Coast growing despite gloom

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WE'RE growing faster than anywhere else, earning more but investing less in property, our weekly grocery bill has skyrocketed and we are still the nation's holiday capital. This snapshot of the city was revealed in the Queensland Statistics report released yesterday by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The Gold Coast still holds top spot in the popularity stakes as the place most people want to live.

We were the fastest growing region in the six years between June, 2001, and June, 2007, with an average annual growth rate of 3.6 per cent, ahead of the Sunshine Coast (3.5 per cent) and Mackay (2.9 per cent).

Queensland's population hit 4.228 million on December 31, 2007, an increase of 96,900 (2.3 per cent) since September 30, 2006. Of that, 45 per cent was due to natural births, 30 per cent to overseas migration and 25 per cent to interstate migration.

Social analyst David Chalke from AustraliaSCAN put much of the city's growth down to the white flight' exodus from southern states, and mainly Sydney.

"The Anglo Celtic Aussies are running away from the city, with young families seeking a sea change and a tree change, and who'd want to live in Sydney's western suburbs?" he said.

Our average weekly wage increased by 4.6 per cent to $1054.90 in the year to February 2008, lower than the national average of $1123.

Queensland women saw the biggest hike in earnings, up 6.4 per cent over the same period while males had a wage increase of 3.5 per cent. But men still earn more than women -- $1107.10 compared to $963.90 a week.

Since May, 1998, the average home loan commitment in Queensland has more than doubled from $104,100 to $248,700. The average loan for first home buyers is now $249,200.

Queensland is still the place people want to holiday, with the longest average length of stay (2.7 days) for hotels and motels in the country, ahead of Western Australia (2.6 days). The national average was 2.3 days.

A total of 2.4 million guests holidayed in Queensland in the March quarter alone.

The weekly grocery bill has skyrocketed, with food retailing now accounting for 41 per cent of the total retail turnover.

"On our research, the average household is now about $90 a week worse off, thanks to food, petrol and interest rate hikes," he said.

As budget blues start to bite, hospitality and other service industries accounted for just 17 per cent of the budget while we are spending less on clothing, down 16 per cent.

The sale of new cars also took a hit, falling from 67 per cent of all vehicle sales in May, 1998, to 52 per cent last May.

"With milk now at $2 a litre, no one should be surprised that the food retailing bill is increasing and new clothes and cars and hospitality will be the first thing to go as people stay home rather than go out for a meal or movie," said Mr Chalke.