

Saul Eslake urges Tasmanian MPs to fix education, health

Sean Ford
Local News



Saul Eslake. Picture: Brodie Weeding.

"Fixing" the education and health systems should be priorities if Tasmania is to fully grasp its population growth opportunities.

That is the opinion of prominent economist Saul Eslake, who is urging politicians to focus on fixing the systems in the lead-up to the state election, due by the first half of next year, but likely to come earlier.

"As I wrote in the TCCI's Tasmania Report last December - something which was studiously ignored by the government - Tasmania now has an enormous opportunity to capitalise on its superior handling of the pandemic and its much improved economic performance since the middle of the past decade by attracting more mainlanders - and, when it's possible, foreigners - to come here to live and work, and encouraging more Tasmanians to stay," Mr Eslake said.

"But in order to make the most of that opportunity, we need to fix our under-performing education system.

"Otherwise, families with children may well think they are taking risks with their children's prospects by moving here."

He made a similar argument about the health system, saying families with children and people approaching or past retirement age might think they would be taking risks with their health by moving to the state at present.

"It would be nice to think that how to do both of those would be front and centre of the conversations between those seeking to form the next government and Tasmanian voters that will no doubt take place between now and whenever the next election is held," Mr Eslake said.

"We shall see."

He was speaking after the Australian Bureau of Statistics released its latest population figures on Thursday.

They showed [Tasmania managed population growth in the September quarter despite national population falling for the first time since the First World War](#). Tasmania's population growth was because births exceeded deaths and more people came to live in the state from the mainland than left for the mainland. The state lost more people overseas than it gained from other countries, as did the nation.

"The apparent pick-up in the rate of natural increase (births minus deaths) is probably a result of the changing age composition of population movements across Bass Strait in recent years, with fewer Tasmanians in their 20s and 30s leaving for the mainland and more mainlanders in their 30s coming to Tasmania, than had been the case between the early 1980s and about 2015-2016," Mr Eslake said.

"Tasmania's population grew at a faster rate (0.99 per cent) over the year to September 30 than any other state or territory except Queensland (1.3 per cent) and Western Australia (1.2 per cent).

"The decline in Australia's population growth rate, and that of most other states and territories, is largely due to the closure of Australia's international borders ..."