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5.0 COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

5.1 GENERAL

Consideration in discussing the Community Characteristics has to take into account two distinct groups, firstly the Visitors that would be affected by a major incident (e.g. Boat Passengers etc), and secondly, the Local Community.

5.2 VISITORS

Observations of visitors to the West Coast area reveal a wide cross section of visitors from Tasmania, Interstate and Overseas. Age groups vary from babes in arms and strollers, through to the very elderly, some of whom are not particularly mobile. Even though the number of overseas visitors to the West Coast is only a small proportion of visitors, this segment of the market is showing a steady increase. With this goes an increasing number of visitors that do not have English as their native language, and this may make communication difficult with them in an emergency situation.

Visitors arrive in the area mostly by cars and campervans, either their own or Rent-a-cars, or in groups aboard Tour Coaches. There is an increasing number of hitch hikers and cyclists also visiting the area, as well as low budget travellers arriving by service coaches. Many of this group are

young (<20 yrs) overseas visitors.

Most people travelling on cruises or scenic flights from Strahan during the day will have stayed overnight prior to their visit in one of the West Coast towns - either Strahan, Queenstown or Zeehan. Some will stay a second night after their visit, while many will complete their visit to the area by early afternoon, and then travel out of the area to other destinations. This is a particularly common practice with Coach Tours and other package Rent-a-car holidays.

5.3 LOCAL COMMUNITY

Note: Statistics are taken from CENSUS 86 unless otherwise stated.

5.3.1. OVERVIEW

The Tourist operations in the Macquarie Harbour/ Lower Gordon River Area are based at the port of Strahan on Tasmania's West Coast. Formerly a busy railway town and port for the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company at Queenstown, and a sawmilling centre for Tasmania's famous Huon Pine, today Strahan, with a population of 597 is a small fishing and tourist centre, still boasting two Huon Pine Sawmills. Tourism growth is steady and expected to continue as new attractions

in Forestry and the World Heritage Area continue to draw additional people to this unique part of Australia.

Strahan is dependant on two other major West Coast towns of Queenstown and Zeehan for quite a bit of support. Many people employed by both tourist and other businesses in Strahan draw staff from these communities, and Strahan is a popular holiday and recreation area for all West Coasters. Queenstown, with a population of 3471 is the largest of the West coast towns today, and has major hospital and education facilities to support the West Coast area, and is 45mins traveling time from Strahan by road. Zeehan, some 35 mins to the north of Strahan, has a population of approx 2000. Both Queenstown and Zeehan are mining towns supporting major mining operations at Mount Lyell and Renison Bell respectively.

In the event of a major incident in the area being studied, the resources and people of Queenstown and Zeehan would also become involved as well as the more immediate involvement of Strahan. Therefore, in this report, because of the interaction that would be required by each of these communities, the study of the Community Characteristics will also take this into account where it is relevant. Of course, in the event of a major disaster occuring in the area, the relevant emergency agencies from other major Tasmanian centres would also become involved.

West Coast people are content living what may still be

described even today as an isolated lifestyle and they understand the implications of their Isolation in such emergency events. For this reason, studies such as this become important to allow an increased preparedness for such events.

5.3.2 STRAHAN

The Municipality of Strahan boasts one of the largest Municipal areas in Tasmania, but has only the one population centre of Strahan situated in it. Virtually all of the population of the Municipality reside in the town area, with only a handful of people living in a few scattered farms nearby. No persons live permanently south of Macquarie Harbour or to the east of Lowana, near the mouth of the King River.

STRAHAN has a population of 597 (1992 Census), an increase of some 11% since the 1986 census. The town has an increasing dependance on Tourism, as the gateway to the Lower Gordon River. Tourist Cruise boats and a Seaplane Operation are based here, and are the main methods used by visitors to travel into this area. Approximately 100,000 people a year currently visit this area and this is expected to increase in the future. Strahan has a motel and several other accomodation facilities to support visitors to the area. Whilst operations to the Gordon River run all year, the Tourism industry is quite seasonal. The normal Tourist Season on Tasmania's West Coast now runs from October to April, with peak months in January

and March. Accomodation during these two months is frequently booked out in all the West Coast towns, with a subsequent increase in visitor numbers to the communities.

Emergency services in Strahan are provided by a 2 man Police Station, a volunteer Ambulance and Fire Brigade Unit, and a Medical Centre operated as an annex by the West Coast District Hospital (Queenstown) and manned by a permanent Nursing Sister. There are no Doctors in the community.

The Forestry Commision and the Department of Parks Wildlife and Heritage have there main offices for the West Coast situated here. The Forestry Commission supports their activities in all the West Coast areas from here, and especially the Huon Pine operations in the Starhan area, which today, still supports 2 sawmills, and a new craft and furniture factory. They are also developing a rainforest-area at nearby Teepookana as an additional visitor attraction to the area. The department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage use Strahan as a base for their activities and management of the National Parks, and particularly the World Heritage Areas in the region. The Lower Gordon River Area is one of their major responsibilities and they have an 8 metre Devil Cat to patrol this area. They are developing a visitor interpretation centre for the area at Strahan also as an additional attraction in the area.

Strahan has only a small shopping centre, and locals here

frequently travel to Queenstown and Zeehan for supermarkets and banking. High School and TAFE Students travel daily to Queenstown for education, as Strahan only has primary school facilities.

Two fishing companies have operations based here, and boats fishing the West Coast Waters, especially during the Crayfish and Abalone seasons frequently operate in and out of the port. Only a small number of fishing boats are now based at Strahan, but fishing is still a major industry and employer in the community. Fishing Boats also frequently shelter in Strahan from the West Coast weather. Aquaculture with 2 fish farms located in Macquarie Harbour is a new and successful addition to industry in Strahan and is expected to increase in importance in the coming years.

Unemployment in the 1986 Census was 11.3%, considerably higher than other West Coast towns. Average gross incomes are lower than other West Coast areas at \$18,324 (1986), and this is a reflection of the industry of this community, much of which is seasonal. The median age of the population is 34.7 years, relatively high for Tasmanian Municipalities, and some 89.5% of the population is Australian born. 42% of the population is in the workforce, and some 30.3% of these are employed in the Government Sector, highlighting the increasing role being played by the forestry and parks in the area.

Strahan boasts the only all weather airport on the West Coast, and it has Radio Navigation Aids (NDB and DMEA) and night lighting. Instrument Approach procedures are published for this airport by the Civil Aviation Authority, and because of its situation, there would be few occasions during the year that an approach to landing could not be completed, even taking West Coast weather into account.

Strahan is connected by roads to the East and North, to Queenstown and Zeehan respectively. The Lyell Highway to Queenstown is a 40km narrow winding road, whilst Henty Road to Zeehan, 52kms and opened in 1984, is a high standard road. Virtually all traffic to Strahan traverses either one or both of these roads. This traffic includes approximately 500 Tourist Coaches a year, tourist traffic and all local traffic. The condition of the busiest of these roads, the Lyell Highway to Queenstown, has been of some concern to all authorities for sometime due to the increasing traffic levels on it, and its sub standard condition.

5.3.3 QUEENSTOWN

The municipality of Lyell has a population of 3,471 (Census 1992), and the population is entirely centred on the communities of Queenstown (pop approx 3400) and Gormanston (pop approx 70). Queenstown is 40 kms from Strahan along the Lyell Highway. This road is a winding road with twisting

corners and a narrow bitumen surface, yet is one of the major links with Strahan and is traversed by virtually everyone that visits Strahan. Queenstown is linked to the East along the Lyell Highway to Hobart (257 kms) and to the North along the Zeehan and Murchison Highways to Zeehan (37kms) and Burnie (180 kms).

As a result of the 110 year history of mining in the area, Queenstown has established itself as the major West Coast centre, and therefore, has more community infrastructure than the other West Coast communities. Particularly relevant to this study, is the district Police Headquarters for the West Coast, and the West Coast District Hospital, which operates the local Ambulance service and supports the medical centre and service for Strahan. Emergency services are supported by a Volunteer Fire Brigade unit, a State Emergency Service Unit with Road Accident Assistance (RESCUE) and limited Search and Rescue capability, and an active St. Johns Ambulance Australia division. There are 4 Doctors in the community, one of which is a Surgeon based at the WCDH.

The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company is the major employer in the community, currently employing 450 directly, plus 100 contractors and their staff. They have excellent workshop and maintenance facilities to support their Copper mining operations. In times of need in the communities of the West Coast, Mount Lyell has always been supportive and willing to assist wherever possible.

The Municipality of Lyell has a population with a median age of 28.6 years, average incomes of \$25,887 (reflected in the mining incomes), unemployment of 6.5%, and 44.3% of the population is in the workforce. 42% of the workforce is employed in the government sector, highlighting the roles played by Queenstown as the West Coast headquarters for many government departments , the provision of the West Coast District Hospital, and Education facilities from pre school through to the College of Advanced Education (TAFE).

Queenstown currently provides the largest number of visitor accomodation beds in the West Coast region. It also has good shopping facilities, banks and some tourist infrastructure based on the mine, the Hydro-electric Commission and the colourful history of the area. Tourism though, mainly centres on support for the Gordon River Cruises. Any impact from a major incident in the area of study, would also have a devastating impact on the increasingly important tourist infrastructure of Queenstown.

Queenstown also has an Airport, but operations here are restricted to daylight in visual flight conditions, and is therefore subject to the whims of West Coast weather. Daily scheduled flights operate into Queenstown, and are seldom disrupted by weather. Fuel is available at Queenstown Airport through the local BP Agent.

5.3.4 ZEEHAN

The Municipality of Zeehan has a population of 5,076, divided between the major communities of Zeehan, Rosebery, Tullah and a 3 other small communities.

Zeehan has a population of approximately 1700, and is a mining based community, supporting the Renison Bell tin mine some 17kms north of the town. Zeehan also has accomodation facilities that depend on the total West Coast Tourism package, and like Queenstown, depends on the Gordon River Cruises as the major drawcard in the area.

Zeehan's relevance to this study would be in the provision of additional emergency service support to any incident in the study area. Zeehan has a Tasmanian Ambulance Service (TAS) base station, manned by a permanent officer, with volunteer support. Also, there is also a fully manned Police Station at Zeehan. They are supported by a volunteer State Emergency Service Unit that has Road Accident Assistance (RESCUE) and some Search and Rescue capability, and a volunteer Fire Brigade Unit. Backup for all these services can also be provided from Rosebery, 28 kms to the north, as well as Queenstown. Zeehan has a local Medical centre and has a Doctor and Nursing Staff.

Rosebery, 68kms north of Strahan, has a fully manned Police station and a small Hospital facility, with volunteer Ambulance support. There are 2 doctors at Rosebery.

5.4 COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

There is a more detailed study of some of the characteristics of these communities relevant to this study presented on the following page 38(a) in table form.

Table 5.1

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS:

Ref.	Characteristic	STRAHAN	QUEENSTOWN	ZEEHAN
5.3.1	Infrastructure	Major Town 2 Hotels, 1 Motel, 3 Guest Houses 4 Unit Accom, 1 Caravan Park 2 Churches Primary School Community Hall 1 Service Station (+ 1 pump) Airport - all weather day & night HEC Depot Wharves and Boat Ramps Seaplane Ramps Boat Slips	Major Town Mt Lyell Mine 4 Hotels, 5 Motels, 1 Caravan Park 1 Unit Accom. 4 Churches Kindergarten, 2 Primary Schools High School, TAFE College Community Hall, Football Clubrooms Sporting clubs and facilities 3 Service Stations Airport - Day Visual flight only HEC Main Depot and Switchyard DofC Main Roads Depot, Telecom	Major Town 2 Hotels, 1 Motel, 1 Caravan Park 1 Unit Accom 3 Churches 2 Primary schools Community Hall Sporting clubs and facilities 3 Service Stations Short Airstrip (400 metres only) HEC Depot Rarison Ball Tin Mine
5.3.2	Population	597 (Census 1992) Increase 11% on 1986 Median Age 34.7 yrs 54.6% Male, 45.4% Female Established Family town Broadly based skills but limited by small population. 79.8% home ownership 42% of pop in Workforce	3471 (Census 1992) Decrease of 11.8% from 1986 Median Age 28.6 yrs 57% Male, 43% Female Established Family Town Some Transient because of Mining and Government sector jobs. Broadly based skills 55.9% Home ownership 44.3% of pop in Workforce	approx 1700 (Zeehan Comm) 77 decreasing Median Age 25.7 yrs 80% Male, 40% Female Family Town - some Transient because of mining jobs. Broadly based skills 31.5% Home Ownership 47.5% of pop in Workforce
5.3.3	Density	Virtually all the population reside in the major towns. There is no appreciable population outside of the towns.		
5.3.4	Mobility	1 Taxi, 2x 4wd Tour Buses Cars in most households Average 1 car per household	3 Taxis, 3 Bus Operators Cars in 85% of households Mining Company vehicles available in an emergency	1 Bus Operator Cars in most households Mining Company vehicles available in an emergency
5.3.5	Ethnicity	89.5% Australian Born Virtually no non English speaking Baza in the communities	94.1% Australian Born	88.7% Australian Born
5.3.6	Economy	Tourism, Fishing Sawmilling, Fish Farming National Parks, Forestry	Mining Education, Tourism HEC, Telecom, Main Roads	Mining Tourism

