

# Getting down to business in the bush

By ANGELA KELLY

FROM a corporate headquarters in the tiny Hunter Valley village of Bucketty, telecommunications consultant Paul Budde runs a global business and counts the US Government as his biggest customer.

Between writing reports for his largely overseas clientele and liaising with his 45 employees in various parts of the world, he feeds wallabies, listens to birdsong and campaigns for local heritage issues.

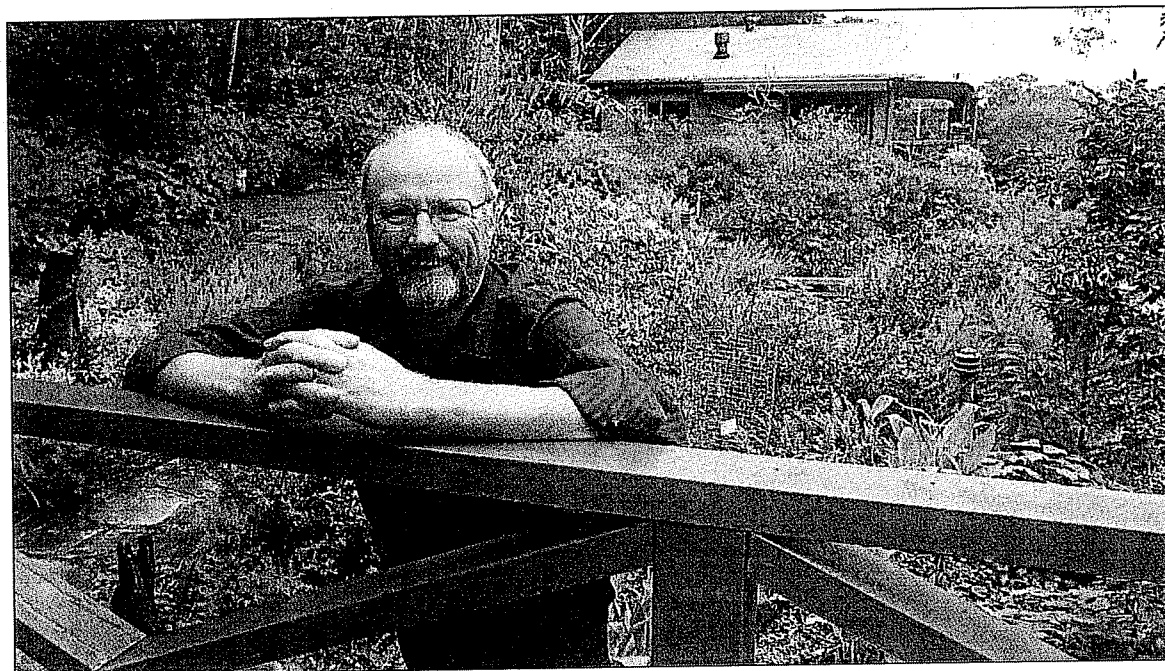
As an advertisement for a successful tree change, there are few better, and Mr Budde enthusiastically encourages others to follow in his footsteps.

Lower costs, loyal employees and low staff turnover, appreciative communities and improved lifestyle are the advantages he has found since shifting his business from North Sydney in 1990. Another advantage – in some regional areas – is the fact that broadband internet is not shared among as many users as in cities and can be faster.

"There are really good opportunities to talk to the rest of the world from regional centres," Mr Budde says.

This is particularly so in parts of the Hunter region, which is close to Sydney and has excellent road and rail links. Originally from Holland, Mr Budde bought a weekender at Bucketty in 1986 and began preparing for the move to the bush.

"At first I was nervous and I was



RIGHT MOVE: Paul Budde runs a global telecommunications consultancy from his bush home at Bucketty.

Picture: BROCK PERKS

going to more functions and events in Sydney than ever, just to make sure I didn't drop off people's radar," he said. "But somebody said I was no further away than if I'd moved to Penrith, which really put it in perspective for me and helped me relax."

Mr Budde said good quality, reliable broadband internet was the

key to a successful move for businesses like his. People considering a move would be wise to consult the local council and make sure the infrastructure was adequate.

Also, it was hazardous to assume a successful business could operate entirely over the internet. "Because the internet is so impersonal we concentrate very hard on customer

service and I do travel quite often for face-to-face meetings."

A former Sydneysider running a business from Dungog in the Hunter Valley is Kevin Johnson-Bade, of Midac Technologies. Mr Johnson-Bade, who moved to the valley in 1992 with his wife, Jennifer, is as positive as Mr Budde about the lifestyle benefits of the

change, but sounds a note of caution about doing business in the bush.

"In Sydney there are lots more dollars about, so you can afford to specialise and operate in small niches, but the big eye-opener in the country is that there is less money and to prosper you have to diversify your business," he said.

The couple's original plan was to run a software development business from their acreage in the Monkerai Valley in the foothills of the Barrington Tops, but after three years of "fighting Telstra" they gave up and shifted the business into Dungog, where they set up shop in the back of the old post office.

To begin with, Midac – which had a comfortable niche in Sydney, developing control software for high-rise buildings – began capitalising on Hunter rural communities' need for internet expertise.

But soon Mr Johnson-Bade found he could insulate his business from the vagaries of sporadic demand by seeking out national opportunities.

Using a powerful internet server in Newcastle, the company serves national clients from the bush, but Mr Johnson-Bade said Telstra's apparently declining commitment to rural data and mobile phone services did not augur well. "In practice that it is getting harder to do serious business from anywhere other than the more substantial towns," he said.