

Lifestyle still driving force behind growth

By BILL HOFFMAN

THE Sunshine Coast has grown at a rate of 3.1% a year for the past five years, a trend which, if it continued, would see its population double in just 22 years.

New Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show Australia grew nationally by more than a million people in the past two and a half years alone, one year less than it took to add the previous million.

The Sunshine Coast council has estimated, taking into account SEQ Regional Plan projections and locked in development approvals, real growth to 2031 will be about 54% on today's Coast population of 330,000 taking it to 510,000.

The State Government has nominated as minimums the 70,500 people it wants accommodated at master planned areas at Palmview, Caloundra South and Maroochydore with a further 75,000 to be located through infill of existing communities.

Sunshine Coast Environment Council manager Narelle McCarthy said mandatory growth numbers should be removed from planning documents.

UDIA Sunshine Coast president Mark Van Wyk said his industry had never advocated unchecked growth.

He said unmanaged populations would reach saturation point.

"Is our economic make-up sufficient to allow a growth pause?" he said.

A little over two years ago, Sunshine Coast Council parks and gardens staffer Jason Sheriff was managing a bearing company in his home town in country Victoria and enduring "cold, rainy winters".

His desire for a lifestyle change increased the Coast's population by three, a deci-



LIFESTYLER: Despite the lack of Australia Rules coverage Jason Sheriff is glad he moved from Victoria to the Sunshine Coast.

PHOTO: JOHN MCCUTCHEON/192159

sion about which he has no concerns, despite still being unable to afford a house for his family which includes wife Stacey, a Sunshine Coast Council health inspector, and their four-year-old daughter.

They sold their four-bedroom home in Morwell for \$290,000 but could find nothing of a comparable price here. Jason retrained as a horticulturalist at Nambour TAFE and obtained the tickets necessary to secure, through a labour hire company, his present part-time job at council.

A keen Australian Football player, he now coaches Noosa AFL's reserve grade side and says through footy he continually bumps into fellow Victorians.

"I'm glad we made the

move," Jason said yesterday. "You don't get as much Rules coverage but the lifestyle's great, I get to work outside and there is so much

more to do here compared to where I'm from."

That desire for a new lifestyle is helping fuel growth on the Coast. The Sunshine Coast growth rate outstrips rates for Australia (1.8%) and Queensland which has absorbed 29% of national population growth, adding 100,000 new citizens a year for the past five years.

Peak resident group OSCAR has called on council to re-affirm its commitment - made in its submission to the

SEQ Regional Plan - that the Coast's ability to grow should be measured against identifiable constraints rather than mandatory targets including in master-planned areas.

Spokesman Ian Christesen said projected growth to 510,000 should be challenged by the new regional plan being developed.

Mayor Bob Abbot, this week named on a national sustainable population advisory panel set up by Julia Gillard and chaired by former NSW premier Bob Carr, said he wanted population numbers in the master-planned to be considered maximums rather than the minimums decreed by state planning minister Stirling Hinchliffe.



REALITIES: Rob Walford.

Lease hike for rescue helicopter

DESPITE suffering a \$1.5 million operating deficit last year the AGL Sunshine Coast Rescue Helicopter Service has accepted council's decision to more than double its lease at Sunshine Coast Airport.

Rescue helicopter CEO Rob Walford said yesterday the lease increase from about \$20,000 to more than \$50,000 a year was part of a rent review all airport tenants were going through.

"We're acutely aware that all airports nationally are going through change to reflect commercial reality," he said.

"Other services elsewhere like ours are experiencing the same thing."

Mr Walford said the helicopter service had sought an extension of its lease and the rent review had been part of that process.

He said council was "very generous" to the organisation, giving it an annual grant and contributing towards operational costs each year, including assistance with fuel for which the helicopter service was appreciative.

It was now negotiating with councillors, airport management and council to define ongoing support as part of the lease extension process.

"We're not getting our knickers in a knot (over the rent increase)," Mr Walford said.

"We are working positively with council to get the support structure in place."

He said among things being explored was the potential to offer council staff the chance to donate to the rescue service through a payroll deduction scheme.



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