

Auck population drops, ditto most cities

Kiwis on the move internationally and within country

John Weekes

Auckland's population has fallen, losing people overseas and to internal migration.

Stats NZ population data released yesterday showed New Zealand's population grew in the year to June 30, but only slightly.

But a majority of cities experienced population loss.

The data arrived soon after council elections and at a time when many businesses were already concerned about a labour shortage as pent-up Kiwis started moving overseas.

Auckland lost 5900 people to net international migration in the June 2022 year.

Downtown Auckland and the innermost suburbs from Westmere to Newmarket in the Waitematā ward had a population decline of 5.8 per cent, the biggest loss in the country.

Of the 21 Auckland local board areas, 12 experienced net losses from both international and internal migration.

There were 12,000 more births than deaths in Auckland but that was not enough to compensate for the 15,000 lost to net internal migration.

Rodney district and Papakura on the city's periphery had population growth in the year, as did some south Auckland neighbourhoods in Manurewa.

The city's northwest and northern fringe from Henderson and Massey to the East Coast Bays had population

growth, but of less than 1 per cent.

Christchurch and Wellington also had net losses from both international migration and internal migration.

Christchurch lost 900 people to overseas migration and 1200 to domestic migration.

But the nearby Selwyn district burgeoned, with population growth of 4.8 per cent, the country's highest rate.

Wellington lost 1600 people to emigration and 1700 to internal mi-

gration.

Dunedin's population declined but Central Otago's grew by 2.7 per cent.

Stats NZ said, nationally, natural increase was the lowest since World War II.

Natural increase was 24,100 and the country's net international migration loss was 11,500.

It's a depressing stat for Auckland, but Simon Bridges says at least things

are likely to already be improving in the city.

"It's better today than it would have been in June," said Bridges, the Auckland Business Chamber chief executive. "We should all be impatient for the trajectory to speed up."

The population decline called for central government, local government and business to team up to find solutions, he said. And big CBD employers should encourage staff to return to the office where possible, to enliven the city and add other benefits to downtown, he added.

"If there are more people coming into work, there's less crime and antisocial behaviour. There are more

people to keep it in check."

Waitematā ward councillor Mike Lee said many Auckland CBD businesses were already facing hassles from roadworks and the City Rail Link construction, and population decline could present another problem.

But Lee said the decline could be a blessing for the environment, and for ratepayers straining to fund infrastructure.

"Population movement is significantly dependent on immigration, so really, governments of all parties have had a policy of making Auckland as big as possible."

High Auckland population growth could fuel GDP growth and property prices, Lee said, but could impose an "infrastructure deficit" on the city.

Boomtown, Central Otago

It's a different story in the big-sky country between the Queenstown Lakes and Dunedin. In Central Otago, population is booming.

Mayor Tim Cadogan said popularity could seem good or bad, depending on who you talked to.

"There are some people who would like Central Otago to stay the same as it was five minutes after they moved here."

The region's population had grown 20 per cent in just six years, he said.

That kind of explosive growth placed pressure on the environment, visual amenity, infrastructure and house prices.

But more ratepaying properties could lessen the per capita burden of funding local government services.

Cadogan said, broadly speaking, Central Otago's population growth was a vote of confidence in the region. But the council was also working urgently on ways to foster more intensive housing development, to avoid urban sprawl.

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