

# Oxford Australia Word of the Month

January 2008

**tree change** – a relocation from the city to a rural area for a lifestyle change

*Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary*

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# tree change

## The story behind the Word of the Month

On 14 August 2004 the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper reported:

Students, doctors, engineers, teachers and architects are being joined by other city dwellers who have caught onto the regional revolution, and know that country cities offer more than drought and bank closures. In small but growing numbers, they are leaving the pollution, strain and costs of the city behind and taking a **'tree change'**.

**Tree change** is an Australian word that is a conscious variant of **sea change**.

The ABC television program *SeaChange* ran from 1998 to 2000. It depicted a corporate lawyer who left her hectic city life and job for the quiet life of the seaside town Pearl Bay. Even while the program was showing, people who made a similar lifestyle change were being called **seachangers** and the activity itself a **sea change**.

**Sea change** continues to be used, and has an assured place in Australian English. For a while it looked as if the term would become so generalised that it might apply to shifts to parts of the country that are not on the sea. Take this passage from the *Canberra Times* in September 2003, describing the town of Braidwood, about 90 km from Canberra and 60 km from the coastal town of Batemans Bay (with Clyde Mountain in between):

Braidwood, for many people, is a stop-off on the way to the coast. A chance to fill up on petrol, go to the toilet and maybe grab a pie from the local bakery. But it's also a rural town

in transit. A place that is still attracting artists but also young families, **seachangers** and developers wanting to take advantage of its proximity not only to the coast but to Canberra and even Sydney.

But if the notion of a sea change were to be taken literally, then it would certainly be stretching its meaning to see inland Braidwood as a haven for frolicking seachangers. It was therefore perhaps inevitable that a parallel term would be created for those who sought a dramatic change of lifestyle by shifting to a non-coastal rural area. And so **tree change** and **treechanger** were born.

While the terms are relatively new, they are serving a needed function in Australian English, and seem destined to be stayers.

And on the principle that there is no English noun that cannot be 'verbed', the verbs have also appeared:

As they **'sea-change'** and **'tree-change'**, the boomers are spending more on recreation than either younger or older households.

*Courier-Mail*, 19 March 2007

All of the terms can be written as two words or solid: **treechange**, **treechanger**, **seachange**, **seachanger**.

These are fascinating examples of the way Australian English continues to generate new words.

metrosexual  
weapon  
of mass  
destruction  
karrack  
glycaemic  
burka  
index  
barbecue stopper  
senior moment  
Sudoku  
hornbag  
dishlicker  
witlof  
cyberstalking  
Naltrexone  
pear-  
shaped  
Bioterrorism