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July 2011

Ref: J2429

A NOTE ON POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR CAIRNS & FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND

1. GENERAL

The purpose of this note is to draw attention to a need for caution in using recently released Queensland Government population projections for the region.

It sets out a long history of the State Government writing down the projected growth of the region in relation to other parts of Queensland with actual growth subsequently exceeding the projections by a substantial margin.

This has led to a long history of under investment in facilities and a tendency for investment only taking place as a crisis response.

2. DIFFERENT TYPES OF POPULATION FIGURES

Up until 1976, population statistics were based on simple census count type data.

The growing influence of tourism and travel on residents being away at any given time and visitors being present led the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to produce from 1976 onwards, 'estimated residential population' figures.

It should be noted that the projections of population being predicted by the Queensland Government are of 'estimated residential population'.

It should be noted that in some non-tourism areas, the actual 'on the ground' population will normally be lower than the residential population, whereas in tourism areas, the reverse occurs.

The following table estimates this effect on the population of Cairns and Far North Queensland at the time of the last census count in 2006.

	Cairns Statistical Sub Division (1)	Far North Q'ld Statistical Division
Total census count population	143,436	264,676
Residents counted at home	117,262	220,230
Visitors	26,174	44,446
Less estimated residents away	14,302	27,357
Estimated net visitor population	11,872	17,087
Estimated residential population	131,564	247,589

(1) Note: Urban population Gordonvale to Palm Cove.

Source: Cummings Economics from ABS data.

The visitor and net visitor population will fluctuate during the year. The census is held at a higher but not the highest time of the year for visitors.

The census data indicates that at census time, the visitor populations were adding 20% to the residential population of Cairns and 18% to the region and net visitor populations adding 9% to Cairns and 7% to the region.

The relevant figures to use – ‘estimated residential’ or ‘census count’ will depend on the service or facility being looked at but it needs to be kept in mind as a factor in using the projections.

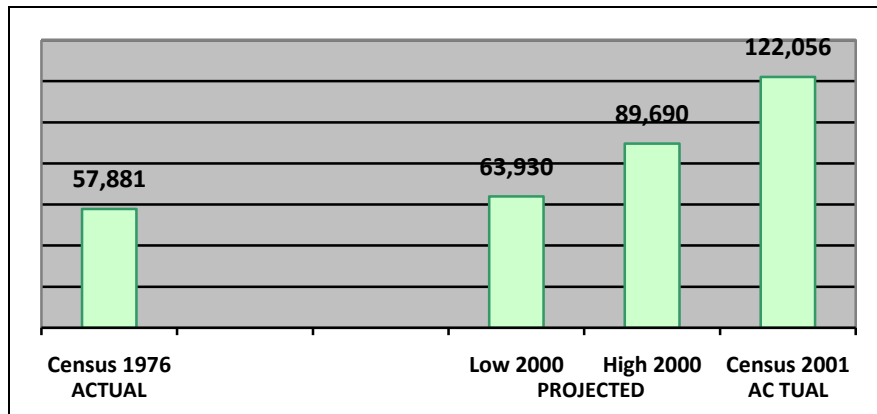
3. HISTORY OF ACTUAL GROWTH & PROJECTIONS

1976 Projections – Cairns & Mulgrave

Consultants, WD Scott & Co, produced projections for the Coordinator Generals Department for Cairns City and Mulgrave Shire (including Yarrabah) for 1985 and 2000. These were census count type projections.

The following shows the projections against what actually happened.

Projected	1985	Low	54,420
		High	63,930
Actual	1986	Census	83,968
Projected	2000	Low	63,930
		High	89,690
Actual	2001	Census	122,057



<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
+58,126	+91%
Actual	Over high
+32,366	+36%

1981 Projections – Far North Statistical Division

The Coordinator General prepared estimated residential population projections in the early 1980's of the 2006 population based on 1981 figures for the Queensland Statistical Divisions.

The following table gives details.

1981 Population Projections of 2006 Population Compared with Actual Outcomes			
	Projected	Actual	Over/Under Estimate
North West	52,417	33,213	+19,204
Far North	243,633	247,295	(-3,662)
North	229,321	223,037 ⁽¹⁾	+6,284
Mackay	173,615	146,665 ⁽²⁾	+26,950
Fitzroy	230,652	206,204	+24,448
Central West	19,586	12,535	+7,051
Darling Downs	231,441	225,807	+5,634

Note: ⁽¹⁾ Including Bowen. ⁽²⁾ Excluding Bowen.

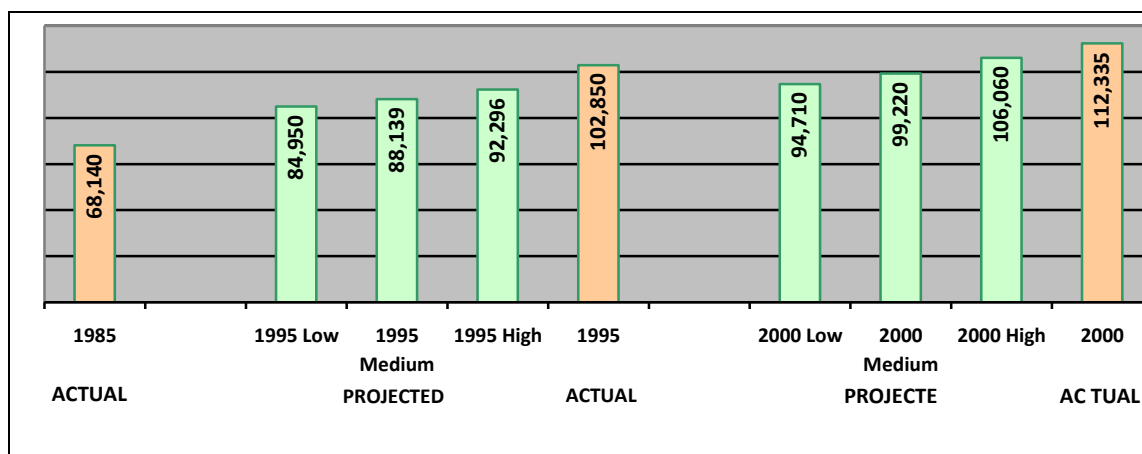
Source: Cummings Economics from ABS data. & Population Projections for Qld 1981 – 2006, Queensland Premiers Department.

By and large, these projections were over optimistic for most regions, especially the North West, Mackay and Fitzroy Divisions. The only division that was under projected was the Far North with the projection turning out to be relatively accurate.

1985 Projection – Cairns Area Development Strategy

In 1985, the Coordinator General’s Department prepared forward projections of estimated residential population for the Cairns Statistical Sub Division, ie. defined urban area Gordonvale to Ellis Beach for 1995 and 2000, ie. over a relatively short 10 and 15-year time frame.

The following table compares the projections with what actually occurred.



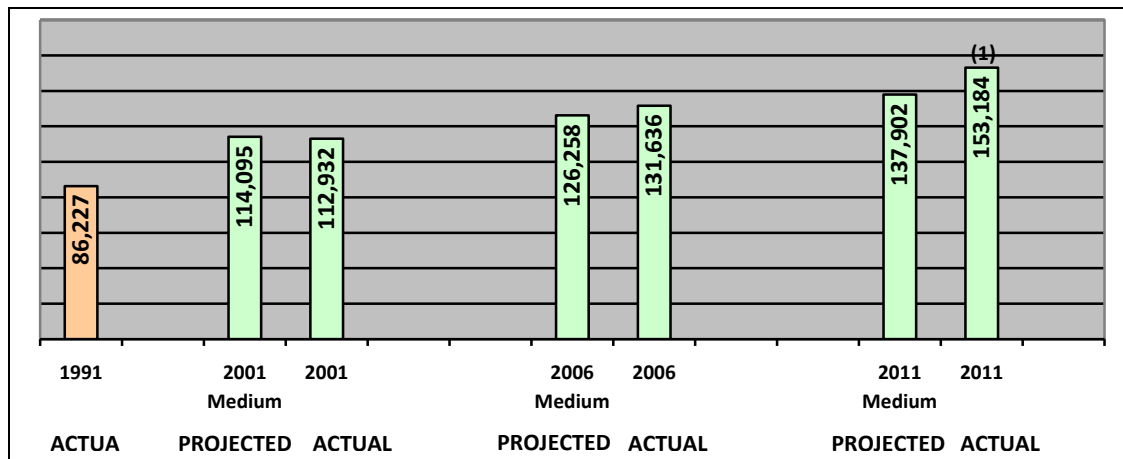
The chart indicates the following under estimation of growth that actually occurred.

Under Projection – Difference Actual Over Projection			
Under projection		Number	Percent
1995	Actual over Medium	+14,711	+17%
2000	Actual over Medium	+13,115	+13%

The relatively slow growth 1995 to 2000 meant that the forward projections 1995 to 2000 were about right and did not add to the under projection 1985 to 1995.

1991 Projections – Cairns Statistical Sub Division

The Department of Housing and Local Government produced projections of estimated residential population in the early 1990’s based on 1991 actual figures for 2001, 2006 and 2011, ie. for a 10, 15 and 20-year time frame. The following gives the medium and high series projections.



(1) *Note:* 2011 estimated – 2010 150,920 plus estimate of 1.5% = 153,184.

The following shows the under estimation in terms of difference actual over projected.

Under Projection – Difference Actual Over Projection			
Year	Description	Number	Percent
2001	Actual over medium projection	(-1,163)	(-1.0%)
2006	Actual over medium projection	+5,378	+4.3%
2011	Est Actual over medium projection	+15,282	+11.1%

The slower actual growth period 1996 to 2001 led to a small over estimate in 2001.

By 2006, the actual was over by 5,378 or 4.3% and by 2011, over by some 15,282, ie. 11.1%.

Compounding Under Estimation

Of course, the under estimation tends to be progressively corrected over time as new projections are based on the new higher figures and this disguises the impacts of the consistent under estimation.

Thus, the 1985 based median projection put population 2000 at 99,220. The 1991 projection put median growth 2000 to 2011 at a further 1.9% pa. Combining the two would put the population 2011 at 122,000 when actual will be about 153,000, an additional 31,000 or 25%.