



A FREE GUIDE FOR SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS DOWNSIZERS

The Seven Dollar Mug.

Why letting go of a lifetime of things is harder than it should be and what the science says actually helps.

Nobel prize winning economists found that the moment you own something you want about double what anyone will pay. That was a coffee mug owned for ten minutes. Now think about a dining suite owned for thirty years in Bowral.

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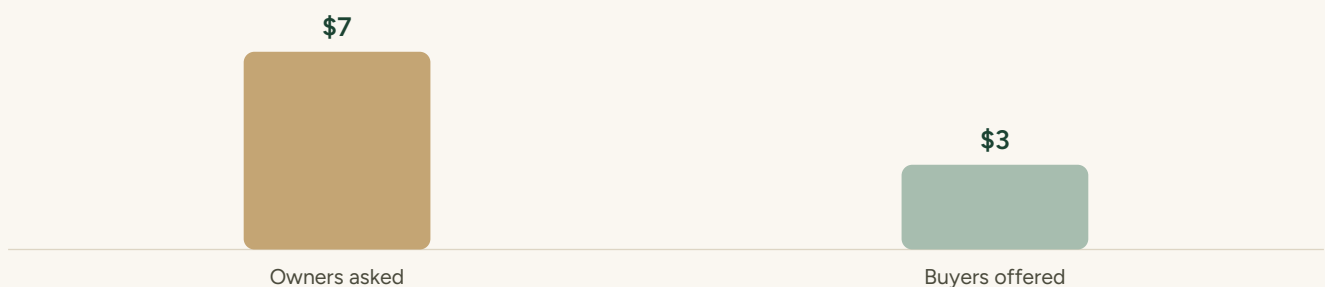
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THE EXPERIMENT

Seven dollars to sell. Three dollars to buy.

In 1990 three economists, two of whom would later win the Nobel prize, handed plain coffee mugs to half a room of students and asked what they would sell them for. They asked the other half what they would pay to buy one.

Same mug. Same room. Same afternoon.



Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler, Journal of Political Economy, 1990. Replicated many times since.

They called it the endowment effect and it has held up for more than thirty years. **The moment something is yours, you value it at about double what anyone else will pay.** It is not greed and it is not sentiment, at least not at first. Giving something up registers as a loss and losses weigh more heavily than gains of the same size.

Now add time. A later study in the Journal of Consumer Research found the longer you have owned something, the more you overvalue it. The mug was owned for minutes. The dining suite has been owned since 1994.

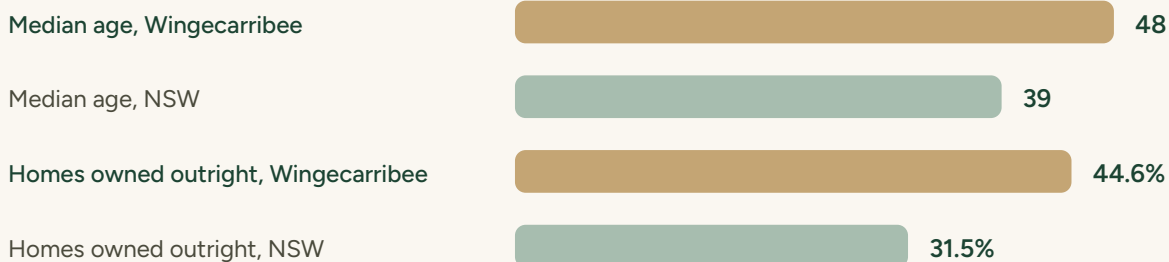
A shed owned for thirty years in Moss Vale is not a shed. It is a museum and you are the curator.



PART ONE

Why it is harder here than almost anywhere.

The Southern Highlands is, by the numbers, a place where people have stayed.

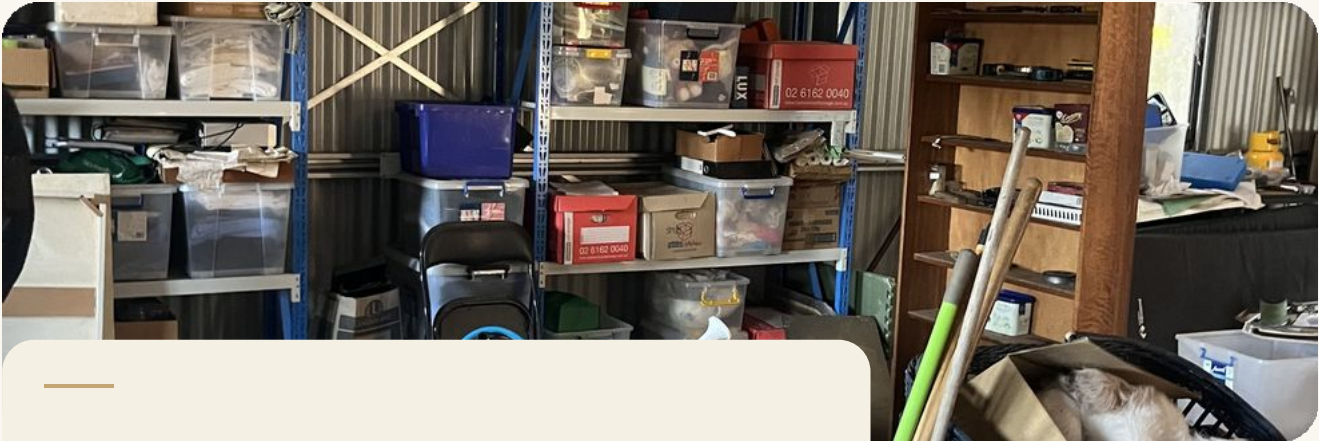


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2021.

Older, longer in the one home and 90 percent of us in a separate house with a garage, a shed and often a paddock with something parked on it. Long ownership widens the gap between what things feel worth and what they are worth and sheds give that gap somewhere to accumulate.

A sociologist who spent twenty years studying how older people part with their possessions found that **60 percent of people over 60 admit to having more than they need** and that the ones who had done it called clearing a long held home one of the hardest things they had ever done. Not because they were disorganised. Because every item was a small decision and every decision registered as a small loss.

If the shed feels impossible, you are not failing at something simple. You are doing something hard, in a place where it is harder than average, with a brain that is working exactly as designed.



PART TWO

What the stuff is costing you while you wait.

A study of 60 couples published in Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin asked people to give a spoken tour of their own home, then measured their stress hormones over the following days.

How people described their home	What their bodies did
"Cluttered", "unfinished", "still to do"	Flatter cortisol pattern across the day, the profile linked to chronic stress. Mood fell as the day went on.
"Restful", "calm", "finished"	Healthier cortisol pattern. Mood improved through the day.

The effect held after accounting for personality and marriage satisfaction. A second study of about 1,400 adults, median age 54 and mostly homeowners, found clutter weakened people's sense of being at home and lowered their wellbeing. And a paper published in 2025 found clutter dulls the owner's sense of how beautiful their home is, which is why after twenty years you genuinely cannot see the shed the way a visitor can.

The shed is not waiting for you. It is working on you.

PART THREE

What the science says actually helps.

What helps	Why it works
Decide the meaningful things first	Every household in the research did the big furniture and the family pieces first. Once those are settled the rest is sorting.
Know what it is really worth	The endowment effect cuts both ways. Families bin the shed tools that would have sold and agonise over the wall unit that will not. An honest valuation from someone who does not own it removes the guesswork and the guilt.
Send it somewhere it will be used	The strongest finding in the downsizing research: people felt best knowing their things would be used and cared for. A sale or a good donation is not losing the thing. It is finishing the story.
Do not price it yourself	You are the one person in the shire who cannot see the mug for what it is. Let a buyer, an auction house or a contents sale set the number.
Start before the deadline	About two months done properly. The people who did it under time pressure were the ones who called it the hardest thing they had ever done.

TRY THIS

The honest price test.

Before you decide any item is too valuable to let go, ask three questions. They take you out of the owner's chair and put you in the buyer's.

- ☐ If I saw this in a shop window in Bowral tomorrow, with no history attached, what would I pay for it?
- ☐ Would I buy it again today, at that price, for the home I am moving to?
- ☐ If a stranger offered me that price this afternoon, would I be relieved or offended?

Relieved means sell it. Offended means it is worth more to you than to anyone, which is a good reason to keep it and a bad reason to expect a buyer to pay the difference.

NEXT STEPS

Two free ways to find out where your property stands.

Downsize Detail runs estate and contents sales for Southern Highlands families: an honest read on what a home holds, then the selling, the donating and the clearing, with no upfront fee. Start with whichever of these suits you.

FREE · 2 MINUTES · NO OBLIGATION

Get your free property scorecard and personalised report.

Sixteen quick questions about your home and your timeline. You get a score across the five areas that decide what a Highlands home sells for, plus a personalised report on what to fix first.

Go to downsizedetail.com.au and take the Sell For More Scorecard.

FREE · 15 MINUTES · PERSONALISED

Book a free 15 minute personalised video call.

Talk through your property with Downsize Detail and hear what it needs, in what order and roughly what it involves. No forms, no pressure. If it is not for you, you still leave with a plan.

Go to downsizedetail.com.au and book your free 15 minute video call.

Prefer to talk now? Call Downsize Detail on **0434 395 387**.

Bowral, Mittagong, Moss Vale, Robertson and the Southern Highlands.



WHERE THE NUMBERS COME FROM

The research behind this guide.

We only quote figures we can point to. Every study below is published and peer reviewed unless marked otherwise. Local market figures are dated because they move.

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General information for Southern Highlands homeowners, not financial, legal or valuation advice. Market figures are correct at the date shown and will change. Research findings describe averages across the studied groups, not a promise about any individual property. Photography shows Southern Highlands properties prepared by Downsize Detail.