



Living on Tasmania's West Coast: Perspectives of new residents

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A photograph of traditional Aboriginal objects. In the foreground, there is a dark wooden bowl with a braided cord around its rim. To its right is a large, shallow, reddish-brown clay bowl. In the background, there are several woven baskets made of natural fibers, some containing dark stones or seeds. The objects are arranged on a light-colored, textured surface, possibly a piece of animal skin or a woven mat. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the same objects and a hint of an outdoor setting with greenery.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the palawa/pakana of lutruwita, the traditional owners of the land upon which we live and work.

We pay respects to Elders past and present as the knowledge holders and sharers. We honour their strong culture and knowledges as vital to the self-determination, wellbeing and resilience of their communities.

We stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language and history.

About the Tasmanian Policy Exchange

The TPE has been established at the University of Tasmania to make timely and informed contributions to key policy debates occurring in Tasmania and beyond, thus making a positive contribution to the future of our state and its people.

The TPE's policy work and analysis can be found at www.utas.edu.au/tpe

This study was commissioned by the West Coast Council to contribute to the development of the State Government's [Strategic Regional Partnership](#) with the Western Region of Tasmania.

This study was approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (S0029626).

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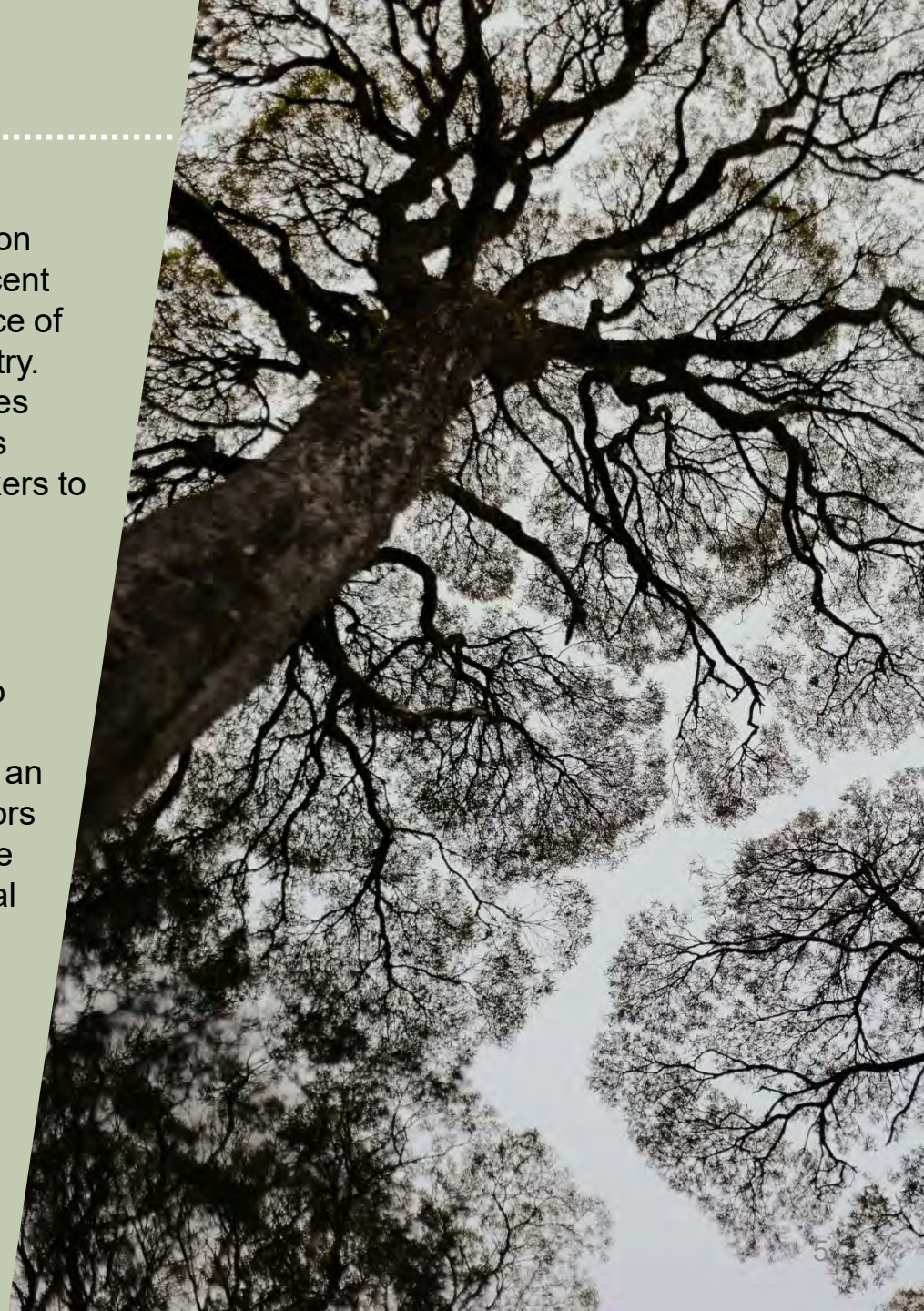
Part 1: Introduction

CONTEXT | The West Coast Local Government Area (LGA) is seeking to grow its population and workforce to encourage sustainable economic growth and community wellbeing. In recent years, the region has experienced population ageing and decline, and the growing incidence of drive-in/drive-out and fly-in/fly-out (DIDO/FIFO) workforces, particularly in the mining industry. These challenges have contributed to a decline in service delivery, which in turn discourages people from moving to the region. Key government, business and community organisations have recently signed a memorandum of understanding to enact a plan to attract more workers to the West Coast.

THIS REPORT | Building on two previous reports, the Tasmanian Policy Exchange has conducted preliminary social research with new arrivals on the West Coast. Our aim was to better understand the factors they considered when deciding to relocate, and what they perceive as the strengths and challenges of living in the region. This summary report gives an overview of the ‘pull’ factors that attract new arrivals to the West Coast, and the ‘push’ factors that deter them. Overall, we aim to provide an evidence base that can be used to inform the development of creative, place based, locally-led policies and strategies to improve regional liveability.

There are well documented ‘pull’ factors that could be utilised better to attract well qualified people to live and work in isolated places

– Haslam McKenzie 2011



Research timeline

1

November 2022

The changing nature of employment on Tasmania's West Coast

Our first report found the West Coast LGA has a higher share of non-resident workers than anywhere else in the State; most of these workers are employed in mining. DIDO workforces can have a range of negative impacts on regional economies, services, infrastructure and wellbeing. The high incidence of DIDO working causes significant amounts of wealth to leave the West Coast region in the form of wages.

2

August 2023

Population change and housing needs in Western Tasmania: a preliminary analysis

Our second report found that the West Coast population and many of its critical industries experience a high degree of churn. The relationship between population churn and housing is complex. The West Coast faces a housing paradox: housing is underutilised, with many vacant and single occupant dwellings. However, rental demand outweighs supply, indicating a misalignment between stock and utilisation.

3

February 2024

Living on Tasmania's West Coast: Perspectives of new residents

The current project aimed to better understand population, workforce and housing market trends through social research targeting new arrivals to the West Coast. We focused on identifying new arrivals' needs, motivations and preferences. This information can be used to design effective, targeted policies that ensure a long-term sustainable resident workforce and population.

Liveability framing

Our analysis is informed by research and literature on regional liveability. This concept underpins the Regional Australia Institute's (RAI) approach to "understanding what matters to different kinds of people who are moving to, from, or staying in towns in regional Australia" (Bourne 2019). The RAI views the role that liveability plays in relocation decisions as a two-step process:

1. A person decides to move to regional Australia based on whether their primary needs can be met e.g., employment, services, infrastructure.
2. Having identified broad areas that are suitable for relocation, a person decides where in regional Australia they'd like to live based off a more personal and nuanced 'liveability assessment'.

While there is no universal definition of liveability, the RAI (Bourne 2019; RAI 2022) has identified six key factors relevant to most people in regional Australia:

- Health services
- Education services
- Cost of living
- Amenity (e.g., green spaces, public art)
- Connection to community
- Lifestyle and opportunity

Our research project is underpinned by the idea that to improve the liveability of an area and its appeal to potential new residents, "it helps to have a good understanding of the various factors at play, each region's particular strengths and weaknesses, and how this matches with the preferences of the kinds of people the community wants to attract" (Houghton and Vohra 2021).

Therefore, we build on existing work by the RAI by investigating how liveability influences new arrivals' decisions to move to, stay in, or leave the West Coast of Tasmania.





Method and sample

This exploratory project was designed to identify preliminary themes to inform the direction of future, in-depth research. We conducted thematic analysis of qualitative data gathered from a total of 12 participants through ten interviews, one of which was a group interview. Interviews were semi-structured and in-depth.

To be eligible for the study, participants had to be ‘new arrivals’ to the West Coast, defined as anybody who has lived in the region for approximately five years or less. We employed a range of sampling methods: emails were sent to various businesses and organisations on the West Coast; the West Coast Council assisted in providing contact details for potential participants at our request; and some participants were located through snowball sampling methods, whereby interviewees recommended other potential participants from within their social circles.

Our goal was to interview an indicative cross-section of new arrivals to the West Coast, capturing the perspectives of key cohorts including those working in mining, education, and local government, and those who both own and rent homes. During interviews participants were asked open-ended questions about the considerations that drew them to the West Coast, their experiences since residing there, and their future plans. The purpose of the interviews was to gain in-depth insights about ‘what matters’ to different participants when making relocation decisions.

Industry of Employment	Number of Interviewees
Mining	7
Education	2
Other	3
Total	12

Housing	Number of Interviewees
Rented	2
Owned	6
Housing Provided	4
Total	12



Part 2: Pull factors

Affordable housing for purchase, desirable employment opportunities, and lifestyle benefits such as proximity to nature and living in a closeknit community are all factors that attract new arrivals to the West Coast.

In this section we provide some insight into how employment, housing, and lifestyle intersect, how participants make trade-offs between them, the strengths that attract people to the West Coast, and the considerations that tended to factor most strongly in their decision to relocate to the area.

Pull factors: Employment

Employment was often a key factor in new arrivals' relocation decisions, with many being attracted by specific job opportunities and workforce/skills deficits.

Our interviews confirmed that people often moved to the West Coast for a specific opportunity to work in a sought-after position. However, participants told us that even when employment was a key factor in their decision to relocate, it was usually not the only consideration. A combination of lifestyle, housing, and personal factors were also important.

"First of all, this was the kind of job I was looking for [...] something I really wanted to learn and develop those skills, something I haven't worked in previously before [...] the second reason was Tasmania. It's one of the beautiful places in Australia, I want to explore it, I want to spend some time here in this beautiful part of the world. The third reason was, Sydney was very expensive."

(Participant 6)

A minority of participants moved to the West Coast because it is the only place in Tasmania where they can work in their profession (e.g., mining), not because it is somewhere they wanted to live.

"I guess the big drive for the West Coast was the mining. Yeah, mining work is pretty limited to the West Coast of Tasmania. That's basically it."

(Participant 7)

Some participants were attracted to the West Coast almost entirely for lifestyle or housing reasons. These people were more likely to be dissatisfied with their employment, feeling that they had to 'take what they could get' due to limited options. This highlights that the West Coast offers positive employment opportunities in some occupations such as mining, but lacks opportunities in other sectors.

"You take what you can get [...] [if I left] I could do a job that I actually love. I could probably make a lot more money, double what I'm making now, be close to family, and be a few hours from the city."

(Participant 3)



Pull factors: Lifestyle and community

Many participants relocated to the West Coast for a better work-life balance, including access to leisure activities and nature.

The West Coast was described as a scenic destination offering convenient access to a range of outdoor leisure activities, including bushwalking, mountain biking, kayaking, paragliding, swimming, fossicking, and four-wheel driving. Participants appreciated this proximity to nature, particularly in contrast to their experiences living in cities or urban areas.

“I’m surprised by how many little adventures there are to do within 10 minutes of here. That’s awesome. You don’t need to leave town to have a full day of a full weekend camping, or hiking, or paragliding, or a kayaking trip, or mountain biking”

(Participant 5)

Living on the West Coast offered participants a better work-life balance, with many enjoying a slower pace of life, reduced commuting time, fewer distractions, and less financial strain. Overall, this enabled more time for leisure activities or quality time with family.

“In Sydney [my wife] used to be rushed. Life was very fast there [...] but here she has more time. She can spend more time with the kids”

(Participant 6)

For several participants working in the mining industry, relocating to the West Coast and joining the residential workforce marked their departure from a FIFO/DIDO roster. This was perceived to offer a better work-life balance compared to spending extensive periods of time away from home.

“It’s great that the mine provides accommodation, but it still sort of feels like you’re at work. Whereas having your own house and lovely neighbours and all that sort of thing, it’s much nicer”

(Participant 7)



Pull factors: Lifestyle and community

The West Coast offers a distinctive lifestyle that many participants found appealing, including being part of a relatively small, close-knit community.

Participants noted that although some people might not enjoy living in a remote area, they personally wouldn't be happy living in a big city. They had adapted to the way of life and learned to 'go with the flow'.

"It's all about your priorities. Some people are more happy in big cities, they like that night life, and fast life, and fast food [...] I don't like all of that, so this is a very good place for me. I would prefer to stay here"

(Participant 6)

"Some people like to go to the movies, or you know, go to live theatre and things like that. You're not going to do it when you're living here [...] that's the lifestyle I like, and I choose. If you're wanting a nightclub type atmosphere [...] this isn't the place to do it"

(Participant 1)

Several participants saw living in a small town as offering the opportunity to be part of a close-knit community and make a difference. This is referred to by the RAI as part of the 'rural idyll', where "community members are on a first name basis and people gather in support of the town and one another" (Bourne 2019).

"To be part of a small community... was also a drawcard for me... to actually contribute in a more practical, direct way"

(Participant 2)

"I was hoping to get into the community, make friends. So immediately, when we started living here I joined the SES [...] so I made friends there, found a local church, made friends there, and [work] people are good. It feels like I'm fitting in"

(Participant 4)

"It's a different way of life. Coming from Sydney, we didn't know our neighbours, we just waved to them. Here, if you knock on somebody's door, there's a cup of tea and a scone... it's like how we were brought up as kids. It's going back to the old way of life"

(Participant 1)



Pull factors: Housing ownership

Many participants were attracted to the West Coast by better housing affordability compared to major cities, and they were often willing to trade off housing quality for affordability.

Several participants emphasised that the availability of affordable housing was one of the most significant factors influencing their decision to move to the West Coast – and that if cheap housing wasn't available, they wouldn't live there. Participants also noted that affordable housing facilitates better work-life balance by reducing financial pressures.

“Definitely the price point. So we bought a house here for \$160,000... I’ll be mortgage free before I’m 40. That’s a lot of stress out of life. And it allows us to travel and not be stressed about money all the time”

(Participant 3)

Participants who made the decision to relocate based primarily on housing affordability rather than specific employment opportunities were more likely to have also considered moving to locations other than the West Coast. Ultimately, they chose the West Coast due to a combination of housing, lifestyle, and employment factors.

“I would say definitely the affordability of the housing, that’s probably number one. But if the house was somewhere like in the middle of the desert or whatever, I would have said no, because I wouldn’t have enjoyed it. But here there’s so much [to do] as well”

(Participant 4)

Housing affordability was so important to participants that many were willing to make trade-offs in quality (discussed in more detail in Part 3 of this report).

“The housing is relatively cheap compared to other places. It’s probably not as good a condition as a lot of other places too. But I think it’s still relatively cheaper”

(Participant 12)





Part 3: Push factors

To attract and retain new arrivals, the West Coast needs to be liveable for them and their families/partners. However, different people and groups have varying needs for services and amenities.

Most participants feel happy with their lives on the West Coast and can access necessities either locally or by travelling outside of the region. However, most participants believed that they would be forced to leave the West Coast at some point in the future due to the lack of access to specific services and infrastructure.

Only a very small minority of participants felt entirely dissatisfied with their experience of living on the West Coast, and there is evidence that these participants would be unhappy living in any remote or regional area.

Push factors: Remoteness

Even among participants that were largely satisfied with their lives on the West Coast, most expressed concern that at some point, limited access to certain necessities would likely cause them to leave.

Participants mentioned a range of services and infrastructure that were difficult to access on the West Coast, including but not limited to: tradespeople, such as electricians, plumbers, mechanics, and hairdressers; services, such as Centrelink, childcare, and veterinarians; and infrastructure, such as swimming pools and parks. This is compounded by remoteness, because it is expensive and time consuming to travel to larger regional centres or organise for service providers to visit the West Coast.

Most participants were willing to adapt to these challenges, emphasising that it is part of the lifestyle they understood they were choosing when relocating to a relatively small, remote region.

“I think you just get used to the hardship, the cost of everything, and the fact that there aren't services here that you would wish... everything else outweighs those things”

(Participant 4)

However, most participants foresaw that they would have to leave the West Coast at some point in future. This often related to changing life circumstances and needs. For example, participants worried that as they aged, it would become more difficult to maintain their property and to travel to Burnie frequently. Many who had young children or plan on having children in the future worried that they would need to relocate to access better secondary schooling. Others had family members with complex health needs and anticipated that they would need to move closer to specialised medical care as their situation changed.



Push factors: Healthcare

Access to healthcare was a key concern for many participants, particularly those who were ageing, unwell, or had specialist health needs.

Participants noted that while it was usually possible to access primary healthcare (GPs and pharmacies) on the West Coast or through Telehealth, they often had to travel to urban centres to receive other treatments, resulting in a financial, logistical, and time strain. Specific services that patients mentioned as being difficult to access included cancer treatments, physiotherapy, psychology, dental care, aged care, and birthing options.

“For instance, today I had to drive two hours for an appointment with a specialist [...] it’s a big expense. It’s a whole day of travel, a whole day off work [...] it’s just a massive time and money expense”

(Participant 5)

Participants felt that the available services tended to be understaffed and overrun with patients, and that healthcare professionals in the region were often lacking skills and experience. High staff turnover meant patients had to frequently reintroduce themselves and their medical history to new doctors.

“Even the doctors that do come here seem so disinterested”

(Participant 3)

“There is now a GP that’s regular here, which is really nice... but before then I was just always seeing locum doctors. And so a lot of people in town have that experience, like always [seeing] a new person that doesn’t really know your history”

(Participant 2)

Some participants felt they would need to leave the West Coast in the future due to lack of access to health care. For example, a participant who had a child with complex medical needs anticipated that they may move away eventually to access specific treatments. Another participant regularly drove their partner to Burnie for cancer treatment, and worried about being able to continue doing this as they age.

“It’s only once a month, I’ll just drive him there [to Burnie]. But how long am I going to be able to, you know? I’m not getting any younger either. I don’t know, I think about all those things, as you get older you do, you know, you’ve got to weigh it up”

(Participant 1)



Push factors: Education

Most participants with children and those planning on having children anticipated leaving at some point due to the perceived low quality of schooling available on the West Coast. This supports trends found in our [previous quantitative research](#).

One participant and their family were in the process of preparing to relocate from the West Coast to Burnie because of their child's difficulty accessing schooling; the child had been travelling several hours on a bus each day to go to school in Burnie, which was becoming unsustainable. Another participant with a baby foresaw that they and their family would likely leave once the child reached late primary school age, even though they had purchased a home in Rosebery and were happy with their employment.

"My wife's reluctant to still be living here [with] our baby when he's late primary school aged, but maybe then I'll consider DIDO or something like that if I'm still here"

(Participant 12)

We spoke with several participants who worked as teachers. They felt that they worked in a challenging environment for a range of reasons. Consequently, one of the participants had already left the school, and the other was planning on leaving the following semester.

"I don't want to leave [the school], but I also don't want to be in it, because it's too much and it's not sustainable for people to work in those conditions [...] I'm not a masochist. I don't need money that badly, you know?"

(Participant 5)

Access to childcare and other forms of early childhood education were also described as important by some participants, and likely have a significant impact on how and whether some new arrivals can participate in the workforce.

"With the things to think about if we were to stay down here, along with schooling, I guess is childcare options. I mean, we don't have kids yet. But that's something that would make us stay or leave I guess"

(Participant 7)



Push factors: Rental shortage

A lack of good quality rental accommodation in key locations was a significant barrier for those who wanted to move to the West Coast, but were not able – or did not want – to purchase a home.

Several participants had been attracted to the West Coast by specific, skilled employment opportunities in the mining industry, wanted to live locally with their families/partners, and sought out the West Coast as a location for its lifestyle and other benefits. However, they all had to overcome significant barriers in acquiring rental accommodation.

Rental availability was described as being very poor in the mining towns of Rosebery and Zeehan. Several participants had to rent in Strahan or Queenstown because they were not able to find a suitable quality and price rental closer to their worksite – in some cases, even after months of searching. One participant ended up purchasing a house to remain in Rosebery once their lease finished, because there were no other rentals available in the area. We also heard anecdotally that some mine workers in Rosebery hot-bed due to limited rental availability, with six workers sharing a substandard three-bedroom house.

This research project did not specifically explore why many mine workers prefer to rent rather than buy. However, there is some evidence that the volatility of house prices (as detailed in our [previous research](#)) likely deters long-term investment and contributes to increased rental demand.

“I’ve never been that keen on buying in a mining town, because it’s very cyclical. I think at the moment the prices are quite elevated [...] if we go into a mining downturn, I don’t know if those prices are sustainable”

(Participant 12)

The evidence presented here supports our findings from [previous research](#) that a lack of appropriate rentals presents a real barrier to recruiting professionals to work on the West Coast. In some cases, this might be driving mining industry workers who would otherwise become residents into DIDO/FIFO arrangements. There are clearly specific supply and demand issues/market failure at play.



Push factors: Housing quality

Housing on the West Coast is generally lower quality than in major cities. This was consistently noted by participants whether they were homeowners, renters, or living in company- or government-provided accommodation (e.g., teacher housing).

Housing quality issues frequently mentioned included lack of insulation, mould, leaks, and issues with plumbing and electricity. Participants told us that they tolerated these conditions partly because housing was affordable, and partly because they had few other options.

“I guess we didn’t have high standards, it was like a \$100,000 house [...] we’re making it homely”

(Participant 7)

“If you’d had options, you probably wouldn’t have accepted [the quality of the rental]”

(Participant 12)

The housing quality challenge is compounded by limited availability of tradespeople and remoteness from hardware stores.

“Trying to get tradespeople is impossible [...] unless you can do it yourself, you’re in trouble. And you’ll be paying a lot to get people from Burnie”

(Participant 4)

Poor housing quality was not only a challenge for participants in their own homes. The experience of seeing numerous derelict and abandoned houses and buildings contributed to some participants feeling negatively about their town and their future there.

“My neighbours live in a shed, and there’s a lot of very visible trauma [...] there’s a lot of neglected houses, just empty and being washed away”

(Participant 2)



A close-up photograph of numerous small, bright yellow flowers, possibly mimulus, in full bloom. The flowers are densely packed and have a fuzzy, spherical appearance. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the same flowers and some green foliage.

Part 4: Strategies for population attraction and retention

This research has shown that the West Coast offers myriad strengths and benefits which draw new arrivals to the region. However, as participants' needs and circumstances change, limited access to certain services and infrastructure risks driving them away.

Addressing these challenges will require:

- Long-term strategies and policies focused on improving the delivery of education, healthcare and housing, with the aim of encouraging new arrivals to view living in the region as a viable option in the long run.
- Shorter-term interventions focused on the more nuanced aspects of lifestyle and amenity, which aim to create immediate quality of life improvements for new arrivals and other residents.

This approach reflects RAI's two-step conceptualisation of location decision making described at the start of this report (see page 7).

Furthermore, given that addressing some of the more complex systemic challenges on the West Coast will take time, we recommend that the West Coast consider a strategy that embraces 'medium-term residents' who move to and participate in the West Coast community for a few years.

This section concludes with some preliminary recommendations based on practices implemented in remote regions elsewhere.

Long term: Improving the basics

Generally, the provision of basic infrastructure and services acts as a 'hard gate' in peoples' location decision making (Bourne 2019). While many participants were satisfied with their lives on the West Coast, many also anticipated reaching a 'tipping point' that would cause them to move when their circumstances changed. Key tipping points included children entering secondary school, and loss of mobility or poorer health due to ageing. While housing quality was not necessarily described by participants as a 'push' factor, challenges with housing quality are ubiquitous and not easily overcome. Rental shortages also pose a challenge to new arrivals, and likely contribute to the prevalence of DIDO/FIFO arrangements.

Therefore, these are four main areas that we believe attraction and retention policies and strategies could target:



Improving the quality of primary and secondary education.



Improving the quality of healthcare services, and/or facilitating easier access to healthcare outside the region.



Increasing the supply of higher quality housing and improving the availability of home improvement resources (tradespeople and hardware stores).



Increasing the availability and quality of rental accommodation in high-demand locations (particularly mining towns).

It will take a concerted, long-term effort to create significant improvement in these complex, interlinked areas. However, effectively addressing these basics is essential to the long-term sustainable development of the West Coast.



Short term: Improving lifestyle and amenities

In addition to the 'hard gate' items, people make location decisions based on personal assessments of liveability and 'what matters' to them. This includes considerations such as green space, walkability, 'cultural vitality', and social inclusion (Bourne 2019). Unlike housing, education, and healthcare, these lifestyle and amenity factors can be addressed through short-term, targeted initiatives.

First, the West Coast could implement a range of initiatives that create immediate amenity and quality of life improvements for specific cohorts. Participants offered a range of suggestions, including:

- Increasing the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables, for example through community gardens or grocery delivery services
- Offering yoga classes
- Increasing the availability of Halal food
- Setting up an artists' co-op

These small, lifestyle-focused initiatives would increase the attractiveness of the West Coast as a destination.

Second, it is important to continue supporting organisations and initiatives that create a sense of community and vibrancy. Participants noted that joining community groups and volunteer organisations (such as the State Emergency Service, the Country Women's Association, churches, sports and outdoors clubs, and Rosebery Neighbourhood House) helped them to gain access to formal and informal networks, which in turn improved their quality of life. Similarly, participants told us that artistic and cultural events such as the Unconformity create a sense that the region is thriving, making it more appealing to outsiders. Ongoing funding for these organisations and events is vital.

Moving forward, developing targeted strategies and solutions will require further research to better understand the needs of specific cohorts that the West Coast wishes to attract and retain.



Targeting medium-term residents: A complementary strategy?

Attracting new, permanent residents to rural and regional areas has become increasingly challenging as Australia's workforce becomes more mobile. For example, short-term locums for doctors are becoming the norm; teachers rarely stay at one school for more than a few years; sea/tree changers often move between rural areas; and skilled resource industry workers are less fixed in place with the rise of long-distance commuting (Kilpatrick et al. 2010).

Rather than battling against this trend, the West Coast could complement the short- and long-term approaches described earlier with a strategy to attract 'medium-term residents'. This would focus on using the strengths of the region to attract desirable medium-term residents and capturing as much community benefit as possible from these people during their time in the area. Newcomers bring economic, social, and environmental benefits to regional areas, ranging from injecting money into the community by buying property and undertaking renovations, to providing fresh perspectives based on experiences in other places (Vitartas et al. 2009). They do not have to become permanent residents for the region to benefit from these things.

There can be negative consequences to population churn. These include the cost of transporting, settling and integrating workers, and turnover in social networks such as sporting teams and community groups. A strategy for medium-term residents would therefore need to be carefully designed to mitigate these potential negative impacts, while ensuring the benefits of attracting mobile skilled workers are maximised (see below for more on potential strategies).

While the West Coast should (and is) ultimately seeking to improve its delivery of key services like healthcare and education for a sustainable long-term future, in the meantime there is an opportunity for the community to capture greater advantages from skilled workers who move through the region (Kilpatrick et al. 2010; Vitartas et al. 2009).



Targeting medium-term residents: Strategy examples

The challenges the West Coast faces are shared with many other remote regions. There is a growing body of research that considers strategies to attract mobile skilled workers for the medium-term, and how to capture maximum benefit from them during their time in the community. These strategies include:

- **Understanding, promoting, and marketing the strengths of the community to potential workers** (Kilpatrick et al. 2010). Place marketing campaigns have been increasingly adopted by regional areas to attract new residents (Niedomysl 2007). For example, the RAI's Liveability Toolkit is designed to help regional leaders identify and promote the unique opportunities and strengths of their town (Houghton and Vohra 2021).
- **Proactively welcoming workers and their families** (Kilpatrick et al. 2010). Research has shown that communities that assist new arrivals to develop strong social networks are more likely to derive benefits from mobile workers during their stay. These networks can be fostered through a formalised welcome process, directly linking workers and their families to community groups, and helping family members find volunteer and/or paid employment (Kilpatrick et al. 2010).
- **Coupling monetary incentives with social support programs** (Kilpatrick et al. 2010). Monetary incentives to attract key workers – similar to that offered by the Tasmanian Government to recruit teaching staff to the West Coast for the 2024 school year – are most effective when accompanied by social support programs. For example, assigning mentors to newcomers to establish a sense of familiarity and a point of contact can be effective for new graduates whose first job is in a remote location and who often face a steep learning curve (Haslam McKenzie 2011).

It is important that the West Coast aims to attract medium-term workers who are most likely to successfully integrate into the community. Based on our preliminary research, this would include people who are adaptable and flexible, community- and outdoors-oriented, and at particular stages in their life and career (e.g., those who do not have school-aged children or complex health needs).



Conclusion

Our research suggests that the decision to relocate to the West Coast is driven by a combination of practical considerations and personal preferences. Employment opportunities and affordable housing for purchase often serve as initial motivators for attracting and retaining residents. However, a broader set of lifestyle and community factors are also important. New arrivals are often seeking improved work-life balance and quality of life, which is facilitated through access to leisure activities, nature and a close-knit community.

Relocating to the West Coast presents challenges, often related to remoteness and limited access to services. However, we found that many believe these obstacles are surmountable if they know what to expect, are adaptable, and have access to support networks. Indeed, for many participants the lifestyle benefits outweigh the challenges. Nonetheless, specific life tipping points may push new arrivals to relocate.

Further research is needed to better understand the preferences and needs of the key cohorts that the West Coast wishes to attract and retain. Policies and strategies should be place-based and tailored to the local context, focusing on both emphasising the strengths that 'pull' new arrivals to the region, and mitigating the barriers that are likely to 'push' them away.



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