Submission on *Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy*

January 2023

A. Comments

- Perpetual population growth on a finite island is ultimately not possible, desirable or sustainable. Tasmania's Population Strategy needs to focus on identifying the optimal population size and mix to deliver the best possible sustainable outcomes for our collective social, economic and environmental well-being, now and for the future.

- Governments sometimes use population growth as a simple driver for economic activity and growth, and view Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a key indicator of success. However, GDP is a narrow and unreliable measure of overall progress and performance in achieving sustainable well-being outcomes across important community and environmental arenas. As recognised in the Consultation Paper, "economic growth alone does not account for a community's success or progress over time" and "the unprecedented population growth over recent years has come with its challenges". These challenges will only get worse with continued population growth. For example, continued population growth will exacerbate land-use competition and conflicts, increase demands on infrastructure and community services, and place additional pressures and adverse impacts on Tasmania's natural resources, environment and biodiversity.

- Excessive population growth can be expected to degrade and diminish some of Tasmania's outstanding and unique strengths and positive points of difference that distinguish our beautiful island state from other places in Australia and around the world. For example, these include:

    - Tasmania is a beautiful, peaceful and safe place to live and bring up children.
    - Tasmania offers diverse opportunities for quality sustainable living in harmony with nature.
    - Tasmania enjoys a mild temperate climate without extremes of heat or cold, and generally has reliable rainfall which supports productive lands and seas, and a green and pleasant living environment.
    - Tasmania has an outstanding natural environment with beautiful scenery and waterways, vast wilderness areas, globally significant natural and cultural heritage, unique and diverse wildlife, world-class national parks and reserves, and globally exceptional clean air, dark night skies, and (mostly) clean waters.
    - Tasmania is largely self-sufficient in food and clean water, and produces a wide range of quality and high value foods, beverages and other natural products.
    - Tasmania is largely self-sufficient in clean energy from hydro and wind power generation systems.
    - Tasmania is an appealing place for interstate and international visitors, offering a range of attractions and hospitality venues within easy reach of Tasmania's major cities and ports.

- Tasmania's "brand" and international profile rely on maintaining and building the state's reputation for being "clean, green and sustainable".

- Ongoing population growth can be expected to have a range of adverse impacts on quality-of-life attributes that Tasmanians value highly, such as the opportunity to live in a home with a backyard.

- The Consultation Paper provides well-reasoned guidance for adjustment of Tasmania's demographic profile and population mix to achieve a variety of desirable social and community objectives; however it does not address the fundamental question: "What is the optimal population size for Tasmania to achieve the best sustainable social, economic and environmental well-being outcomes?"

- The Consultation Paper is largely focused on demographic attributes of communities and does not provide adequate consideration of population strategy for achieving key environmental, ecological and biodiversity outcomes. Further inputs are required to consider and address this wider range of desired outcomes for a sustainable Tasmania, with additional specific detail provided in the Population Strategy.

- The Strategy should recognise that with sound strategic planning, Tasmania is well positioned to become a world leader in sustainability. For example:

  - Tasmania can provide world-leading science, research and innovation to support the delivery of local, regional and global Sustainable Development Goals.

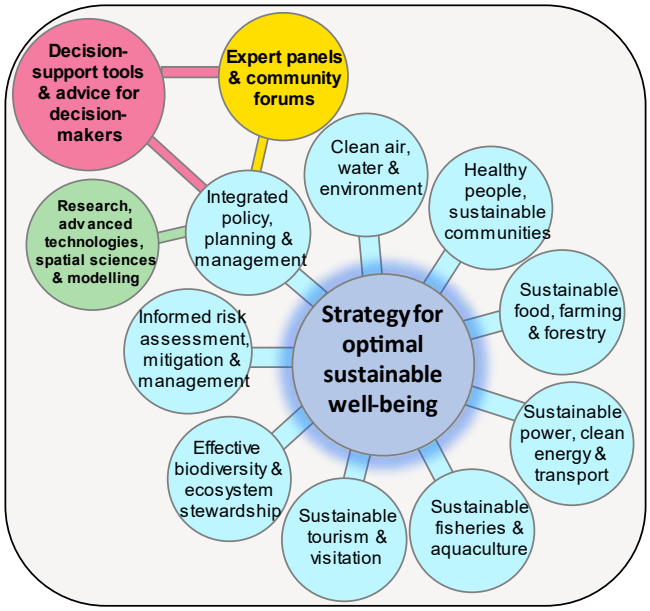
  - Tasmania can provide advanced education courses in sustainability, and demonstrate real-world examples of best practice sustainability in action through on-site visits to leading industry practitioners and providers.

B. Recommendations

1. Tasmania's Population Strategy should include an overarching objective that relates population strategy to the achievement of desired sustainability outcomes for Tasmania, such as: "To guide the appropriate population size and mix to facilitate achievement of the optimal sustainable social, economic and environmental well-being outcomes for Tasmania, now and for the future."

2. The Population Strategy should include a simple, integrated, whole-of-government graphic to communicate the strategic framework for key sustainable well-being outcomes for Tasmania. As an example, see Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Framework for Sustainable Tasmania



Source: modified after Jones (2021) Science for Sustainability: The Paradigm Shift our World Needs. Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere (MAHB), Stanford.

3. Tasmania's Population Strategy should address the fundamental question: "What is the optimal sustainable population size for Tasmania?" to achieve the best possible social, economic and environmental well-being outcomes, now and for the future.

4. As the above question is complex to answer, the Strategy should commit to engaging a reputable independent research institution to undertake the necessary research and modelling to produce an authoritative published report to address this question and provide reliable information and well-founded recommendations to guide the optimal sustainable social, economic and environmental well-being outcomes for Tasmania.

5. Clearly explain the terminology used in the strategy and what is meant by 'sustainable' and 'unsustainable' population / population growth, with examples to illustrate.

6. Clearly recognise and state the need for Tasmania to transition its economy away from a heavy reliance on continuous population growth and towards an optimal stable population appropriate to achieving the best possible sustainable well-being outcomes.

Replace phrases referring to "facilitate sustainable population growth" with phrases that refer to stabilising an optimal population size and mix to facilitate the delivery of long-term sustainable social, economic and environmental well-being outcomes.

7. Include identified key environmental risks and adverse impacts associated with unsustainable population growth. For example, Table 1 lists 14 benefits of population growth and only 6 challenges, with no consideration of environmental and biodiversity impacts associated with population growth (such as loss of native vegetation and habitat for wildlife as a result of land clearing and re-zoning of land to cater for expanding cities, suburbs, communities and population; increasing demand for freshwater resources for domestic and agricultural irrigation etc.)

8. The Population Strategy should include measures and provisions to ensure Tasmania's outstanding and unique natural and environmental values and positive points of difference are not diminished as a direct or indirect result of inappropriate or unsustainable population growth.

9. The Strategy should identify opportunities for strengthening Tasmania's capacity, leadership and influence in sustainability. For example:

    9.1. Establish a multi-disciplinary Science Centre for Sustainability as part of the foreshadowed Science Precinct at Macquarie Point in Hobart. Key aims for the Centre should include: communicate, share and promote advances in scientific research and technology for sustainability; showcase Tasmania's best practice sustainable industries, products and exemplary practice in environmental protection and sustainable management. The appended Mercury Talking Point article ('We're a science state so act like it') provides a brief outline of the case for a Science Centre for Sustainability at Macquarie Point.

    9.2. Expand and grow TAFE and tertiary education course offerings that build on, advance and share Tasmania's strengths, expertise and knowledge in environmental management and sustainability, advanced technologies in clean energy, natural resource management and associated fields.

    9.3. Invest in Tasmania's capacity to host national and international forums, workshops and conferences in sustainability, innovation and advances in environmental management, with associated field trips around regional Tasmania to see real-world examples of innovation and exemplary practice in sustainability.

    9.4. Recognise and facilitate Tasmanian industry leaders who are demonstrating good to exemplary practice in sustainability (e.g. in sustainable food and farming practices, sustainable eco-tourism, protected areas and conservation management etc).

10. The Strategy should include government commitment to address known areas of weakness in sustainable management of Tasmanian natural resources to bring practice into line with internationally recognised best practice standards for sustainability (such as

Marine Stewardship Council standards for sustainable management of key fisheries species, and Forest Stewardship Council standards for sustainable forestry).

11. Please take account of the following articles:

- Science for Sustainability: The Paradigm Shift our World Needs (Jones, 2021)
- When outcomes matter – the adaptive management cycle (Jones, 2015)
- Has the population bomb exploded? (Cribb, 2022)
- 'We're a science state — so act like it' (Jones and Sainsbury, 2020) – see Attachment 1 overleaf).

ATTACHMENT 1. Mercury Talking Point article, 3 September 2020

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2020
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We're a science state so act like it

A science centre at Macquarie Point could put Tasmania at the front of the world's sustainability push, write **Glenys Jones** and **Keith Sainsbury**

THE COVID-19 pandemic has brought a forced halt to business-as-usual in Tasmania, as elsewhere. This pause provides a unique opportunity to reflect on the directions Tasmania could take to secure the best future for our health and wellbeing.

The need for science-savvy leadership and evidence-based policy has never been greater. In her excellent Talking Point, Tasmanian neuroscientist Lila Landowski draws attention to the positive role science can play in shaping a bright future for Tasmania ("The top job we need for success," August 20). Dr Landowski draws attention to the fact Tasmania has the highest number of scientists per capita of any state yet is the only state without a chief scientist, which is needed to address "the big hole in the state's plans for a great future".

She points out science is already an important part of Tasmanian life, with major institutions including CSIRO, IMAS, Antarctic Division, University of Tasmania, and several private companies providing significant employment and a skilled workforce driving world-leading advances.

We share Dr Landowski's view that Tasmania should be building a future where scientific method and critical thinking are a core part of our society, where science empowers society with policies that are evidence-based and where scientific knowledge and understanding arms Tasmanians with the ability to dissect fact from fiction.

To our minds, it makes good sense to build on the strengths Tasmania already has in science and research capabilities and to grow Tasmania's opportunities for leadership in science and sustainability. Science can help inform and guide state strategic planning and policy to create the right conditions for nurturing the best possible sustainable future for our collective community wellbeing.

This includes harnessing science to assist multiple industry sectors to flourish sustainably. Think sustainable food, farming, forestry, fisheries, tourism and so on.

Science can be a catalyst for innovation and excellence, and can help advance Tasmania's opportunities for leadership in key areas. For example, Tasmania has outstanding opportunities for demonstrating leadership and exemplary practice in fields that link and align to the natural world and environmental UN Sustainable Development Goals. Think clean energy (eg sustainable power/clean transport), climate action (ocean/climate research, fire-risk modelling), life on land (global leadership in nature conservation and World Heritage management) and life in water (marine and Antarctic research, sustainable fisheries management). Such leadership strengthens Tasmania's international reputation and credentials for sustainability, enhances Tasmania's marketing brand and, importantly, contributes to community and planetary wellbeing.

At a Hobart Town Hall public meeting some years ago, community leaders were expressing their support for a proposed new science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) centre for Hobart. Former Hobart Lord Mayor Sue Hickey said, "Hobart can be known for being clever and smart with knowledge at our heart". Renowned science broadcaster Robyn Williams put it this way, "The future is in science related to the natural world and how we live. The science is there, the natural world is there. It's time for this town, this state to do something different and lead" (Talking Point, November 17, 2017).

Perhaps more than any other place on Earth, Tasmania has the potential to walk the talk in achieving quality sustainable living in harmony with nature. Tasmania is a natural fit for a Science Centre for Sustainability.

> "TASMANIA HAS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF SCIENTISTS PER CAPITA OF ANY STATE. HARNESS SCIENCE TO ASSIST SUSTAINABLE FOOD, FARMING, FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND TOURISM

We call on the Premier of Tasmania, state and federal ministers for science and technology, science and community leaders, and all stakeholders with an interest in creating Tasmania's optimal sustainable future, to consider the opportunity and benefits of establishing a Science Centre for Sustainability as part of the planned development of a state-of-the art science precinct at Macquarie Point in Hobart. The Science Centre for Sustainability could support government strategic directions, assist key Tasmanian sectors, and involve communities through expert panels, community forums, decision-support tools and advice for informed decision-making. Such a centre would play a valuable role in community life and would contribute to forging the best possible sustainable future for Tasmania. We encourage the Macquarie Point Development Corporation to consider this concept and engage in discussions with others as appropriate with a view to developing a realistic plan.

MAKE WAY: Tasmania's strength in energy, Antarctic science, fisheries and food can help the state flourish. Inset, Macquarie Point.

Glenys Jones has a background in natural sciences, research and policy and 30 years' experience in government, universities, CSIRO and private sector. She is a University of Tasmania associate (Geography & Spatial Sciences).

Keith Sainsbury is Associate Professor of Marine Systems Science at the Institute of Antarctic Studies, a member of the Marine Stewardship Council's Technical Advisory Board and managing director of a consultancy advising on sustainable fisheries management. He was a CSIRO senior principal researcher. The views here are their own and not necessarily the views of any other entity.

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