



tasmanian conservation trust inc

Department of State Growth

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5 March 2023

Submission to the Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy

These comments are not to be taken as a direct response to the "Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy Consultation Paper" but as standalone comments worthy of serious consideration and response of the State Government.

The existing Population Growth Strategy seems to have been produced solely to justify and plot a pathway to the state government's arbitrary target of having a population of 650,000 people in Tasmania by 2050. The 'Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy Consultation Paper' is justified, in the first paragraph of the introduction (page 2), as wanting to build on the success of having "reached the 2030 population milestone eight years ahead of target". It then states that a "refreshed Population Strategy will support this".

One reason for not commenting on "Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy Consultation Paper" is that the opening paragraph makes it entirely unclear whether those responding are being asked to comment on the 2015 "Population Growth Strategy" as well as the "Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy". I certainly do not intend to make a detailed submission on the 2015 document on the off chance that this was the government's intention.

Another reason for not commenting on "Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy Consultation Paper" is that it is dishonestly seeking those who respond to "build on this success", meaning to build on population growth that has occurred even more rapidly than the previous strategy had anticipated. An honest approach would have involved asking the Tasmanian community what their views on population are without presenting the recent growth as a success to be built upon. Many Tasmanians would be expected to not see a population of 650,000 by 2050 as a positive outcome and these people would have been discouraged from responding by the introductory comments quoted above.

Another reason for not commenting on "Refreshing Tasmania's Population Strategy Consultation Paper" is that while it identifies some important structural issues with Tasmania's population – such as the aging of the population and the increasing

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proportion of people not of working age as a proportion of those who are of working age – there is no critical analysis provided of what has caused these developments since the release of the 2015 Strategy. It seems that the state government has entirely mismanaged the population changes since 2015 so that it has exacerbated these structural problems. The State Government's overwhelming focus on increasing the total population has helped bring about these structural problems or at least has distracted it from noticing and addressing them.

Another reason for not commenting on “Refreshing Tasmania’s Population Strategy Consultation Paper” is the entire document addresses a single goal “To better balance our currently aging population, an aim is to increase the proportion of people aged between 0 and 44” and four objectives designed to meet this goal.

This goal and the four objectives are plucked out of nowhere, with no attempt to justify why these are chosen or even to prompt responders to offer alternatives. It is simply unfair and dishonest to force a particular slant on a key policy (increasing the 0 to 44 age bracket) and expect people to respond unthinkingly.

As state before, no attempt has been made to describe the casual reasons for the structural problems developing (even though some are suggested by the Government's own Department of Treasury – see below). Why does Tasmania have an in balance between the younger and older persons? Understanding the cause of the problem logically would assist in understanding the possible solutions.

An intellectually fair and balanced approach would also have asked ‘can we address the structural problems while not having such rapid population growth or not having any growth?’ Sadly, no alternatives have been considered.

Another reason for not commenting on “Refreshing Tasmania’s Population Strategy Consultation Paper” is that the four objectives are clearly addressing important issues but in each case the policy statement ends with no clear commitment.

Objective 1 dealing with improving liveability concludes by stating:

The Population Strategy will consider practical opportunities and localised approaches, with an interest in fostering collaboration between communities that are dealing with similar challenges. For instance, areas with older populations, or those trying to foster a greater sense of belonging for recently arrived community members.

There is no actual actions stated, it just states that the strategy will “consider practical opportunities and localised approaches” and will foster “collaboration between communities that are dealing with similar challenges”.

Objective 2 dealing with removing apparent barriers to having and raising children concludes by stating:

The Population Strategy will consider policies which permit and encourage women to stay in the labour force when they have children; including for instance, ways to increase access to affordable, quality childcare, family friendly workplaces, gender equity, and work/life balance policies. Working with the Australian and local governments along with nongovernment entities and communities where possible will be central to our success.

Again, there is no actual actions stated, it just states that the strategy will “consider policies which permit and encourage women to stay in the labour force when they have children” and suggests looking at “ways to increase access to affordable, quality childcare, family friendly workplaces, gender equity, and work/life balance policies” without committing to any specific measure to do this.

Objective 3 dealing with migration concludes by stating:

The Population Strategy will consider how to strengthen attraction and retention of working age and family formation age groups. Increasing community members' sense of belonging will be key to successful settlement and more broadly for Tasmanian's wellbeing. It is acknowledged that stories of belonging are not complete without recognising the voices of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and their continuous custodianship of country and culture.

Again, there is no actual actions stated, it just states that the strategy will “consider how to strengthen attraction and retention of working age and family formation age groups” and suggests “Increasing community members' sense of belonging” without getting to specifics about how that is achieved.

Objective 4 Manage a structurally ageing population is the odd one out as it doesn't directly address the stated goal of the “Refreshing” document i.e. “to increase the proportion of people aged between 0 to 44 years”. Strangely it seeks to “embrace the economic and social opportunities of an ageing population” which seems to actually be counter to the goal of addressing the population in balance or at least not relevant to it.

Putting aside Objective 4, the other three objectives seem to show a lack of commitment from the state government to actions on what appear to be quite important issues. It is not far fetched to conclude the state government is not serious about addressing these problems. This would be consistent with its failure to attempt to identify the reasons for the structural problems developing. The explanation for this strange lack of commitment from the state government is that it wants the “Refreshing” document to be used solely to justify its population target rather than a sincere attempt to address these issues. Why should I comment in detail on each objective when the state government has not committed to any specific deliverable actions.

Another reason for not commenting on “Refreshing Tasmania’s Population Strategy Consultation Paper” is the failure of that document to reference and build on the “2019 Population Projections – Department of Treasury and Finance” (along with Treasury's 2022 interim rebased population projections). One key difference between the two documents is that Treasury is looking at actual population change in the past and determining key causal factors in those changes and using these as the basis for a range of three possible projections of future population. Just two key facts from the 2019 Treasury document demand to be highlighted.

On page 4 of the 2019 Population Projections document, it states:

In addition to this there is a consistent trend of Tasmania losing younger persons of reproductive age, and gaining older persons. Both these trends produce a situation whereby natural population increase (number of births less number of deaths) declines and the State is therefore more dependent on migration to support population growth. (page 4)

While it was not the purpose of the Treasury document to investigate the “trend of Tasmania losing younger persons of reproductive age, and gaining older persons” it stands out as a subject the state government ought to have addressed but did not.

The other key population facts included in the 2019 Population Projections document, that are worth highlighting here, are the actual regional changes of population from 1992 to 2017 and the projections from 2017 to 2042 (Chart 5, page 9). It is noted that:

- the population of the west and north west of Tasmania has stayed virtually unchanged for 25 years and the chart shows a consistent decline in this region between about 2010 and 2017. The projection, summarized by Treasury as “relatively steady over the projection period” actually shows a slow and consistent decline over the 25 years from 2017 to 2042.
- The Launceston and north east region shows a near perfect flatlining for the 25 years from 2017 to 2042.
- In contrast, almost all the actual and projected growth statewide is in the Hobart and South east of Tasmania.

These dramatic regional patterns do not warrant any mention in the “Refreshing” document.

Yours sincerely,



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