

## Submission on the Tasmanian Government's Consultation Paper

### "Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy"

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Although I am a UTAS Adjunct Professor, this is a personal submission, and cannot be considered as representing a view of UTAS, official or otherwise.

I hope you find my comments useful in framing and implementing population policies. However, I must observe that it seems a conflict to have population policies in the hands of a body named the "Department of State Growth". It demonstrates a bias toward continuous growth, whereas such a view is not sustainable, rather, it is destructive over the long term.

Overall, this consultation paper is disappointing and far too narrow in its views for the future of our state. There is an over-riding focus on economic development and growth as defined by increase in GDP and population. Businesses favour an increase in GDP and population because they increase their income and profits, but only an increase in *per capita* GDP benefits the population. Yet, this concept is ignored in the Consultation Paper. The Paper should ask – how can we increase the *per capita* size of the economy? Table 1 concentrates on Benefits of population growth (16 dot points), and minimizes the Challenges (only 6 dot points). This is a very unbalanced, unrealistic view. Nowhere is another reality of population growth mentioned: infrastructure always lags the growth in numbers of people, thus disadvantaging both existing residents and especially new arrivals. Compared to the rest of Australia, Tasmanians are already under-resourced and their salaries are lower. Population growth alone will only make this worse. How will these things be dealt with?

Continuous growth is by definition, not ecologically sustainable. The government has a population target of 650,000 (Figure 2): instead, it should have a population limit. Any sane population strategy must address the question of how many people can be sustainably supported (and, of course at what level – 1<sup>st</sup> World?, 3<sup>rd</sup> World?). The Consultation Paper fails to do this. Water supply is a key issue, yet is not mentioned. Will there be enough water for any planned population level? Will agricultural use of water need to be reduced to provide for population increase? Again, this is ignored. The loss of prime agricultural land to development required for increased population and to erosion is not mentioned either. Will Tasmania be able to feed its own future population, let alone have surplus to export to the mainland and the world?

Climate change is virtually ignored in the Consultation Paper. How will climate change affect the number of humans that can live sustainably in Tasmania? Again, this is a subject that is not mentioned. What effect will sea-level rise resulting from climate change have on the area of Tasmania that will be livable? How many coastal homes, sheds, agricultural areas and other facilities will need to be relocated or lost altogether? These things will impact many people, and reduce the number of people who can live in Tasmania, yet they are not mentioned. Experts predict more and increasingly severe bushfires due to climate change, and this will have a major impact on many aspects of life in Tasmania, including the size of the human population that is ecologically sustainable. This is another subject that is not included in the Consultation Paper. Adaptation to and recovery from the impacts of climate change will be very expensive for both governments and the population in general. This will mean less money for positive spending on things like health, education, infrastructure for new arrivals, etc., which will reduce the size of the population that is sustainable.

Growth in urban populations in Tasmania must be based on better public transport, not only within the city proper, but also including the surrounding 'bedroom communities' of commuters. For example, light rail along the existing rail corridor in Hobart's northern suburbs is essential, and ultimately, it should be extended to New Norfolk.

Unfortunately, the Government has produced an inadequate Consultation Paper with many omissions and flaws. One can only hope that it's Population Policies will address these problems.