

No room at the inn for a million Coasters

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THERE is no room left at the inn, and the Gold Coast faces a million person overload and the death of the backyard shed.

A new 2031 target has estimated the city's population will swell to 937,000 leaving it with little breathing space.

Experts have told The Bulletin that the city could become like a 'can of sardines', even if the State Government releases more land on the northern patch.

The state has made a public declaration there will be enough 'room at the inn', but the cold, hard truth is that the city is not prepared.

The Government's approach is to manage the population boom rather than control it, which means that the council and developers will be left with the daunting task of building the infrastructure.

Griffith University urban management planning expert Professor Paul Burton said the Gold Coast would be at full capacity by 2031.

"To accommodate those types of numbers then, the local bodies had better start building the infrastructure immediately," he said.

"The basic physical engineering infrastructure is crucial ... the roads, water, social infrastructure, schools, shops, parklands and recreation. The link roads must be built, the sewer system must be sorted, as well as the drains. Do they need more water treatment plants?"

"It is fine to release land but if the market can't sustain it and if there is not enough workers to be employed on the sites then that isn't the practical solution."

He said the population boom could spell the end of the big Australian back yard on the Coast.

"We're going to see high-density living -- the attached house and the 80 storey tower block in Surfers Paradise," he said.

"It will see the end of acreage property on the Coast, but high-density living could have problems and negatively affect the transport network and clog already busy hubs."

The review of the South East Queensland Regional plan has been overhauled by the Government with pressure on council to accommodate the extra residents expected to spill into the region.

The original estimate of 250,000 additional residents by 2026 has been knocked on the head at George Street.

Sustainable City Future chairman Cr Peter Young said council had been informed that the extra heads would have to be accommodated after the State Government's latest calculations.

"The figures they had were hopelessly out of date and what has been indicated to us is that the Government can't control the growth. They're just managing it," said Cr Young.

"We have been told to shift our thinking to this new target by 2031 rather than the old figure.

"They want us to squeeze them in and we'll have to build the infrastructure to keep up with the growth. It's not practical and it's being rammed down our throats.

"We'll be absorbing at least a quarter of all of the growth in southeast Queensland."

During a three-day investigation The Bulletin has talked to senior development and council figures and compiled a 2031 infrastructure wish list.

The checklist would require, at least, the immediate construction of the six-lane arterial road along the intra-regional transport corridor running from Stapylton, south of Beenleigh, to Nerang-Broadbeach Road. At least a dozen new schools, pools, libraries, community centres and a cemetery would need to be built.

The Coomera Town Centre, which would be bordered by 80,000 new residents, would have to be supported by a second shopping centre near Yatala.

Acting Mayor Daphne McDonald said the city could not sustain one million residents.

She feared the Government could rip up local area plans and allow unhindered development along the coastal strip.

"We wanted to do a Palm Beach local area plan and that was blocked by the Government. The only way they're going to fit that many people on the Gold Coast is to build high rises on the coastal strip," she said.

"Local residents don't want that but the Government has already shown they are ready and willing to step in and allow local area plans to be thrown out."

Developers, including Mirvac, Leda, Ingles Group, Young Land Corporation, QM Properties, Romanza and Heritage Pacific are progressing or planning housing projects at Pimpama and Coomera.

Senior development figures contacted by The Bulletin said the state land release of 3000ha at Coomera and 1200ha at Maudsland would not sustain almost doubling the population.

A senior development figure, who did not want to be named for fear of political reprisals, said the infrastructure to sustain a one million person city was non-existent.

"There is so much dithering going on. This Coomera Town Centre has been stuck in the mud and they're going to need that right away and a second shopping centre further north near Yatala," he said.

"We're going to be packed in like a can of sardines. There won't be much breathing space because there's no land left on the southern or central Gold Coast.

"Council can't even get its act together with the Pimpama Wastewater Treatment plant so I'm not sure they're going to be up to building this type of infrastructure in time."

Cr Young said the extra population would have to also support the tourist numbers during peak season. "The population of almost one million would exhaust what is an already exhausted infrastructure with the tourism element," he said.



Jam-packed. the Gold Coast is looking at a population of almost a million by 2031 prompting fears of overcrowding.

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