

# Population goal of 2m a 'stretch'

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SOUTH Australia's goal of reaching a population of two million by 2050 is a "stretch" and "highly unlikely" to occur, according to one of the Rann government strategy's chief designers.

The target, first outlined in the Government's State Strategic Plan in 2004, has been retained in an updated version announced yesterday, despite concerns over the demand it would place on infrastructure and resources such as water.

Peter Blacker — a former Nationals MP and vice-chairman of the strategic plan's update team — said the two million target aimed to force people to consider the importance of population growth.

"The population target in the original plan was very much a stretch and highly unlikely to be achieved," said Mr Blacker, who held the Eyre Peninsula seat of Flinders for nearly 21 years until 1993.

"What we're trying to do is just focus on the probabilities or the likelihood of the response if we don't act ... Theoretically it is possible to achieve but I think (in terms of) practicality you've got to look at the possibility that it is very much a stretch."

The updated plan includes an interim population target of 1.64 million by 2014.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has predicted South Australia's population is likely to increase to 1.62 million by 2021, but drop to 1.58 million by 2051.

The deadline for reducing annual interstate net migration loss to zero has been modified to a "more realistic" goal, moved back from 2008 to 2010.

Premier Mike Rann said that more than half of the targets set out in 2004 were on track to be met or had already been achieved.

"What we've tried to do is to make targets stronger and tougher so they can continue to be a goad to action," he said.

The revised strategic plan was formed after consultation with communities across South Australia.

Feedback reflected the importance of issues such as water, incorporated into the new plan, with a goal to manage the state's water resources "within sustainable limits" by 2018.

The plan does not outline how this would be measured or achieved, however, prompting an attack by state Opposition Leader Iain Evans, who questioned why steps such as the proposed weir at Wellington were not mentioned.

"Where is the increase in water supply in the state strategic plan?" Mr Evans said. "Where is the sewage recycling, where is the desalination plant?"

"If I was premier I'd be seeking scientific advice as to whether South Australia can sustain a two million population ... South Australians are concerned with our population growth, that we can't sustain it because we don't have adequate water."

The plan also promised an extra 500 gigalitres of water in environmental flows for the Murray River, a promise water expert Mike Young said had been talked about since 2003.

"Every year somebody in government has concluded that this must happen," he said. "It's been reaffirmed at every summit that's been held and every meeting."