



Review of Regional Migration Settings Discussion Paper

University of Tasmania Submission
26 July 2024

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TASMANIA 

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The University of Tasmania is pleased to provide this submission to the Review of Regional Migration Settings Discussion Paper, and we welcome the Australian Government's commitment to developing policies and migration settings which support and enhance regional migration.

Effective regional migration is critical for thriving and prosperous regions, and Australia's migration system needs to include strategies to attract and retain migrants within regions to strengthen local economies and distribute national population growth.

Specific to our university's local settings, the Tasmanian Government's recent Population Policyⁱ highlights the importance of maintaining international migration to sustain population growth, mitigate structural aging and meet the state's future workforce needs. The Tasmanian Population Policy notes that international migration will be the main driver of balanced population growth for the state which is critical to the economic and social wellbeing of Tasmania.

We would welcome the opportunity for a further discussion on the detail provided within this submission.

International students are critical for regional settings, and regional migration and international education policies should be aligned for maximum regional benefit.

We note that the Discussion Paper considers international student visa settings as out of scope, and though the current policy environment for international education is complex, our position is that initiatives to attract and retain international students to regions should not be out of scope when setting regional migration strategies or policies.

International student populations are crucially important for regional settings, and they can play a key role in maintaining population growth and filling skills shortages.

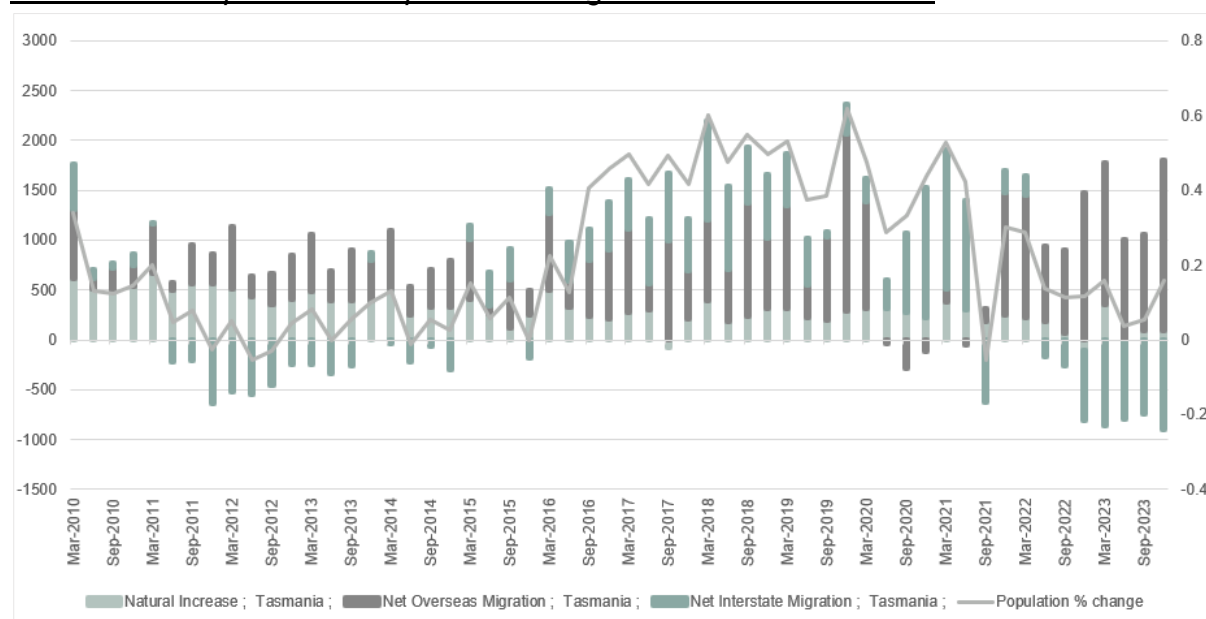
In Tasmania, the rate of population growth is declining, and significant international migration will be required to meet the state government's target of a population of 650,000 by 2050.

In addition to a declining population, Tasmania has an ageing population which will result in fewer young people available to fill workforce gaps. Tasmania's shrinking workforce has the potential to hinder economic growth and reduce the state's ability to attract and retain industry and business.

Chart One: Components of Population Change in Tasmania 2010 – 2023, demonstrates Tasmania's slowing population growth. Tasmania's annual population growth rate in 2023 was 0.41% - the lowest of all states and territoriesⁱⁱ.

During this period, the population growth in Tasmania is entirely attributable to international migration – demonstrating the important and sustained contribution international migration makes to the Tasmanian population.

Chart One: Components of Population Change in Tasmania 2010-2023



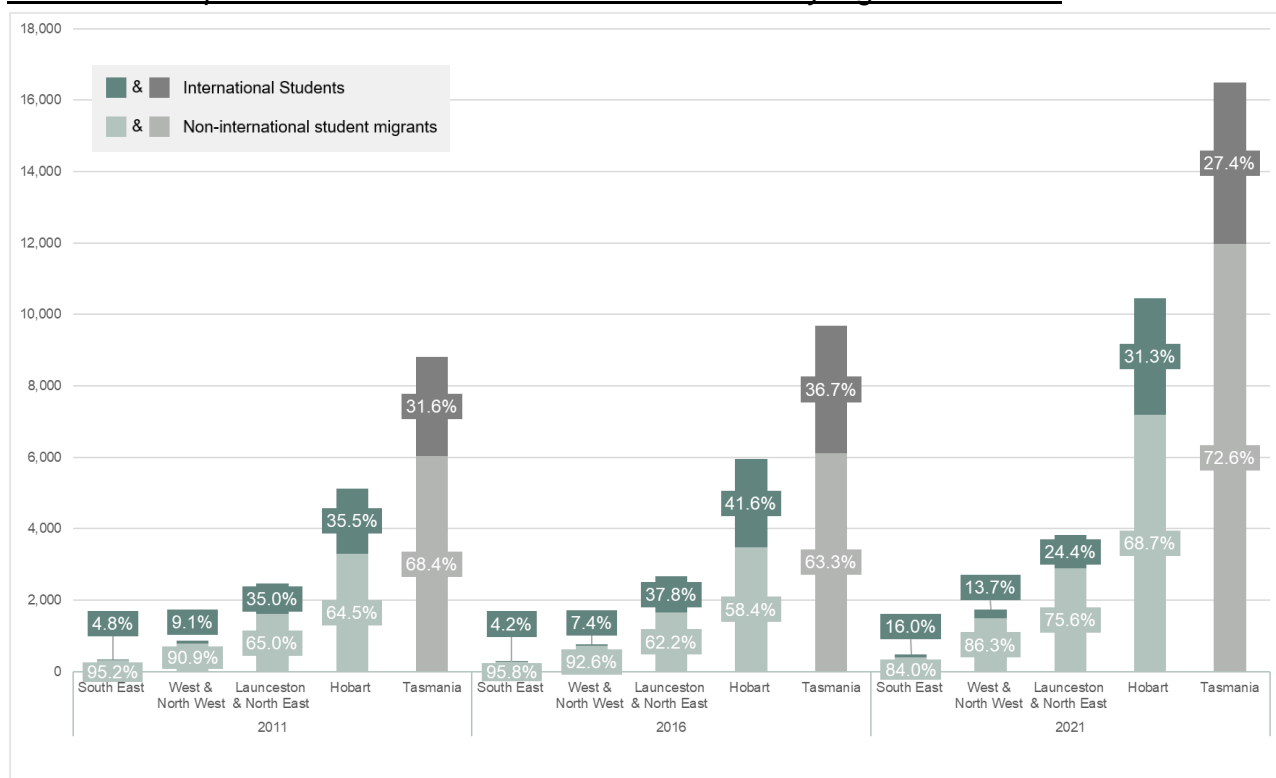
Given the volatility of interstate migration, sustainable population growth in Tasmania will be dependent on a combination of overseas skilled and international student migration.

While not all international students will migrate to regional settings following the completion of study, for those who wish to migrate suitable processes and visa programs are required to encourage and enable this. Given the critical importance of sustainable international migration for Tasmania’s future prosperity we are working closely with the Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments to develop strategic approaches to attracting high quality international students in areas of regional skills needs.

We have recently prepared a [submission to the Australian Government’s Draft International Education and Skills Strategic Framework](#) which considers how to allocate international student cohorts more equally across Australia for maximum benefit, particularly for regional locations. As part of the proposed managed international education system, we support increasing alignment between international student recruitment and areas of local workforce need.

Chart Two: Proportion of International students in Tasmania by region 2011-2021 demonstrates the proportion of international student migrants to Tasmanian regions and shows that despite growth in total numbers, in 2021 27.4% of student migrants to Tasmania were international students, down from 36.7% in 2016.

Chart Two: Proportion of International students in Tasmania by region 2011-2021



This also demonstrates the uneven distribution of international students across Tasmania’s regions – with Hobart consistently attracting the highest proportion of international students and much smaller numbers in the North, Northwest and Southeast regions of Tasmania. Regional migration strategies need to consider the different levels of regionality within jurisdictions, and address how a greater number of international migrants can be attracted and incentivised to live in areas outside of capital cities to better distribute the economic and social benefits of increased migration to regional settings.

While this data shows growth in Tasmania’s overall student migration up to 2021, in subsequent years this growth has slowed for international student migration. The current international student policy settings are having a detrimental impact on regional settings like Tasmania, and the current approach to international student visa processing is going to have further significant impacts on international migration to Tasmania.

Based on the 2024 visa rejection data, we have estimated a third of the State’s total overseas migration will be impacted - which will have serious flow on effects into Tasmania’s workforce and age profile.

International student numbers and migration behaviour needs to be included in government analysis of regions to inform aligned policy approaches across both education and migration, to encourage and enable international students to study and ultimately work in regional Australia.

Many of the demographic and economic factors and challenges outlined for Tasmania's setting are true for rural and remote settings across Australia, and an aligned and coherent set of migration incentives will be needed to address this.

Place-based strategies to encourage regional migration are needed to support migrants to settle within regional locations, engage within local communities, and improve retention.

Complex issues such as migration, population and workforce need require holistic place-based strategies, an approach we strongly support in development of regional migration settings. We strongly support the statement posed by the Discussion Paper that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to regional policy development does not address the diversity of regions across Australia, as this is certainly true of Tasmania's regions. A place-based approach is needed in developing strategies to increase connection, belonging and improve retention of migrants within regional locations.

A place-based approach to regional migration and retention would bring together local community, government, business and industry, community organisations, and education providers to implement local strategies to support migrants to create connections, integrate within the community, and settle in regional locations.

Tasmania is less culturally diverse than other parts of Australia - in 2021 the percentage of Tasmanians that were born overseas was 15.3% compared to a national average of 27.6%ⁱⁱⁱ. Cultural diversity is linked to economic, social and innovation benefits, and international migration is key to enhancing this in Tasmania^{iv}. Attracting and retaining international migrants in Tasmania will have long lasting effects on diversity and the broader benefits this brings. Place-based approaches to regional migration and retention will encourage concentration of migration communities within regions, fostering culturally safe and welcoming environments.

Australia's Regional Migration Settings can support and enable place-based partnerships to improve the attraction and retention of migrants within regions. Engaging government, industry, community and education in sub-regional civic agreements or partnerships with a targeted focus on regional migration will encourage the concentration of international migrants within communities.

These partnerships could include location-specific incentives to make regional settings more attractive and affordable for migrants; job opportunities within local businesses connected to areas of local skills needs; access to education and continuing education; and community integration through programs that support migrants' engagement with, and integration into, local communities.

These partnerships would also lead on public awareness campaigns and local leadership to build welcoming and inclusive communities. To improve the longer-term retention of migrants within regions, it will be essential to create these strong connections to the community, and it is important that these connections are made for all members of a family unit.

Employment opportunities will be critical in facilitating connection to community and retaining international migrants within regions – in many of Australia's regions, international migration will also be needed to fill workforce and skills gaps.

Tasmania's ageing population results in an ageing workforce, with an increasing number of employees and business owners approaching retirement, and fewer young people available to fill workforce gaps. Recently released demographic projections predict the ratio of working age Tasmanians (15-64) to those over 65 will decrease from 3:1 in 2023 to 2:1 in 2053^v.

Meaningful and skilled employment opportunities are critical to attract and retain migrants in regional locations. For many regional settings in Tasmania, employment opportunities are often with small businesses who might not have the experience or capability to navigate the processes for employer-sponsored programs for hiring international workers. Place-based partnerships which involve community organisations, local businesses and industry and education providers can provide leadership on targeted support and resources for regional employers, and help small businesses overcome these barriers and leverage the benefits of a diverse workforce.

In addition to structural aging, future workforce shortages for Tasmania are likely to be compounded by lower levels of education attainment in the State. With predictions that over the next five years, over 90% of new jobs will require post-school education, and more than three-fifths of the total projected employment growth will be in high skill level jobs, it will also be important to engage international migrants in education and continuing education opportunities. This includes engaging the families of skilled workers in learning and education pathways to engage all family members within the community and enable opportunities for future skilled employment within the region. It will also be important to continue attracting and enabling international students to study in Tasmania and provide pathways for migration on completion of study for areas of regional and state skills need.

To support a place-based approach to engagement in employment, education and community for retention, visa settings and migration mechanisms will need to encourage migrants to settle within regions.

Current visa programs tend to have fixed timeframes for living regionally, and without whole-of-community programs to ensure inclusion and integration into the community, it can be challenging to retain migrants within regions, particularly those which already have low cultural diversity.

Place-based approaches to regional migration could be enabled through mechanisms like the Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs), to support regional migration and retention of migrants within regions. While DAMAs focus primarily on addressing workforce shortages and skills need through employer sponsorship, broadening this approach to include regional education opportunities across all levels of the education sector, as well as community leadership and engagement, would support the attraction and retention of a critical mass of migrants. This would provide a strategic focus for regions in improving their cultural diversity, foster welcoming and accepting communities, and improve the long-term retention of migrants within regional areas.

Tasmania would be a suitable location to trial this broader place-based approach to Civic Agreements within sub-regional areas. Given the State's ageing population and slowing growth, and the workforce and skills challenges particularly within our regional settings, there would be significant benefits from strategies which support critical mass of international migration within regions.

This approach aligns well with the Tasmanian Government's Population Strategy, and item 2.8 within the Strategy on Social Cohesion - to support place-based approaches to engage young people, bring together community as a diverse society and enhance feelings of belonging.

By implementing place-based partnerships which include frameworks for regional migration, regional communities could become more inclusive, vibrant and economically resilient, while strategically addressing workforce and skills shortages.

Summary of Recommendations

The University of Tasmania recommends that in response to the Review of Regional Migration Settings, the Australian Government should:

- Develop and implement suitable processes and visa programs to encourage international migration to regional Australia, with a clear focus on both workforce needs and supporting long-term settlement within the regions.
- Ensure specific representation of international student numbers and their migration behaviour in government analysis of regional migration and aim for alignment in policy approaches between regional migration and international student migration.
- Implement place-based approaches to increase connection, belonging and retention of international migrants in regional locations. These approaches should include engaging all levels of government, industry, community and education providers in sub-regional civic agreements or partnerships for implementation of localised regional migration strategies.
- Develop a mechanism to enable place-based approaches to regional migration, potentially through broadening the Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs) to include regional education and community engagement or contribution opportunities in addition to workforce shortages and employment.
- Provide targeted support and resources for regional employers (particularly small and medium sized businesses) to employ and support international migrants in areas of skill need.

ⁱ Tasmanian Population Policy, 3 July 2024.

www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/policies_and_strategies/populationstrategy

ⁱⁱ National, State and Territory Population, 13 June 2024.

www.treasury.tas.gov.au/Documents/Population.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ ABS, 2021 Census Data. www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/snapshot-australia/2021

^{iv} OECD 2020, The impact of diversity: A review of the evidence. www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5f8c1531-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5f8c1531-en

^v TasPOPP 2024: Tasmanian and Local Government Area Population Projections – 2023 to 2053, May 2024. www.treasury.tas.gov.au/economy/population-projections