

Persuading people to call SA home

IT IS mildly encouraging that Australian Bureau of Statistics figures released this week show Adelaide's population rose by a touch under 10,000 people in the year to June, 2006.

This compares with a jump of 49,000 people in Melbourne, 37,000 in Sydney and 29,000 in Brisbane.

But after years of almost static population movement, the latest figures support the State Government's drive to increase South Australia's population.

SA needs population growth to strengthen and expand a diverse economy, ensure a viable, skilled workforce and lower the average population age.

But population growth, in itself, is not a magic bullet, a guarantee of prosperity.



Tim Flannery is one of the better known people to leave for the eastern states.

Population can't be increased artificially. People must be given the incentive to resettle in a new environment. They must want to come.

In the competitive global economy, some of SA's brightest and most talented workers and academics – people such as scientist Tim Flannery (here for more than five years) and businessman Robert de Crespigny – are drawn to the eastern seaboard where Australia's economic power resides.

Equally, people who want to return to their home state and their family network find employment opportunities are limited at the level and wage structure which they desire.

South Australians can no longer delude themselves that people want to settle here because of our lifestyle.

Lifestyle is a fringe benefit, not a core value. The primary need is economic security.

Promoting lifestyle alone implies SA is a nice place for people who don't want to work.

There is no properly orchestrated, focused and financed interstate promotion between government and private industry trumpeting the economic benefits of SA.

This week the Tasmanian Government inserted a seductive brochure promoting the tourism and economic benefits of the Apple Isle in newspapers across Australia. It was read by millions.

SA's promotional slogan – a Brilliant Blend – does not suggest a regional economy of high energy and innovation. Rather a nice place to have a drink and a bit of a rest.

Our state does indeed have a real story to tell. To build on the latest population increases SA must project itself as a strong economy with genuine job prospects, particularly in the mining and defence fields. We must shed any aura of inferiority.

At the same time, as a community we must start investing in infrastructure such as public transport, an upgraded urban and regional road network, and even public amenities such as Victoria Square, the parklands and the suburban beaches.

It is not a case of build it and they will come. But if we don't give an outward impression of innovation and growth, they won't come.

Tens of thousands of people will visit Adelaide and wider SA in the next three weeks to share our culture in areas as diverse as car racing, the Police and Fire Games and the arts.

They should leave with a genuine intention of returning – either as tourists or permanent residents.

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