

# The Tasmania Project

Share your experience during COVID-19.

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## Third General Survey – Summary of Findings.

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In our third general survey (TTP3), The Tasmania Project continued to explore Tasmanians' experiences with and attitudes to COVID-19 restrictions and measures, activities and behaviours, wellbeing and concerns, food access and supply, housing, work and employment, and financial wellbeing. With border restrictions firmly in place, we also took the opportunity to hear the thoughts of Tasmanian residents on international and interstate relationships, risk and threats, and what they wanted for the future in terms of Tasmania's place in the world.

The survey was open from 27 August to 7 September. Many restrictions had been eased, although some continued on the numbers of people allowed in businesses and households. While pressure continued in Tasmania to ease all internal restrictions and to open borders to some states, the situation in Victoria, which had imposed some of the toughest rules on movement ever seen in Australia to combat a second wave of infections, tempered criticism of the Tasmanian controls.

### Who won't do what? Why not?

Given signs in some countries of increasing politicisation of COVID-19 control measures, we were interested to know if this was influencing the thinking of Tasmanians.

While most of the 1133 respondents to TTP3 indicated high levels of compliance with and support for measures to limit the spread of the virus, evidence is emerging that some Tasmanian residents carry deep concerns about what is being asked or may be asked of them.

For example, 6% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, 'I would wear a facemask in public to limit the spread of COVID-19', with 84% agreement. Likewise, 4% said they would not be tested if they showed mild symptoms of COVID, and 5% said they would not be vaccinated if a COVID-19 vaccination became available. While 76% said they would be vaccinated, 18% said they did not know. In terms of trusting authorities' claims about COVID-19, 3% of respondents felt that the virus was not as contagious as health authorities claim and 6% thought it was not as dangerous.

We asked respondents to explain their answers in relation to vaccinations. Negative responses included that the decision would be based on 'evidence of safety and efficacy', 'I'm anti-vaccination', 'potential side effects', 'I don't trust government' and 'I am not anti vax but will not be forced to have a vaccine either'.

Positive responses included 'So I could travel overseas to see my family', 'to be personally safe and to ensure safety among my colleagues and friends', 'prevent further deaths', 'help eradicate COVID-19', 'peace of mind', 'human body needs help some times' and 'keep others safe'.



Image: Christine Booth Pexels

## Who is doing more or less of what?

We asked respondents to indicate if their level of participation had changed in a range of activities over the last month compared to before the pandemic began in March. In terms of exercise, 28% were doing more, compared to 23% doing less. A lot less had been fishing (35%) compared to 11% fishing more, although this result is likely to have been impacted by the pandemic coinciding with the colder seasons. Perhaps unsurprising given Tasmanians have one of the highest rates of boat ownership in the world, 18% of our 1133 respondents fished before the pandemic.

Respondents were generally cooking more (33%, compared to 8% cooking less) and eating more fruit and vegetables, but seafood consumption did not vary greatly. Respondents were also gambling more online than before the pandemic (34% more, compared to 16% less), but were less likely to gamble in venues (8% more, 49% less). This suggests fewer people were losing higher amounts in venues, given Tasmania's [poker machine data](#) has shown a significant rise in spending since venues reopened compared to the same time last year. Overall, 6% of the sample gambled online and 6% gambled in venues.

A higher number of respondents are smoking, drinking and using illegal drugs more than they were before the pandemic (compared to less), although the sample size for these three categories varied greatly with 91% of our 1133 respondents identifying as non-smokers and 94% not using illegal drugs, compared to 24% who said they did not drink.

Our findings reflect national data on the impact of COVID-19 on work, with 26% of respondents who had been in paid work prior to the pandemic saying they were doing less work, including 16% who said they were doing much less. In contrast, 6% said they were doing somewhat more and 3% were doing much more.

A potentially important finding relates to volunteering. While 13% said they were doing more volunteering, 17% said they had done somewhat less and another 17% said they had done much less.

## Are we still complying?

In TTP3, more respondents did not support the statement that the Tasmanian Government should keep state borders closed until COVID-19 was eradicated from Australia (45% disagreed, 36% agreed, 19% were neutral). More respondents from the North (40%) agreed, compared to 38% from the North-West and West, and 33% from the South. An age pattern was observed across all three surveys where younger age groups were more likely to support

keeping state borders closed, compared with older age groups.

In TTP1, 51% agreed, 20% were neutral and 29% disagreed that state borders should remain closed. Respondents from the North-West and West, and North were more likely to agree (55%) compared with those from the South (49%). Females were more likely to agree (54%) compared with males (43%). There was less agreement that borders should remain closed in TTP2 (45% agreed, 20% were neutral and 35% disagreed), than in TTP1.

In TTP3, 89% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I believe Tasmanian border restrictions are keeping us safe'. However, just under half of TTP3 participants (45%) believed that Tasmanian officials were making fair and equitable decisions about who can enter the State, while 28% disagreed and 27% were neutral. More respondents from the North agreed (51%), compared with the North-West and West (45%) and South (42%). In both TTP2 and TTP3, most respondents (79%) did not believe the government has been too slow to ease COVID-19 restrictions.

In all three surveys, respondents were asked if they always followed social/physical distancing rules<sup>1</sup>. In TTP1, 81% agreed, however this proportion decreased substantially in TTP2 (64%) and again in TTP3 (47%). This observed decrease is likely to reflect the easing of restrictions that occurred between TTP1 and TTP2, and then again prior to TTP3.

In TTP3, 59% of respondents in the North-West and West, 49% of those in the North, and 43% of those in the South agreed they were following distancing rules. An age pattern was observed, with older aged groups more likely to comply (54% of 65 years and above and 47% of 45-64 years) than younger groups (36% of 25-44 years, 30% of 18-24 years).

As restrictions continued to be lifted, less respondents (TTP3) reported compliance with remaining measures. It is likely that an easing of restrictions and decline of COVID-19 cases in Tasmania has resulted in the emergence of a certain level of complacency around COVID-safe behaviours that is evident across the three surveys. A comparison of attitudes to border closures and compliance with restrictions across surveys is available in [Report 38](#).

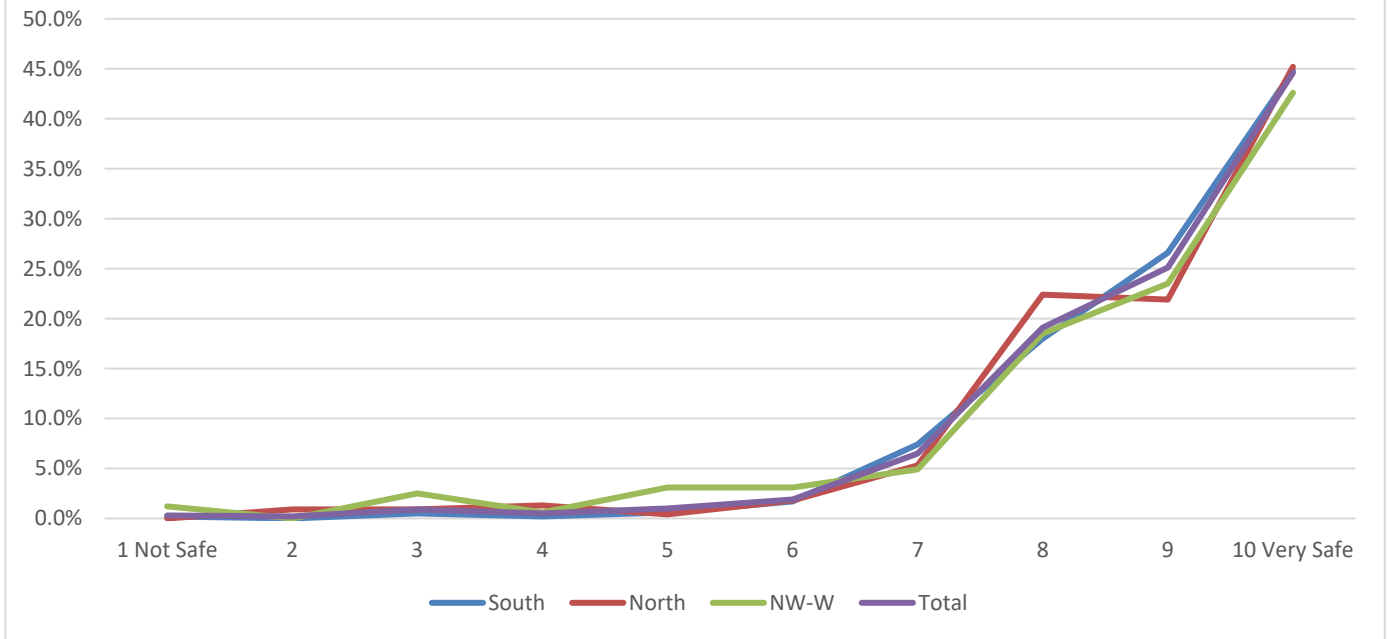
## Food insecurity

TTP3 found that rates of food insecurity reported by Tasmanians have not greatly improved since earlier in the pandemic. A more detailed analysis is available in [Report 37](#).

Food security means access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. For comparison, the prevalence of food insecurity amongst the general Australian population (pre COVID-19) has been estimated to be approximately 5%. The Tasmanian



### Thinking about world events, how safe do you feel in Tasmania?



Population Health Survey in 2019 reported that 6.2% of Tasmanians were experiencing food insecurity due to financial stress.

Our Food Survey in June found that one-quarter of respondents had experienced food insecurity. In this latest survey, we found a still alarming number (close to 1 in 5) have run out of food because they could not afford to buy more during the COVID- 19 pandemic.

The same groups of people within the Tasmanian community continue to experience the highest rates of food insecurity – those whose jobs have been impacted, and vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, single people with dependents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, temporary residents, and young people.

Higher rates of very low food security were reported by respondents in the North-West and West (7%) compared with those in the North (3%) and South (3%).

### Re/connecting to the world

The biggest threats to Tasmania’s future, according to respondents, are pandemics, environmental disasters and degradation, global economic downturns and Tasmania’s lower levels of education. The threats considered least critical are international protest movements, slow population growth, and terrorism, both domestic and international.

The Tasmanian industries, products and expertise most selected as central to the state’s brand and reputation internationally are

Agriculture, Tourism, and Environment and national parks. Those considered central by the least number of respondents were Defence, Clothing and footwear, Business events and ICT.

The countries and regions with which respondents said we should have strongest economic connections were New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Japan, China, Indonesia, India and the United States.

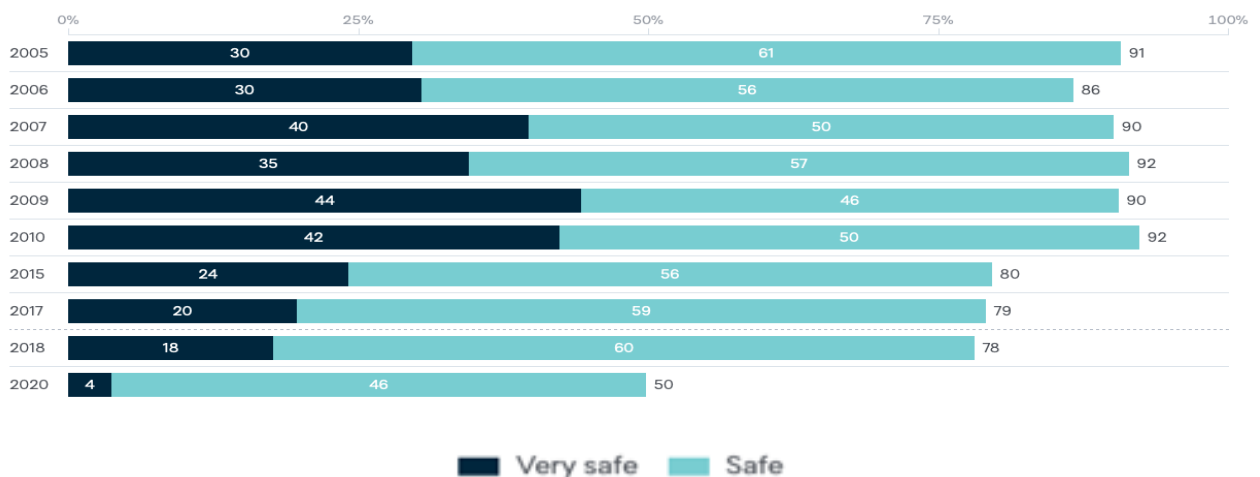
A higher percentage of respondents considered interstate tourists and interstate trade as very important to Tasmania’s future. International exports, tourists and skilled workers followed. International property investments and unskilled migrants were considered very important by the least number of respondents.

Generally, respondents feel very safe in Tasmania, although slightly less so in the North-West and West.

*“45% said they felt very safe in Tasmania when thinking about world events. This compares with a recent Lowy Institute finding from an Australian wide survey that found only 4% said they felt very safe.”*

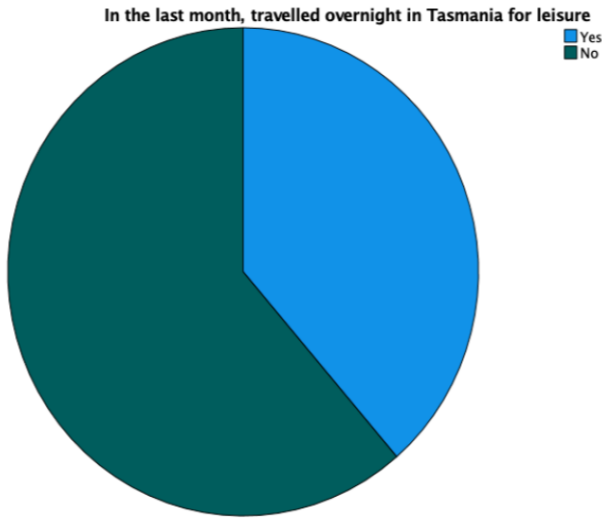
The younger the age group, the more likely they were to consider international movement of people, money or goods into Tasmania as very important, although this reversed for international exports from Tasmania.

### National results on feelings of safety: Lowy Institute – Thinking about world events, how safe do you feel?



## Getting out and about in Tasmania

How many Tasmanian residents have been exploring their island during the pandemic once internal travel restrictions lifted? In the month prior to completing the survey, of 1127 respondents, 38% had travelled overnight in Tasmania for leisure, 22% had travelled overnight in Tasmania to visit family and/or friends, 12% had travelled overnight in Tasmania for another reason such as work or medical, and 50% had visited a national park or reserve.



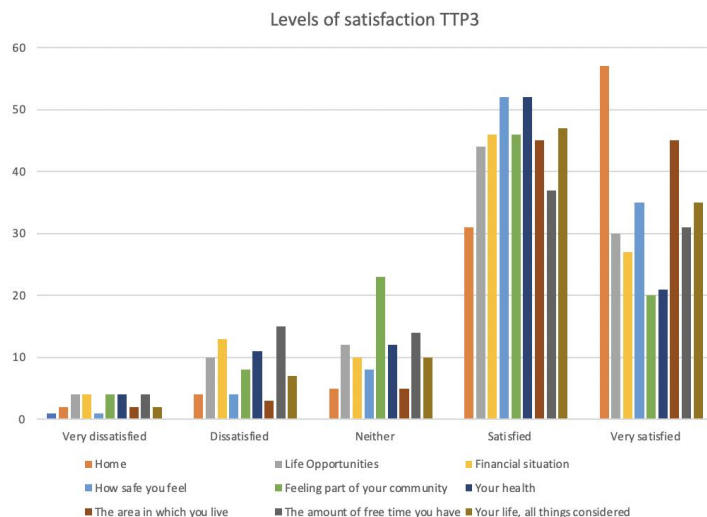
*More than 90% of respondents to the survey had bought a Tasmanian product to support local producers during COVID-19.*

## Who do we care for?

Given the impact of COVID-19 on how we are able to care for others, we asked respondents to tell us if they have people who rely on them for care, at home or elsewhere, and who they are. Almost half the sample said they had caring responsibilities. Nearly a quarter of all respondents cared for children, 13% for relatives, 19% for their spouse or partner, 2% for a neighbour, and 4% for a friend. Another 5% selected 'other', with many listing grandchildren (while their adult children worked) and adult children with disabilities. Labradors also showed up in the list surprisingly often.

## We feel safe but are we satisfied?

In a question repeated across TTP2 and TTP3, levels of satisfaction remain relatively high, with little change in the two months between the surveys.



## Work, home and finances

We were interested in how many of our working respondents had been given the option of working from home during the pandemic. TTP3 found that 63% had the option, leaving 37% without the option.

We also found that for 31% of working respondents, their employment situation had changed since the pandemic began. Living arrangements had changed for 9%, and 5% had experienced difficulties in paying their mortgage or rent.

As a result of the pandemic, 12% of working respondents said they wanted or needed to continue attending work meetings online rather than in person and 17% wanted or needed to continue working from home. Only 3% wanted to cut interstate travel for work in the future, and 2% wanted to cut international travel.

Financially, 13% of respondents described their household income as decreasing a lot since the pandemic began, 17% decreasing a little, 56% remaining about the same, with 14% saying it had increased.

Meanwhile, household spending had increased a lot for 3% of respondents, a little for 15%, remained about the same for 37%, and decreased a little for 11%.

*“Eat less, drive less, spend less.”*

One-third of respondents said they were concerned about their financial situation, while 40% said they were not concerned. Due to COVID-19, 11% have drawn on savings, 2% have increased the balance owing on their credit cards by \$1000 or more, 5% have sold household goods or jewellery, 4% have sold other assets, and 7% have made early withdrawals on their superannuation.

Comments from respondents under 'other' included 'Eat less, drive less, spend less', 'Request to pay off Aurora bill over a number of pays', 'Stopped private health insurance' and 'There was an awful gap where I had no income at all and did not qualify to draw on superannuation. NO MONEY FOR FOOD'.

## Who has seen discrimination?

We asked respondents if they had experienced or witnessed discrimination in Tasmania in the last month, and found the following:

13% said they had experienced discrimination on the basis of age, 3% on the basis of skin colour/ethnic origin, 2% on the basis of religion, 11% on the basis of gender and 6% on the basis of disability.

In terms of what they had seen, 15% said they had witnessed discrimination on the basis of age, 19% on the basis of skin colour/ethnic origin, 7% on the basis of religion, 15% on the basis of gender, and 13% on the basis of disability.

## What next?

The findings continue to present a complex picture of life in Tasmania - one where people feel far safer than on average, but where discrimination is commonly witnessed and experienced, where too many are suffering food insecurity; where people carry high caring responsibilities but feel generally satisfied with their lives; where half have spent time in national parks and reserves in the last month, and consciously bought Tasmanian products to support local producers.

Findings help us understand how we want to reconnect to the world, both in the short-term with the reopening of borders, and in the longer-term where trade, migration, population growth and tourism will again become issues for public debate.

We have also found a small number of respondents who are firm in their convictions against some measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, and many respondents now relaxed about physical distancing, suggesting reconnecting with the mainland and the world will carry its challenges.