

Apple Isle blooms in people stakes

A NATION

ON THE MOVE



Stephen Lunn

TASMANIA has staunchly its debilitating population drift to the mainland and is now holding on to its 15- to 34-year-olds.

In the five years from 1996 to 2001, the capital Hobart lost 2600 more people than it gained via interstate migration and the rest of Tasmania shed a staggering 10,500. But from 2001 to 2006, Hobart attracted 2800 more people than it lost, and the rest of Tasmania added 1900.

While Sydney sucked 500 of Hobart's economically productive 15- to 34-year-olds away from 1996 to 2001, it has lured only 100 in the five years since, and areas of Tasmania outside Hobart went from losing 400 young people in those years to picking up 200 young Sydneysiders in the following five years.

Across all ages, Hobart drew 1000 more people from Sydney between 2001 and 2006 than went the other way, part of the reason the nation's most populous city has been shedding 22,000 citizens a year to other parts of Australia over the past half-decade. Even Brisbane, where interstate migration has been so strong for so long, lost 200 more people to Hobart than it gained in the past five years.

The Apple Isle's population revival in the past five years, identified by *The Australian's* analysis of customised census data, defies the predictions of demographers who just eight years ago raised serious concerns

about Tasmania's viability, given its problems with a declining population.

They said Tasmania's population was increasingly made up of either children or older people as productive-aged workers chased opportunities interstate, seeing it as a serious threat to the state's economic future.

While many of those moving to Tasmania are still in the older age brackets, which will have implications for the health sector into the future, worries about the bleeding of productive workers from the state have been lessened by the new data. Lifestyle was the prime attraction for Sydneysiders looking to move to Tasmania, said obstetrician and mother of two Amanda Muldoon, who shifted with her family from Sydney's west to Launceston two years ago.

"We really wanted to leave Sydney because we just got tired of the traffic, the time we wasted travelling. It just wasn't family-friendly," Dr Muldoon, 40, said.

"I had to get a nanny in Sydney because I couldn't get formal childcare. The expenses of my private practice were high, rents, insurance and staff costs mainly," she said.

"It just became more and more unpleasant to be working so hard just to cover our expenses in terms of my practice and our mortgage."

Dr Muldoon, her biomedical engineer husband Brent, 33, and

their two daughters, Amy, 3, and Isabella, 10 weeks, now live 15 minutes' walk from the centre of Launceston and two minutes' drive from her work.

"The cost of living here is cheaper; for instance our mortgage is less than half what it was in Sydney. We find ourselves buying fruit directly from the farms and meat directly from the factory, although processed food is more expensive," she said.

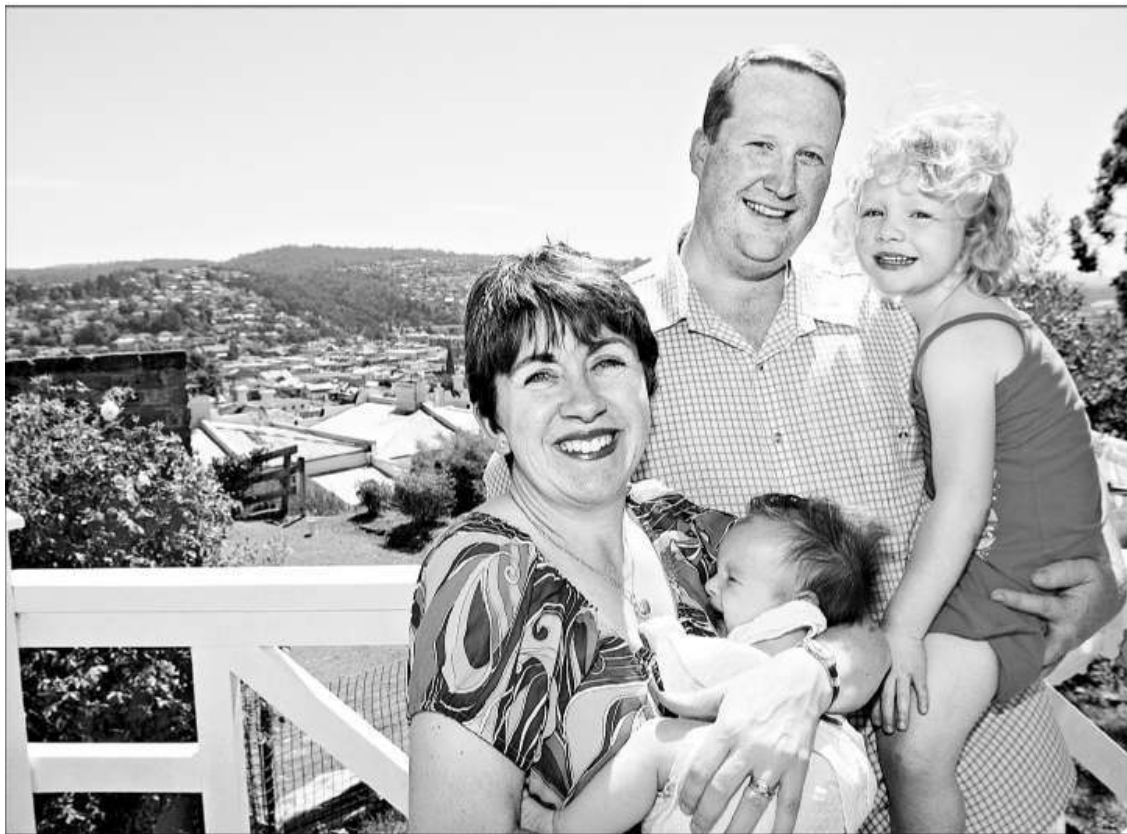
"It all adds up to me being in a place where I can work full-time, but don't have to work such ridiculously long hours to live the life that we want.

"And that's pretty important when you've got two young children," Dr Muldoon said.

But what about the glitz, glamour and razzle dazzle of Sin City; surely sleepy Launceston falls a long way short?

"When you're a young couple with children, you tend to socialise with similar families. Even in Sydney, you really tend to stay pretty much in the suburb you are living in, and Launceston is nicer, certainly cooler, but also nicer than where we were in Sydney. The one big issue we have is both our families are in Sydney, so we don't have a lot of support if there's an issue.

"But we're close to an airport, and it's probably quicker to Sydney from here if there's a problem than living in regional NSW."



No regrets: Amanda and Brent Muldoon chose to move with their daughters to the friendlier environment of Launceston