

Aucklanders head for exits

Frustration at rule-breaking, concern over hospital capacity, and uncertainty over a lockdown end date are among reasons people want to move, survey shows. Geraden Cann reports.

Nearly half of close to 10,000 Aucklanders surveyed for the *Sunday Star-Times* want to leave the city because of the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown.

Stuff's NowNext survey was completed by 9987 people. It was a self-selected, non-scientific poll.

Forty-four per cent of respondents said they were considering moving, with 51 per cent saying they weren't considering it, and five per cent saying they didn't know.

Manurewa resident and retiree Robyn Falconer was one of those considering upping sticks, and said the main reason was because she couldn't see any end in sight to either the lockdown or the spread of Covid-19.

Falconer said she found the lockdown very isolating, but it was the constant rule-breaking she witnessed locally and the continued refusal of many to get vaccinated that made her feel the situation was hopeless.

Falconer's 20-year-old granddaughter had been against getting the vaccine, but she managed to convince her. Both have now had both jabs.

However, for some, Falconer said she saw little hope.

"We have to come to terms with the fact that people who aren't going to get vaccinated aren't going to," she said.

"We are all sick of it, everyone is under pressure, but I think we have to stick to the rules because I don't see any other way for New Zealand to recover."

Falconer was also concerned Auckland hospitals may become overwhelmed and be unable to care for cases as numbers increased.

"The way things are going now I think I'd like to go as far down south as Invercargill."

North Shore resident Mark Gibson said he was considering leaving because, in his opinion, there was no clear plan to manage the situation or lay out the path for a return to normal life.

Gibson said it was becoming clear the closer you were to a high population area, the more likely you were to live under restrictions.

"My main reason for responding to that survey was exasperation with what appears to be no plan, no definite dates, no actions, no accountabilities, no what-if

scenarios presented," he said.

Gibson has a second property on the Coromandel, and said he would likely be moving to it once borders reopen.

Auckland Chamber of Commerce chief executive Michael Barnett said he wasn't surprised many were considering leaving,

but there was a big difference between considering and actually moving, and he didn't expect any exodus.

He was, however, concerned by numbers that showed more highly skilled workers were leaving for Australia.

Australian recruitment companies had been active in recent times, Barnett said, and workers in the construction, engineering, technology, and legal sectors were all among those moving across the ditch.

"When the economy gets turned back on we are going to need every bit of talent that we can get our hands on. Any thought of seeing a reduced workforce is not a positive thing for Auckland at all."

Stats New Zealand found in October that, after a year of small

migration gains from Australia, the six months from October to March saw a net loss of roughly 3800 people across the pond.

Stuff's survey was self-selected and non-scientific. However, its findings are lent credibility by recent findings from Stats New Zealand that Auckland's population has fallen for the first time ever, by 1300.

Stats NZ population projections manager Hamish Slack said while this was only a 0.1 per cent drop it was still a "significant change" from the average population growth of 1.8 per cent a year over the previous two decades.

The region's population was estimated to be 1.72 million at the end of June.

There have been other strong hints from the property sector of Aucklanders considering a shift, spurred on by exclusionary house prices.

In early October, Realestate.co.nz figures showed 228,592 users based in Auckland had been looking for properties outside the region on the company's website since the Delta lockdown began.

That was up 5.9 per cent when compared to the equivalent time in 2020.

However, that surge had now dropped off, a Realestate.co.nz spokeswoman said.

Realestate.co.nz chief executive Sarah Wood said agents in areas like Christchurch and Central Otago had told her team they're speaking to Aucklanders wanting to move away from the city because of the lockdowns.

Wood said high house prices, an acknowledgment many jobs could be done from home, and the fact the city had suffered repeated lockdowns when other regions had not was also contributing.

In September, Christchurch-based mortgage adviser Isaac Rawsthorne said Aucklanders now made up 30 per cent of his client pipeline, and prices were the main driver.

Stuff ran its survey from October 26 to November 2.

"When the economy gets turned back on we are going to need every bit of talent that we can get our hands on. Any thought of seeing a reduced workforce is not a positive thing for Auckland at all."

Michael Barnett