

# Perfect country crust

## Treechange has pair on the rise

By TESS CAMPBELL

FORGET a seachange.

The new phenomenon gripping Australia is the treechange, and the Hunter is one of the state's top spots to which city dwellers are turning in search of "the good life".

Maitland's population has grown by 2.1 per cent, from 55,379 in 2000 to 61,517 in 2005.

For many Australians, a change is no longer a dream, says social trends commentator Bernard Salt, who estimates 150,000 people will make the switch to either the coast or the country this year.

The concept of treechange involves city-based people buying homes outside a capital city, pulled by the same gravitational forces that drive seachangers.

Mr Salt has found that a popular treechange town must be within a three-hour drive of a capital city, be near a body of water and that the surrounding countryside must be pretty and have services such as broadband.

The town gets top marks if it is registered with the National Trust.

One such place is historic Morpeth, which has become increasingly popular for city escapees.

Morpeth businessman Trevor Richards said his town is becoming popular with treechangers because it has a lot of city traits.

"You have good coffee shops, dress boutiques and gourmet foods, with a decidedly rural atmosphere," Mr Richards said.

"Business has just exploded here because it is a relaxed life and a lot of the shop owners themselves are city expats."

He says the town's magnificent views over river flats to the Barrington appealed, because Morpeth was not yet strangled by development.

Stephen and Allison Arnott swapped their Glebe terrace house for Morpeth three years ago.

"We were repeatedly broken into, and five days after I got my new car, it was keyed in the street," Mr Arnott said.

"We had a little girl and our priorities changed."

The Arnotts operate the Morpeth Sourdough bakery and their products sell from Byron Bay to Mittagong.

The Swan Street premises is the oldest oven in Australia and Stephen Arnott is now baking traditional sourdough bread using the same recipe and techniques used by his forefathers, who began the prolific Australian



CONVERTED: Morpeth Sourdough owners Stephen and Allison Arnott with Mackenzie, 3.

— Picture by Simone De Peak

company Arnott's Biscuits in 1860.

He is the the great-great-grandson of founder William Arnott.

"We looked at the old bakery and were only half joking when we made an offer - the last thing I expected was the owner to sell," he said.

"We both loved history and Allison has a food

background, so we sold everything for this bakery and rural life.

"In Sydney you are just another card in the deck, but out here you're a part of the community.

"I get lots of people coming into the shop saying 'we're thinking of doing the same thing'. I say 'don't think, just do it,'" Mr Arnott said.



DYNASTY: Right, the old Arnott's Bakery in Newcastle and, left, founder of the business William Arnott.



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