



Tasmania's future – is it Populate or perish?

AS the debate rages about what population growth means for Australia, how many Tasmanians have stopped to think about what we want as a state?

The expression populate or perish – a good old fashioned catch cry for population growth, but is possibly one that has validity with Tasmania when the statistics are looked at.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has forecast that Tasmania will have the country's slowest rate of population growth over the next 25 years.

The ABS estimated that population grew in 2008-09 by 5,400 people to 503,300, an increase of 1.1% for the year. The lowest rate of any state or territory.

Tasmania has 2.3% of Australia's population.

At June 2009, the population density of Tasmania was 7.4 people per square kilometer (sq km). The capital city of greater Hobart had a population density of 160 people per sq km, much lower than Australian capital cities combined (370 people per sq km)

As a state it is hard to see how we can manage to provide all the services and benefits that we experience now with a 1.1% population growth rate.

As a community we need to ask ourselves a series of questions about our future and what we want to provide to the next generations.

Questions such as do we want Tasmania to grow both in terms of population and economic growth?

With the potential population of 36 million by 2050 nationally – what is the percentage that may come to Tasmania and how do we attract them?

With the creation of new industries, such as the NBN that potentially means a slight increase in our population, in turn means greater demand for houses and services – how do we address this increase in demand?

Right now we have Australia's fastest ageing population and one of the most dispersed – how do we address demographic change and do we want to actively change the existing Tasmanian population profile?

Combined with questions about future growth we know that our current population is steady at around 500,000 which means that it is harder to argue for increasing services and infrastructure provision which don't meet economies of scale.

In addition, we need over 3,000 houses statewide to meet housing demand at the same time as affordability is looking increasingly fragile.

We know that as we drive to work, congestion by Hobart and Launceston standards is increasing.

We all talk about livability and sustainability but what does that actually mean?

Does it mean that we want no change, no population growth in this state?

If so how can we continue to ensure employment growth and a drop in the unemployment rate of 6.5%.

How do we justify the call for increased infrastructure for a population of 500,000 – whether that be more health facilities, improved roads, more public transport such as ferries and light rail?

A central theme amongst the many commentators on population growth is the need for a plan – a plan for better, progressive livable cities.

Population growth and planning are integral and intertwined.

In a Tasmanian perspective it's about having a strategic plan which takes into account population growth within a setting of our infrastructure, economic, social and environmental needs.

Population growth is firmly centred around urban areas, our cities – greater Hobart and Launceston.

It's about being able to address the question of growth at the same time as maintaining people's living standards, the aspects that Tasmanians love – shorter travelling times, being able to afford a house, being able to send your children to a school close to home.

As a community we need to work out what we want and what we need to achieve it.

The Property Council sees that population growth is fundamental to ensuring that Tasmania continues to economically grow, to provide the jobs for our children, to provide the services which our community needs, to maintain the living standards that many of us enjoy and extend those standards to those who are excluded.

But we need a plan to manage that growth.

As with many issues facing this State , the government and the community has not defined what we need and how we actually get it.

Nor has the state government set out a how it will directly influence demographic, social and economic change.

In this policy vacuum, not withstanding the Tasmanian Demographic Change Advisory Council, the Property Council is holding the inaugural Growth Summit and has amongst other well known speakers, Bernard Salt, leading demographer, Brian Haratis from Macroplan and Telstra CEO David Thodey to talk about some of the issues which we need to address as a state, as a nation and as a community.

Its about starting the discussion in the community, its about providing goals for our future, its about growing our state.

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