

Population growth strategy needs to

In order to entice more people to move to Tasmania we need a better understanding of migration, writes **Dr Lisa Denny**

LIKE many regions in the developed world experiencing population ageing, the Tasmanian government's mitigation strategy has been to focus on population growth, and the assumed economic benefits associated with population growth, to address the perceived fiscal challenges presented by an ageing population.

Tasmania's Population Growth Strategy: 650,000 people by 2050, launched in 2015 (disclosure: I provided advice to the Tasmanian

government at the time), includes three key pillars, made up of 52 initiatives – (i) job creation and workforce development, (ii) migration and (iii) liveability, with the overall aim to attract people to move to Tasmania and retain Tasmanians in the state.

Despite the three pillars, much

of the proactive effort has been on migration and promoting the state's lifestyle as the best place to live and work and raise a family.

It could be said that this approach successfully achieved the intended outcomes.

Until 2018, Tasmania's

population grew at its highest rates this century, driven by both interstate and overseas migration, accounting for around 80 per cent of the growth. However, growth started to slow in 2019 as arrivals to the state began to decline and departures from the state increased, largely explained by our relative housing affordability (or lack thereof).

Since the start of the Covid-19 global pandemic in the first quarter of 2020, discussion and debate about the potential

impact on migration patterns and long-term trends in Australia has been prominent, particularly in relation to lifestyle and where people want to live.

Given that Tasmania's population growth since the pandemic has been driven by natural increase (more births than deaths), overseas migration for Australia continues to be negative and that the true volume of interstate migration is skewed by the impact of the mass vaccination rollout, the 2015

Tasmanian Population Growth Strategy is now obsolete as it stands and a comprehensive review is warranted.

While previous marketing endeavours to grow the population through migration were successful, they also came at a cost. Research out of the Australian Government's Centre for Population finds that "Relative property prices in states and territories appear to have a greater influence than relative unemployment rates on interstate migration.

involve attracting people we 'need'

A 5 per cent increase in property prices will increase the number of people migrating out of that state by 1.0 per cent."

When Tasmania's housing relative affordability began to decline in 2018, so too did net migration for the state, because the government failed to plan for that growth.

The Tasmanian government also failed to target the migrants it needs most. Touting our enviable lifestyle may attract the low hanging fruit but it also has

the potential to increase the demands on already stretched public services and infrastructure. Without a corresponding increase in the provision of these services and infrastructure, the liveability of Tasmania – our competitive edge – is harmed, not just for attracting migrants, but for retaining Tasmanians.

While the Centre for Population reports that the top reported drivers behind interstate migration in Australia are family reasons (35 per cent) followed closely

by employment reasons (30 per cent), research also shows that the decision to move interstate or overseas is a personal one influenced by a multitude, and conflation, of other factors such as partner's jobs, housing, schooling and lifestyle to name a few. However, those seeking lifestyle advantages tend to relocate to regions within their own state.

Previous research has also shown that the Tasmanian diaspora will only return to the state if the provision of health

and education services meet their expectations, and that wage parity is within acceptable levels.

Given that the Tasmanian Population Growth Strategy has not been reviewed since 2018 (according to the Department of State Growth website) and the critical shortage of a range of qualified and experienced workers impacting the provision of key public services and infrastructure, which in turn impacts the potential for population growth, a

comprehensive review of the Population Strategy needs to be undertaken.

Tasmania has established itself as an enviable place to live as for many, it has a strong brand, and great potential. However, a strategy around 'growth' needs to be inclusive and needs to move beyond marketing that lifestyle and the risks it presents. The strategy needs to move to the next level and prioritise its efforts to attract and retain those people we *need* in the state, for Tasmania and

Tasmanians. To do that, it may need to strategically target people who may not have previously considered Tasmania as a place to live and work and raise a family. And to do that, it will need a much greater understanding of the theories of migration and the anthropological differences in what constitutes a good life, success and happiness.
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