



A SMART WAY FOR GROWTH



FOUR years ago I was involved in the Big Australia debate. I was in one corner and Dick Smith was in the other. I'm sorry Dick but the race has been run and Big Australia has won.

We continue to add almost 400,000 people every year compared with a long-term average of only 220,000. At the 1954 Census there were eight million Australians; there are now close to 24 million; by 2050 there will be 38 million.

Overseas migration has more or less doubled within a decade. And the reason is simple. Baby boomers are now exiting the workforce and the prime taxpaying years. We need to backfill the worker base.

But this means that our cities are growing faster and nowhere is that better illustrated than in Queensland. Six of the 20 largest cities in Australia are based in Queensland: Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine

Coast, Townsville, Cairns and Toowoomba. By 2050 there will be eight with the addition of Mackay and Bundaberg pushing out the slower growing Albury in NSW and Launceston, Tasmania.

During the 21st century no other state will have as many large cities as Queensland. Sure, more people will continue to live in Sydney and Melbourne than in Brisbane, but Queensland dominates with more cities in the nation's Top 20. If ever

there was an Australian state and a people who should own the space of city planning and regional development it is Queensland. No need for such emphasis on regional development in the southern states because southerners bunch up in their capitals.

And it's not just the number of Queensland cities it's their rate of growth. Over the 37 years to 2050 the population of Gold Coast-Tweed is projected to grow 102 per cent to 1.2 million. By mid-century Brisbane will be a city of 4.2 million which is the same size as Melbourne now. Townsville will rise by 93 per cent, Rockhampton by 79 per cent and Cairns by 55 per cent. Mackay is expected to jump 130 per cent to almost 200,000 by mid-

century propelling it to 17th largest city in Australia.

Growth on this scale and in so many places means that Queensland will change. I made the point in recent visioning work I completed for the city of the Gold Coast that Australians will not want a city

of a million residents based on retirement and tourism. The Gold Coast must diversify and especially into the knowledge economy.

Like it or not, ready or not, Queensland must change. By mid-century there will be more than six million people in southeast Queensland which is more than in Sydney-Newcastle-Wollongong today.

This critical mass of people and of economic power will muscle its way into the political and economic landscape of the nation. Sydney and Melbourne will lose their relative dominance: corporate jobs and high-end culture and inner-city edginess will be as much a part of Brisbane and dare I say, perhaps even parts of the Gold Coast, as they are now of this nation's most powerful cities.

But there are challenges. The doubling of our population base requires visionary planning. The strategic plan for Singapore looks to



2060. The recently released strategic plan for Melbourne looks to 2050. Sydney's recently released strategic plan looking way out to 2031 is kinda lame in comparison. If we are moving towards a bigger Australia, and it very much looks like we are, then the planning and the thinking and the visioning horizon needs to lift a notch.

The southeast Queensland regional plan needs to look to mid-century and nothing less. But this is a "calls to arms" more than thinking about where to place housing and roads and schools, it's about creating the kind of city, the kind of state, the kind of Australia we want by 2050.

There was a time when Australia rode on the sheep's back. Those days are long gone. There was a time when Queensland prospered on the back of tourism, lifestyle and retirement. That's not the way forward. The rest of Australia is moving in the direction of knowledge work. Melbourne and Sydney have

the head offices and the institutions (universities, research schools) that drive knowledge industries.

Queenslanders need to think differently about their future. My recent work on the future of the Gold Coast argues for a transformative process. It is possible to make the knowledge workers reconsider where they want to work. Might they be attracted to the energy, the vibrancy, the can-do capability of Queensland? My research shows that Phoenix, Arizona, can attract hi-tech workers. The Gold Coast has already had some success in this sector and especially through Griffith University but there's scope for more.

Some say that these workers will only consider the southern capitals. However I think there is such a thing as the MONA effect.

Hobart's edgy Museum of Modern and New Art has changed mainland Australia's perception of Hobart.

Queensland and its cities and its regions will find a new space, a new

engagement, a new cultural compact with the southern states.

The underlying shift in demography is important; it shapes economic opportunity. It is time to recognise a break point in the continuum of how Australians generate wealth. The future of Australia, Queensland, the Gold Coast lies in our response to the shift into knowledge industries. "Smart state" is the right sentiment. But so too is enterprise, energy and sheer, unapologetic and confronting-to-others self-belief.

Bernard Salt is a KPMG Partner and an adjunct professor at Curtin University Business School. bsalt@kpmg.com.au



15 Feb 2015
Sunday Mail Brisbane, Brisbane



Author: Bernard Salt • Section: Agenda • Article type : News Item • Audience : 393,766
Page: 54 • Printed Size: 827.00cm² • Market: QLD • Country: Australia • ASR: AUD 26,873
Words: 911 • Item ID: 373070777

isentia.mediaportal

Copyright Agency licensed copy (www.copyright.com.au)



MOVING FORWARD:
Brisbane city and the Gold Coast need to prepare now for huge population growth.