

Dear Review/Government

I would like to make a brief submission to the Review “Refreshing Tasmania’s Population Strategy”.

I have recently retired from my career as an R&D professional – leading and managing R&D in agriculture nationally, and my wife and I have moved to Tasmania after a long period based in northern NSW.

I was born and grew up in Tasmania.

I have learned about PMAT (Planning Matters Alliance Tasmania) and have been impressed by their approach to encouraging public consideration of planning matters in the state. For my key points I completely support their Key Concerns and Recommendations (included below), but would like to add brief comment of my own.

Since moving back here 6 months ago, several issues relevant to population strategy have been very obvious:

- The state is struggling to maintain infrastructure and services consistent with the level one should expect as a state in one of the wealthiest countries on the planet. Health, education and aged care services are obviously under continual pressure, and the public discussion seems focussed simply on catching up, or at least reducing the gaps to what would be normal expectations.
- Transport seems also to be a problem – works on the Midland Highway seem to have been stationary for many years, yet this is the primary land connection for the entire state.
- Planning around housing and services around major population centres seems limited at best – with high or complete reliance on limited road services for access to work, services, shopping etc
- Hobart in particular is clearly in need of massive upgrading of public transport
- Impacts on the natural environment of any developments seem to have very limited consideration, despite the fact that nature and a slow, less crowded lifestyle, is touted as (and I am sure is) the primary attraction of the state for visitors and residents
- I am sure there are departments, people and local and overseas experience in knowing the rates of development of infrastructure etc required to keep pace with population – but at least superficially, these requirements seem to be falling behind the population growth that has occurred
- There is no obvious reason to have more people – why not have a higher quality of life for those living here and visiting? In terms of tourism, extract greater value through design and quality.
- A zero growth, replenishment of the natural and built environment should be very carefully considered.
- Simply talking as if population growth is automatically a good thing seems just cargo-cult thinking.
- And finally, what exactly would the government do to manage any population strategy – given that recent growth has probably been largely driven by leveraging relatively lower costs of living for baby boomers and overseas students.
- The strategy of government should be to focus on maximising quality of life.

And the PMAT submission points are very worthwhile:

PMAT’s key concerns:

1. The notion of perpetual growth on a finite island.
2. No direct relationship between growth and well-being.
3. Lack of community support for continuing population growth.
4. Fails to address what is Tasmania's optimal population size.
5. Fails to outline where the population growth will occur.
6. Conservative population projections.
7. Does Tasmania have enough land to do what the Government wants?
8. Narrow view on the disadvantages of population growth e.g. diminishing democracy, dismantling strategic planning, impacts on cultural heritage, loss of bushland, scenic landscapes and biodiversity, impacts on urban amenity, quality of life, liveability and well-being; increased traffic congestion and road safety considerations; increased land use conflict; impacts on urban water supplies, freshwater ecosystems and resources including river health; undermines Tasmania's brand, loss of agricultural land, increased pressure on waste management, increased inequality, increased use pressure on recreational and protected areas, increased pressure re fire management, increased pressure on sewerage systems and wastewater and the enormous cost of new infrastructure and its maintenance, and
9. Further stress on the environment as well as public services including health, education, housing and associated infrastructure costs.

PMAT's key recommendations:

1. Tasmania should transition its economy from a reliance on continuous population growth towards an optimal stable population to achieve the best possible sustainable social, environmental, cultural, economic and well-being outcomes. The Strategy should commit to engaging an independent academic research institution to determine how this could be achieved. The outcomes or well-being indicators could be linked to State of the Environment reporting.
2. The Strategy should recognise that it is better to determine a long-term sustainable population size rather than by picking an arbitrary population growth number.
3. The Tasmanian Government should ensure it has a mandate for promoting continued population growth.
4. Establish a dedicated Planning Department.
5. Reinstate the State Architect and introduce a design policy for high-quality urban design.
6. Reinstate the role of local Councils as 'place shapers' underpinning community well-being and enriching our cultural and natural heritage, lifestyle and democracy.
7. Recognise that with sound strategic planning, Tasmania is well-placed to become a world leader in sustainability.
8. Clearly define the terminology used in the Strategy.
9. The Strategy must identify the environmental risks and negative impacts associated with unsustainable population growth.
10. The Tasmanian Government should ask the Federal Government to implement a National Population Policy which aims to stabilise Australia's population as soon as possible.
11. The Strategy should consider /question the notion that reaching population targets early is a sign of success, and
12. There should be a moratorium on Government efforts to actively promote migration to Tasmania pending:

- Provision of clear evidence demonstrating that population growth benefits individuals and communities;
- Definition of an optimal, sustainable stable population size for Tasmania; and
- Evidence that a clear majority of Tasmanians support continuing population growth.

Kind regards

Robert Banks

Dr Robert Banks