

Cases for and against proposed constitutional ballot questions
SPA Annual General Meeting 2020

Resolution 1: That the Vision statement be amended to the following:

Vision: A relationship between people and the biophysical environment in which the human population size and its ecological footprint are well within planetary boundaries and national carrying capacities, such that both universal human wellbeing and resilient, fully-diverse, and functional ecosystems are permanently sustained at global and bioregional scales.

Case for:

The revised vision statement seeks to fine-tune the existing vision by making some of the determinants of sustainability more explicit. Firstly, it explicitly defines the overarching context of sustainability as being that of ecological limits defined through concepts such as ecological footprint, planetary boundaries and carrying capacity. Secondly, it seeks ecosystems which are diverse, functional and resilient, and which are therefore biodiverse. Thirdly, the revised vision explicitly connects sustainability to the needs of future generations by clarifying that the time frame is 'permanent'. Finally, it specifies that the vision must operate at multiple scales, including global, bioregional and national.

Case against:

The existing vision clearly links sustainability and human well-being to the continuance of the earth's life support systems over evolutionary time scales. The idea of ecological limits is already implied by terms such as integrity and sustainability.

Resolution 2: That a new objective 2.2.4a be adopted as follows:

To support measures, campaigns and institutional reforms designed to more strongly protect Australia's natural environment.

Case for:

SPA will always have as its primary focus the reduction and eventual cessation of population growth. There is no likelihood that SPA will evolve into a broad-scope, multi-issue environmental advocacy organisation. However, SPA should nonetheless be empowered (through its constitution) to occasionally lend its support to initiatives that focus on 'indirect' approaches to mitigating the negative impacts of ongoing population growth. Such indirect methods could include campaigns to protect specified natural areas, or to legislate for stronger environmental protection. In effect, such measures raise the costs for those who seek high population growth and make such growth more difficult to achieve. Recent experience where SPA was excluded from one such initiative, due to our constitution being perceived as only focused on a 'single issue', is further reason for having this option included in the constitution. This would also enable joining in coalition with other groups for specific campaigns, should we choose to do so.

Case against:

The proposed changes are unnecessary. They add complexity without any real change in outcomes. SPA is rightly focused on the issue of population and how population specifically affects the natural environment. We have chosen to be members of this organisation and to support this organisation specifically because we feel it is the single most effective way to "strongly protect the natural environment". There is no need or strategic benefit in SPA diverting its scarce resources to other measures campaigns and reforms which are not population specific. We can put the effort into explaining why this single issue is so important rather than pander to critics who will never be satisfied. We shouldn't dilute our objectives to include other issues or initiatives that we know are less critical.

Resolution 3: That objective 2.2.5 be amended to the following:

To advocate low immigration rates while rejecting any selection of immigrants based on race, *ethnicity* or *religion*.

Case for:

The purpose of this amendment is to make it abundantly clear that SPA's advocacy of low immigration is about determining the *numbers* (the 'rate') of immigrants. It is not about selection of immigrants based on ascribed characteristics such as race, ethnicity or religion – all of which are often perceived (mistakenly or not) as being intertwined. For the sake of completeness and for the avoidance of any doubt, ethnicity and religion should also be included in this clause. In the current climate of public opinion, where accusations of racism can be used to shut down discussion about the need for reduced population growth, and also where extreme right-wing groups openly advocate racism or religious bigotry, it is important that SPA makes a crystal-clear statement of where it stands.

Case against:

The people who accuse us of being racist or of discrimination and of promoting coercive population control will also not be silenced by us adding words to our objectives. Regardless of the change, we will still be falsely accused of things and will still need to sell the necessity for population stabilisation.

Resolution 4: That objective 2.2.6 be amended to the following:

To promote policies that will lead to stabilisation, and then to reduction, of global population *size*, *while rejecting involuntary population control*.

Case for:

SPA should be clear that it only supports approaches to fertility control that are based on individual consent and informed choice. It rejects approaches that are not voluntary choices by the individuals concerned. One of the main rhetorical arguments used by opponents to population stabilisation and reduction, is that we are advocating measures such as forced sterilisation or forced abortions. They point to 20th century examples where this occurred. SPA should fully distance itself from any such measures and thus avoid making ourselves an easy target for our opponents. This amendment is not designed to persuade our hard-core opponents, but it is targeted to people in the middle ground who may be contemplating joining SPA as members, but who may be concerned about things they have heard (including smear tactics by our hard-core opponents). Equally if not more importantly, this amendment ought to express the values upon which SPA is based.

Case against:

The people who accuse us of being racist or of discrimination and of promoting involuntary population control will also not be silenced by us adding words to our objectives. Regardless of the change, we will still be falsely accused of things and will still need to sell the necessity for population stabilisation.

Resolution 5: (1.NAME) That SPA change its name

Case for:

In 1988 the founding parents gave the organisation the name 'Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population', as we felt it nicely encompassed our objectives. The 18 syllables were a problem, however, and the acronym AESP not quite pronounceable. And so, we changed the name to 'Sustainable Population Australia' which was shorter and had an acronym (SPA) which, while sharing its name with hot springs resorts, nevertheless was pronounceable. Unfortunately, the word 'sustainable' has been degraded to such an extent that people no longer understand its true meaning. People sometimes ask: "Does that mean you want a bigger or smaller population?" In other words, our current name is ambiguous and time is wasted explaining what we stand for. The name does not indicate that we are an

environmental organisation, the prime objective of which is ecological sustainability. It is time we had a name again that explains what we stand for.

Case against:

The aim of passing this Motion is to make way for a specific name change, i.e. Ecologically Sustainable Population Australia (ESPA). Any name change involves paid and voluntary time to make changes to satisfy legal requirements, design new logos, letterheads, existing documentation and find ways of communicating the new name that are effective for both SPA members and the general public. The cost to SPA is not worth all this effort. The suggested name is cumbersome and likely to lose a listener's interest. Time needed to win people over is time better spent carrying out SPA's Objectives. The corruption of the word 'sustainable' can be addressed by better means than changing SPA's name, since unless something is ecologically sustainable through natural cycles, it is not 'sustainable' at all. If the word 'sustainable' can be corrupted, so also might the meaning of any other word such as 'ecologically,' forcing SPA to be continually on the defensive.

Resolution 6: (1. NAME) In the event of the members agreeing to SPA changing its name, that the name of the organisation be changed to 'Ecologically Sustainable Population Australia' (ESPA)

Case for:

This name uses essentially the same words as the original name of the organisation (Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population) but in such an order as to make the acronym (ESPA) pronounceable and not synonymous with any common name in English (as was the case with SPA). It explains clearly what our objectives are by reinstating the word 'ecologically'. While the whole name is as long as the 1988 original, nevertheless, having a pronounceable acronym means the length of the full name is no longer problematic. While our objectives state that we seek to stabilise, then reduce, our population for economic and social reasons as well as environmental, nevertheless, it is critical that our name shows clearly that we are, first and foremost, an environmental organisation. We then dissociate ourselves from political parties and organisations that want to lower immigration for non-environmental reasons, some of which are discriminatory.

Case against:

Other alternatives to 'SPA' have been suggested apart from 'ESPA,' e.g. 'Post Growth Australia,' 'Australians for De-Growth or names that do not include the word 'Australia,' since the human population problem is global; so different possibilities may be preferable to 'ESPA.' Usually, shorter names that still encompass the meaning of any longer original name are taken up most readily, as happened with 'SPA' in place of the original, AESP. Since SPA is the only Australian environmental NGO promoting awareness of the need to stabilise then reduce human population both globally and locally, 'population' should still be a stated part of the name; however, new names might yet be suggested that achieve this other than ESPA which is cumbersome, takes more time to write and may not fit on electronic forms which often lack space for lengthy names.