

NeoVox Australia

Population growth threatens resident's lifestyles

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Brooke Potter, Bachelor of Journalism

The population of Australia's Sunshine Coast is growing at one of the fastest rates in the region, risking the environment and sustainable standards of living.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported South-East Queensland accounted for more than two thirds of Queensland's total growth for the period of June 2007 to June 2008.

Organisation of the Sunshine Coast Associations of Residents (OSCAR) treasurer Wayne Knibb said many Sunshine Coast residents see rampant population growth as a threat to their values.

"The vast majority of residents here have made it abundantly clear in surveys conducted by the state and in local government elections that they value the environment, its sustainability, and their liveability," Mr Knibb said.

Mr Knibb describes a sustainable lifestyle as not the maximum population we can have before a crash, but the maximum population we can have while still enjoying the things we value without stress and social dysfunction.

"At some point population growth, if unchecked, will destroy the things that make the Sunshine Coast the most desirable region in South-East Queensland," Mr Knibb said.

OSCAR president Johanne Wright said the rapid population growth the Sunshine Coast has had is already threatening the Coast lifestyle.

"Infrastructure has not kept pace and we have lost biodiversity, important [wildlife] habitat and have not had the economic strategies in place to provide sufficient jobs," Ms Wright said.

"We are facing overcrowding on beaches, traffic congestion and impacts on visual and other amenities."

Planning strategist Paul Summers said the issue was about measuring the impact of development in environmental, economic and social terms, and the desires of local communities.

"We grow our cities and seaboard areas at rates, and to scales, that are beyond the capacity of the natural environment to cope with and our governments to service," Mr Summers said.

"At the same time we try to prop- up rural and regional communities.

"The result is that we treat the symptoms of the problem in each location, without curing the disease."

Mr Summers said spatial distribution would provide our regional and rural communities with growth, including public and private sector investment, jobs and infrastructure that make these locations attractive to live, relieving the strain on our cities.

"Spatially re-distributing the growth eases the pain in all areas," Mr Summers said.

University of the Sunshine Coast lecturer of environmental economics Graham Ashford said there is no need to place impractical limits on the movement of people into the Sunshine Coast.

"I think what is far more important is considering how future growth should be accommodate in the region through appropriate planning," Mr Ashford said.

"Foremost in this regard would be pro-active planning for water use, transportation, energy use and climate change adaptation and mitigation."

Mr Ashford said population could be seen as a way to diversify our economy, which would further enhance our resilience to economic shocks.



"Population growth should be seen as a way of diversifying our Sunshine Coast economy to attract and retain a greater diversity of business types that would allow many of the university graduates from the area to return to the area for their employment," Mr Ashford said.

Queensland Conservation Council president Simon Baltais said population growth is not mandatory to build a successful community, and many successful nations on the planet have small populations and have low, no and negative growth.

"Sadly, we invest heavily in roads and such like to keep pace with growth," Mr Baltais said.

"Imagine what Queensland would be like if we had low growth, and therefore had the opportunity to re-invest coal royalties back into pension funds and or infrastructure such as education and health."

Mr Baltais suggests the Sunshine Coast should invest in the protection of its natural resources.

"These underpin a healthy economy and community and will ensure the Sunshine Coast will have a vibrant economy based on a sustainable industry," Mr Baltais said.

University of the Sunshine Coast lecturer of integrated environment management Sonia Marshall believes a sustainable population strategy must be developed based on principles of sustainability to manage growth.

"The [South-East Queensland Regional Plan](#) should be amended as it currently ignores carrying capacity by imposing arbitrary dwelling and population targets," Ms Marshall said.

"Greater recognition of the symptoms of population growth, such as climate change, is needed on every level to provide a holistic and sustainable approach to managing this complex issue."

The Sunshine Coast Regional Council implemented the [Sunshine Coast Biodiversity Strategy 2010-2020](#), which aims to protect and enhance the region's biodiversity by involving all levels of the community.

The long-term goals of the strategy include ensuring the region's biodiversity is resilient to climate change, building green infrastructure and making sure Council plans are in line with the community's vision for the future of the Sunshine Coast.

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