

**Census 2021: A Strategic Tool for Planning our Future**

**Remarks by Premier Hon. G. Wayne Panton**

**2 p.m., Thursday, 28 July, 2022**

Good afternoon to everyone,

Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon as we release Census 2021.

With this document, we now have clarity on what our population growth has been. It reflects a significant rate of growth consistent with what we have had for some time now.

It also shows us that we need to have a clear idea in terms of what we want, in regards to the growth of the Cayman Islands.

Some persons may ask “Why does population data matter? What is the value of knowing how many people are in the country and who they are in terms of age, gender, education level, occupation and other characteristics?”

Ladies and gentlemen - accurate, up to date population data is essential to any government to effectively plan and allocate resources. All countries need to know the size and composition of its population to make informed decisions, and it is a widely-held view that census data is particularly important for small-island developing states such as the Cayman Islands, because we have a unique set of considerations brought about by a variety of factors, such as our geographies. I think we all understand that between Grand Cayman, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac, there are differences as well. In addition to age, gender, education, health and occupational factors, knowledge about where people live helps us plan infrastructure, transportation and services to best serve our communities.

Looking at the new census report we can see that there have been some obvious benefits to the country, but it also shows us that there are significant negatives as well that we need to take into account.

We have had unplanned, unrestrained growth and we have had significant concerns expressed and significant consequences for our people on a variety of areas including the ability for Caymanians to find affordable housing.

Our growth has also resulted in increased costs and is reflected in terms of concerns around significant development.

We as a country have to decide on what is an appropriate rate of growth, and try to design policies that are in line with that, instead of just leaving it to the market to generate unrestrained, uncontrolled growth, which is what has happened for some time until now.

The information contained in the census report is a critically important tool, a valuable tool in planning the future of the Cayman Islands, helping the public and private sectors make decisions about our future that are underpinned by current statistical evidence.

The primary highlight of the Census is that we can now confirm that the population of the Cayman Islands as of October 2021 was 71,432 persons with an “active population” of 71,105. This data aligns with Government’s estimate at that time of 71,000 used to determine the rate of vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the drive to achieve maximum vaccination.

In considering the data results of the 2021 Census, it is worth considering that the population was estimated to be just over 63,000 in 2017, and if we look back to 1997, it was estimated to be 37,000. This represents significant growth of approximately 26,000 people – or 70% in 20 years. Imagine – a 70% population growth in 20 years.

The 2021 Census results show a further growth of 29% in the last decade, which seems to be tapering off a bit. This growth is largely the result of our open immigration policy, and using that policy to support economic growth, this has brought of course many opportunities for our country – particularly economic opportunities for both the government and the private sector.

However, because much of that growth was ad hoc and unplanned – as I noted earlier – it has left us without certain proper systems and structures to optimize our growth, with infrastructure that is not keeping up and a lack of proper development plan to ensure our sustainable future.

In a report entitled “Population Scenarios: Past Trends and Future Possibilities” authored by the late Dr. Philip Pedley in 2007, he noted:

*“Few communities have seen their population grow at the rate experienced by Caymanians over the past generation. Modern development in the Cayman Islands, which had its first stirrings in the 1950s, began to affect population growth during the 1960s. But it was not until the 1970s that development had a marked effect on the size of the population. Since then, Cayman’s population has continued to rise at a rate that would be considered rapid for any country, but which is perhaps especially significant in a small island nation.*

*Cayman’s population grew four times as fast in the seventies as it had in the sixties. This remarkable trend continued year after year. During the 1980s the population increased by 52%.*

*During the 1990s it increased by 51%. Since the new millennium, it has climbed a further 30% in six years. This is the same rate of growth seen in the 1980s and 1990s – a rate apparently unhindered by the economic effects of 9/11 or the ravages of Hurricane Ivan. Taken together, the years 1970-2006 witnessed a massive 428% increase in population. What this means is that a Caymanian born in 1970 has already seen the population of Cayman multiply five times. By the time he or she is fifty years old, it will have multiplied ten times, if the present trend continues. Few communities experience growth of this kind in a single generation.”* ***[end of quote]***

Again, the result of the census shows consistency with this level of growth. It has also brought us many economic benefits, supported the growth of industries and companies, created jobs and sustained revenues for Government. However, we must also acknowledge that this staggering pace of growth has left many Caymanians and long-term residents feeling a sense of frustration, and of course that is only exacerbated today with the increases in the cost of living, with the soaring costs of housing, the traffic issues and lack of school spaces.

Dr. Pedley asked an important question in 2007, which I think is relevant today, 15 years later:

*“How will the population of Cayman change in the next twenty years? The question has important implications for every area of government policy and public life - from the number of schools needed, to demands on the healthcare system, to environmental, social and infrastructure pressures, to the size of the George Town landfill.”*

Moving forward, we need as a government and as a country to have careful, managed growth; growth that is paced to allow us to leverage the opportunities of growth, while addressing the negative consequences of neglect which may have occurred over a period of decades. We can do this by having a very clear sustainable development strategy and plans to guide our development, investments and decision making. This is the challenge, and this is the work of this Government.

A key priority of the PACT government is to improve the social conditions and standard of living for persons with disabilities and older persons in our society. The information we glean from the census will help us ensure that the vulnerable members of our community are able to access the services and assistance they need.

With the new census information we now have information on persons outside the labour force, older persons, persons with disabilities, veterans, persons in households with food security issues and those without health insurance for example. Having this information is going to be very valuable in assisting our government in being able to work for you, but it will also help the many hard-working community-based groups – the NGOs – to better understand and serve the people they help as well.

To the staff of the Ministry of Finance, the Economics and Statistics Office, my colleague Minister for Finance Chris Saunders, the Economics and Statistics Office, and all the other contributing agencies and institutions, thank you for a job well done. Thank you to our community who participated in and supported this census - in sharing your data you have contributed to the future planning of our Islands’ developmental needs.

I think many of us took some time to take the survey to provide this very valuable information, and it is going to be very vital to persons and our communities.

I urge everyone to take some time to read the report and use the data in planning and decision-making, just as Government will be. Let us all use this data for the collective good of all who call our beloved Cayman Islands home.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless our Cayman Islands. I will now turn it over to my colleague, the Deputy Premier and Minister for Finance and Economic Development.

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