by sandy and shingle bays. Inland the land is hilly, dissected by glens, and rises to 2980 ft on Foinaven and 2863 on Ben Hee. The rocks are mainly of gneiss, bare and hummocky, red sandstone hills and some limestone.

Durness Parish, 234 square miles, occupies the northwestern corner of the county. On the northwest and north it is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by Tongue and Farr, and on the west by Eddrachillis. It is the-most sparsely

populated parish in Scotland (2-4 persons per square mile). The coast is mainly of precipitous cliffs. There are two inlets, the shallow Kyle of Durness and the longer deep-water Loch Eriboll. To the west of the Kyle is the undulating plateau the Parph. The rocks here are of Lewisian gneiss and Torridonian sandstone. The surface is covered with deep peat and accordingly the region is bleak moorland and peat bog. Between the Kyle and Loch Eriboll lies a range of hills attaining an elevation of nearly 3000 ft at Foinaven. The western flank of the hills is formed of gneiss and the eastern slopes of Cambrian quartzite, and so their vegetation is scanty. East of Loch Eriboll the rocks are quartzite and schists of the Moine series, resulting in desolate moorland to the south of which stands Ben Hope (3040 ft). Forming a triangular tract round Durness village and a narrow zone on the southwestern shore of Loch Eriboll are limestone rocks giving rise to good pasture land. At Balnakeil Bay there is a stretch of shell sand, which inland forms a machair.

Tongue is bounded on the north by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east and south by Farr, and on the west by Durness. It extends to 136 square miles. The coast consists of precipitous cliffs, some sandy bays and a long shallow inlet, the Kyle of Tongue. To the west of Kyle lies the Moine, an undulating tract of bog and moor in the north of which rises Ben Hutig where *Arctous* descends to some 500 ft. On the shores of the Kyle, Tongue woods contain many exotic trees while in the coniferous plantations grow *Listera cordata*, *Good yera repens* and *Pyrola minor*. The chief river is the Borgie from Loch Loyal. *Equisetum telmateja* is found on its banks in its upper reaches, the sole locality in v.c. 108. Above Loch Loyal stands the picturesque Ben Loyal.

Farr, a very large parish of 417 square miles, is bounded on the north by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by Caithness, on the south by Kildonan, Clyne, Rogart and Lairg, and on the west by Eddrachillis, Durness and Tongue. The coast consists of cliffs and sandy bays. Near the coast there are many bare rocky outcrops. Inland the land is hilly culminating in the south at Ben Klibreck (3154 ft) and in the southwest in Ben Hee (2864 ft). The rocks are mainly schists of the Moine series, granite in Strath Halladale. The parish is for the most part moorland but there is arable land in Strathnaver, Strath Halladale and at Strathy, Kirtomy and Bettyhill.

What is a 'Fragile Area'?

Across the HIE and Highland Region areas, a range of aspects characteristic of fragile rural areas are regularly examined to establish the relative fragility of each sub area.

The seven indicators used by Highland Council are:

- • population density, by Highland Council settlement zone
- • % population change between 1981 - 1991, by Highland Council settlement zone
- • % change in population aged 0-15 years, between 1981 - 1991, by Highland Council settlement zone
- • % people aged over 18 claiming income support, by 1996 Ward
- • % of long term unemployment, by District Ward
- • 10 minute drive time to 5 key services - PO; Food Shop; GP; Primary school; Petrol facility
- • areas outwith 1.5 hr drive time of Inverness

Figure 6.1a below shows the pattern across Highland Region. An updated version, based on the 2001 census results, is provided at Figure 6.1b.

HIE uses a slightly different method of ascertaining fragility, but the same core areas emerge as most fragile. HIE uses the following to define fragility:

Geographic

- *Islands which lie off other islands and are not linked by a causeway*
- *A distance of more than 50 miles from a population centre of 5000*
- *Over 70% of roads are single track*

Demographic

- *Islands with a population of less than 2,500*
- *Population density less than the HIE area average (9 persons per square kilometre)*
- *More than 20% of the population is of pensionable age*
- *Population loss between last two censuses*
- *In-migration of economically active below the HIE average*

Economic

- *Economic activity rate below the HIE area average*
- *High average and/or seasonal unemployment*
- *Long term unemployment more than 25% above the HIE average*

- *High dependency on primary sector employment¹*

6.2 Demography

At the time of the 2001 Census there were 1,187 households in Mackay Country and a population of 2,596 compared to a population of 2,717 at the time of the 1991 Census. About 57% of the population live in Tongue and Farr and the remaining 43% live in Eddrachilles and Durness. Durness and Eddrachilles have a population of 1,105 in 471 households while Tongue and Farr have a population of 1,491 in 716 households. During 2001 23% of the Mackay Country population were born outside Scotland and just over 10% of the population could 'speak, read or write Gaelic' compared to a Highland average of 7.5% and a Scottish average of 1.4%. In Tongue and Farr a slightly higher proportion – just over 12% - could 'speak, read or write Gaelic'.

The age structure in Mackay Country is older than the regional average although this is more marked in Tongue and Farr. The table and graph below show the pattern at settlement zone scale. Some 67% of the population are in the 'economically active' age range which is similar to the Highland pattern.

Table 6.1: Population by Area

Area	Population 1991	Population 2001	Households
<i>Mackay Country</i>	2717	2596	1187
Eddrachillis & Durness	1120	1105	471
Tongue & Farr	1597	1491	716
Melvich	541	525	251
Bettyhill & Farr	553	516	253
Altnaharra	58	42	18
Tongue	445	408	194
Durness	353	353	154
Kinlochbervie	464	480	197
Achfary	53	64	22
Scourie	250	208	98

Table 6.2 – Age Structure (%) – 2001 Census

Age Structure 2001 Area	% in Each Age Group						
	0 - 4	5 - 14	15 - 24	25 - 44	45 - 64	65 - 74	75+
<i>Highland</i>	5.4	12.9	10.6	27.4	27.1	9.3	7.3
Mackay Country	4.5	13.8	7.8	25.2	29.7	10.5	8.5
Melvich	4.2	12	9	24.2	31.4	10.7	8.6
Bettyhill & Farr	3.1	10.3	7.6	21.9	32.2	12	13
Altnaharra	4.9	14.8	7.4	25.3	28.4	12.3	6.8
Tongue	2.9	11.7	6.8	22.4	26.2	15.9	14
Durness	4.8	13.9	8.5	25.2	31.2	9.1	7.4
Kinlochbervie	5.5	16.8	9.4	25.9	28.9	7.2	6.3
Achfary	5.6	17.5	7.5	26.3	31.9	6.9	4.4
Scourie	5.1	13.2	6.9	30.6	27.3	9.7	7.2

¹HIE - Network Strategy Office

Figure 6.3: Age Structure – 2001 census

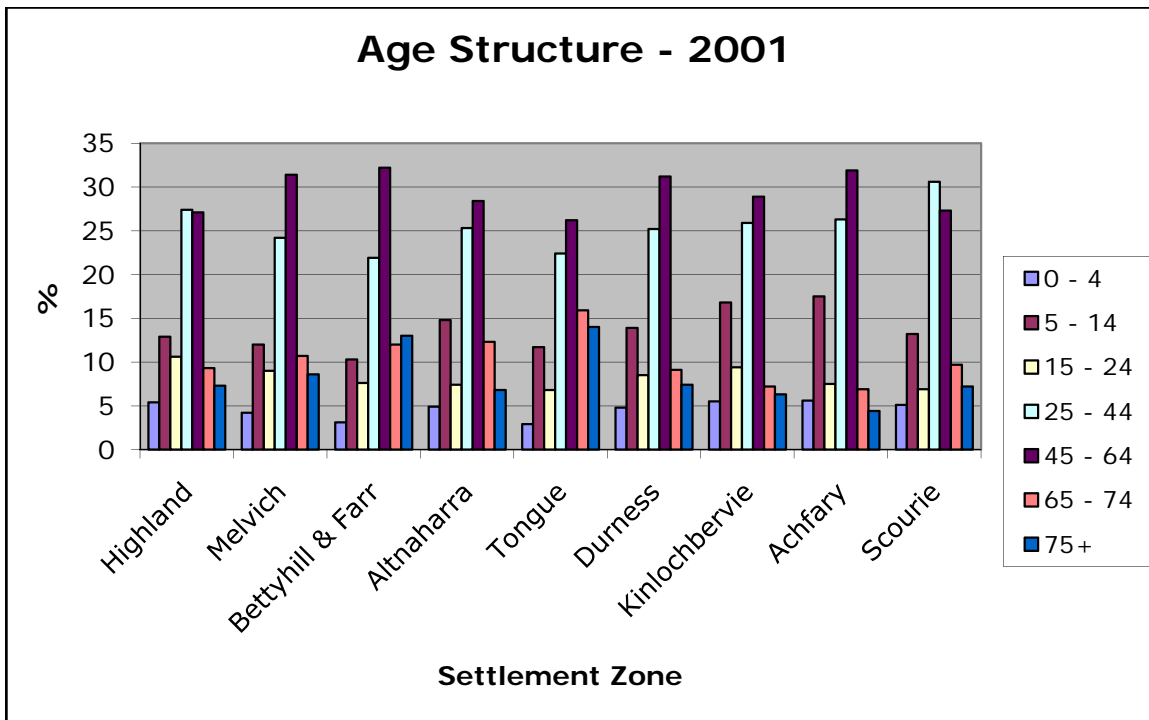


Figure 6.1a: Fragile Areas: HC Areas with 7 Rural Indicators
Source: Highland Council Planning Department

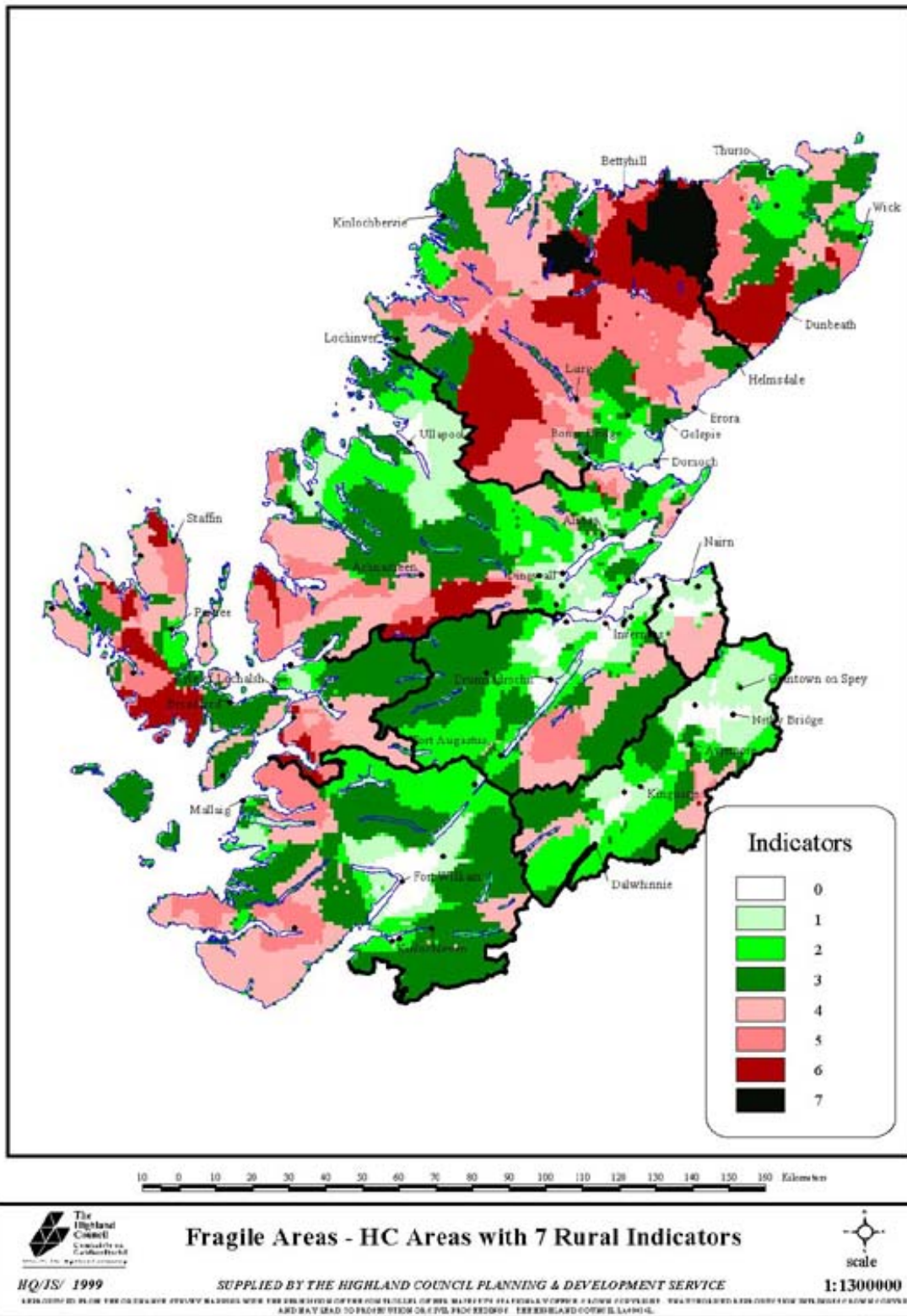
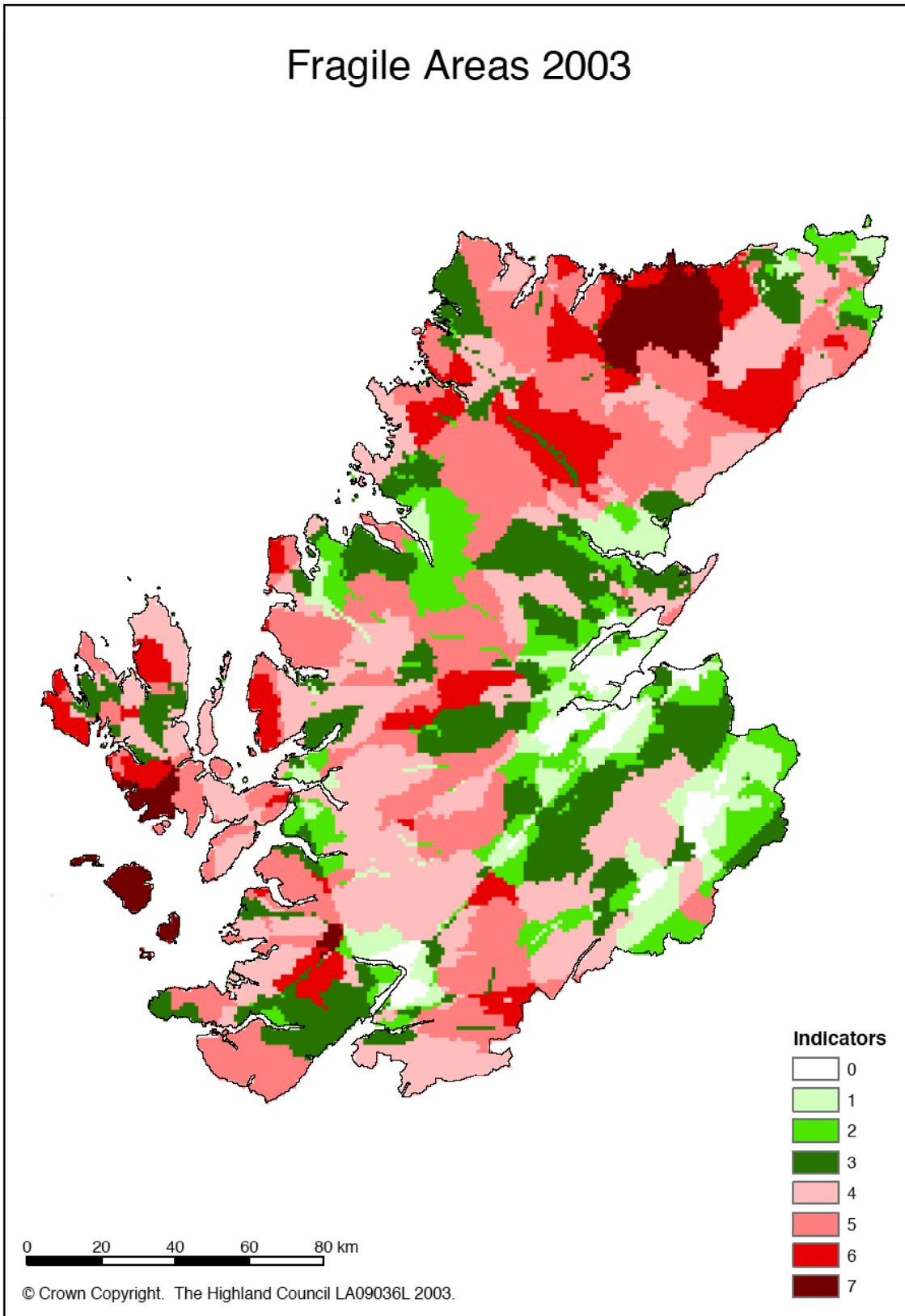


Figure 6.1b: Fragile Areas: HC Areas with 7 Rural Indicators
Source: Highland Council Planning Department



6.3 Housing

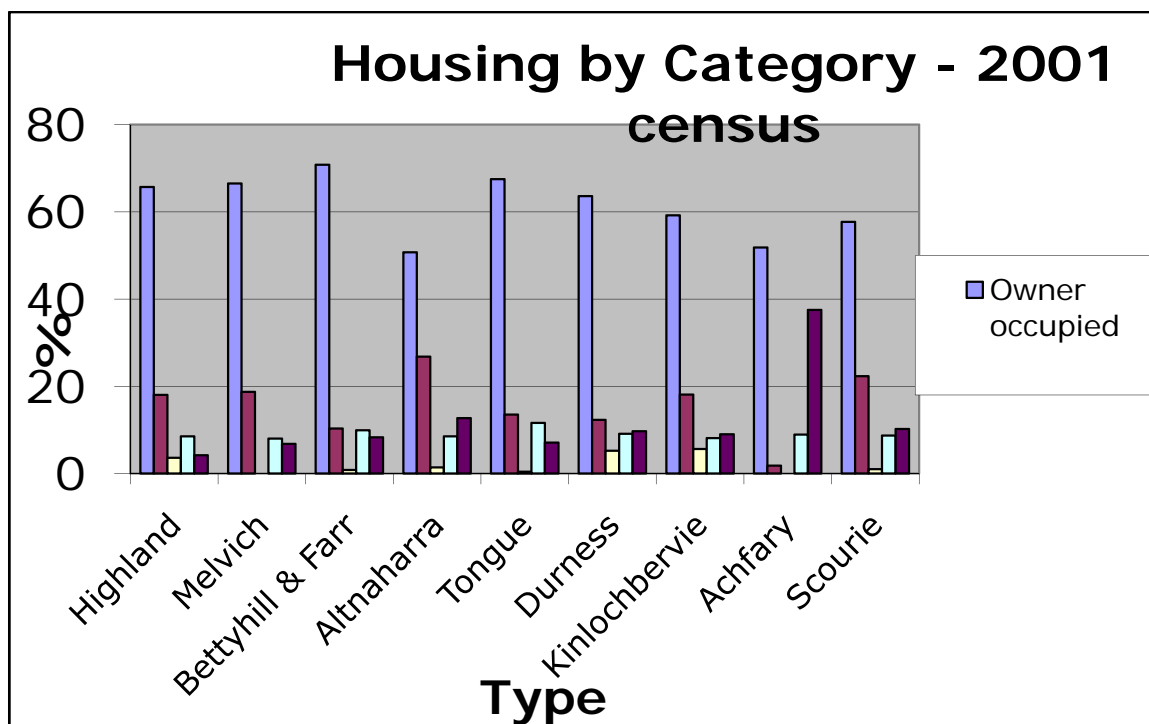
In Eddrachilles a very high percentage of the housing stock is second homes of holiday homes. Across Mackay Country the proportion is on average 18% but ranges between 24.4% in Achfary, 23% in Tongue and 11% in Melvich.

Table 6.4: Percentage of Housing Stock which is holiday home or second home – 2001 census

Area	% of Second / holiday homes
Highland	6.2
Mackay Country	19.4%
Melvich	11.2
Bettyhill & Farr	17.9
Altnaharra	18.5
Tongue	23.3
Durness	15.8
Kinlochbervie	20.7
Achfary	24.4
Scourie	23.6

Figure 6.2 shows housing types by settlement zone. As is usual in a crofting area ‘owner occupation’ is very high – croft houses are counted as owner occupied. Some significant variations are seen – in Achfary 37.5% of households are living ‘rent free’. This is because of a very high level of tied housing in Achfary associated with estate work.

Figure 6.2: Housing by category



6.4 Economy

Figure 6.3 below shows the main categories of economic activity and the proportion of the economically active population working in each sector. Table 6.6 shows the percentages by settlement zone. In the region of 16% of people are self-employed in Mackay Country compared to a Highland average of 10%. This is typical of remote rural areas where people often make ends meet through a range of jobs and self-employment. In Durness over 20% of working people are self-employed. Many people have more than one job and incomes and employment in tourism related activities is very seasonal.

Eddrachilles and Durness are much more dependant on fishing and fishfarming than Tongue and Farr. In Tongue and Farr the influence of proximity to Thurso and Dounreay can be seen in the proportion of people employed in energy, construction and health and social work.

6.5 Crofting

There are 706 crofts and some 478 crofters in Mackay Country. About 40% of resident households have a croft but absentee rates are as high as 33%.² Returns from agriculture have been falling in recent years. It is likely that CAP reform will put further pressure on crofting agriculture since small scale production will struggle to survive under new market conditions despite production of good quality, hardy animals through low intensity methods. Crofting remains a mainstay of Mackay Country communities in terms of social cohesion, communal working and cultural contribution, including maintaining the Gaelic language.

Figure 6.5: North West Sheep and Cattle Numbers

Source: SEERAD – June Returns

Cattle & Sheep		EDDERACHILLIS		DURNESS		TONGUE		FARR	
		Units	Number	Units	Number	Units	Number	Units	Number
YEAR		12	66	9	275	29	523	63	1,369
1985	Total Cattle								
	Total Sheep	71	9,300	37	19,400	76	15,228	156	50,072
1986	Total Cattle	12	75	7	211	31	568	61	1,360
	Total Sheep	70	8,915	38	19,398	77	16,205	157	50,895
1991	Total Cattle	24	173	18	365	45	923	120	2,868
	Total Sheep	154	25,395	90	42,139	167	34,317	335	100,562
1995	Total Cattle	10	130	8	55	28	504	62	1,453
	Total Sheep	52	10,602	35	19,843	80	15,841	162	47,568
1996	Total Cattle	10	112	8	176	29	475	59	1,424
	Total Sheep	52	9,828	36	19,654	80	16,479	155	49,126
2000	Total Cattle	12	135	*	*	29	527	50	1,324
	Total Sheep	52	11,688	28	17,555	67	15,789	137	50,747
2001	Total Cattle	13	154	*	*	28	529	48	1,244
	Total Sheep	53	12,757	28	16,546	66	15,613	128	46,313

² P1 I MacPhail 2001 NWCPA Feasibility Study

Figure 6.3: Employment by Category – 2001 census

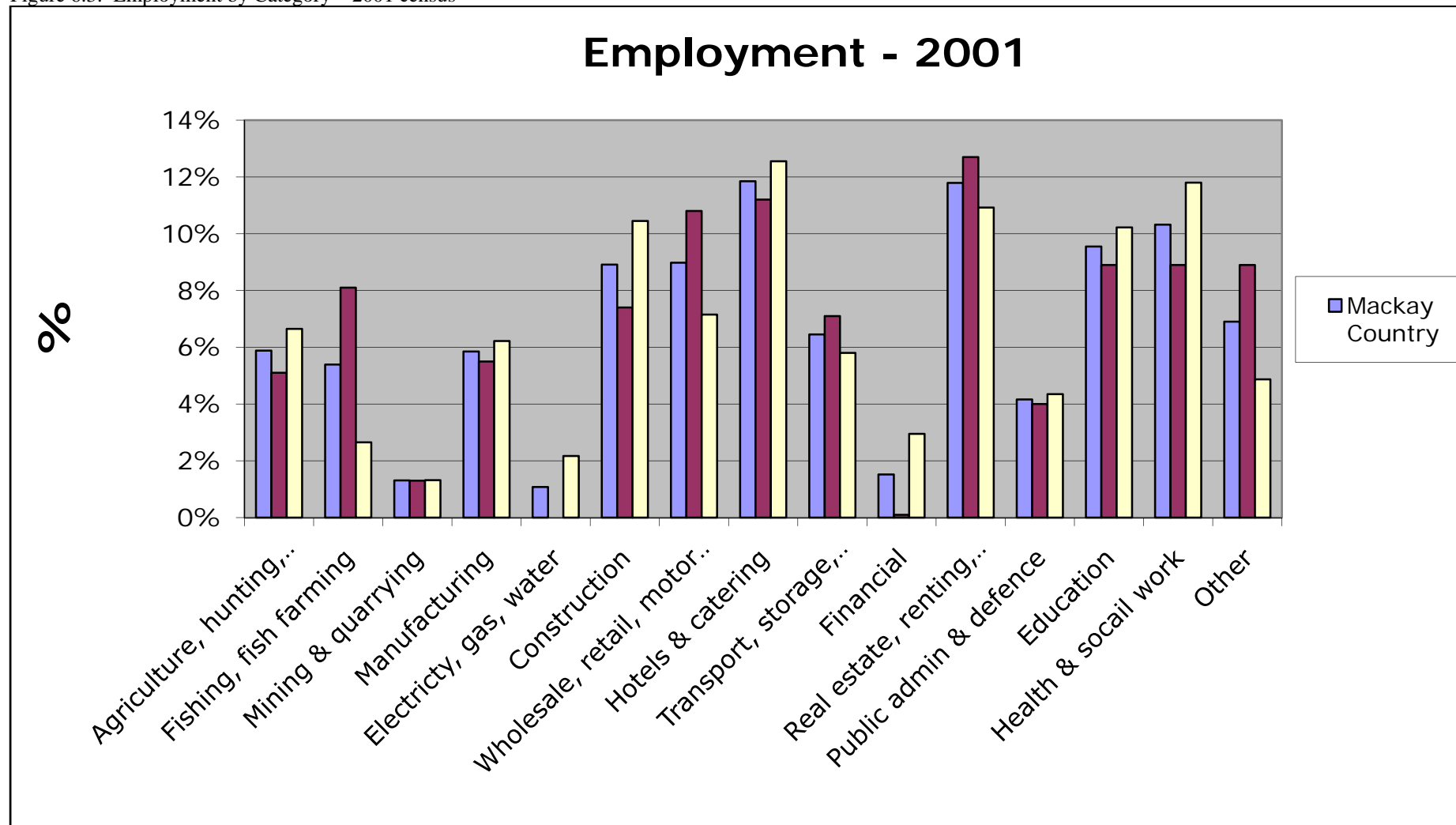


Table 6.6: Employment by Settlement Zones – (%) 2001

Employment	Agriculture,	Fishing, fish	Mining &	Manufact	Electricit	Construction	Wholesale,	Hotels &	Transport,	Financial	Real estate,	Public	Education	Health &	Other
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	hunting, forestry	farming	quarrying	uring	y, gas, water		retail, motor vehicle repair	catering	storage, communicatio ns		renting, business	admin & defence		social work	
<i>Highland</i>	3.7	1.4	1.3	9.1	1	9.2	14.7	9.3	7.1	2	9.9	6.8	6.6	12.4	5.3
Mackay Country	5.88%	5.39%	1.31%	5.85%	1.08%	8.91%	8.98%	11.85%	6.45%	1.52%	11.79%	4.16%	9.55%	10.32%	6.90%
ED	5.10%	8.10%	1.30%	5.50%	0%	7.40%	10.80%	11.20%	7.10%	0.10%	12.70%	4%	8.90%	8.90%	8.90%
TF	6.65%	2.65%	1.32%	6.22%	2.17%	10.45%	7.15%	12.55%	5.80%	2.95%	10.92%	4.35%	10.22%	11.80%	4.87%
Melvich	3.8	2.3	1.9	11.3	1.4	13.1	2.8	6.1	2.8	4.2	17.4	6.6	8.9	12.2	5.2
Bettyhill & Farr	9.8	0.5	0.9	6.5	2.3	9.3	6	8.4	9.8	1.9	12.6	3.3	12.6	11.2	5.1
Altnaharra	7.8	2.6	1.3	2.6	2.6	10.4	11.7	22.1	2.6	2.6	7.8	3.9	10.4	9.1	2.6
Tongue	5.2	5.2	1.2	4.5	2.4	9	8.1	13.6	8	3.1	5.9	3.6	9	14.7	6.6
Durness	6.8	4.9	0.6	10.5	0	10.5	8.6	11.7	8	0	10.5	2.5	12.3	9.9	3.1
Kinlochbervie	4.3	9.7	1.6	2.5	0	5.2	17.4	12.2	4.1	0.4	9.4	4.6	10.4	11.2	6.9
Achfary	3.6	2.4	1.2	3.6	0	3.6	7.2	9.6	4.8	0	22.9	4.8	7.2	7.2	21.7
Scourie	5.8	15.5	1.8	5.3	0	10.2	10	11.1	11.5	0	7.8	4	5.6	7.1	4