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Tim Smith MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Victorian Leader of the Opposition
Population Policy Taskforce Chair
Via email tim.smith@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Smith,

Surf Coast Shire Council Submission to the Population Policy Taskforce 2017.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding managing Victorian population growth. Surf Coast Shire's population increased by 18.8% between 2006 and 2011, which was more than double the Victoria average growth rate. Surf Coast Shire Council is acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities linked to population growth.

We strongly support effective planning across all levels of government to ensure population growth is properly managed and our communities and environment continues to thrive.

This submission responds to the four domains expressed in the Population Policy Taskforce's discussion paper. Surf Coast Shire Council encourages the Taskforce to understand the connectivity between the four domains and how they interrelate when forming policy for population growth.

Population growth needs to be considered in a region's context. People live their lives and use services without consideration of municipal boundaries. State Government policy and investment must take a regional approach to population planning. In our case, specific areas of neighbouring councils are growing rapidly which will place pressure on Surf Coast Shire services and facilities. This needs to be recognised in developing population policy and future State Government investment strategies.

Economic growth and productivity

Future population growth for the Surf Coast Shire is forecast to remain strong. By 2036 the population is expected to reach 43,700 residents (an increase of approximately 17,100 from 2011 levels). To keep pace with this rate of population growth an estimated 2,000 additional jobs need to be created between by 2036. Failure to achieve this could see Surf Coast Shire's economic growth and productivity decline. State Government population policy must pay close attention to job creation in the regions to ensure overall economic wealth is not diminished.

The Surf Coast economy is unique. Key industry sectors of surfing, tourism, events construction and an emerging hinterland have played key roles in driving Surf Coast Shire's gross regional product beyond \$1 billion in 2016. In the context of the G21 Region, Surf Coast's economy plays a vital role in delivering economic diversity. Importantly, these

sectors are not built via traditional industries such as manufacturing, but rather, innovative small businesses which can provide global services from home and / or eclectic business parks. Surf Coast Shire strongly encourages funding programs that recognise unique economies and provide flexibility in securing funding for expanding businesses and knowledge based innovators. Current programs lack this depth and flexibility which has led to a number of businesses leaving or considering leaving Surf Coast Shire for other locations. Examples include Oakley and Ghanda. These funding programs will help build a diversified economy and boost productivity as businesses which generate higher levels of value add activity flourish. The State Government has a vital role to play advocating ensuring our internet and mobile phone networks cover regional Victoria with world class capacity and speed to sustain regional business growth. This is particularly so for areas such as the Surf Coast where there are multiple blackspots and many micro businesses being established for lifestyle reasons.

Surf Coast Shire is the home of Bells Beach, the start of the Great Ocean Road and the host of several hallmark Victorian events including the Rip Curl Pro, Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race and the Falls Festival. We perform an integral role in communicating a broader message for Victoria's prosperity and desirability as a destination. We therefore encourage the State and Federal Governments continued investment in the Great Ocean Road Visitor Economy including funding for the road itself. We support Great Ocean Road governance models being streamlined and better coordinated including the affirmation of the important role of local government. Given the ability of regional areas to showcase Victoria to the world through events, and in doing so create additional jobs, we encourage an expansion in funding of the Regional Events Fund beyond the \$20million level.

The environment is critical to sustained growth in these sectors. Surf Coast Shire supports measures to protect the unique environment that forms a basis for attracting 1.8 million visitors here annually. When considering growth in regional areas, State Government policy must ensure the environment in regional Victoria is not compromised. A prime example of such an area is Surf Coast's hinterland which is emerging as a key to Surf Coast and the Great Ocean Road region's ability to generate additional jobs via food tourism, better connected supply chains, provenance, and innovative agricultural pursuits via the use of technology. Funding programs must recognise the importance of hinterland areas in job generation and the intrinsic value of the land.

The Great Ocean Road is Victoria's second most visited destination. The region attracts approximately 5 million people each year who inject an estimated \$700 million into Victoria's economy. Surf Coast Shire therefore encourages adequate levels of funding to be directed towards ensuring road conditions are to a high standard and the experience received by visitors is world class. Surf Coast Shire is planning to Grow Adventure Tourism through investment in Surf Coast Trails including the Surf Coast Walk. We are seeking State Government support which will help deliver a regional plan worth \$24 million per year in direct visitor spend and 273 jobs. We are also advocating for funding to implement the Shipwreck Coast Masterplan to boost the Great Ocean Road Visitor Economy.

Liveability

Surf Coast Shire is a great place to live. We will continue to work with the State Government to establish permanent town boundaries to keep it this way. Uncontrolled growth is likely to erode people's pride in the place they live and remove the very identity of a town that encourages them to live there. Surf Coast Shire Council has adopted strong strategic plans which protect our beautiful coast and hinterland. We ask that government policy supports Council's strategic plans by helping make town boundaries permanent and improve liveability in our towns.

Great access to transport is a key feature of successful population growth in regional Victoria. Public transport plays an important role in providing access to education, employment and social activities for community members in these locations.

Limited public transport exists in many regional and rural areas. Poor access to public transport is directly linked to isolation (social and economic) in the many regions in Victoria. Increasing the utilisation of public transport contributes to reducing traffic congestion, improving the environment, and overcoming social and economic isolation.

Victoria introduced a minimum service level for Melbourne bus services in 2006, but there is not a minimum level of service for many regional communities. (*G21 Transport Strategy, 2014*) The Victorian Government should establish a clear policy with guidelines for levels of services for regional communities. Flexible service trials that use smaller vehicles in rural areas should be considered to reduce costs while still catering for the level of passengers using these services. Longer term planning and investment from the State Government is needed for transport infrastructure – including but not exclusively for rail and road - to adequately service population growth before and as it happens.

The State Government can further support population growth in regional Victoria by adequately funding services it is responsible for. For many years and in the lead up to introduction of the Fair Go Rates System, an increasing range of services that are State Government responsibilities have been provided by councils under shared funding agreements with the State. Research indicates that the State's contribution has reduced, stopped completely or not kept pace with costs. Examples of these services include school crossing supervisors, library services and emergency services such as the S.E.S, Marine Rescue and Surf Life Saving.

School crossing supervisors began as a joint 50:50 funding split in 1975 but now only has 20 per cent of costs covered by the State, with councils contributing \$44 million a year. Public libraries are now funded 83 per cent by councils, with the State only providing 17 per cent, creating a funding gap of \$73 million annually for councils, despite an original 50:50 agreement. Maternal and child health services are closer to a 40:60 funding split, creating a gap of \$13 million for councils in 2015-16. These services are important and the State Government needs to adequately fund them to support regional communities to grow.

State and Federal Governments can support population growth in the regions by investing in enabling infrastructure in these areas. In Surf Coast Shire, population growth planning and investment must consider the harmonious distribution of people in coastal and hinterland locations. Winchelsea in Surf Coast Shire is ideally placed to grow to the predicted levels of 10,000 people and the State government needs to continue to invest in this area. To support this growth, State Government can partner with us to deliver key community infrastructure including new Winchelsea Netball Facilities, Torquay Active Transport (new paths and cycling routes), a Multipurpose Indoor Sports Stadium in Torquay and the redevelopment of Lorne's Stribling Reserve facilities.

Social inclusion

Surf Coast Shire and Victoria have ageing populations. The State Government has a vital role to play in advocating to the Federal Government to ensure the needs of older Victorians are met. This advocacy should focus on key areas such as health, accommodation and financial security.

Growth regions commonly have a higher proportion of people in younger cohorts. Surf Coast Shire's population has a higher proportion of people aged 0-9 than Victoria. (14.5% compared to 12.5% - *ABS 2011*). Surf Coast Shire's younger population is also growing at a faster rate than the state average. State and Federal Governments need to continue to

invest in education and health services for young people. We support the State Government in calling on the Federal Government to continue to allocate sufficient funding to retain 15 hours of kindergarten per week for all kindergarten children.

There is an opportunity for the State Government to enhance social inclusion by investing more in unstructured recreation facilities, active transport links and increasing open space. State Government grants have historically focussed on structured sport facilities and projects that promote economic activity. Open space plays a major role in improving community health, both physical and mental, reducing crime, stimulating economic growth and even boosting property value. Funding that is aligned to enhancing open space can support social inclusion and make regional communities better places to live.

Environmental sustainability

Surf Coast Shire strongly encourages the Victorian Coalition to actively address climate change by including renewable energy and reduced carbon emissions in population growth policy. The Taskforce discussion paper is silent on the role renewable energy can play in supporting sustainable population growth in regional Victoria. We are committed to pulling our weight in contributing to State and National renewable energy targets. That's why we are looking to establish a partnership with other levels of government to establish renewable energy micro grids in a ground breaking partnership with Deakin University. The State Government has a leadership role to play in developing sustainable regional centres by investing in renewable energy options including establishing micro grids. This will not only help environmental sustainability but has a direct economic benefit by delivering local jobs to communities.

We are working with other councils in the G21 region to replace streetlights with energy efficient globes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 2,500 tonnes. This is another opportunity for government partnerships to build environmental sustainability to support population growth.

Surf Coast Shire is currently developing a Local and Sustainable Food Strategy which will deliver environment and economic benefits for our region. We know there is an opportunity in our Shire and across the state to develop the food and tourism sector in a way that supports climate resilience, increases food quality, provides local jobs and boosts regional economies. These are all features that can support population growth. The State Government should develop a statewide sustainable food plan to maximise the benefits to local communities and the state.

Surf Coast Shire applauds the State Government for banning the exploration of unconventional gas in Victoria. We have long advocated for this outcome. This legislation will protect the environment as well as the agricultural and tourism sectors in regional and rural communities. We call on future State Governments to keep this ban in place and to advocate to other states and the Federal Government to implement the same policy.

On the coast, we understand the damage plastic bags do to our environment including the native wildlife. The Victorian Government should create regulations to establish controls over the 'free' distribution of lightweight plastic shopping bags by Victorian Retailers (similar to the action taken in Tasmania, South Australia, the ACT and the Northern Territory). A pristine environment is a key reason why people choose to leave the city so this policy will help support population growth in the regions.

Planning for how Victoria manages emergencies must be considered in population policy. Natural weather events will become more extreme as a result of climate change. More people living in the regions will place a greater number of people at risk. The State

Government needs to adequately resource emergency management to keep pace with population growth in regional Victoria.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to have our say on considerations for population growth. If you have any enquiries regarding this submission or any other information about Surf Coast Shire, please contact myself or Chief Executive Officer, Keith Baillie on 5261 0602.

Yours sincerely

Cr Brian McKiterick
Mayor Surf Coast Shire

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