

Submission on Tasmania's Population Growth

Over the past two decades there has been a marked increase in the population of Tasmania with significant numbers choosing to settle on the island for various reasons.

This has resulted in many issues such as a lack of affordable housing and medical services as well as traffic congestion.

Reasons for population growth are not confined to the attractiveness of island life, but are significantly influenced by the justified perception that Tasmania is, and increasingly will be, less affected by climate change than other parts of Australia and the world. Many of the "climate change refugees" have found that they are able to continue working from home, often at a long distance from their work-base, and Covid increased the popularity of this way of life. These factors have resulted in an influx of talented and creative young people.

New residents are likely to come with different perspectives from those of many Tasmanians who have occupied land and housing for many generations. Therefore, in looking at population growth, it is important to place importance on the diverse values that relatively new residents may bring, even where they may differ from the traditional attitudes of the Tasmanian "establishment".

The first question that must be considered is how to manage population growth.

No society, especially an island community, can be sustainable where there is uncontrolled growth – the resources of the island are finite and must be a primary consideration. Tasmania is valued for its natural heritage, waterways, wild places and relatively small population. With uncontrolled growth this will inevitably change and with it the quality of life for the people, as well as the degradation of the natural environment, unless it is managed with an inclusive and transparent approach.

Land use planning should include the productive use of rural land for horticulture and agriculture, rather than simply for its "lifestyle" values, as appears to be happening in rural areas, especially close to cities.

Local food production increases the availability of healthy food and decreases "food miles" and therefore greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Population policies should therefore include measures to maintain and increase local horticultural and agricultural production.

Analysis of the effects of population growth must include consideration of additional pressure on recreational and conservation areas, and increased resources will be needed for fire management. The potential costs of more intensive usage of existing infrastructure, as well as the increased need for more public services including health, education and housing must be considered.

There appears to have been a growing trend towards residential use of rural land, especially within a reasonable distance of a city, and this appears to be resulting in suburban subdivisions that have no relationship with the established communities that they adjoin. They do not appear to have been designed with active transport and connectivity in mind.

I will concentrate on the region south of Hobart because it is the area with which I am most familiar.

Transport in rural areas

Tasmania has a very dispersed population, with many small land titles, especially in the south of the state. Land with water and mountain views is highly desirable and often such land, used for residential purposes, is distant from existing settlements and depends on local gravel roads for access. This requires residents to have at least one car because there is little if any community transport. At present there is limited availability of cars through Community Transport Services Tasmania (CTST), to transport people for health care and other essential needs. Many live in social isolation and due to lack of suitable housing elsewhere do not have the choice to move. In the event of limited supplies of petrol many will be unable to leave their homes. Young people are at a disadvantage where they cannot drive, cannot afford a car or for any reason are unable to reach a town or the city of Hobart. School buses enable only transport to schools, unlike in other places such as Hobart where children travel to school on Metro bus services.

Previous health surveys in the Huon Valley have revealed that a primary concern for those commenting on the health needs of the community focused on transport.

In thinking about population growth, transport must be a primary consideration. Services, especially care services, ambulance and fire services become more costly as the dispersed rural population increases. Also, at present a large proportion of Tasmania's GHG emissions are from transport, so, from an environmental perspective, improvement of transport services, especially in rural areas where there is so little coverage must be a priority.

Linking those living in rural communities to major bus routes would enable those who are unable to drive themselves to travel from home to a major centre. Population growth will result in issues of road safety, congestion in Hobart and poor health outcomes for residents unless local community transport is part of the strategy.

Recommendation

The population growth strategy must place connectivity around the state as a matter of great importance. Modern systems of community transport that result in a mode-shift from cars to local shared transport should be implemented sooner rather than later. The health benefits of more active transport in local areas are also important and will require appropriate infrastructure.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and I look forward to learning more about the progress of Tasmania's Population Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

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