

Our biggest asset is

who we are

THE attraction of Tasmania is being Tasmanian.

This may appear an odd and obvious statement, but there are trends to make us similar to the mainland and even overseas.

The uniqueness of our island is what is appealing.

Knowing and building on this, we can develop Tasmania as unique in the nation, and the world. Some who come here declare: "Nice place, but it needs to be changed."

But does it? We cannot remain stagnant, but we can move in the right direction so our cherished lifestyle, its charm and high standard of living, is maintained for locals and visitors.

Reg Watson says we must fight to keep our most unique and valuable trait – our Tasmanianness



SCENIC: Aerial view of Hobart during the Australian 2015 Wooden Boat Festival.
INSETS: Rural land at Kaoota, far left, and Sandy Bay by night, left.
Main picture: KYLE GARDNER/
AERIAL VISION AUSTRALIA

Tasmanians must not only recognise this, but appreciate and capitalise on it.

For instance, there is little understanding of the contribution Tasmanians have made to the world. One of my subjects is Innovations, Inventions and Firsts of Tasmania. Most would be astounded with our efforts in this regard. It does go to show that from a small population great things can happen and it is not necessary to be big to be successful or to achieve.

One strength of Tasmania is undoubtedly our scenery.

Naturally, there are magnificent places of beauty elsewhere, but so much beauty is encapsulated on an island with the sites usually available within short travelling distances. Our scenery attracts many to our shores; scenery and landscape that lies undeveloped. Although it is undeveloped in a modern sense, it does not mean such sites cannot be well managed for all.

Another attraction is our lifestyle. It is the envy of many visitors and criticised by others. However, if you want the fast lifestyle of the big

cities, Tassie is not for you. By all means go to the big cities, but let's not duplicate them here. Our lifestyle is a result of a relatively small population. There is no reason a smallish community with sensible growth cannot be successful and prosperous.

The State Government believes we should aim for three million people, six times what we have. The problem is once we reach three million there will be demands for five million. It is erroneous that rapid population growth is the only way to prosperity. Big business is behind such growth rates throughout Australia.

Our immigration intake annually is far too high, putting stress on infrastructure which is not keeping up with demand. Big business backed by governments like growth to absorb and consume their overproduction of goods and be able to purchase or rent enormous, and may I say ugly, residential towers of up to 90 floors. These are places where only the rich can live, forcing up prices so locals, particularly the young, find it difficult to own their home.

This trend is evident in big cities, which we must try not to emulate. I recently visited Parramatta, in NSW, where the growth is phenomenal. What is happening is that four or five old-style bungalows are being bought, pulled down and in their place huge towers are built housing thousands of

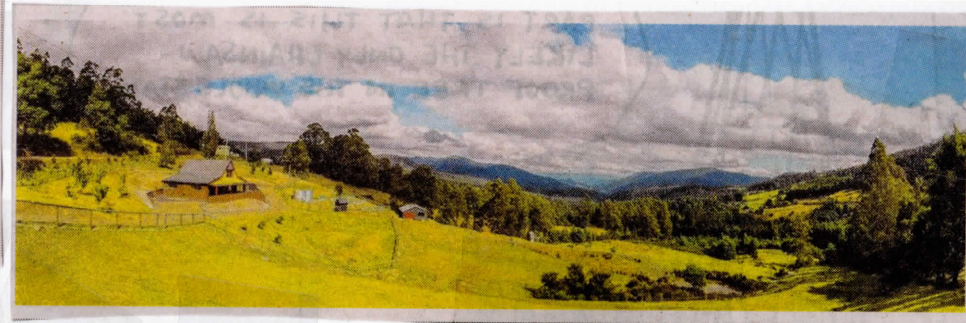
people, where once only four families once lived. Living like ants is un-Australian. We are replicating cities found in the US and China.

There are protests coming from the people and not from the government. Talking to people, reading signs erected and letters to the *Mercury* and other newspapers, the people are taking on the challenge, and saying "no more".

Sadly, governments are not listening.

In the latest Parramatta development, promised plans for a two-storey public viewing deck and restaurants at the 90-storey Aspire development have been scrapped by the Parramatta Council so these floors too can be developed for prestige housing.

Ugly development has to be avoided. It is un-Tasmanian.



Prince Charles is spot on when he criticises modern architecture. What buildings are highlighted and admired most in Hobart and Launceston? Those built in the 19th century or at the turn of the century, such as the GPO in Hobart and the Town Hall.

There are benefits being a smallish community. One feels a part of society and not just a cog in the wheel. Families are interconnected and know each other. Very Tasmanian. There is social cohesion, less crime, less traffic, less stress on infrastructure.

My experience of big cities is constant noise, clogged

traffic at all hours, crowds, sounding of sirens of police, ambulances and fire trucks.

Arriving back in Tasmania, one thinks, "Hallelujah". The air is fresh, one feels it as soon as one steps off the plane.

Things have to change I know. We no longer live in the 1950s or any past era. Yet we

can continue what is good from the past and embrace the present and future for what is good for locals and what is attractive to visitors.

Recently, I met in Hobart my friends from Hong Kong. They were amazed I lived in a house all by myself. No one in Hong Kong does. This got me

thinking that we share an amazing place here, and that this wonderful lifestyle should be maintained with sensible planning and development, not development for development sake.

There are those who believe Hobart, Launceston and Tasmania should follow big cities in other countries.

Why should we be the same? Let's maintain our uniqueness. Are we perfect? Gosh no. However, our

heritage is different to the rest of Australia, although there are similarities to Sydney, but even here, we diverge and find our own way. This different

heritage has produced a different kind of person. Tasmanians are distinctive. Mainlanders often say so, sometimes in a derogatory

manner. This is unfair, but who cares? Our lifestyle, our casualness, our friendliness, our towns, our character, our thoughts, our ways are ours and only ours and this is our biggest asset and attraction.

Reg A. Watson is a Tasmanian author and historian.

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