

THE ADMINISTRATION OF NORFOLK ISLAND

POPULATION AND PLANNING ON NORFOLK ISLAND

Report No.1:
Overview of the Norfolk Island Plan

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POPULATION AND PLANNING ON NORFOLK ISLAND

This report has been prepared in response to anticipated amendments to laws on Norfolk Island that would require the planning system to take on a more prominent role in establishing and enforcing controls that effectively set a limit on Norfolk Island's population.

1. Population control on Norfolk Island

Historically, Norfolk Island's population has been controlled through a permit system. The (Norfolk Island) *Immigration Act 1980* controls migration to the island by establishing classifications of residency status, including visitor entry permits, temporary entry permits, and general entry permits. Successive Norfolk Island Assemblies have endorsed a population growth target of 2% per year to ensure continued economic growth and prosperity. This target has never been reached.

The means by which the Territory of Norfolk Island is administered is currently under review. The Commonwealth Government and the NIG have recently agreed on a "Norfolk Island Road Map" (2 March 2011). Several proposed Actions in this agreement relate to, or have implications for, population, planning and development:

Immediate Actions:

 Implement changes to the immigration, customs and quarantine regimes to reduce barriers to tourism and other investment;

In 2011/12:

- Develop and implement a land use plan and town planning strategy;
- Remove barriers to business investment on Norfolk Island, including allowing Australian citizens to operate new businesses on Norfolk Island;
- Develop a land use plan that builds a sustainable economy and environment for Norfolk Island;
- Review application of the Migration Act 1958 (Cth) to Norfolk Island in order to enable its full application to the Island.

Further to the above points, the Chief Minister announced, by publication in the Norfolk Islander on 16 April 2010, an intention to table further actions to be taken as part of a funding agreement between the Norfolk Island Government and the Commonwealth Government, including:

Norfolk Island will amend any current restrictions to:

- a) allow self-funded retirees to live within the Norfolk Island Territory as part of the ordinary resident population by 30 September 2011; and
- b) enable Australian citizens to start new businesses within the Territory by 31 December 2011.

These actions, if undertaken, will effectively remove the migration barriers currently in place under the *Immigration Act 1980* for retired Australians to relocate to Norfolk Island and for Australian businesspeople to start up their own businesses on the island. The actions for 2011/12 include development of a land use plan and town planning strategy with the intention of facilitating a sustainable economy and environment. As such, planning is intended to replace immigration controls as the means by which population and development are controlled on Norfolk Island.

Letter to the Editor, Norfolk Islander, by then Chief Minister Andre Nobbs, 17 April 2009.

2. Demographic background

2.1 Number of residents on Norfolk Island

At the time of the recent Commonwealth-funded household survey (5 to 12 March 2011), and according to Immigration Services, 1861 people comprising the "ordinarily resident population" of the island (i.e. Residents, G.E.P's & T.E.P's) were on the island on 9 March 2011. By comparison, the number on the island at the time of the most recent Census (2006) was 1863.

2.2 Number of dwellings on Norfolk Island

The 2006 Census recorded 892 occupied private dwellings and 240 unoccupied private dwellings, resulting in a total of 1132 private dwellings on Norfolk Island. In the Census, "private dwellings" excluded tourist accommodation and the hospital. Given the similar figures for the number of people living on Norfolk Island in 2006 and 2011, it would be reasonable to assume that there are around 892 occupied private dwellings in 2011.

The number of dwellings on the island increased by approximately 24 between the time of the 2006 Census and March 2011. This figure takes into account the number of dwellings approved prior to 2006 but not ready for occupation until after that time, the number of dwellings approved, constructed and ready to occupy from 2006 onwards, and the number of changes of use of existing buildings, either to or from use as a dwelling. It would be reasonable to assume therefore that the total number of private dwellings on Norfolk Island in March 2011 was 1132 plus 24 = approximately 1156, with about 892 occupied and 264 unoccupied.

During the 2011 household survey, 963 households were visited, and 825 forms were given out to households, suggesting that there were 825 occupied private dwellings and 138 unoccupied private dwellings at that time. These figures also excluded tourist accommodation and the hospital.

The difference between the household survey figures and extrapolated Census figures can be attributed to the different manner in which the Census and the household survey were conducted. Census enumerators were trained to ask residents about any dwellings that might exist separate to the main house on a property, such as granny flats or other self-contained units. All such dwellings were counted, whether occupied or not. In the case of the recent household survey, officers did not visit properties that they knew were empty at the time. As such, they still found some empty houses, but the figure of 138 should not be taken to represent the whole number of empty houses on Norfolk Island as at March 2011. The 2006 Census identified 240 unoccupied private dwellings, and given that the ordinarily resident population is was about the same in 2006 and 2011 despite a net increase in 24 dwellings during that period, it is assumed there were about 24 additional unoccupied dwellings in March 2011 (i.e. a total of about 264 unoccupied dwellings).

The number of occupants per occupied dwelling at the time of the 2006 Census was 2.1 (i.e. 892 occupied private dwellings divided by 1863 people ordinarily resident on Norfolk Island). The occupancy rate has fallen over the years, from 2.5 in 1986, 2.4 in 1991, 2.2 in 1996 and 2001. The figure in 2011 is likely to be around 2.0 or 2.1.

3. Limits to development under the Norfolk Island Plan

3.1 Strategic objectives of the Norfolk Island Plan

The Planning system on Norfolk Island is administered under the (Norfolk Island) *Planning Act* 2002. The Act sets the framework for the preparation of a Norfolk Island Plan, Development Control Plans, the process for seeking approval for new land use or development, and the system for enforcing planning laws. The Norfolk Island Plan 2002 (as amended) in turn establishes a zoning system across the island, and sets limits on subdivision of land and particular land uses and developments that may be allowed within each zone.

Although the Norfolk Island Plan does not set a specific limit on population or development, Part A of the Plan (the "Strategic Plan") includes several passages which are aimed at balancing social, economic and environmental goals by imposing limits:

Part A Section 2.1 includes the following principle:

(d) there is a need to limit the extent of development to maintain Norfolk Island's intrinsic, desirable attributes.

Part A Section 3.2.2: the objective of providing an appropriate range of land use or development opportunities to be achieved by, amongst other things:

- (d) requiring relatively large minimum land parcel sizes in rural areas so that viable agricultural parcels of land are retained and encouraging group or community titling practices so that viable agricultural land is not sub-divided into small unviable parcels;
- (e) limiting larger lot residential use or development to areas that are already principally residential or rural residential in character;

Part A Section 3.2.4: the objective of encouraging orderly and efficient use and management of resources, to be achieved by, amongst other things:

(d) maximising retention of viable agricultural land by minimising land fragmentation;

Part A Section 3.2.7: the objective of promoting high standards of visual amenity and protection of significant landscapes by, amongst other things:

(e) minimising land subdivision and in so doing retaining larger lots that contribute to the landscape character of Norfolk Island.

3.2 Limits on the subdivision of land

Part B of the Norfolk Island Plan includes subdivision limits for each of the zones on Norfolk Island. The "minimum lot size" requirements are as follows:

Rural zone:

4 hectares

Rural Residential zone:

8,000m2

Residential zone:

2,000m2

Mixed Use zone: Business zone: 800m2 300m2

Light Industry zone:

800m2

Industrial zone:

"Subdivision shall ensure that there is adequate area for any

intended or future use of the site including other ancillary use or

development purposes".

Open Space zone:

There shall be no further subdivision within the zone except to allow a lot of which the purpose is to give effect to the intended use or

development of the land in accordance with a development approval.

Conservation zone:

(As per Open Space zone).

Special Use zone:

The intended function, use or development of the site shall

determine lot sizes and dimensions.

Airport zone:

(As per Special Use zone).

Road zone:

(As per Open Space and Conservation zones).

Much of Norfolk Island was subdivided prior to the introduction of minimum lot size requirements, hence there are many cases where lots are smaller (some significantly so) than the current minimum lot size requirement. In many cases however, there are portions that could be subdivided into smaller portions, particularly the Mixed Use zone where portions of just 800 square metres can potentially be allowed. The following table presents a realistic account of how many potential additional lots could be created in each zone if each portion was to be subdivided to its maximum potential.

Table 1: Scope for subdivision for residential development

	Rural	Rural Residential	Residential	Mixed Use	TOTAL
Potential net additional lots through subdivision	59	105	43	699	906

(Note: Figures for other zones are not shown in this table because dwellings are not permitted in other zones, and figures are therefore irrelevant for the purpose of this report).

3.3 Limits on the development of land

The Norfolk Island Plan allows for the development and occupation of a "Residence – Dwelling House" (i.e. a single dwelling on a lot) as "Permitted Use or Development" in the Rural, Rural Residential, Residential and Mixed Use zones. Although many of the lots in these zones already have dwellings on them, many do not. The table below shows the number of vacant lots in these zones.

Table 2: Vacant land

	Rural	Rural Residential	Residential	Mixed Use	TOTAL
Vacant privately owned lots	299	215	56	48	618

(Note: Figures for other zones are not shown in this table because dwellings are not permitted in other zones, and figures are therefore irrelevant for the purpose of this report).

According to this data, the Norfolk Island Plan allows for the approval of up to 618 additional Residence – Dwelling Houses on existing vacant lots on Norfolk Island. Given that subdivision controls could potentially allow for the creation of up to 906 additional lots in zones where Residence – Dwelling Houses are permitted, this means there is scope under the current Norfolk Island Plan for the approval of up to 1524 single dwellings on Norfolk Island.

The Norfolk Island Plan also allows for the development and occupation of "Residence – Dual Occupancies" (i.e. two dwellings on one lot) as "Permissible (with consent)" in the Rural, Rural

Residential, Residential and Mixed Use zones. The table below presents a realistic estimate of the number of dual occupancies that could potentially be approved (i.e. minus very small portions that are capable of containing only a single dwelling), and also the figures from the two tables above and the totals for each zone.

Table 3: Scope for development of dwellings and dual occupancies

	Rural	Rural Residential	Residential	Mixed Use	TOTAL
Potential net additional lots through subdivision	59	105	43	699	906
Vacant privately owned lots	299	215	56	48	618
Subtotal (i.e. potential additional single dwellings on existing & potential lots)	358	320	99	747	1524
Potential dual occupancies where there is already a single dwelling on an existing lot of adequate size for two dwellings	378	324	117	51	870
Potential dual occupancies on potential net additional lots	59	105	43	699	906
Total potential additional dwellings and dual occupancies	795	749	259	1497	2394

(Note: Figures for other zones are not shown in this table because dwellings are not permitted in other zones, and figures are therefore irrelevant for the purpose of this report).

The Norfolk Island Plan also allows for the development and occupation of "Residence – Multiple Dwelling" complexes in the Residential and Mixed Use zones. The density of these types of developments is controlled through Development Control Plan (DCP) No.3 (Multi Units). Under this DCP, a multiple dwelling complex can only be developed on a lot containing an area of at least 1200 square metres, and each unit must have a "site area" of at least double the floor area of each unit. The DCP categorises units in terms of their size:

- "small" (less than 75m2 or 1 bedroom)
- "medium" (75 110m2 or 2 bedroom)
- "large" (110 140m2 or 3 bedroom)
- "extra large" (more than 140m2).

New residences typically have a floor space of around 200 square metres, whereas tourist accommodation units typically have floor space of around 100 square metres. In a multiple dwelling complex on Norfolk Island intended for long-term occupancy, an average of around 125 square metres can be anticipated, requiring a site area of 250 square metres per unit.

An estimate has been calculated of the number of dwellings that could potentially be approved in the Residential and Mixed Use zones. The figures below assume that landowners would develop multiple dwelling complexes rather than subdividing their land or developing single or dual occupancy dwellings on the land. This assumption is made based on the fact that more dwellings can be constructed in a multiple dwelling complex.

For example, a lot in the Residential zone with an area of 4000m2 can be subdivided into two portions, with a dual occupancy on each = 4 dwellings, or alternatively it can be developed into a multiple dwelling complex with a site area of 250m2 for each unit = 16 dwellings. A lot in the Mixed Use zone with an area of 1600m2 can be subdivided into two portions, with a dual occupancy on each = 4 dwellings, or alternatively it can be developed into a multiple dwelling complex with a site area of 250m2 for each unit = 6 dwellings.

The number of potential additional dwellings and dual occupancies are therefore subtracted from the above figures in lots large enough for multiple dwelling complexes, and the number of potential multiple dwellings are added instead. Topographical limitations are also taken into account in the calculations. Where there is an established intensive development on the land (such as a shop, warehouse or industry), it is assumed that the landowner will <u>not</u> redevelop the site for multiple dwellings.

Table 4: Scope for development of dwellings

	Rural	Rural Residential	Residential	Mixed Use	TOTAL
Total potential additional dwellings and dual occupancies	795	749	259	1497	2394
Net additional dwellings that could be allowed in multiple dwelling complexes	0	0	1067	1162	2229
Total potential additional dwellings (single, dual occupancy and multiple)	795	749	1326	2659	4623

(Note: Figures for other zones are not shown in this table because dwellings are not permitted in other zones, and figures are therefore irrelevant for the purpose of this report).

Under the Norfolk Island Plan, housing for aged persons is separately defined as "Residence – Residential Care Establishment". This type of housing is classified as "Permissible (with consent)" in the Rural, Rural Residential, Residential and Special Use zones, and "Permitted" in the Mixed Use zone. The density controls in DCP No.3 do not apply to this type of dwelling, so the number of units that can potentially be developed for aged residents is difficult to predict.

3.4 Summary of data

The above figures show that there are currently around 1156 dwellings on Norfolk Island, and the Norfolk Island Plan currently provides scope for approval of about 4623 <u>additional</u> dwellings (most of those subject to prior approval to subdivide land), <u>not including</u> housing for aged persons. The total number of dwellings would be approximately 5779. At present, around 79% of dwellings are occupied. Assuming a hypothetical scenario of a booming economy that has led to a housing / population boom, it would be reasonable to assume that the occupancy rate would be higher, e.g. 90%, (5201 out of 5779 dwellings), and with the number of residents per dwelling at around 2.0 to 2.1, the Norfolk Island Plan provides scope for a population of around 10,400 to 10,900, not including housing for aged persons (around 5 to 6 times the present population).

These figures are not sustainable for Norfolk Island for a variety of reasons: the inability of utility services to cope with the increased load (e.g. electricity, telecommunications, sewerage), the increased traffic and congestion on the road network (particularly in Burnt Pine), the adverse impacts on the natural environment (groundwater supplies, creeks, loss of native vegetation for building sites and gardens), and the diminished food security of the island (i.e. a severe drop in the island's ability to feed itself).

4. Next step

Although the Norfolk Island Plan discusses the importance of limiting the subdivision and development of land on Norfolk Island, controls are not based on what is considered to be a sustainable population limit for the island. The scope for further subdivision and development at present provides the opportunity to develop the island to unsustainable levels, but what in fact are the limits for a sustainable population for Norfolk Island?

The task of determining a sustainable population limit is the next logical step in this process. "Sustainable" in the context of population policy can be defined in a number of ways. The Federal Government is currently considering the need for a sustainable population policy, defining "sustainable" as "the maintenance or improvement of wellbeing now and for future generations". In turn, "wellbeing" refers to all of the economic, environmental and social aspects of people's lives, defined via a wide range of indicators across each or all of these three aspects.

A sustainable population is one where changes in the population's size, distribution or composition are managed to provide for positive economic, environmental and social outcomes. ³

A number of issues arise in the context of population and sustainability for Norfolk Island, including availability of water supply, threats to natural habitat and food security, the impact of climate change, the island's ageing population, and impact on the island's unique way of life, culture, personal safety and security. The task of determining a sustainable population limit for Norfolk Island will require prior analysis of the issues that can impact on wellbeing, for example:

- What is the "carrying capacity" and "carbon footprint" of Norfolk Island, should these be
 factors in determining if and how a population limit should be set for the island, and are
 these more or less important than other factors, e.g. economic growth?
- What impact would an increased population have on groundwater reserves, how critical a problem would this be for the island, and how might this impact be mitigated?
- Is the island's age profile sustainable in the long-term, and if not, what needs to be done
 to facilitate an age profile that does not impact negatively on general wellbeing?
- What proportion of food consumed on the island is grown on the island versus imported to the island?
- Is it desirable for Norfolk Island to be as self-sufficient as possible in terms of food supply?
- What impact would further development and population growth have on the number and size of agricultural holdings and hence on food security?
- How will climate change impact on Norfolk Island, e.g. tourism industry, agricultural production and rainfall?
- What value does the community place on native habitat compared with other factors such as economic development, particularly in relation to private landholdings where there may be pressure to develop.
- What impact would an increased population have on the preservation of the tradition and culture of the Pitcairn descendents, hence the unique culture and relaxed lifestyle of Norfolk Island?

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² Commonwealth of Australia 2010: A Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia, p.3.

³ Ibid.

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other	relevant	issues	WIII	need	to	be	thoroughly	considered	as	part	of	the	next	sten	of
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