

# Regional development priorities for the Meander Valley community (Draft)

*A background paper for the Meander  
Valley Council's Economic Development  
Forum, 5<sup>th</sup> of February 2025*

Prepared by the  
Tasmanian Policy Exchange of the  
University of Tasmania



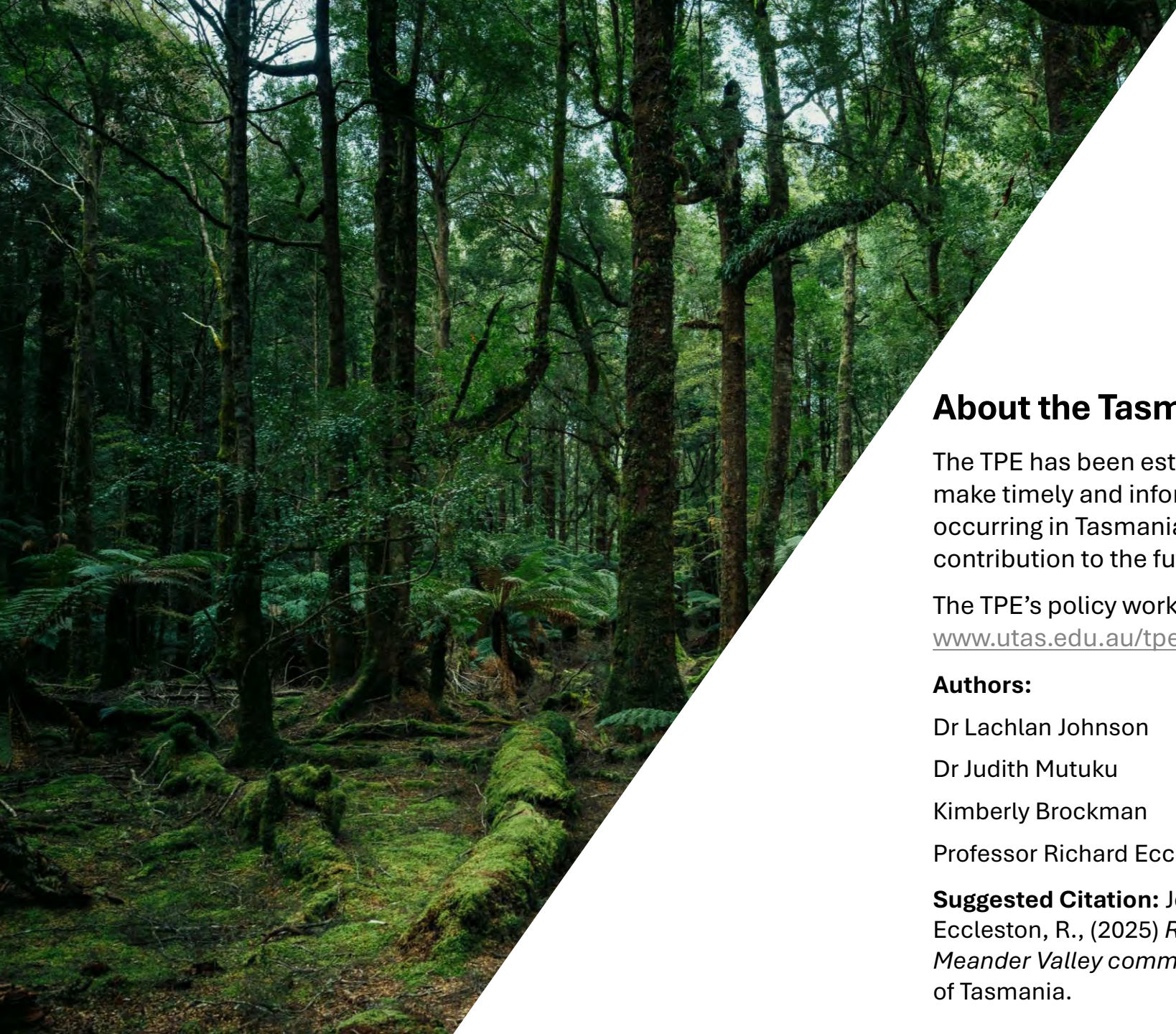


## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the palawa/pakana of lutruwita, the traditional owners of the land upon which we live and work.

We pay respects to Elders past and present as the knowledge holders and sharers. We honour their strong culture and knowledges as vital to the self-determination, wellbeing and resilience of their communities.

We stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language and history.



## About the Tasmanian Policy Exchange

The TPE has been established at the University of Tasmania to make timely and informed contributions to key policy debates occurring in Tasmania and beyond, thus making a positive contribution to the future of our state and its people.

The TPE's policy work and analysis can be found at [www.utas.edu.au/tpe](http://www.utas.edu.au/tpe)

### Authors:

Dr Lachlan Johnson

Dr Judith Mutuku

Kimberly Brockman

Professor Richard Eccleston

**Suggested Citation:** Johnson, L., Mutuku, J., Brockman, K., and Eccleston, R., (2025) *Regional development priorities for the Meander Valley community*, Tasmanian Policy Exchange, University of Tasmania.

# Table of Contents

**Part 1** - Population and settlement change in the Meander Valley

**Part 2** - The Meander Valley economy

**Part 3** - Infrastructure, services, and investment in Meander Valley

**Part 4** - SWOT analysis

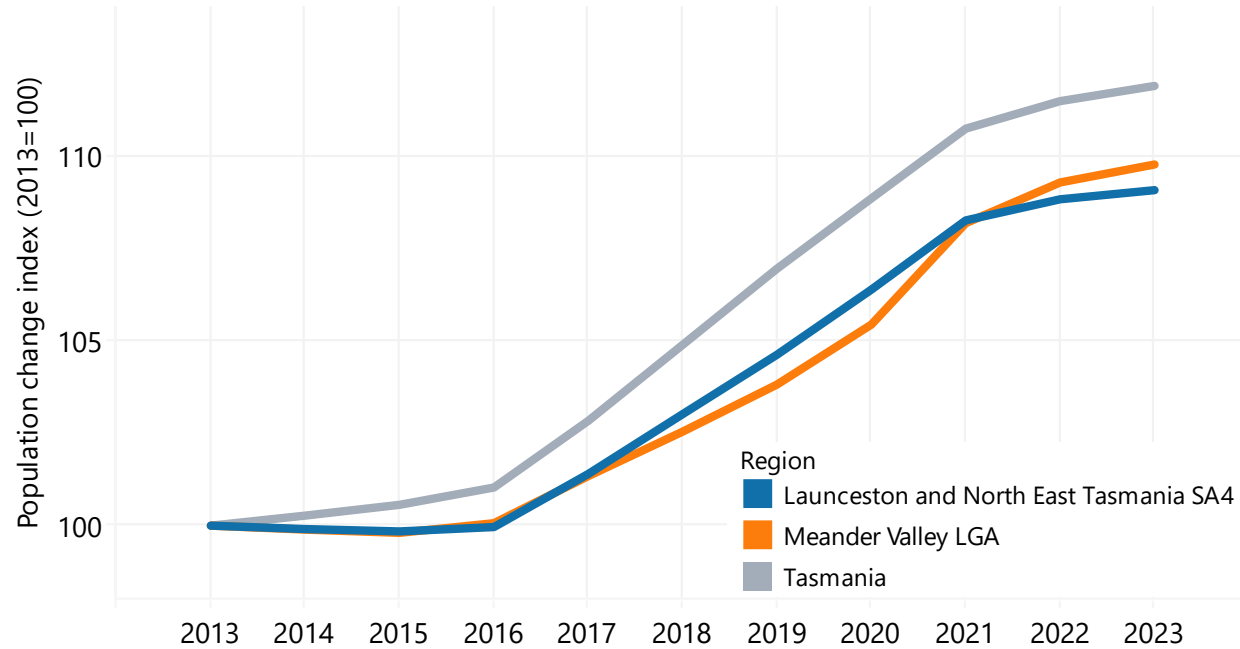




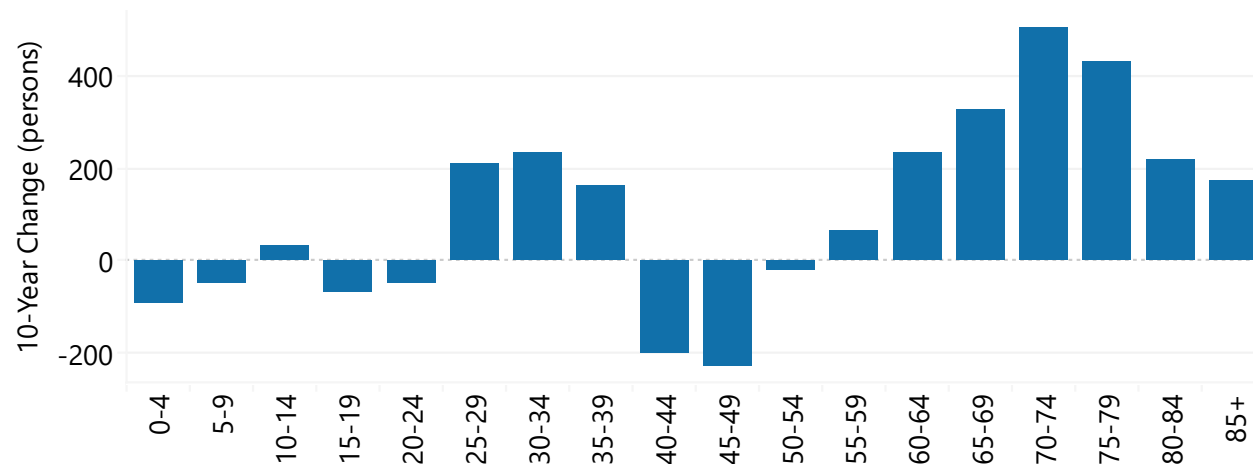
## **Part 1**

Population and settlement change  
in the Meander Valley

Ten-year population growth (2013-2023)



Ten-year population change by age group, Meander Valley (2013-2023)



Data source: ABS

## Population change in Meander Valley

Population growth in Meander Valley has averaged just under 1% in the ten years to June 2023. This is slower than the state as a whole but faster than the rest of Northern Tasmania and comparable with similar regions elsewhere in the country.

Since 2013, the population of Meander Valley has grown by around 1,900 people (approximately 9.7% over last ten years). Like much of the state, Meander Valley's population grew rapidly between 2019 and 2021; however, in the post-COVID period, the growth rate slowed to a more moderate pace.

Breaking down the past decade of population change by age group shows that recent growth in Meander Valley has been driven by two cohorts:

1. Younger employed people aged 25-39, most of whom commute to Launceston for work.
2. Older retired people aged 60 and over. Some of this growth is driven by structural ageing (i.e., ageing of existing residents) and some is driven by net in-migration of older people from other places.

Projections produced by the Tasmanian Treasury suggest that, on current demographic and migration trends, growth will likely remain relatively steady at something like its current rate over the next decade, slowing gradually after that (see page 9).

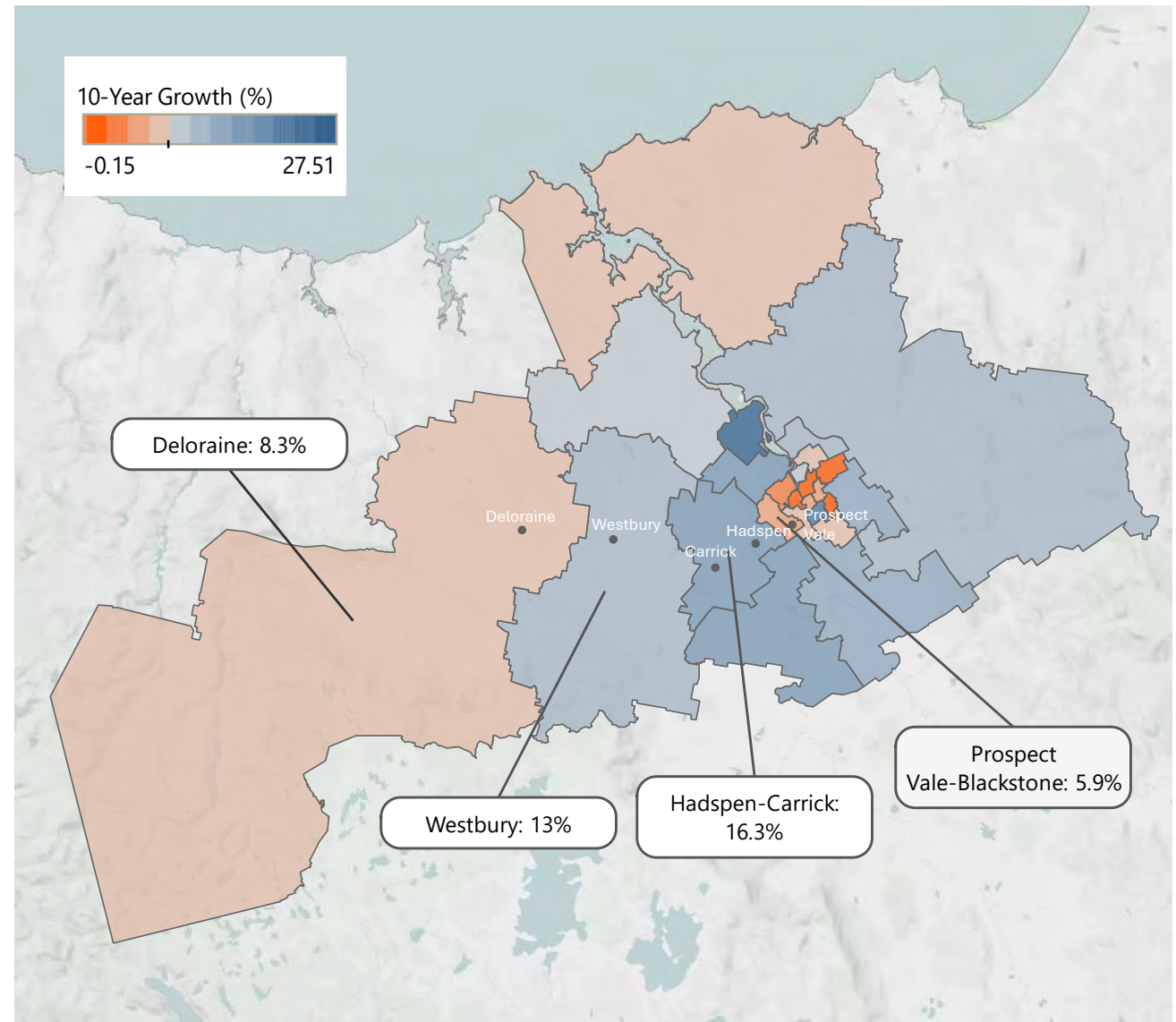
## The distribution of population growth

The distribution of growth across Meander Valley's SA2s has been uneven. Some areas, notably Hadspen-Carrick, have grown much faster (16.3%) than the average for Northern Tasmania. Prospect Vale-Blackstone, however, has experienced below average growth (5.9%)

This change is consistent with a pattern seen in many similar places: slow growth or decline in inner-city areas, rapid growth in surrounding 'satellite' communities, and slower growth in more rural areas. Whilst many are remaining employed in the city, residents are moving to these 'satellite' towns for more affordable housing and the lifestyle being offered.

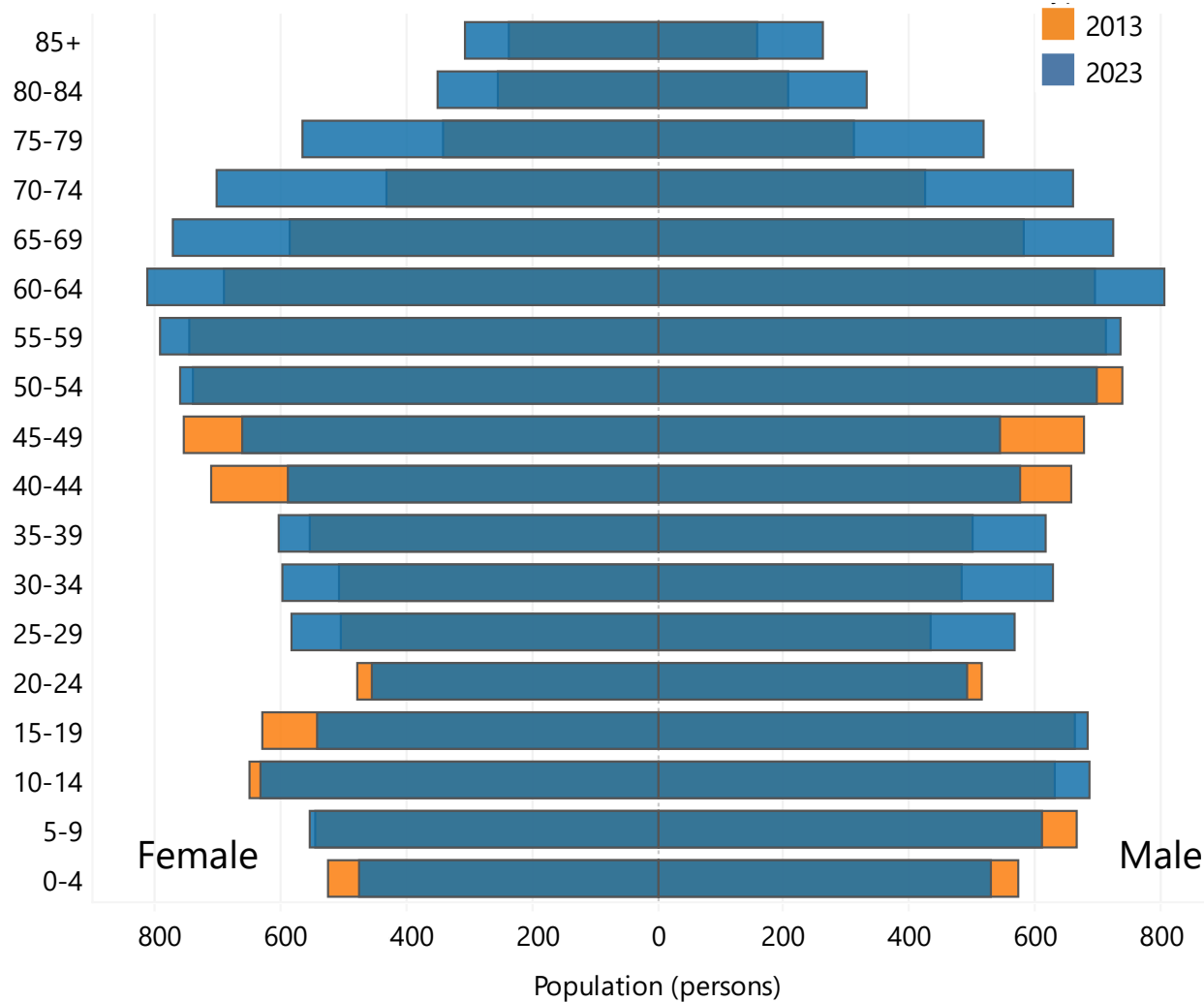
Like much of Australia, and indeed the Northern regions of Tasmania, population movements in the Meander Valley follow a 'stepping stone' pattern. This means that overseas migration, which is dominated by young people, is predominantly to larger cities and metro areas (including Launceston). Migration from city centres to the suburban fringe and 'satellite' towns is dominated by working people in their late 20s and 30s, many with young children. Migration to regional and rural areas is driven by retirees and tree changers.

## Population growth relative to region average in and around Greater Launceston by SA2, 2013-2023



Data source: ABS

Population age structure by sex, Meander Valley, 2013-2023



Data source: ABS

## Meander Valley’s changing population age structure

The region’s population age structure continues to show a ‘top-heavy’ pattern of growth, but this has been partly offset by migration of 25-39-year-olds.

The impacts of population change on age structure varies significantly at the regional level in Meander Valley. Some parts of the LGA are getting older quite quickly (most notably Prospect Vale and Blackstone Heights), but others are ageing much more slowly.

The table below shows how the median ages of Meander Valley’s SA2s have changed in the last ten years to 2023.

Region	Median age 2013	Median age 2023	Ten-year change
Westbury	44.9	46.7	+1.8
Hadspen-Carrick	38.9	40.9	+2.1
Deloraine	45.3	48.6	+3.3
Prospect Vale-Blackstone	42.8	47.3	+4.6
Meander Valley LGA	43.3	49.2	+2.9

However, over the most recent census period (2016-2021), both Westbury and Hadspen-Carrick became younger, due to strong migration of younger families with children to these areas.



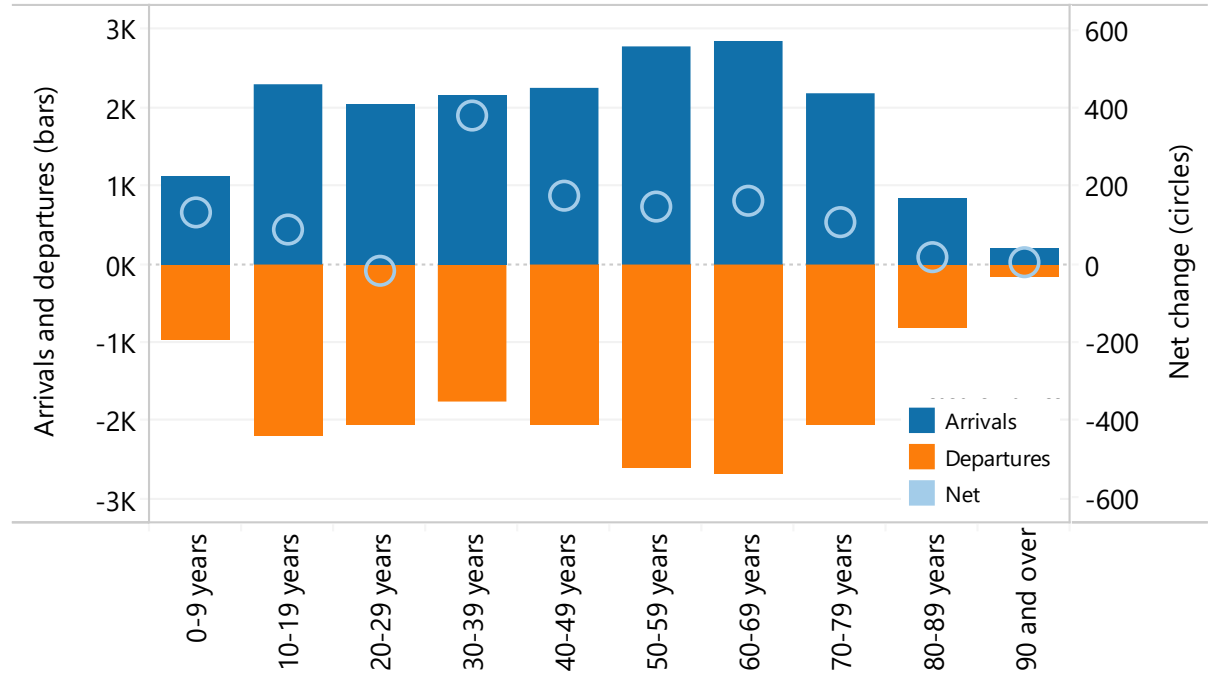
## Rate and implications of Meander Valley population turnover

All types of migration contribute positively to Meander Valley's population growth, but overseas migrants are especially important drivers of growth with an additional 513 people living in Meander Valley that were born overseas.

The cumulative impact of inward and outward migration on a population is often described as population turnover, or 'churn', expressing all arrivals and departures in a given year as a percentage of an area's total population. Meander Valley's rate of population turnover is around 15.5%, which is close to the average for Tasmania. Understanding the components and implications of population turnover can tell us a great deal about how migration impacts the host population. The net effect of population turnover in Meander is overwhelmingly positive for two reasons.

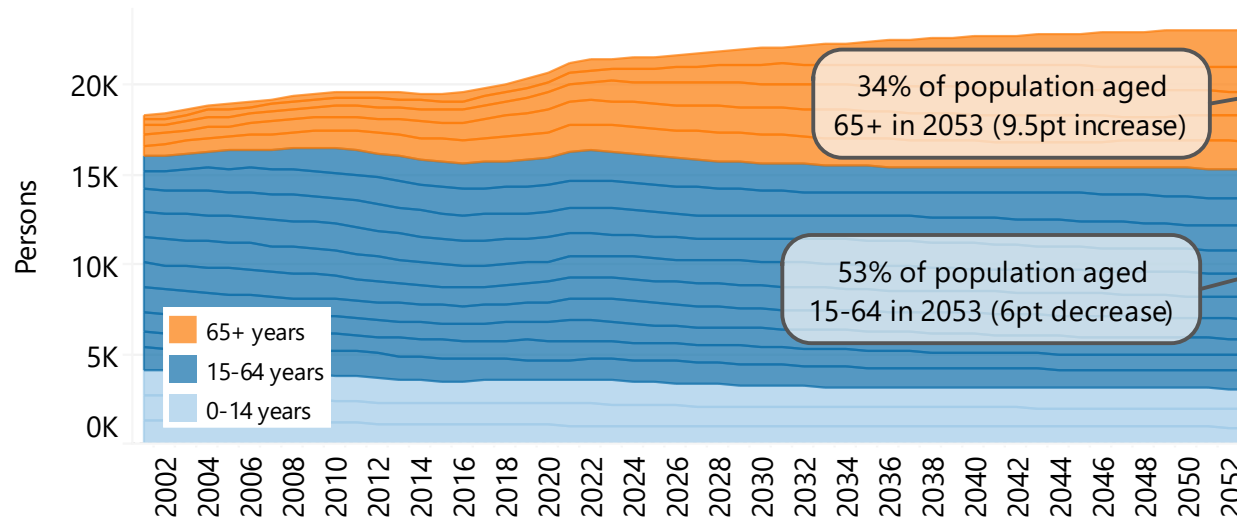
1. Recent arrivals greatly outnumber departures in two key age brackets: 0-9 and 30-39 years. This indicates that families with small children see Meander Valley as an attractive place to raise their families.
2. Recent arrivals are far more likely than long-term residents to be working or participating in education and training. They are also significantly younger (especially international migrants) and earn more – and those migrating from intrastate are typically more highly skilled in their jobs.

Arrivals to and departures from Meander Valley by age group, 2016-2021

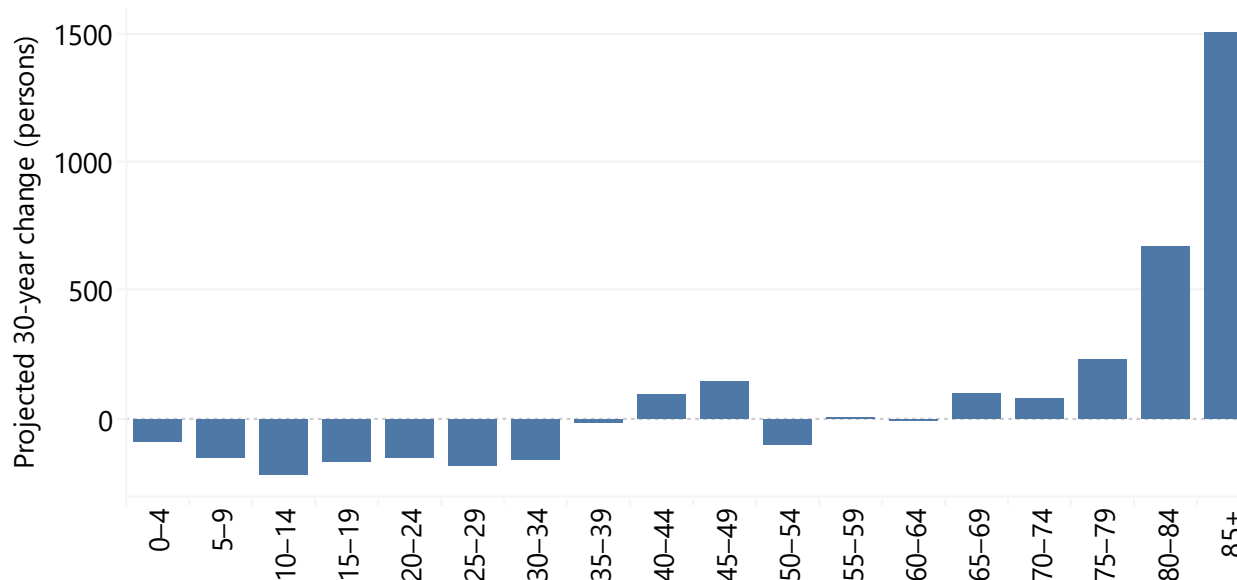


Characteristics of people moving to Meander Valley by place of origin (2021)	Place of origin			Long-term residents
	Intrastate	Interstate	Overseas	
Median age (years)	34.9	44.1	29.7	51.5
Unemployment rate (%)	5.1	8.3	7.5	4.0
Participation rate (%)	69.3	61.9	79.2	59.1
Median weekly income (\$)	829.4	727.3	714.3	643.3
Occupational skill in current job (1=highest, 5=lowest)	3.0	2.7	3.6	3.0

Meander Valley population by age, Tasmanian Treasury population projections (medium series), 2001-2053



Projected change in Meander Valley population by age group, 2023-2053



Data source: Department of Treasury and Finance, [TasPOPP](#)

## Population projections to 2053

Population projections produced by the Tasmanian Treasury suggest that, on current trends, the median resident age of Meander Valley will be almost seven years older in 2053 than is the case today.

Despite strong recent growth among some younger age groups in the past five to ten years, the most likely future scenario for the Meander Valley population in the coming decades is continued steady ageing. While Meander Valley’s population ageing will be nowhere near as extreme as in some other parts of Tasmania, it will still increase pressure on ‘working-aged’ residents to provide for the needs of a growing number of older people. The relationship between working-age people, young people and children, and older retired people is sometimes described by demographers in terms of an ‘age dependency ratio’ which can give a basic indication of the sustainability of service and care provision in a community.

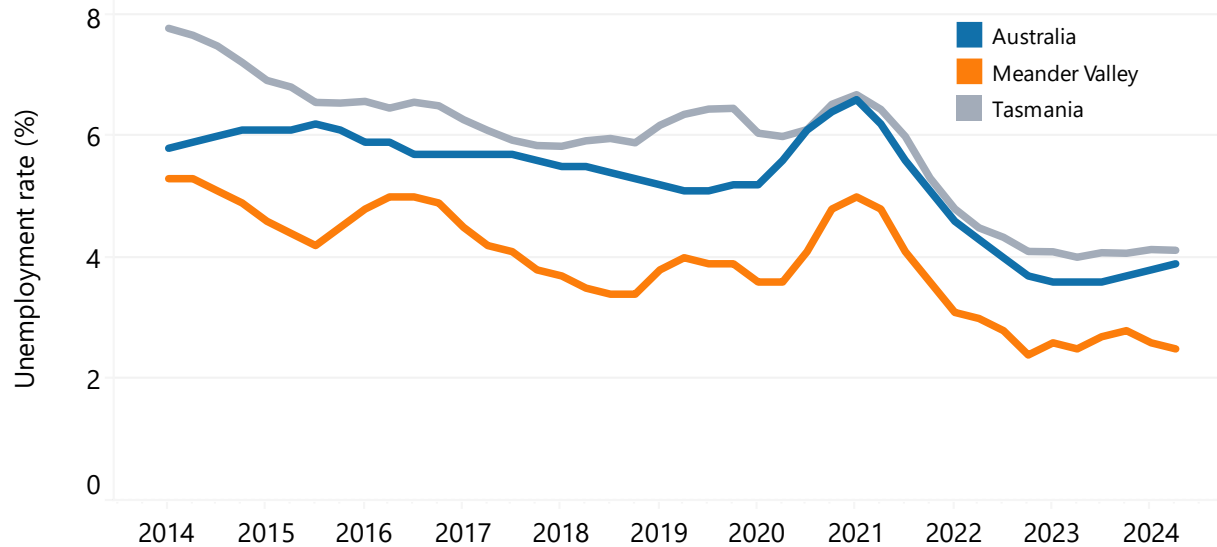
In 2023, the age dependency ratio in Meander Valley was 68.5, which means that there are about 68.5 non-working-aged residents for every 100 workers. By 2053, the medium series Treasury population projections suggest that this ratio could increase to around 89. Attracting and retaining young families in the region could help mitigate the growing ageing population.



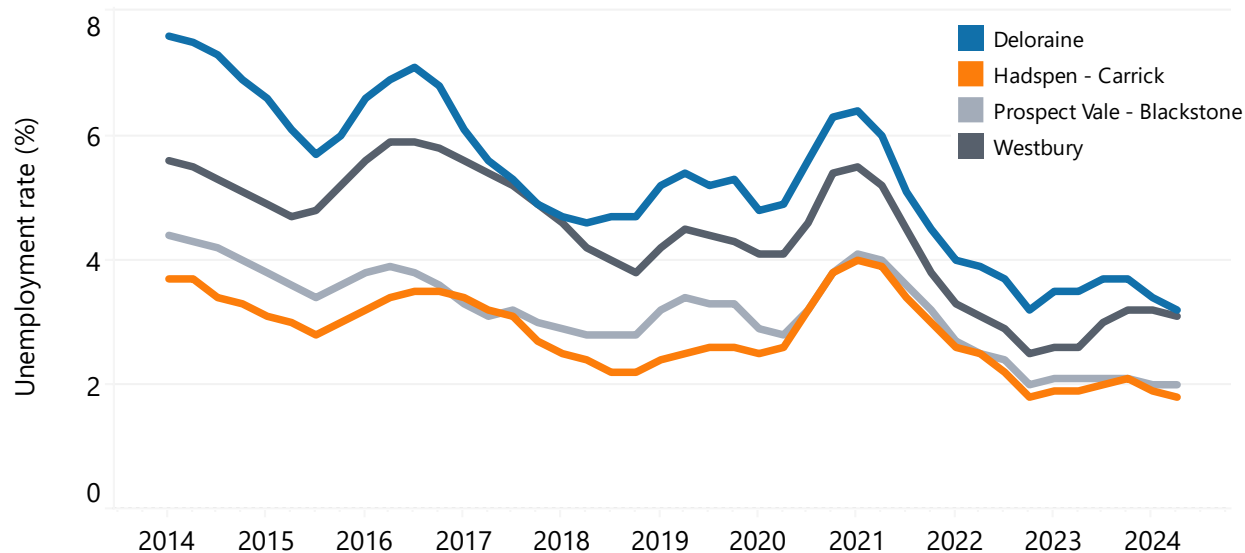
## **Part 2**

### The Meander Valley economy

Unemployment in Meander Valley, 2014-2024



Unemployment across Meander Valley SA2s, 2014-2024



Data source: ABS

## Unemployment and economic participation in Meander Valley

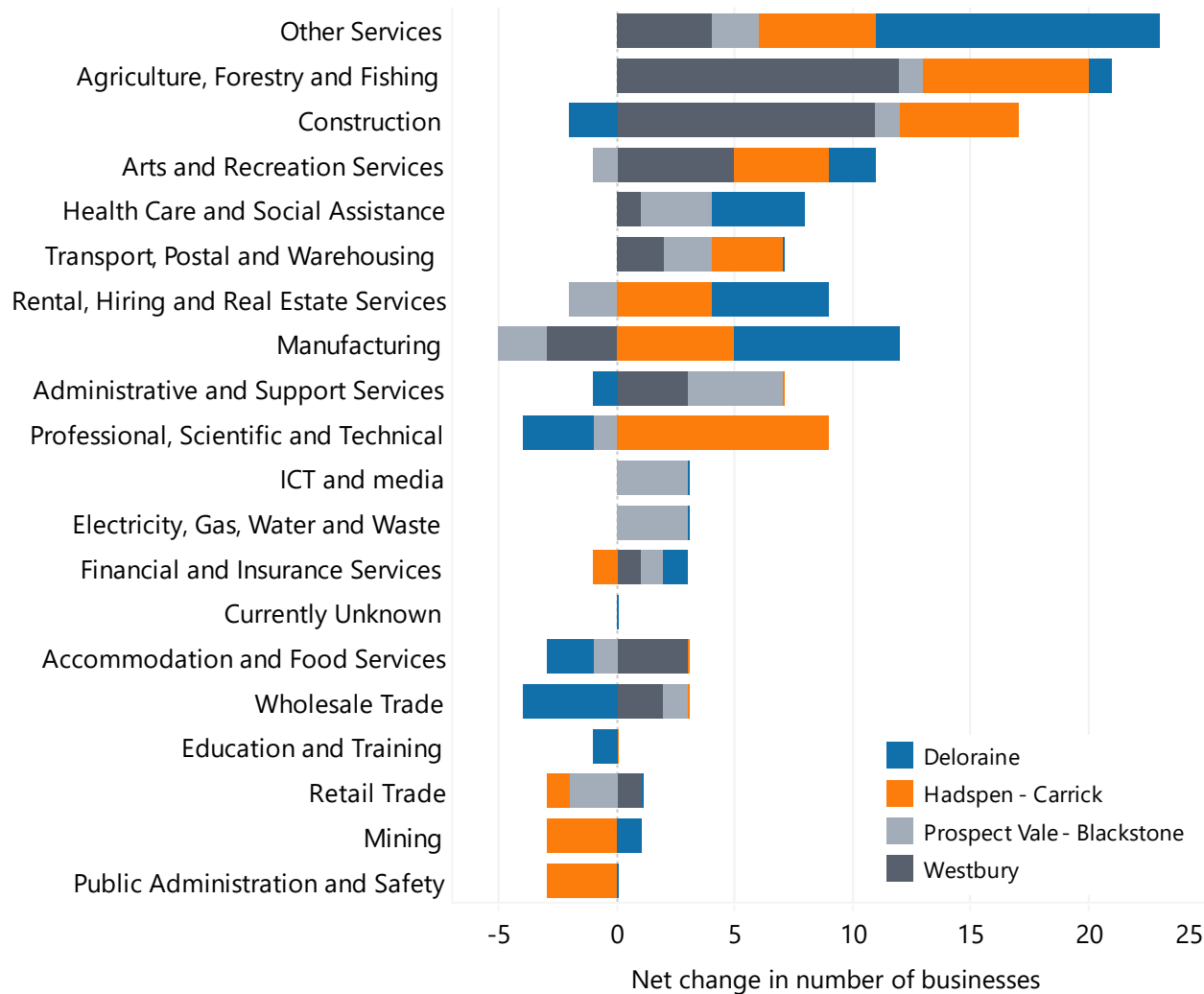
The unemployment rate in Meander Valley is lower than Australia’s and Tasmania’s in all SA2s, but there has been some regional variation in recent years.

The most recent available data (Q2 2024) on employment in Meander Valley shows an unemployment rate of just 2.5%, which is enviably low by state (4.1%) and national (3.9%) standards. Indeed, at no point in the past ten years has unemployment in Meander Valley been higher than the state or national rate (though this not true of all of its individual SA2s – Deloraine in particular has experienced quite high unemployment during several peaks in the past decade). This is likely driven by the inward migration of younger, working families which have helped keep the unemployment rate lower.

Just as important as Meander Valley’s consistently low rate of unemployment is a clear trend of convergence across its four SA2s. The gap between the best and worst performing SA2s was almost four percentage points in 2014 but has narrowed to less than one point in 2024.

Finally, despite a sizeable bump, employment in Meander Valley was impacted less severely by the COVID-19 crisis than other parts of Tasmania or Australia, and also recovered more quickly in its immediate aftermath.

Post-COVID (2021-2023) change in number of business registrations in Meander Valley by industry and region



Data source: ABS

## Employment and new businesses in the Meander Valley

Agriculture and related services and manufacturing are the largest employers in the Meander Valley although more recently around three quarters of new post-COVID business registrations have been in Hadspen-Carrick and Westbury, reflecting strong growth relative to the rest of the LGA.

The biggest growth in business registrations has been in the ‘other services’ category, which includes maintenance and personal services and households employing staff. Nearly all of these are very small businesses (fewer than four employees). This trend likely reflects rapid growth in the sharing economy and short-stay accommodation.

The agriculture (and related service and manufacturing), construction, health and social care, and retail and hospitality industries are major employers (See below).

Top industries by employment	Number of employees	Proportion of employees working in Meander Valley
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing (Ag and Ag Services)	989 (866 and 82)	18.3%
Construction	569	10.5%
Health Care and Social Assistance	495	9.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	485	9.0%
Retail Trade	476	8.8%
Manufacturing (Food processing and Chemical manufacturing)	463 (146 and 113)	8.6%

## Productivity, output, and industrial mix

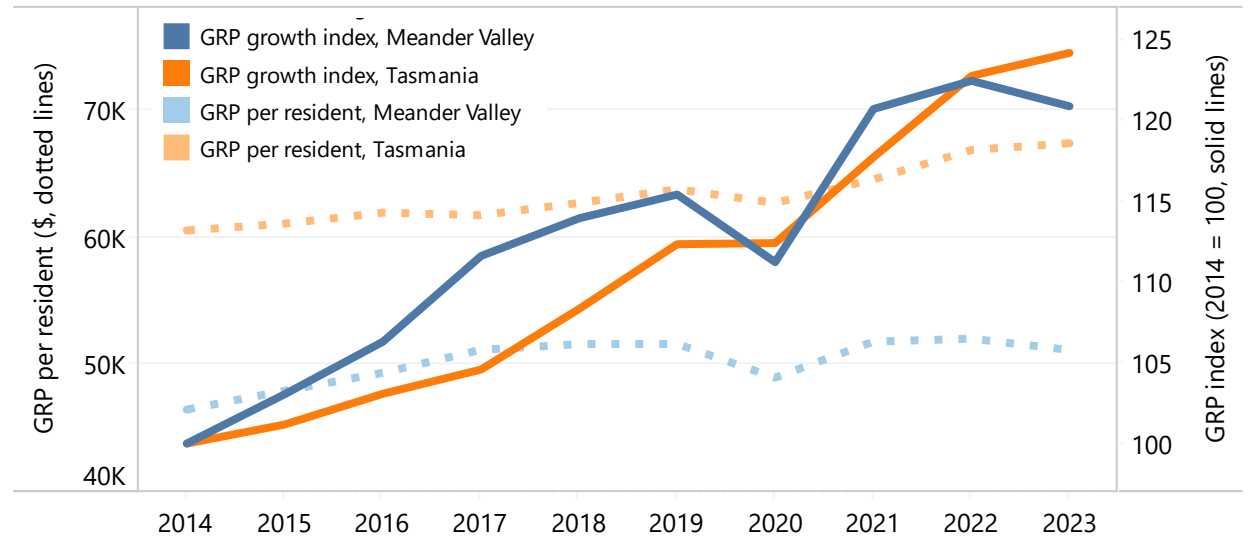
The rate of growth in Meander Valley’s regional output has generally exceeded the statewide average, but as in most regions, job growth is mostly in relatively lower productivity industries (such as accommodation and food services, retail trade, and ‘other services’).

Gross Regional Product (GRP) is a measure of the output of a regional economy. In other words, it is the amount of value generated by people who work in a given region, regardless of where they live, and does not include residents of that region who work elsewhere. Meander Valley’s GRP in 2023 was just under \$1.1bn, which represents an (inflation-adjusted) increase of approximately 21% (over the decade).

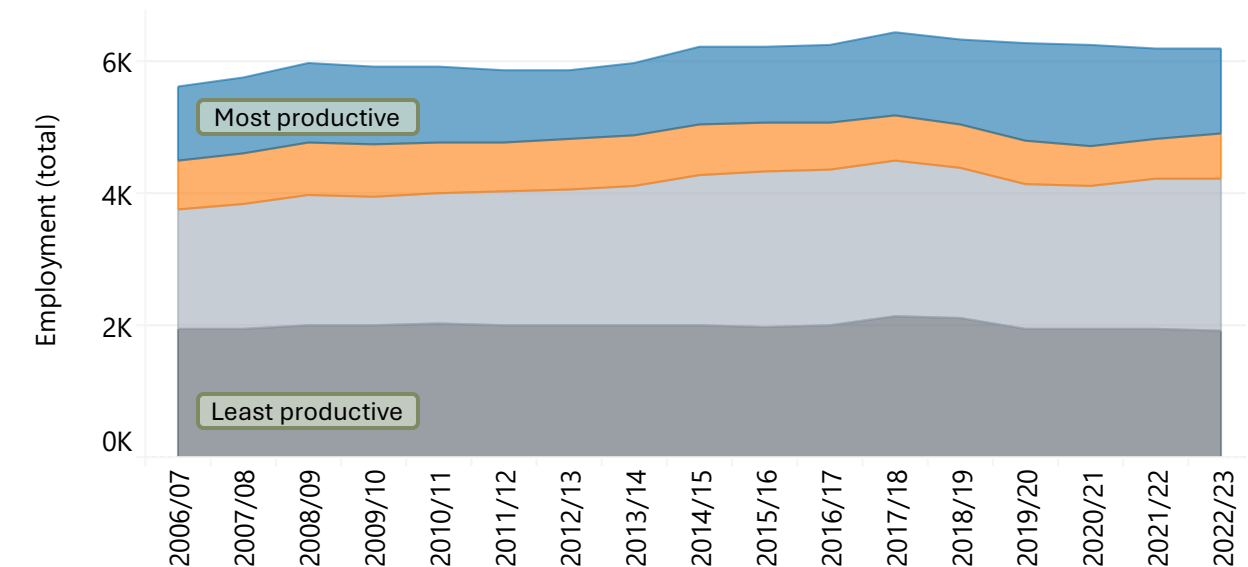
As many residents of Meander Valley work in Launceston, the total output of all people who live in the LGA is about \$1.24bn. As Meander Valley has become more connected to Launceston, the difference between the output of Meander Valley’s local residents and that of its industrial base has grown. In 2001, the GRP of Meander Valley industries was about 75% of the GRP of Meander Valley residents. By 2023, this ratio had declined to about two thirds. This may explain the recent decline in GRP growth index within Meander Valley.

The other reason for this gap is that Meander Valley residents working in Launceston are likely to work in higher productivity industries than those employed in Meander Valley itself.

Gross regional product per capita and over time, 2014-2024

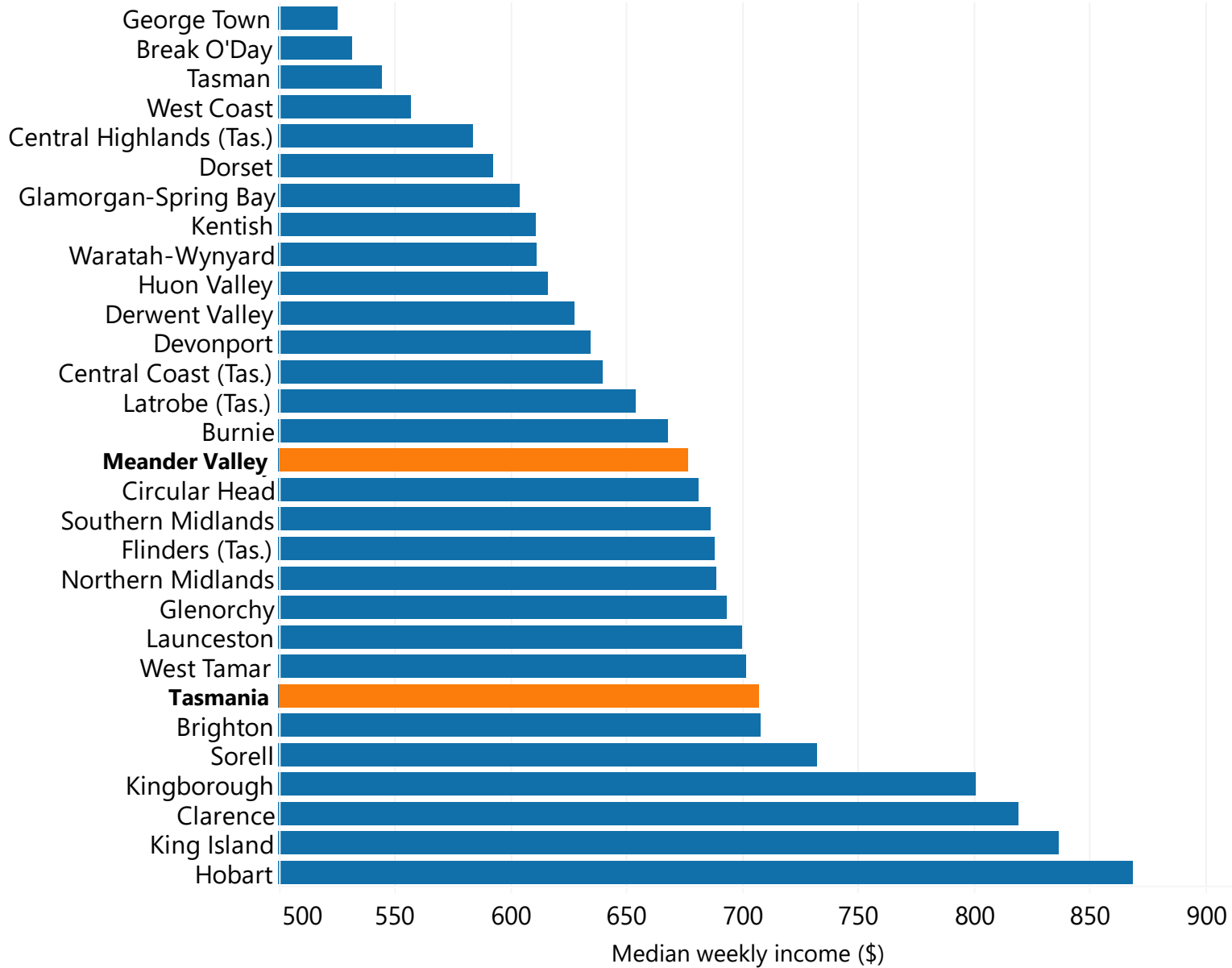


Change in Meander Valley jobs by industry productivity quartile, 2007-2023



Data source: ABS

## Median individual weekly income, 2021



Data source: ABS

## Income

The median weekly income of individuals in Meander Valley is \$675.60 per week and sits in the middle of all Tasmanian LGAs, although the median income varies across areas within Meander Valley.

This is lower than the Tasmanian median income of \$707 per week, and the Launceston median income of \$699.60 per week. However, it is relatively high compared to other Northern LGAs.

Within Meander Valley, the median weekly income varies between areas. The areas closest to Launceston have higher median incomes, exceeding both the Tasmanian and Launceston medians. Whilst the areas further away have much lower median incomes in comparison.

- Hadspen-Carrick has a median weekly income of \$784.22
- Prospect Vale-Blackstone has a median weekly income of \$738.55
- Westbury has a median weekly income of \$617.58
- Deloraine has a median weekly income of \$576.92

# Agricultural innovation and future growth

Agricultural production, related food processing and manufacturing continue to be the most important sectors in the local economy and account for over 20% of all employment in the region.

Supporting innovation and investment in agriculture, agricultural services and downstream processing and value adding should be central elements of the region's economic development strategy. There are opportunities to build on the success business such as Extractas Bioscience as well as emerging products such as biomethane.

Continuing to support residential construction and provide services to ensure livability will both sustain the existing building workforce and will continue to attract young families to the region.

As with many regional communities, there is a need to attract and retain health and care workers as well as retail and hospitality staff. Appropriate place-based training and support (such as child care) are important enablers.







**Part 3:**  
Infrastructure, services, and  
investment in Meander Valley

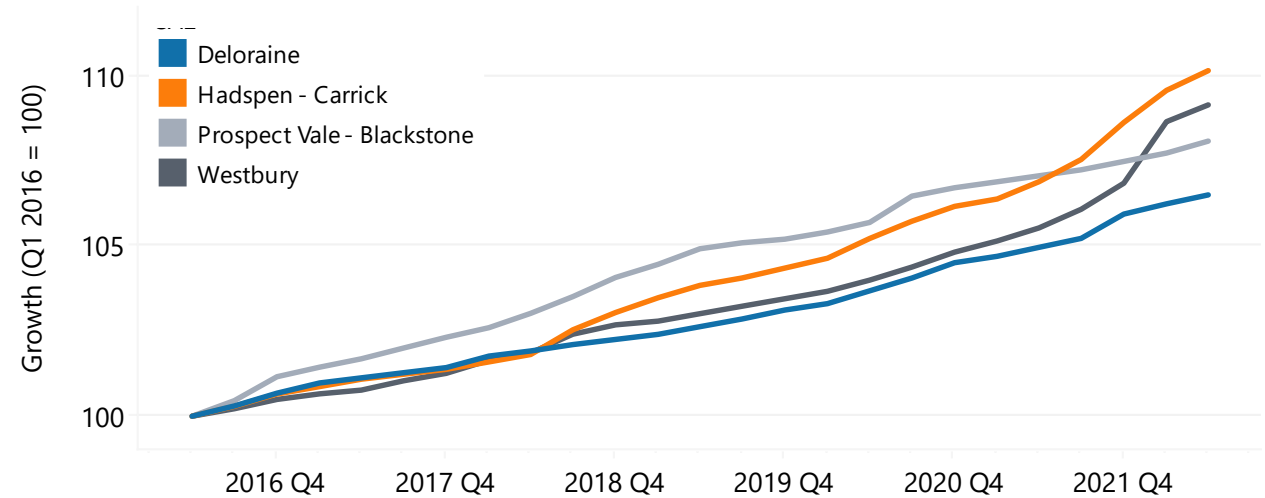
# Housing

There has been growth in the level of housing stock within Meander Valley over the past 10 years, although this is not evenly distributed between the four SA2 areas. Since 2019, there have been 761 residential housing building approvals in Meander Valley – Westbury saw 242 housing approvals, which is almost double the lowest SA2 area approvals, Prospect-Vale Blackstone, which had 124. The growth in Meander Valley accounts for 4.8% of Tasmania’s total residential building approvals since 2019, despite being 3.7% of the Tasmanian population.

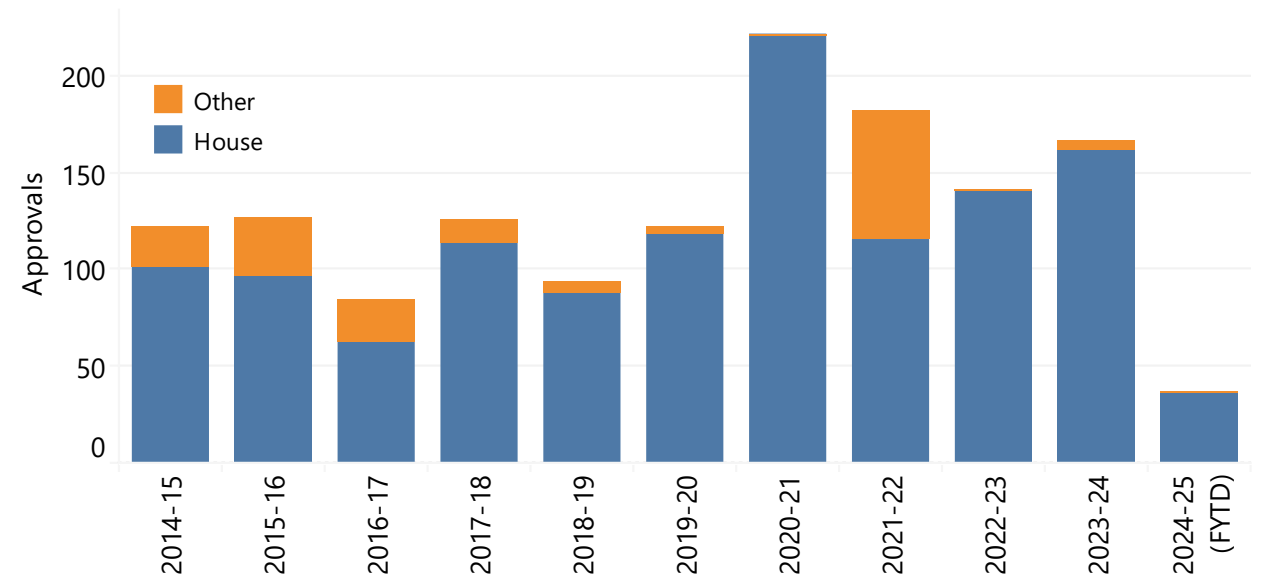
This growth in housing stock has been proportional to and has helped support population growth. Most of the residential building approvals in Meander Valley are for houses, although there is a small proportion of ‘other’ residential accommodation, which could include semi-detached residences, apartments, or small units.

Strong housed development has created more opportunities for home ownership in Meander Valley, compared to the state level, as those who live in the region are slightly more likely to own their own home (either outright or through a mortgage). In Meander Valley, 76% of people own a home, and 20.5% of people are renting. Compared to Tasmania where 70.1% of people own their home, and 26.4% live in rental accommodation.

Growth in Meander Valley housing stock by SA2, indexed, 2016-2022

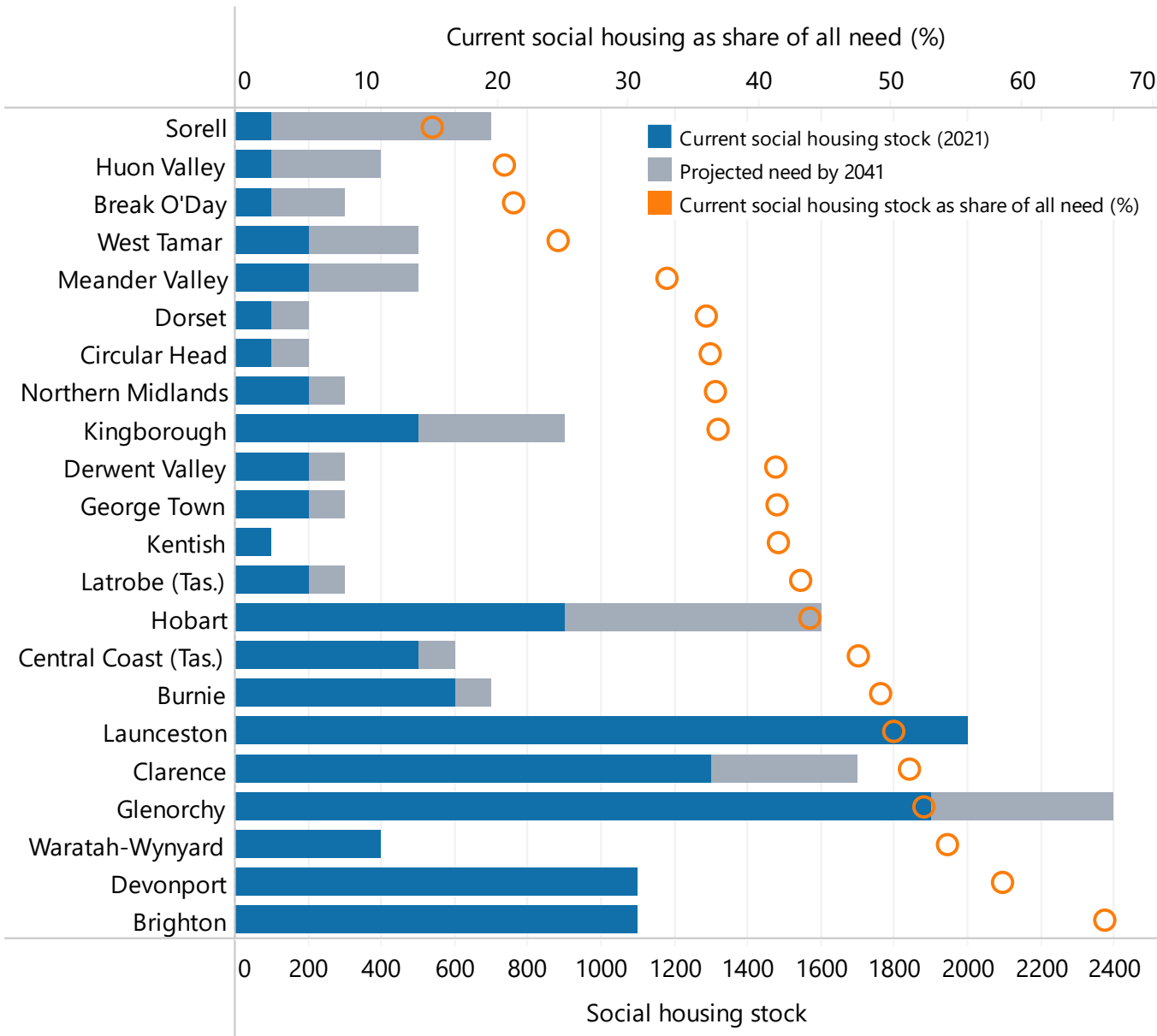


Residential building approvals in Meander Valley by type, 2014-2024 (FYTD)



Data source: ABS

## Current social housing stock and projected future need, selected LGAs



Data source: ABS

## Demand for new social housing

Population growth in Meander Valley is creating high demand for new housing across the board, but social housing stock in particular will need to more than double by the 2040s.

If Meander Valley is to meet future needs, 300 new social dwellings will be required. Projected social housing demand may seem relatively modest in absolute terms, but it will require one of the highest growth rates of housing stock in the state to achieve. Only Sorell, Huon Valley, Break O'Day, and West Tamar have higher rates of projected unmet social housing demand.

Meander Valley's current social housing stock is about one third of what will be required in 2041.

# Worker Commutes

Unsurprisingly, the closer people live to Launceston, the more likely they are to work and commute there.

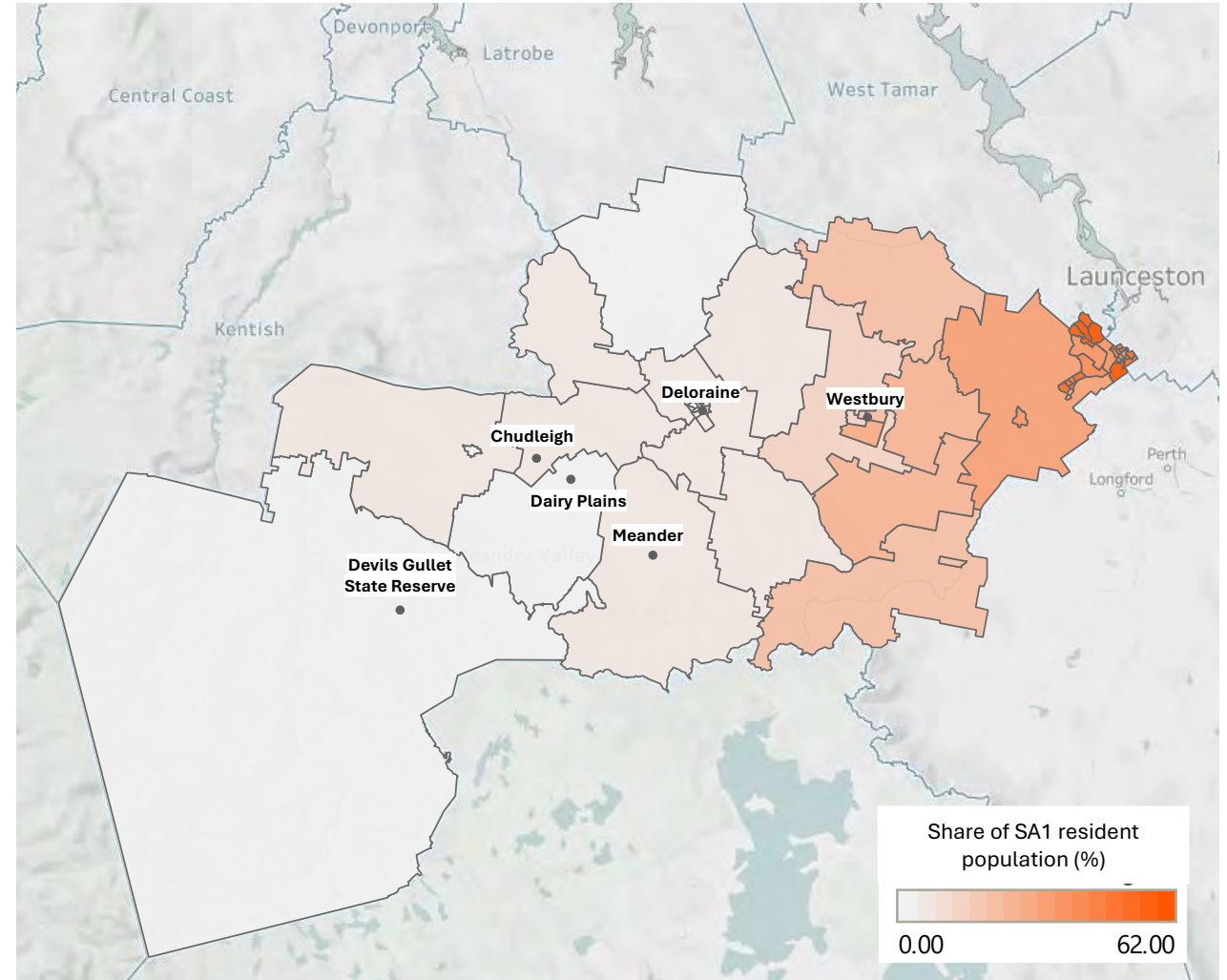
Almost all the residents within Prospect Vale-Blackstone work outside of the Meander Valley region, with 92% of people (5,267 people) working outside their resident LGA. Unsurprisingly, the closer people live to the city, the more likely they are to work outside of their resident LGA (predominantly in Launceston), with:

- 91% (5,267 people) live in but work outside of Prospect-vale Blackstone
- 87% (2,513 people) live in but work outside of Hadspen-Carrick
- 77% (2,777 people) live in but work outside of Westbury
- 66% (3,416 people) live in but work outside of Deloraine

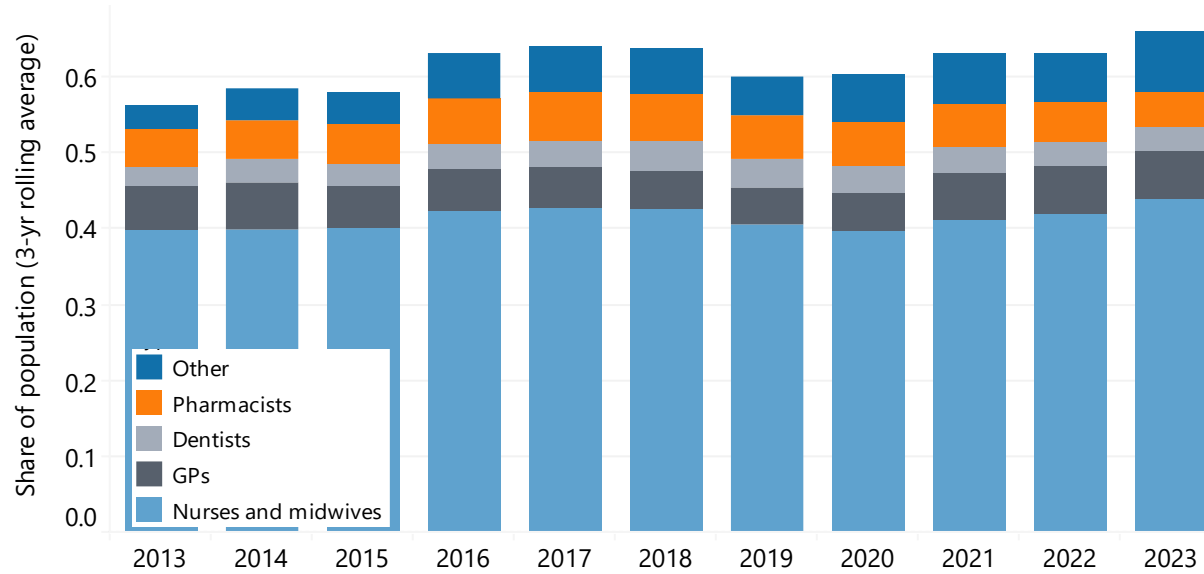
New younger arrivals are much more likely to be commuting to Launceston for work than those who are longer term or older residents. As such, the growth in the outer ‘satellite’ communities is driven by the need for convenient commuting options.

Most people arrive to work via car, or if they are closer to Launceston (i.e., in Prospect), a small but significant proportion walk to work. This means investment in transport infrastructure to support commuting into Launceston will be important to support sustained population growth.

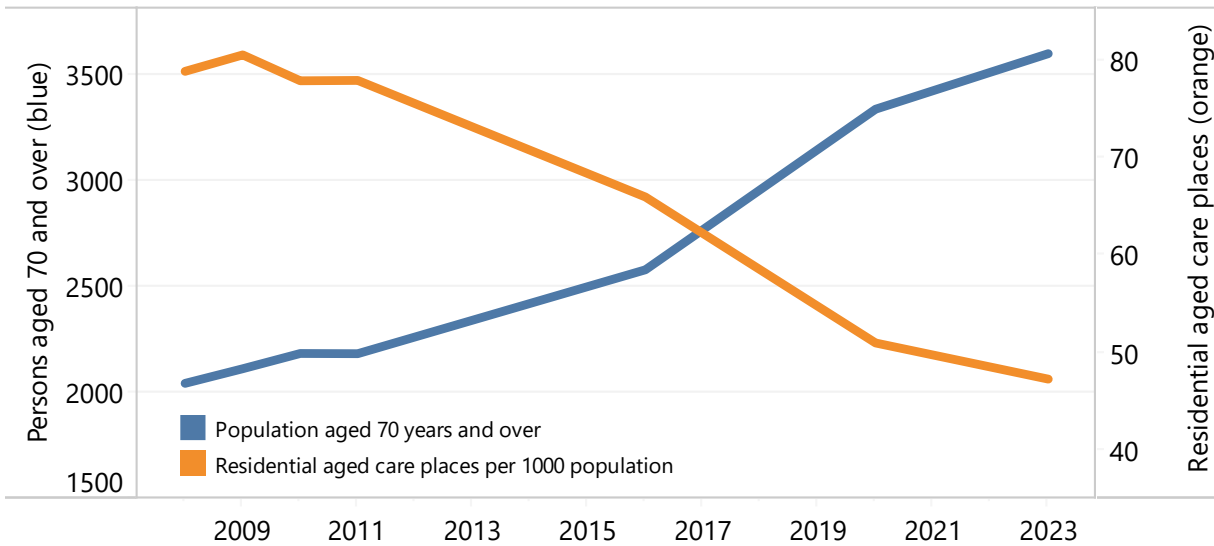
## Share of local Meander Valley residents who commute to Launceston for employment by SA1, 2021



Health workforce by type in Meander Valley, share of population, 2013-2023



Population aged over 70 and residential aged care places, 2008-2023



Data source: Social Health Atlas of Australia (Torrens/PHIDU)

## Population health, aged care, and local access to medical services

Meander Valley’s healthcare workforce has grown in line with its population, but aged care places are falling far behind.

The combination of recent strong population growth in Westbury, Hadspen, and Carrick with population ageing in the rest of Meander Valley is placing growing demand on local health, social, and aged care services. While the number of general and specialist medical practitioners per resident in the LGA remains very low by national standards, it is approximately the average for Tasmania and has at least kept pace with population growth.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for aged care. Since 2008, population growth has seen the number of aged care places per capita in Meander Valley fall by more than two thirds. This is especially concerning given that the LGA’s median age has increased by 6 years since then, meaning that demand for aged care will have outstripped population growth. While the number of residential places has been consistent at around 170 since 2008, the number of Meander Valley residents aged over 70 has increased by more than 1,500 to 3,600 people.

Limited access to healthcare service and aged care is concerning given that Meander Valley is projected to continue getting older in the foreseeable future.

# Childcare availability and school enrolments

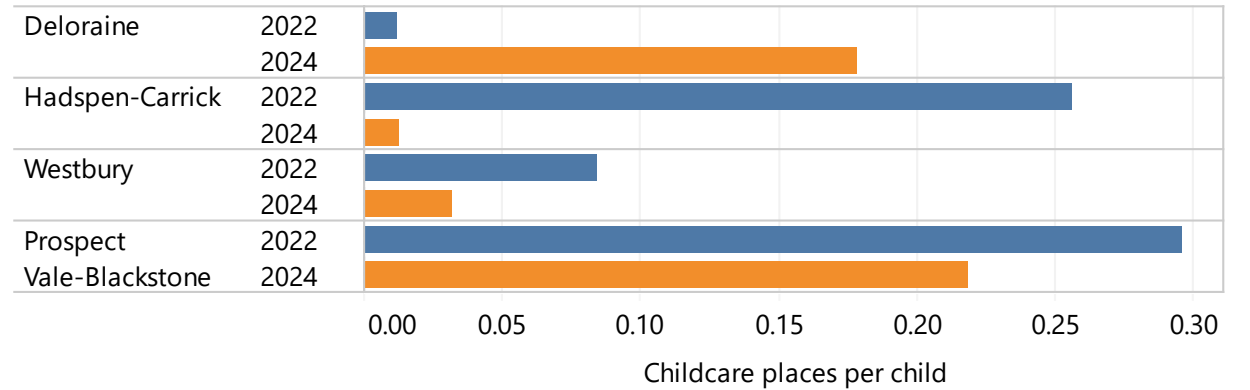
Meander Valley is currently a childcare desert, which means that there are more than three young children per childcare place in all of its SA2s.

Access to childcare has become more challenging in all parts of Meander Valley except Deloraine over the past two years. Recent strong in-migration of 30-39-year-olds with very young children, to Westbury and Hadspen-Carrick in particular, is likely to exacerbate these shortages even further over the coming years. Although we need to establish whether residents want childcare near their home or place of work.

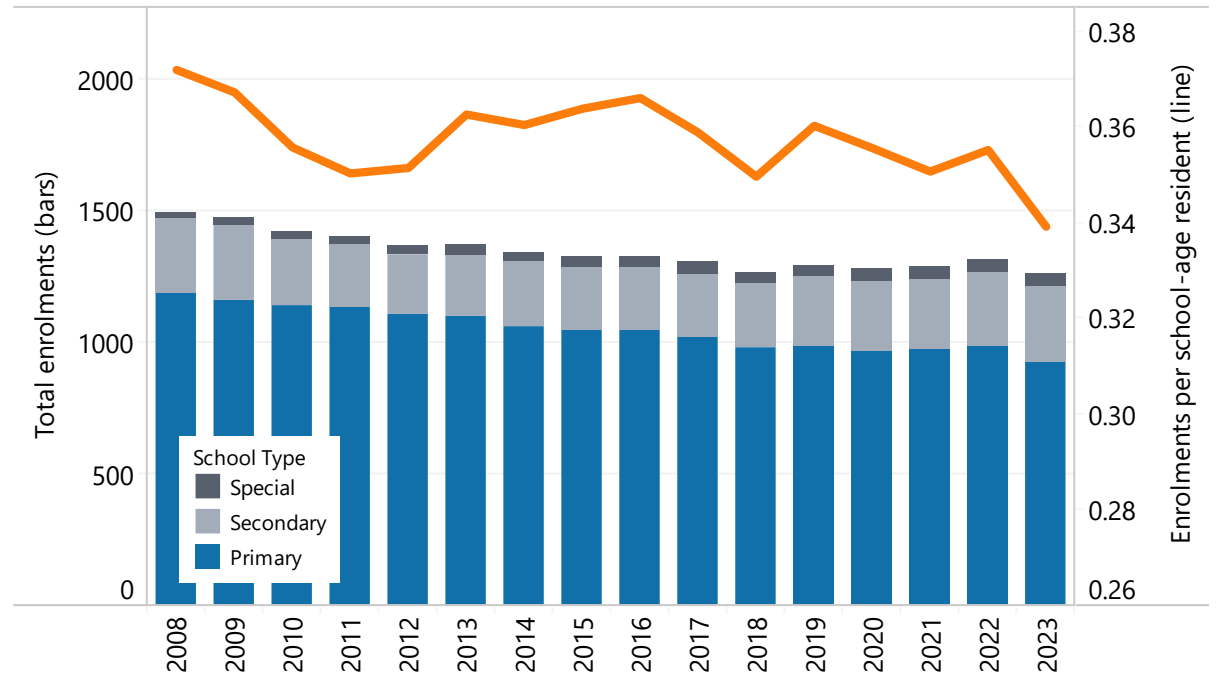
Whilst this aligns with current trends in other regional and rural parts of Tasmania, it is particularly difficult to gain access to childcare in this region. With parts of Meander Valley, namely Hadspen-Carrick and Westbury, having been ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> for worst childcare access in the state.

However, increasing demand for childcare has not translated into growth in enrolments within local Meander Valley primary or secondary schools. The number of students enrolled in local area schools has been declining consistently since 2008, putting pressure on the viability of some schools and even leading to a school closure. At the same time, however, local enrolments per school-aged resident have also been falling, which may suggest that a growing number of Meander Valley residents are attending schools in Launceston.

Access to local childcare by SA2 in Meander Valley, 2022-2024



Enrolments in Meander Valley schools, total and as share of school-aged population, 2008-2023



Data source: ABS, Social Health Atlas of Australia (Torrens/PHIDU)



## **Part 4:** SWOT Analysis

# Strengths

## **Younger workforce migrants and new arrivals in Meander Valley**

The younger workforce arriving in Meander Valley has caused several positive effects on the area, including strengthening the labour force pool, increasing participation rates, and filling in the skill gaps in the workforce. All of which is essential for economic growth and sustainable development.

## **Increasing housing stock**

The increasing housing stock in Meander Valley has been, and will continue to be, a key driver behind population growth. Given the proximity to Launceston, housing growth and development has enabled a commuting workforce to move to these 'satellite' communities for housing and lifestyle choices.

## **Higher Gross Regional Product (GRP)**

Meander Valley has maintained a higher GRP index than the state's average, suggesting the presence of strong local economic drivers such as the rapidly growing manufacturing and agricultural processing industry. Whilst there is a gap between the value of GRP for production in Meander Valley and the GRP of those living in Meander Valley, growth has remained strong.

## **Very low unemployment**

Meander Valley's low unemployment rate is currently enviable by state and national standards. This suggests both high economic performance of the region, as well as an attractive community for those who wish to enjoy the lifestyle benefits of the outer regions whilst maintaining employment in the city.







# Weaknesses

## **Outmigration and aging population**

Whilst Meander Valley is still experiencing inward migration of younger, working aged people, migration patterns in the region are leading to a rapidly aging population. Particularly in the areas further away from Launceston and the ‘satellite’ communities. This creates several implications and demands upon the services within the area, including aged care.

## **Fostering economic growth and development**

The largest growth in business registrations has been in the ‘other services’ sector. While this is a positive outcome, such business rarely generate secure high paying jobs and only make a modest to employment in Meander Valley. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on expanding the high-productivity sectors to boost employment rates and drive economic development.

## **Reliance on commuting**

Much of the workforce in the Meander Valley commutes to Launceston for work. As a result, these people are more likely to spend their leisure time and complete their shopping activity in the city. This means that businesses and communities in Meander Valley are missing out on potential customers and economic returns.

# Opportunities

## **Continued housing development**

Given the population growth in the area has likely arisen from the availability of housing and lifestyle preferences, to continue to encourage population growth in the area more housing should be developed – ensuring there is a sufficient mix of housing types – including rental and social housing.

## **Improving employment rates and skills**

There are opportunities to improve employment rates to upscale the economic growth of Mender Valley by leveraging the influx and high participation rates of the working-age migrants mainly from intrastate and overseas. Fostering employment opportunities, including skills training – particularly in both lower and higher productivity industries can help retain and attract a younger skilled workforce.

## **Growth in industries**

There are opportunities both to encourage and aid growth in high-productivity industries as well as improving diversification of industries within the area. This could include targeted investment and strategic management, for example, upscaling the workforce to meet skills demand in high-value industries. Additionally, helping reduce investment risk through government or policy support could help diversify the region's industries. This could help in the creation of more jobs and increase participation rates to help stimulate the growth of the local economy. Diversification of industries reduces market volatility and industrial or sectoral downturns.



Photo by Alexia Francois on [Unsplash](#)



# Threats

## **Meeting the service needs of the population**

Meander Valley, like much of Tasmania, will need to ensure there is sufficient infrastructure and services in place to help support the growing aging population as well as manage the health and safety concerns within the region (i.e., health services and aged care homes).

## **Commuting infrastructure**

Given the relatively large commuting workforce, it will be important that facilities and travel are sufficiently considered and maintained. It will be important for these communities and workers that they are able to reach their work safely, and within a timely manner (i.e., no major traffic spots, etc.). Additionally, consideration should be given to the level of emissions generated by the large number of commuters travelling via car, in particular.

## **Housing needs**

Meander Valley requires a large amount of social housing to meet current and future demand. Whilst the absolute number, 300, may be modest in comparison to other areas – this represents one of the highest growth rates in the state. As such, tackling social housing needs to become a top priority for this area.

## **Attracting and retaining skilled workforce**

Meander Valley has an expanding manufacturing and agricultural processing industry. Despite the influx of younger immigrants, the projected aging population will reduce the available workforce in the long term.

# References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (n.d.)

<https://www.abs.gov.au/>

Kempton, H., (2014) *Meander Primary School faces an uncertain future as enrolment numbers continue to fall*, The Mercury, September 19 <

<https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/meander-primary-school-faces-an-uncertain-future-as-enrolment-numbers-continue-to-fall/news-story/a116136242430151ad17b420e2a0bafb>>.

PHIDU and Torrens University Australia (n.d.) *Social Health Atlases Australia*

<<https://phidu.torrens.edu.au/social-health-atlases>>.

Ting, I., Chwasta, M., Brettell, T., and Smith, B., (2024) *Australia's childcare divide is growing. Here are the suburbs getting left behind*, ABS News, 20 August <

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-08-20/mapping-australia-s-growing-childcare-divide/104243302> >.

