Background Report 2

Socio-economic profile of the West Coast Community

Hydro Tasmania and West Coast Council April 2008

SGS
Economics & Planning

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Hydro Tasmania

&

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1 Socio-economic profile of the West Coast

This background report provides a socio-economic profile of the West Coast and its townships to provide a clear picture of the current population and changes affecting life in the West Coast. This profile provides the context against which the impacts of cloud seeding will be assessed: what people are affected and in what way?

Historically, population growth on the West Coast was driven primarily by mining activities. Later the Hydro-Electric Commission (nowadays Hydro Tasmania) attracted workers to the area to build and operate its dams and power generators. Employment in mining experienced major ups and downs, following a path of mining activities depending on volatile global market prices. Employment opportunities with Hydro Tasmania have decreased significantly over time as dam building activities have ceased and operation activities have been largely automated.

The fishing industry is another significant contributor to the local economy, and includes aquaculture activity as well as wild fisheries. In more recent years the West Coast has been able to develop its tourism sector, which provides income and employment to a steady and increasing number of people. These main economic drivers have and continue to play a determining role in the growth and opportunities of the population of the West Coast community.

An important factor in people's daily lives on the West Coast is its climate and rainfall specifically. With annual rainfall between 2 and 3 meters a year rainfall is an undeniable presence much as extreme heat and aridity is in some other parts of Australia. Other factors specifically affecting the demographics of the West Coast are its remoteness, natural beauty and the affordability of real estate.

This background report will address the following aspects:

- Population and demographic change (population, age, gender)
- Households and residence (household composition, income, tenure and dwelling type)
- Public health and factors affecting health (health needs assessment West Coast; Alberton Consulting & Di Hollister)
- Economic characteristics, building approvals, etc
- Labour force & employment

Where relevant these aspects are set within the broader Tasmanian context and notice will be made of circumstantial developments that affect life and lifestyle on the West Coast.

The analysis is primarily based on ABS data from Census 1996, 2001 and 2006. The recent release of Census 2006 data ensures the analysis is up to date and incorporates most of the time period of Hydro's current operational phase of cloud seeding.

1.1 Population and demographic change

In 2006 West Coast population counted just over 5,000 persons. Both Census counts and estimated residential population (ERP) numbers are very similar. ERP also takes residents into account that were elsewhere in Australia at the day of the Census[1].

Since 1991 the West Coast resident population has been steadily decreasing, falling by over one third from 7,629. Population decrease was strongest from 1991 to 1996 (-17%) and slowed down: between 1996 and 2001 (-13%) then 2001 to 2006 (-9%). From 1996 to 2001 population decreased in Tasmania overall by 0.7%. However, this trend has been reversed in recent years with the State's population growing by 4.3% to approximately 476,500. The West Coast has not been able to reverse its downward population growth in contrast to Tasmania as a whole (Table 1).

Table 1. Population 1996, 2001, 2006

Location	1996	2001	2006
Tasmania	459 659	456 652	476 480
West Coast	6 336	5 515	5 006
Queenstown	n/a	2 352	2 117
Rosebery	n/a	1 115	1 033
Strahan	n/a	758	636
Tullah	n/a	250	195
Zeehan	n/a	892	846

Source: ABS Census 1996, 2001, 2006, count of usual residents

Table 1 shows the five main townships of the West Coast all saw their populations decline from 2001 to 2006 (1996 data not available at local level). This has happened in spite of the recent mining boom with mines reopening and expanding operations. Apparently much of this new employment is taken up by families residing elsewhere with workers commuting on rotating shifts. Families often choose to locate along the Northwest coast of Tasmania, for instance in Burnie and Wynyard, while the income earner of the family stays in the West Coast during work shifts. This trend does not contribute to the community life of the area.

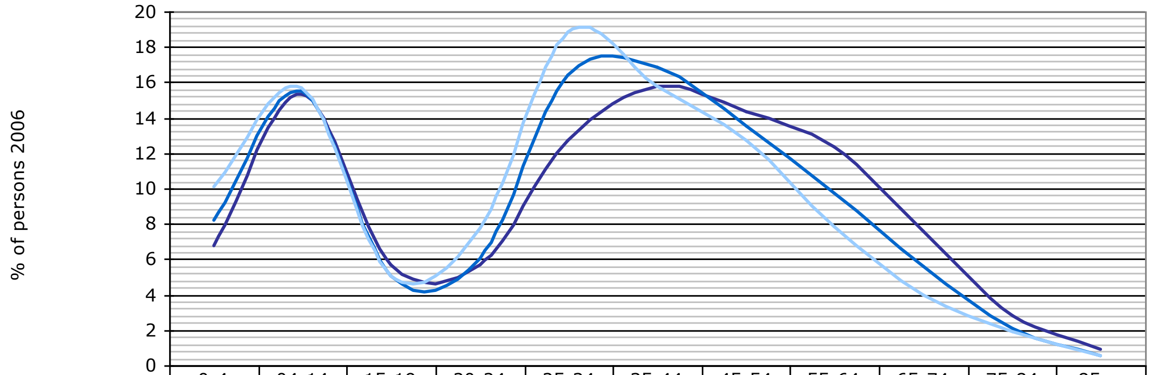
Unless this trend is reversed the resident population of the West Coast will further decline in the coming years. The West Coast seems to attract some seasonal residents who own a second home in the area. The real estate prices are relatively low and the West Coast is an area of great natural beauty.

The population of the West Coast is ageing. Figure 1 below shows the age distribution of West Coast's population in 1996, 2001 and 2006. Over time, the graph lines have shifted towards the right indicating the older age groups are expanding in size. In 1996 approximately 8% of residents were aged between 55 and 64 years of age. By 2006 this portion had increased to 12%. The group

[1] ERP is typically higher than census counts. This suggests that those away from the area and overseas on census night are off set by non-residents in the area on census night.

of 65 to 74 years olds has increased from 4% to 8%. Furthermore, there has been a marked decrease of persons in the 25 to 34 years age group from 19% in 1996 to 13% in 2006. The severe dip in the age profile shows that a large proportion of young adults leave the West Coast.

Figure 1. Population age distribution, 1996, 2001, 2006, West Coast LGA

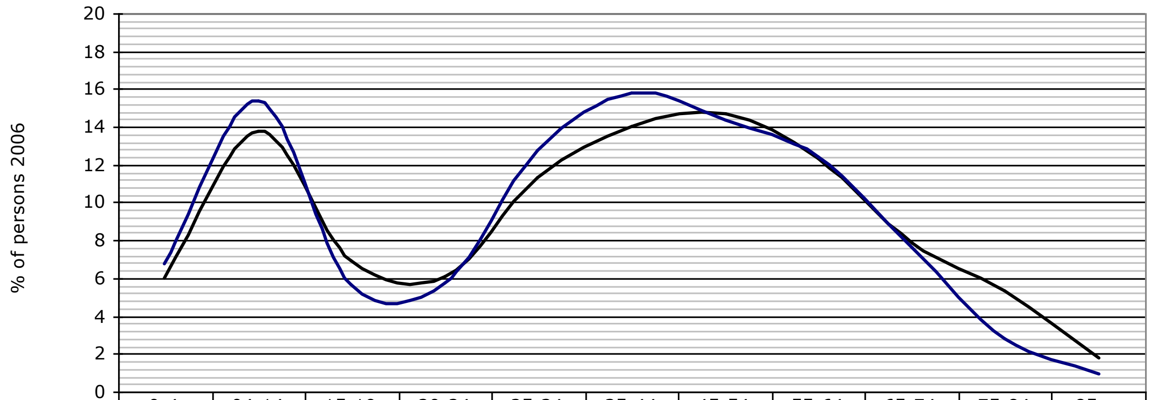


	0-4	04-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85 +
West Coast 2006	7	15	6	6	13	16	14	12	8	3	1
West Coast 2001	8	16	5	6	16	17	13	10	6	2	1
West Coast 1996	10	16	5	8	19	16	13	8	4	2	1

Source: ABS Census 1996, 2001, 2006, count of usual residents

Ageing of the population is not a trend just affecting the West Coast. Tasmania as a whole suffers from it as well. Tasmania and South Australia are the two states where population turns gray at the highest pace. Figure 2 below compares the age distribution of the West Coast to Tasmania (2006). It shows the two age profiles are not far apart and that West Coast has relatively more children up to 14 years old and 25 to 45 year olds. It actually retains a smaller proportion of persons over the age of 75 than Tasmania as a whole.

Figure 2. Population age distribution, 2006, West Coast LGA and Tasmania



	0-4	04-14	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85 +
Tasmania	6	14	7	6	11	14	15	12	8	5	2
West Coast	7	15	6	6	13	16	14	12	8	3	1

Source: ABS Census 2006, count of usual residents

The population in Strahan and Tullah is slightly more aged than West Coast as a whole. Rosebery and Queenstown have more younger age groups present.

West Coast population continues to drop further each year although the pace has somewhat flattened between 2001 and 2006 compared to the period prior to that. During that same time (2001-2006) Tasmanian population started to expand again after it saw its numbers drop between 1996 and 2001. West Coast has not been able to follow this trend. West Coast population is ageing profoundly which is in line with Tasmania as a whole.

Population in the West Coast has been sustained by natural increase offsetting the migration of young adults and to a much lesser extent, the elderly. The crude birth rate is relatively high and the death rate relatively low compared to Tasmania as a whole. This accounts for the relatively high proportion of children. However as Table 2 shows, the rate of natural increase is falling sharply as birth and death rates approach those of the rest of the state.

Table 2. Births and deaths, West Coast 2000-04 and comparison of crude rates

For year ended 31 December		**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**
Births	no.	99	96	74	74	73
Deaths	no.	27	31	36	36	40
Natural increase		**72**	**65**	**38**	**38**	**33**
Crude birth rate (WCC)	rate	17.9	17.4	13.8	14.2	14.3
Crude birth rate (Tas)	*rate*	*12.0*	*13.6*	*12.7*	*12.0*	*12.0*
Crude death rate (WCC)	rate	4.8	5.6	6.7	6.9	7.8
Crude death rate (Tas)	*rate*	*7.8*	*8.2*	*8.4*	*8.3*	*8.0*

Source: ABS National Regional Profile, 2000 to 2004, ABS cat. no. 1379.0.55.001

1.2 Household characteristics

West Coast has 2 053 households and the average household size is 2.4 persons per household. The average household size in Tasmania as a whole is higher at 2.6 persons. The smaller household size is linked to the high percentage of lone person households on the West Coast (see Table 3 below).

Approximately 70% of all households in Tasmania consist of family households whereas on the West Coast this percentage is lower at 64%. Queenstown and Tullah have particularly high portions of lone person households. This is largely due to mining workers who moved to the area for their jobs. Those single or having families living far away would have the West Coast as their place of usual residence.

Table 3. Household composition, %, 2006

	Family household	Lone person household	Total
Tasmania	70	30	100
West Coast	64	36	100
Queenstown	63	37	100
Rosebery	64	36	100
Strahan	67	33	100
Tullah	63	37	100
Zeehan	65	35	100

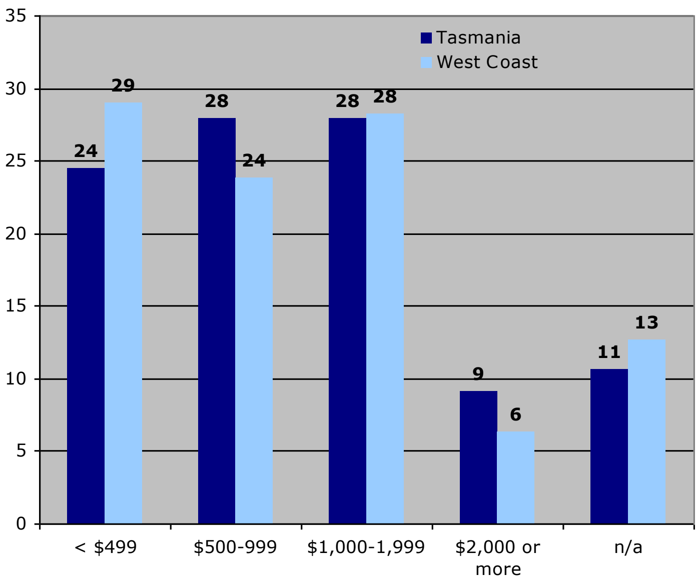
Source: ABS, Census 2006

Approximately 44% of all West Coast family households consist of a couple with children and another 45% of families without children. One in ten families is a one parent household. This is consistent with Tasmania as a whole. Two townships deviate from this broad picture, Strahan and Tullah, which are dominated by couples without children (56%) and fewer households with children (ABS Census, 2006).

1.2.1 Income

The West Coast has relatively more households earning low incomes of up to $500 per week than Tasmania as a whole (see Figure 3 below), but it has fewer households earning medium incomes ($500 to $1000). At the higher end of the income spectrum ($1,000 and more) West Coast is broadly in line with Tasmania as whole except for very high incomes, where West Coast lags behind the rest of the state.

Figure 3. Households by weekly income, in % of all households, 2006



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Source: ABS Census, 2006

The distribution of income is not even across the LGA. Strahan has a lower proportion of the lowest income group while Tullah followed by Zeehan have a higher proportion of households with income of less than $500 (Table 4). Strahan has a higher proportion of households with incomes between $500 and $1000. Queenstown and Rosebery have the highest proportion of income earners in the $1000-$2000 per week category of the West Coast towns.

Table 4. Household income distribution (%), by town, 2006

	Tasmania	West Coast	Queenstown	Rosebery	Strahan	Tullah	Zeehan
Less than $500	24	29	28	27	23	37	34
$500-999	28	24	23	23	29	16	24
$1,000-1,999	28	28	30	30	26	29	27
$2,000 or more	9	6	6	8	7	4	4
Not stated	11	13	12	12	15	14	11

Source: ABS, Census 2006

Over the last five years many households saw their incomes shift from the low segments to higher income groups. Of course, it should be noted that inflation has pushed up prices and incomes in general so the income shift does not necessarily mean households are better off than five years ago.

However, comparing income shifts on the West Coast with the general Tasmanian trend does indicate whether West Coast residents are relatively better or worse off than five years ago compared to the rest of Tasmania. Table 5 below shows the changes in the portions of households per income level in 2006 compared to 2001. For Tasmania as a whole there is a strong shift away from incomes of up to $500 per week (-12%). At the same time there is a strong increase of households earning $1,000 to $2,000 per week (+8%). The West Coast has followed this trend but at a much slower pace: it shows only a 5% decrease in households earning up to $500 per week (less than half the change in Tasmania as a whole) and a 1% increase in households earning $1,000 to $2,000 per week (compared to the much larger 8% in Tasmania).

Table 5. Change in household income distribution (in %), 2001-2006

	Tasmania	West Coast	Queenstown	Rosebery	Strahan	Tullah	Zeehan
Less than $500	-12	-5	-6	-2	-16	-18	2
$500-999	-1	-1	-2	1	0	-5	0
$1,000-1,999	8	1	3	-3	8	18	-1
$2,000 or more	5	3	4	6	4	-2	-2
Not stated	0	1	1	-1	3	7	0

Source: ABS Census, 2001 & 2006

Within the West Coast there are some striking differences between the townships. Both Strahan and Tullah experienced string shifts away from lower household incomes towards higher incomes (an 18% increase of households earning between $1,000 and $2,000 per week in Tullah). Both in Queenstown and Rosebery the income distribution enhanced somewhat but not as strongly. And the income distribution in Zeehan actually deteriorated somewhat. The overall effect has been to level out what were more extreme differences between the towns in 2001.

Overall, West Coast has not kept pace with the growth in incomes in Tasmania as a whole. Incomes on the West Coast in 2001 were slightly higher than in Tasmania as whole. Thus the West Coast now has relatively more lower income households while maintaining its higher proportion of $500 - $1000 income households. Strahan and Tullah however have progressed strongly and decreased the gap with Tasmania as a whole.

As mentioned before, incomes and changes therein expressed in day-to-day dollar values do not say much about welfare as such, as it does not reflect the purchasing power of these dollars over time. Although the affordability of many goods is increasing continuously, especially in regard to retail and homewares, transportation and housing are under pressure. Housing affordability is currently at a historical low in much of Australia.

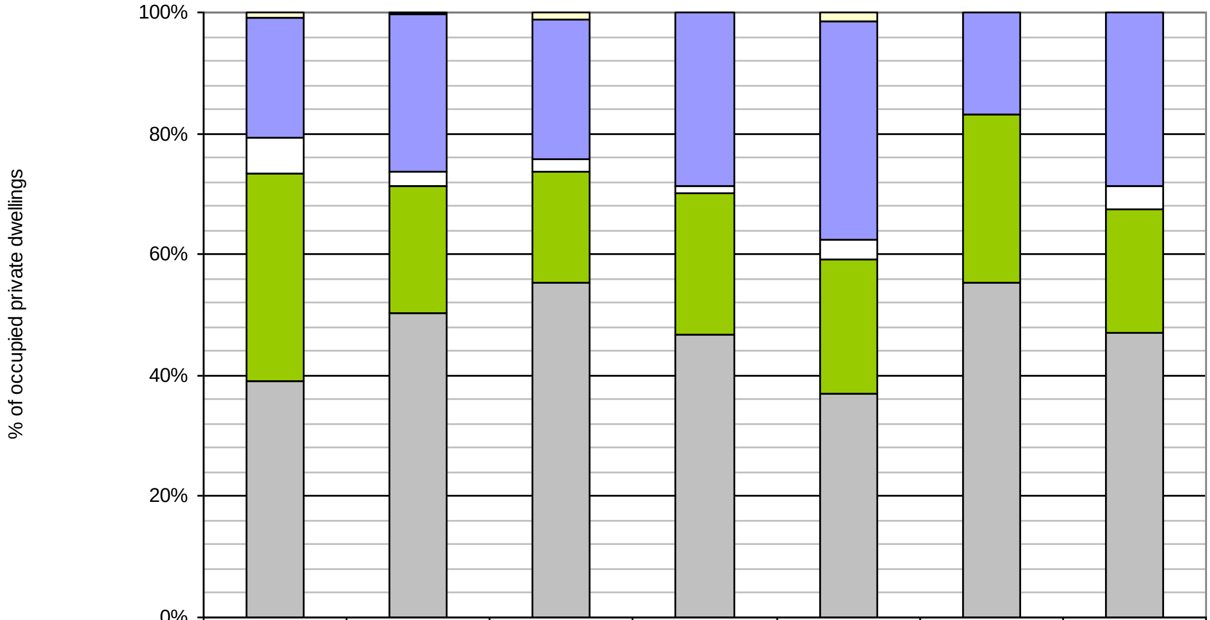
1.2.2 Housing and affordability

Prior to the 1980s, most housing in Tullah, Rosebery and Zeehan were owned by the mines or HEC and workers had to leave when they were no longer employed by these organisations. This in part accounts for the lower level of older residents than in Tasmania as a whole. More recently most housing is now owned or being purchased, largely in line with state averages except that outright ownership is higher in the West Coast. This probably reflects the important characteristic of the West Coast, the generally low real estate and rental prices by Tasmanian and national standards.

On a national scale Tasmania has always been characterised in the same way. However, in recent years some important changes have occurred. Tasmania’s population is no longer dropping and actually grew considerably since 2001. Consequently, demand for housing has increased, pushing up house prices. Rising interest rates have pushed affordability down. The following section shows trends in home ownership and affordability.

On the West Coast there is a high proportion of households that fully owns their dwelling, approximately 48% compared to 38% in Tasmania as a whole. This is offset by a much smaller proportion, 20% of households purchasing their homes compared to 33% in Tasmania (see Figure 4 below). Home ownership or purchase is particularly high in Tullah and low in Strahan.

Figure 4. Households by tenure type Tasmania and West Coast, in %, 2006



	Tasmania	West Coast	Queenstown	Rosebery	Strahan	Tullah	Zeehan
Other	0.8	0.3	1.1	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0
Rented (Private)	19.3	25.1	21.8	27.8	34.7	16.9	27.8
Rented (Housing Authority)	5.7	2.1	2.1	1.0	3.2	0.0	3.5
Being Purchased	33.4	20.1	17.3	22.8	21.3	27.7	19.9
Fully Owned	37.8	48.3	52.7	45.3	35.7	55.4	45.3

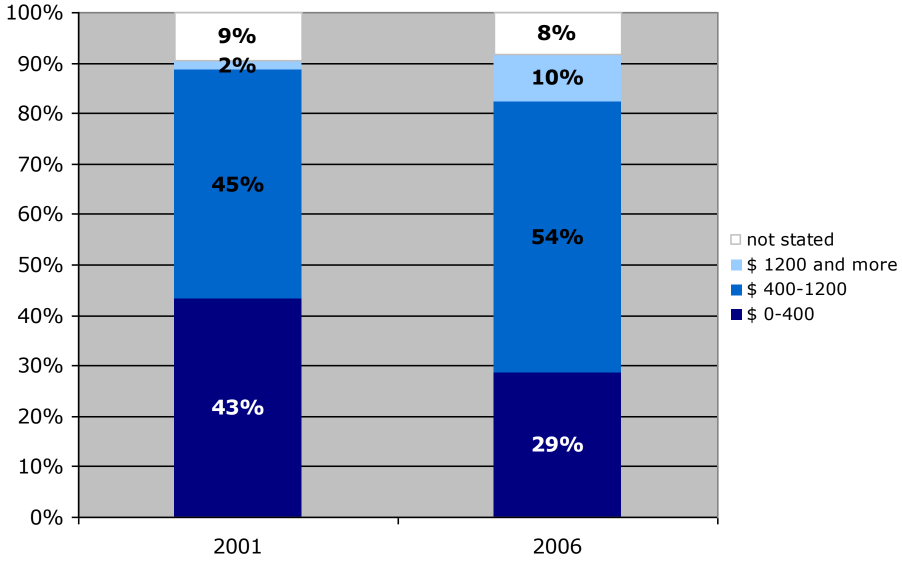
Source: ABS Census, 2006

Around 27% of households on the West Coast are renting, which is slightly higher than Tasmania as a whole (25%). However, the West Coast has few public rental dwellings and more private rental. Private rental dwellings form a particularly large proportion of the Strahan housing market.

There is a marked shift from households fully owning their home to households paying off their home loans. On the West Coast, the proportion of households that fully own their dwelling has been dropping continuously from 55% in 1996, to 53% in 2001 and to 48% in 2006. And the proportion households purchasing their home has steadily been increasing from 14% in 1996 and 2001 to 20% in 2006. This shift is in line with Tasmania as a whole. This could suggest housing affordability is deteriorating. It may also reflect the ageing demographic where an increasing proportion of the population is in the older age groups with fully paid off dwellings and fewer in the family formation house buying age groups.

More evidence indicating housing affordability is deteriorating is provided in Figure 5 below. In 2006 there were more households paying relatively high home loan repayments than in 2001.

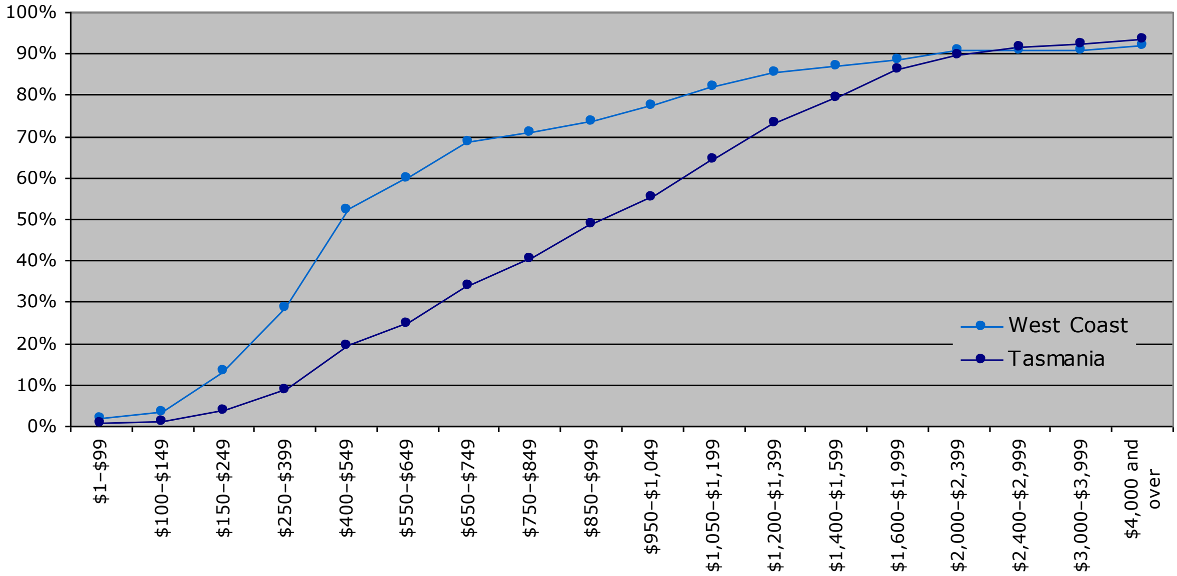
Figure 5. Monthly housing loan repayments by households, West Coast, 2001-06*



* A more detailed comparison between 2006 and 2001 was not possible due to different loan repayment categories for both years Source: ABS Census, 2001, 2006

Overall, housing at the West Coast is still relatively affordable compared to Tasmania as a whole (see Figure 6). Half of households on the West Coast have housing loan repayments less than $550 per month. For Tasmania this is at $950 per month. The same is true for the rental sector (see appendix A).

Figure 6. Monthly housing repayments Tasmania, West Coast, cumulative %, 2006



Source: ABS Census 2006, edited by SGS 2007

1.3 Labour force & employment

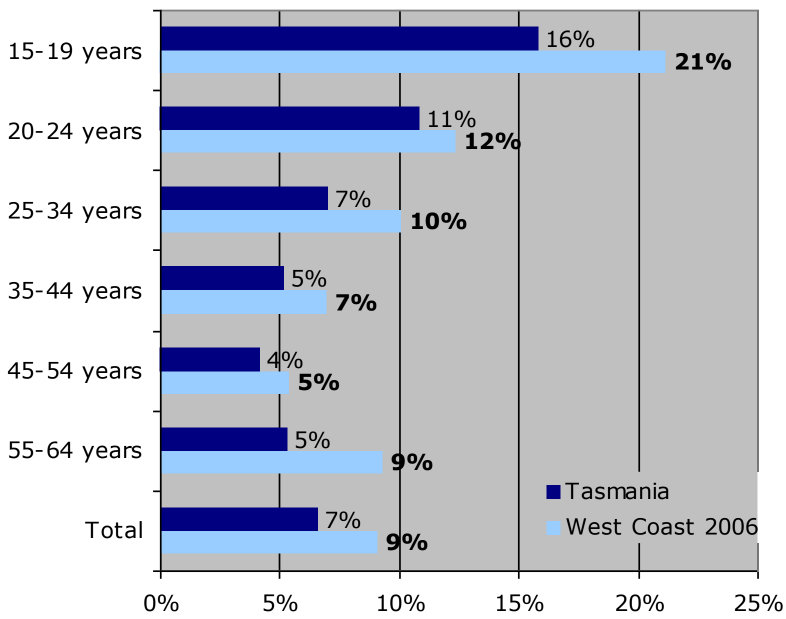
1.3.1 Unemployment

Overall unemployment was higher in the West Coast compared to Tasmania at the time of the last census. This was true for every age group as well as the workforce overall.

Differences in the rate of unemployment were highest for the 15-19 age groups, at 21% in the West Coast compared to 16% for Tasmania. The other age group with a larger than average difference was the 55+, with 9% unemployed in the West Coast compared to 5% for the state as a whole. Other age groups typically had about a 1-2% difference from the statewide levels of unemployment (Figure 7).

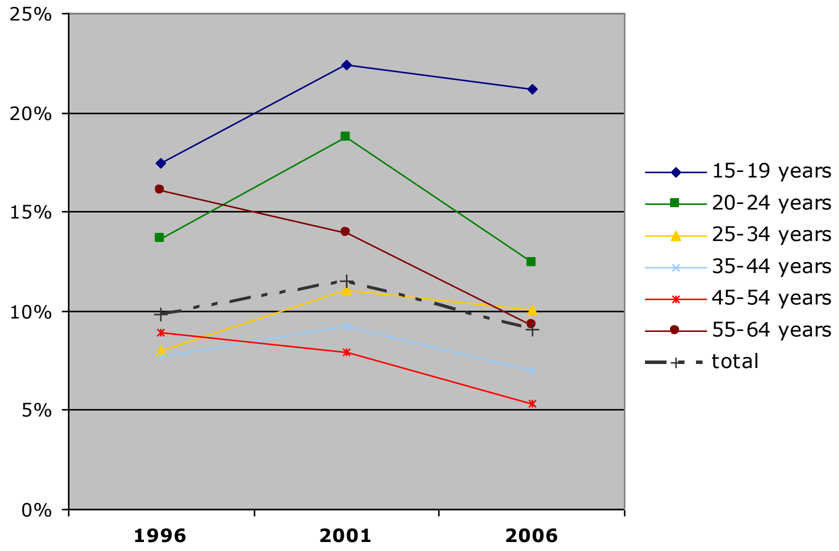
While higher than state averages, unemployment levels have been trending downward in all age groups since 2001. This is in sharp contrast to the trend pre 2001 where unemployment was rising for all age groups under age 45 from 1996 to 2001 (Figure 8). The rising unemployment rate in the late 1990s was undoubtedly a contributor to population loss during that period. More recent improvements would have made some contribution to slowing the rate, but being still significantly above state average levels, would not be helping to retain population in the West Coast.

Figure 7. Unemployment rate by age group, Tasmania and West Coast (in %), 2006



Source: ABS Census, 2006

Figure 8. Unemployment per age group (%), West Coast, 1996-2006



Source: ABS Census, 2006

1.3.2 Labour force participation rate

In contrast to unemployment, labour force participation rates are higher than in Tasmania as a whole. This reflects how participation rates are calculated, and the fact that the West Coast has a smaller proportion of persons aged 75+ than the rest of the state. Strahan has a notably higher participation rate than the West Coast average and Tullah a notably lower one (Table 6).

Table 6. Labour force participation rate % 2006

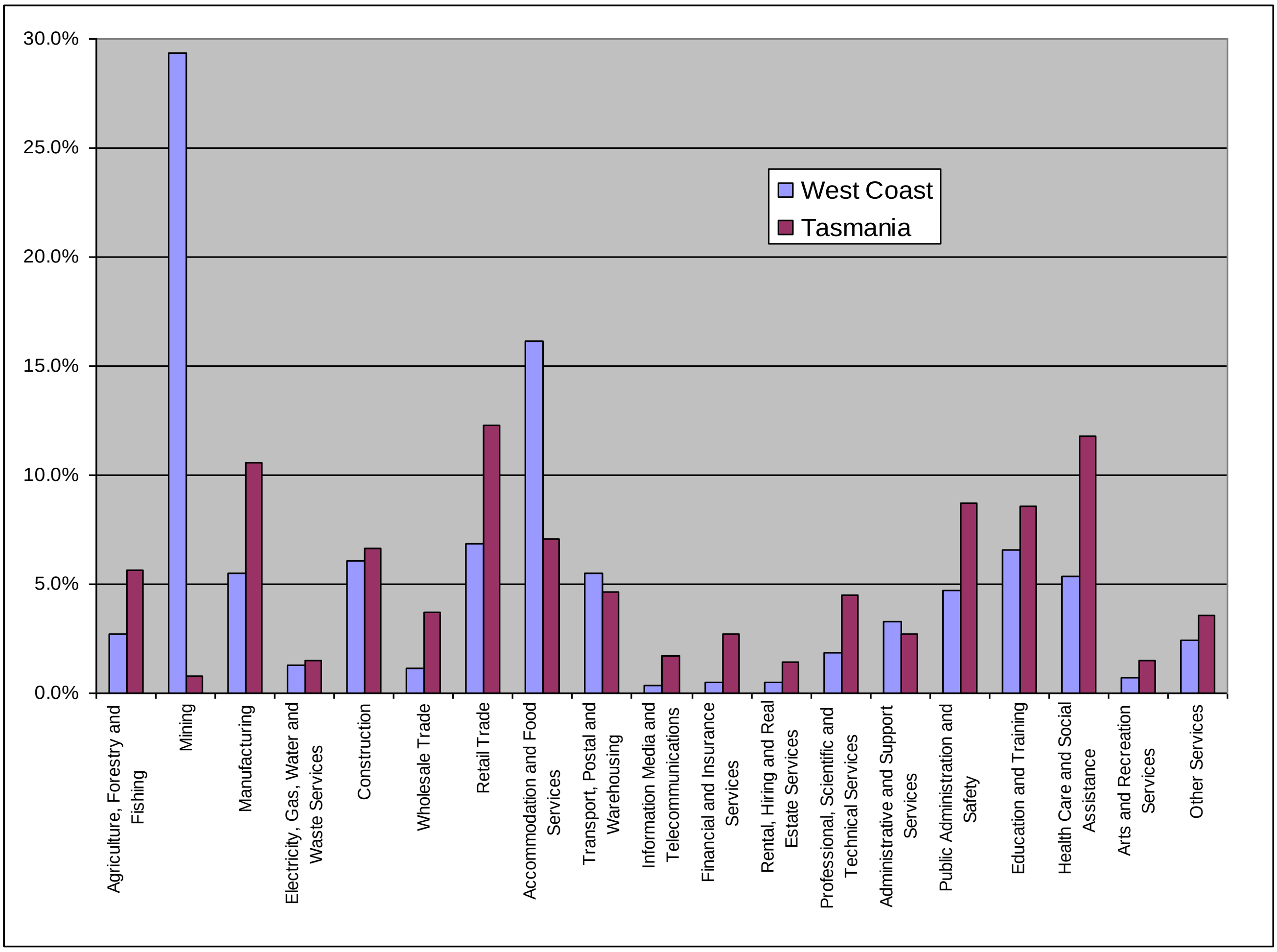
Area	Rate (%)
Tasmania	57%
West Coast	58%
Queenstown	56%
Rosebery	56%
Strahan	67%
Tullah	53%
Zeehan	58%

Source: ABS Census, 2006

1.3.3 Employment by industry

The profile of employment by industry reflects the industrial base described broadly at the start of Section 3. The dominance of mining is striking, with nearly 30% of all employment (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Persons employed by industry in Tasmania and West Coast (%), 2006



Source: ABS Census, 2006, Employment by destination, adjusted by SGS

The only other sectors with a proportion of employment greater than Tasmania are Accommodation, and Food services, Transport, Postal and Warehousing, and Administrative and Support Services. The first of these three is more than double the Tasmanian average, showing the importance of tourism to the region. Traditional industries of Agriculture Forestry and Fishing are minor contributors to overall employment.

1.3.4 Non-resident workers

The breakdown of employment by **place of employment** gives a total estimated employment level of 2230 jobs. This compares to the 2054 residents of the West Coast that reported their employment by industry. The difference suggests that nearly 9% of workers in the area live outside of the West Coast. Indications that just under 18% or 110 workers in the mining industry may do so. Other industries where some workers are living outside the West Coast include construction and health care.

This feature of work practices on the West Coast has been a source of change for the community, with increasing proportions of workers based out of the area. This reduces local spending, the proportion of families resident in the area and tends to 'hollow out' communities. It also contributes to a declining local population, even while employment levels in the area remain strong.

1.3.5 Other economic characteristics

Property sales activity as shown in Table 7 shows a rising trend in residential property sales, both in volume and price. The increase in mean sales value was 59% from 2000 to 2004. However, average prices are far below Tasmanian averages. In 2004, the West Coast average is only 27% of the Tasmanian mean sales price. Further, the rate of increase in sales prices is slower, 59% compared to 84% for Tasmania as a whole over the same period.

Sales of other properties have also strengthened, but only in the latest year shown.

Table 7. Property sales activity and value

Year ended 30 June		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Residential - Number of sales	No.	153		255	304	416
Residential - Mean sales price	$	30704		23349	34066	48875
Other - Number of sales	No.	40		40	43	77
Other - Mean sales price	$	34685		38675	44776	94544
Total - Number of sales	No.	193		295	347	493
Total - Mean sales price	$	31529		25427	35393	56008

Source: ABS National Regional Profile, 2000 to 2004, ABS cat. no. 1379.0.55.001; no data published for 2001

Table 8 summarises building approval activity from 2000 to 2004. Housing activity was reasonably steady over the period. Apart from the burst of units in 2000, it has averaged about 6 houses per year for the period. Non residential construction was more volatile from year to year. Total average building approvals per year have averaged $2.7 million.

Table 8. Building approvals

Year ended 30 June		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Avg
Private sector houses	no.	7	6	9	6	4	6.4
Total dwelling units	no.	20	6	9	6	4	9.0
Value of total residential building	$m	1.1	0.5	0.9	0.5	0.5	0.7
Value of total non-residential building	$m	2.9	1.5	1.1	3.1	1.3	2.0
Value of total building	**$m**	**4.0**	**2.0**	**2.0**	**3.5**	**1.8**	**2.7**

Source: ABS National Regional Profile, 2000 to 2004, ABS cat. no. 1379.0.55.001

This building activity corresponds to an average of about $500 per capita per year. This compares to just over $1000 per capita per year for Tasmania as a whole.

The West Coast has nearly 40% more length of roads per capita than Tasmania as a whole Table 9. However, a higher proportion of these roads are state government owned. The West Coast Council owns about 17% more roads per capita than local governments across the state, relatively a modest increase for a rural council. About the same proportion are paved as the statewide ratio.

Table 9. Roads per capita

	Tasmania			West Coast		
at 30 June 2004	**Length**	**sealed**	**Length /cap**	**Length**	**sealed**	**Length /cap**
	km	*%*	*m*	*km*	*%*	*m*
Local govt owned	14 080	49	29	175	47	34
State govt owned	3 406	93	7	85	100	17
Commonwealth govt owned	412	100	1	0		
All roads	**17 898**	**58**	**37**	**260**	**64**	**51**

Source: ABS National Regional Profile, 2000 to 2004, ABS cat. no. 1379.0.55.001

Tourism is clearly a key industry in the region with 16% of the workforce (353 jobs) employed in accommodation and food services. Others would be employed in tourism related aspects of transport, rental and hire, and recreation services. A portion of retail sales would be to visitors. In total tourism could support approximately 500 jobs including the effects of multipliers, or nearly 25% of the employment in the West Coast. Its economic role is substantially less significant than mining in financial terms as the level of wages and value adding in the tourism industry is much less per capita than in mining. However, it probably spends a greater share of its turnover locally and fewer workers commute to work in this industry than in mining.

Accommodation is the most accurately and regularly tracked measure of visitors and their activity, available as a monthly series. Table 10 summarises the main accommodation in hotels, motels and serviced apartments. There are two caravan parks, two organisations letting holiday flats and units and two hostels. Statistics are not published for these in the West Coast due to confidentiality. Note that smaller establishments are also excluded from the table below. Larger motels and guest houses account for the majority of accommodation in the region.

Table 10. Number of accommodation establishments, rooms, West Coast, March 2007

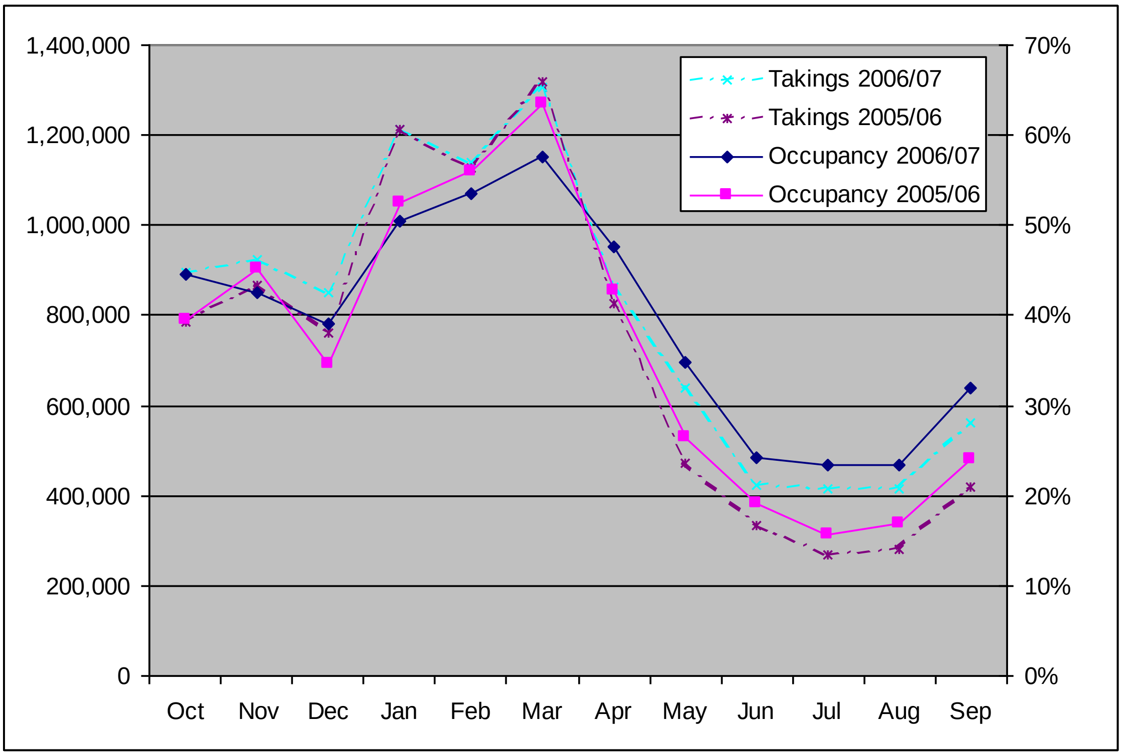
Type of establishment	**5-14**	**15+**	**All 5+**
Licensed hotels	2	5	7
Motels and guest houses	2	6	8
Serviced apartments	3	2	5
All hotels, motels and serviced apartments	**7**	**13**	**20**
Rooms, all types	**63**	**541**	**604**
Beds	**205**	**1495**	**1700**
Employment	**45**	**257**	**302**

Source: ABS Satellite tourism accounts, 8635.6.55.001 Mar 2007 Tourist Accommodation, Small Area Data, Tasmania

Figure 10 shows the seasonal variation in room occupancy and takings. The strongly seasonal character is evident with quite low activity from May to September. October, November and December form a clear 'shoulder' season. Takings drop more strongly in the off season than occupancy, reflecting the generally lower off season rates and use of promotional packages to fill rooms.

Winter occupancy was up substantially in 2006/07 from the previous year, and total takings from accommodation increased by 11% from the previous year. Total takings from the listed establishments were $9.6 million for the twelve months to September 2007.

Figure 10. Room occupancy rate, West Coast, March 2007



Source: ABS Satellite tourism accounts, 8635.6.55.001 Tourist Accommodation, Small Area Data, Tasmania, eight quarters to September 2007

1.3.6 Mining activity

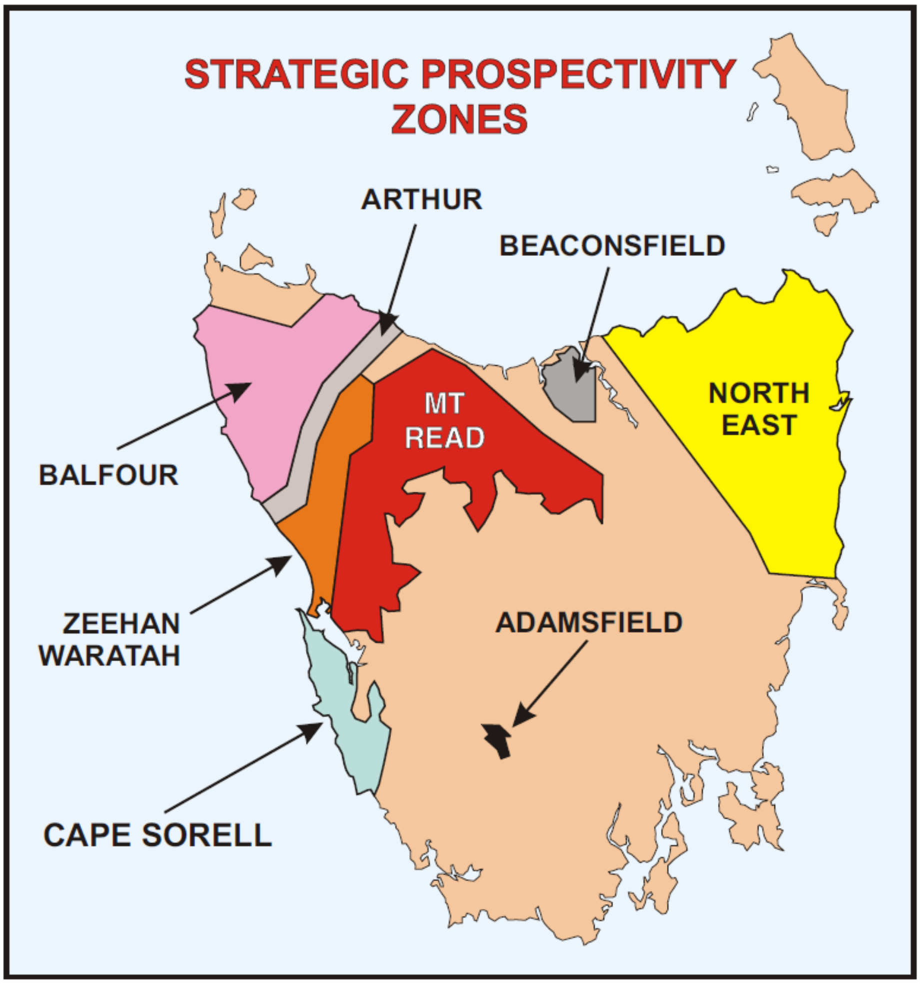
The West Coast has a long and rich mining history including a range of minerals in both open cut and underground mining operations. The West Coast is a particularly rich source of many ores found in characteristically hard rock provinces including copper, tin, gold, zinc, lead, nickel, silver and iron.

The West Coast is somewhat unusual in sustaining mining activity for well over 100 years. Many mining communities are quite transient, with the mines being exhausted and either other economic activity largely taking over (eg Ballarat) or the town dying out. In the West Coast, many long standing mines continue to sustain activity (Mt Lyell) and new mines and mineral processing activities continue to be developed in the area: Allegiance nickel mine at Avebury, the reopening of the Renison Bell tin mine and the upgrade of the Polymetals Hellyer project to recover metals from tailings, etc. Exploration activity continues in the region and existing mines often yield additional resources as more sophisticated modeling of the geology reveals new opportunities:

> *Zinifex Limited announced a 65% increase in resources at Rosebery in 2007 to 11.7 million tonnes of 13.0% zinc, 3.8% lead, 0.4% copper, 138 grams per tonne silver and 1.9 grams per tonne gold. The company considers that its goal of continuing to mine the Rosebery ore body until at least 2020 is achievable.*
>
> *Mineral Resource Tasmania, Annual Review 2006/2007*

Much of the West Coast area is within one of several Strategic Prospectivity Zones, underlying the importance of the area to the mining industry of the state (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Strategic Prospectivity Zones



Source: MRT Annual Review 2006/2007

Mining and metallurgical production in the state as a whole was $2.8 billion in 2006/07. Mining production alone produced $1.02 billion generating royalties of $33.8 million. Of this metallic minerals, the main product from the West coast, accounted for the largest share, $0.92 billion.

Growth in the value of mineral products was greater than growth in volume (tonnes) reflecting strong resource prices recently.

Tasmania and the West Coast continue to benefit from strong international demand for minerals. The character of mining has changed with a change from a dependence on the mining company for most of the housing and other services provided to employee and contractor residents to a more restricted role of employer with few services provided. The other change is in work practices and the increasing pattern of mining families living out of the area with workers coming in for four days of long shifts. This undercuts the degree of identification between the community and the mining companies, and reduces the social and economic role that mine workers and their families once played in the community.

As well as bringing employment and wealth, the mines have left other legacies in the region: acid mine drainage, dead rivers and despoiled landscapes. The bare hills surrounding Queenstown provided stark witness to the extent of damage caused by historic mining and smelting practices. The gradual restoration of vegetation cover is similarly witness to the vastly improved practices of modern mining and cessation of the old forms of mineral processing that proved so destructive. Remediation of old mines remains an ongoing activity of companies and Mineral Resources Tasmania. Nonetheless, there remain substantial remaining environmental effects of past mining activity on the environment and in some cases on human health.

1.4 Public health and wellbeing

Some detailed health statistics are further provided in the Social Health Atlas, a publication from 1999 and hence dated. Some concerning statistics cited in that report include comparisons of Tasmania versus the west coast for a number of measures (Table 11).

Table 11. Comparative health indicators, West Coast and Tasmania 1999

Cause	Tasmania	West Coast	Difference
Standardised death rate[2] (SDR) all causes (males 15-64)	110	147	+30%
Standardised death rate (SDR) cancer (males 15-64)	99	154	+54%
Standardised death rate (SDR) circulatory diseases	108	165	+66%
Standardised admission rate, respiratory treatment	107	160	+35%
Immunisation rate (12 months of age)	84%	69%	-15%
Standard rate, access GPs, males	104	111	+7%
Females	104	117	+13%

Source: as reported in *Rosebery, Zeehan and Tullah Health Needs Assessement, 2000*

Other health issues identified include high incidence of:

- *Insulin dependent diabetes mellitus*
- *Vehicle accidents*

[2] Most causes of death vary significantly with people's age and sex. Standard death rates improves comparability over time and between different populations, as they measure death rates independently of the varying age structures of different populations.

- *Accidents caused by poisoning*
- *Suicide and attempted suicide*

Lifestyle related causes identified included:

- *Cigarette smoking*
- *Overweight*
- *Physical inactivity*
- *Elevated blood pressure and cholesterol levels*
- *Heavy alcohol intake*
- *Inappropriate dietary behaviours*

Source: Rosebery, Zeehan and Tullah Health Needs Assessement, 2000

More recent data is available from the latest Population Health Profile Data published by the Division of General Practice, Australia (March 2007). It is still not fully current as much of the data is from 2002. It shows significant improvement in some measures. The immunisation rate for one year of children was up from 69% in 1999 to 97% in 2002; cancer SDR is now on 13% above state rates (down from 54%[3]) and the SDR from a range of 'other major causes' is 28% *below* state average.

However, by other measures, the West Coast still lags (statistics for age group 0-74):

- SDR, all causes, 25% above the state average
- SDR from circulatory diseases, 50% above state average
- SDR from ischaemic heart disease, 47% above state average
- SDR from injuries and poisonings, over double state average rates

In November the Division published a profile for Northwest Tasmania specifically (PHIDU, 2005). However, a number of statistics are no longer published separately for the West Coast due to the small and declining population. The very small numbers for many diseases mean that there will naturally be a degree of volatility in the numbers, so shifts in trends may not be reliable indicators of underlying health in the long term. More recently statistics are available only for the North West Tasmania, which includes both Burnie and Devonport and are not representative of the West Coast community on its own.

While a range of health services are provided to residents of the West Coast, there is often limited depth – a single practitioner or an infrequent visiting service may be all that is available and no back up if that person or service is unavailable at times. Some services are simply not available locally and a trip to Burnie or Hobart is required, relying at times on volunteer supported transport services. It has proven difficult to attract some health workers to the West Coast.

A number of factors were identified that contribute to poorer health outcomes on the West Coast:

- Lack of health education and poor chronic disease management;

[3] Note that the age group profiled is different but there is a significant improvement nonetheless.

- Lack of recognition of lifestyle contributions to poor health as noted above and the need for preventative approaches to health care. Isolation and restricted recreation opportunities contribute to this.
- Service delivery fragmentation and poor access for some services
- Stress arising from 12 hour mining shifts and the impacts on workers families and opportunities for recreation and community engagement

The West Coast is relatively isolated from the rest of the state. It is 2 to 2½ hours drive to the north west coast and about 3½ to 4 hours to Hobart in good conditions. However the roads are windy and hilly and often subject to adverse weather including snow and ice at times. This adds to the sense of isolation.

Frequent rain and cloud cover adds to the need for heating and gives a gloomy atmosphere that can contribute to depression and inactivity. These factors were noted in the *Health Needs Assessment* report.

Perhaps symptomatic of the malaise implied by this is the high concentration of gaming machines. In 2004 there were 75 gaming machines at 7 licensed premises in the West Coast or 14.7 machines per 1000 population. This compares to 4.7 machines per 1000 population in the state as a whole in the same year. This may reflect a combination of:

- the lack of alternative entertainment options
- the higher working population (relative to resident population) from commuting workers
- the relatively high tourist visitor numbers
- difference in socio cultural preferences

1.5 Conclusion

Income in the West Coast is broadly in line with that of the rest of Tasmania, and the cost of housing generally lower. Unemployment is however higher than in the rest of the state. This suggests that those able to find employment should not on average be more disadvantaged than the rest of the state as far as income and expenses overall. While economic disadvantage is unlikely to be a major reason for population loss in the West Coast, the fact that 9% of workers commute in over a considerable distance but choose to live with their families elsewhere suggests that it is not their preferred location to live.

Mineral wealth and average incomes have not translated into high levels of health and wellbeing as the West Coast continues with a number of poorer than average health indicators. The relative isolation and wet climate have been noted, but lifestyle factors and lack of focus in preventative measures and health education have been identified as significant issues, as well as poorer access to health care services.

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