

'Bruny is a special place.'

It's a statement we hear all the time and something many of us say regularly. It's often an affirmation of the good fortune to be born here, or the wise choice to make this place our home. Sometimes, the statement is tinged with irony, a wry dig at the quirkiness of life on the Island. Other times, it's said in sheer wonder at the beauty of the land and sea.

It's also a statement that means many things to different people. It sums up resilience, ingenuity and stewardship over generations. It's an enticement for tourists. A rallying cry for environmental protection. An itch in the fingers for recreational fishers. A callout for wildlife enthusiasts. A value-add for property investments. A five-star review on AirBnB. A chance for financial independence. A platitude after missing the ferry. Text accompanying a Facebook post. Wistful musing after a long weekend at the shack. A statement of significance for Indigenous Tasmanians.

Each of these meanings can validly apply depending on one's family history, personal perspectives, life stage, financial circumstances and a myriad of other factors.

It's a relatively simple statement made complex by the fact that around 150,000 visitors a year (and growing) discover 'Bruny is a special place' and make the decision to spend part of their hard earned holidays with the 800 permanent residents (and the families of more than 650 other property owners, many with long-term connections to the Island).

It's also complicated because Bruny has demographics that vary from state and national trends, as made clear in the 2016 Census. Bruny's permanent population has a median age of 59 (the national median age is 37); only 13% under the age of 25 (the national figure is 31%); just 37% of people in the workforce (the average for the rest of the country is over 60%); 82% home ownership (the national average is only about 65%); two-thirds of dwellings on the Island not permanently occupied (the national proportion is 11%); and around 68% of households accessing the internet from home, when across Australia the figure is 83%. Even the calm and measured people from the Australian Bureau of Statistics might say, completely objectively of course, 'Bruny is a special place'.

And this is our Island's challenge. To ensure that Bruny remains a special place into the future, while understanding that we have some unique factors to manage and respecting 'what makes Bruny special' is different for all of us. It's a challenge that requires looking for common ground, defining the priorities and developing shared solutions.

Which is why the time is right for the Bruny Island Liveability Study (called 'Bruny Life' for short).

Over the next five months, all Bruny Islanders will be asked for their views about living and working on Bruny, to consider the challenges, to look at things from a range of perspectives and to help determine what's needed to make sure Bruny is a great place to live for many years to come. This consultation will take many forms, including small group meetings across the Island and a whole-of-Island survey.

The Liveability Study is funded by the State Government and Kingborough Council and overseen by the Bruny Island Advisory Committee (BIAC).

While Bruny's increased visitation and associated development and infrastructure pressures (including access to the ferry) currently gain the lion's share of media attention, and will be important parts of the study, there are many other issues that require planning and solutions. These include emergency management; supporting our ageing population; keeping volunteer groups and services going; protecting our land and marine environment; affordable rental accommodation; State and Local government service delivery (such as in health, education, policing and municipal services); striving for a resilient, diversified local economy; access to digital and mobile services; attracting and keeping working-aged Islanders...and many more.

There are risks in embarking on this kind of project. The most obvious is it becomes 'yet another report that sits on a shelf gathering dust'. There is also a risk that it 're-invents the wheel', by failing to take into account the work that has been done in the past and the knowledge that already exists. In order to make sure these risks don't eventuate, BIAC has endorsed a proposal for the study that has the following key features:

Local people will determine the outcomes. 'Bruny Life' is not a report written by outside 'experts'. It's about providing all people who live, work and own property on Bruny with the opportunity to have their say and develop proposals.

Local people will deliver the project. In addition to oversight by local people on BIAC, all of the researchers involved in 'Bruny Life' will be people who live and work on the island.

Proposals will be home-grown, big and small. 'Bruny Life' will focus on suggesting practical and achievable proposals, based on things that matter to local people.

Council and State Government are supporting the project. As the study is funded by the Kingborough Council and the State Government, they have 'skin in the game'.

A permanent resource. All the public information used in the study will be stored on the 'Bruny Life' website. For those who don't have access to the internet, there'll be hard copies available through local organisations. The website will also track how 'Bruny Life' proposals are implemented.

The Kingborough Council, in consultation with BIAC, has contracted me to be the coordinator for 'Bruny Life'. I live in Alonnah and have a professional background in this kind of work, which I've usually done on the mainland. It's an honour to be appointed and I take very seriously the responsibility to let a transparent process determine the outcomes. In my view, there's only one Bruny Islander's views that should take a back seat in this study: the author's.

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