



Sustainable Population Australia inc

POPULATION POLICY

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Background

Physical limitations on population growth

- Australia's capacity to sustain a large population is limited because the continent is largely arid with old, nutrient-poor soils and a variable climate.
- Only six per cent of the continent is arable¹.
- Dryland salinity threatens to destroy up to 17 million hectares of agricultural land by 2050^{2,2a}
- Our rivers show severe signs of degradation through extraction, regulation by dams and other forms of habitat destruction, and increasing salinity is likely to make the water in many of them undrinkable and unfit for irrigation within a matter of decades, further reducing the possibility of large settlements, particularly inland^{3,3a}.
- The CSIRO predicts that by 2070, there will be a 1 to 6°C warming over the continent. There is likely to be less rainfall in the southwest, parts of the southeast, and in Queensland. Where warming is combined with lower rainfall, there will be greater moisture stress⁴. This has significant implications for agriculture, critically, food production.
- The global oil extraction rate is currently four times the rate at which it is being discovered. While global per capita oil production peaked in 1979, the absolute peak is imminent and production will decline thereafter. Oil products (petrol, diesel, plastics, medicines, fertilisers, etc.) will become increasingly expensive. This has huge implications for the economy, particularly manufacturing and food production⁵.

Demographics and immigration

- Australia's fertility rate of 1.78 children per woman is high by OECD standards. Despite it being below the replacement rate of 2.08, the demographic lag-time means natural increase (births minus deaths) will remain positive for another three decades.
- Australia's population was 20.3 million in March 2005 with an annual growth rate of 1.1%. The population grew 230,300 in the year ending March 2005. Natural increase accounted for 52%, or 121,300, of the growth and net overseas migration (immigration minus emigration) accounted for 48% or 110,000^{6a}. Approximately two babies are born and one immigrant arrives for every Australian who dies or emigrates.
- According to the United Nations Population Fund, Australia will have a population of 27.9 million in 2050^{6b}
- Australia, however, will take an extra 20,000 skilled migrants in 2005-06. Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone said in April 2005 that between 130,000 and 140,000 non-humanitarian migrants would be taken, with a skilled migrant component of 97,500, the highest level of skilled migration ever⁷.

- As at 30 June 2004, it was estimated that some 51,000 people were unlawfully in Australia, a large proportion of which are working illegally. In addition, some people lawfully in Australia are working in breach of their visa conditions^{7a}.
- Australia's official migration program fails to take into account the large number of New Zealanders coming to Australia freely under the Trans-Tasman agreement (net gain of 30,000 in 1999-2000)²¹.
- At the end of 2001, there were 858,886 Australian citizens living overseas long-term and another 264,955 shorter-term 'visiting citizens'. None of these were identified in the census.²² All of these citizens have the right to return home should they wish to and indeed they might should the situation overseas become difficult.

Habitat and biodiversity loss

- Australia, one of the top 12 biodiverse countries in the world, has signed an international agreement for the protection of its biodiversity.
- Nevertheless, Australia has a very bad record with respect to extinction of species, particularly mammals⁸.
- Clearance of native vegetation for human settlement and agriculture is the single most significant threat to terrestrial biodiversity⁹.

Consumption

- Australians have one of the highest consumption rates, and their greenhouse gas emissions per capita are amongst the highest in the world¹⁰.
- As immigrants come to Australia from less industrialised countries their consumption increases as they adapt to the Australian life-style¹¹.
- Most environmental indicators (biodiversity, water quality, soil, etc.) are declining in Australia, meaning that the current population is not living sustainably at the current standard of living¹³.

Climate change

- A policy of high population growth based on high levels of immigration will see Australian greenhouse gas emissions increase twice as fast compared with a policy of zero net immigration, making it increasingly difficult to meet international targets with respect to climate change, whether in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol or its alternatives¹¹.
- Global warming may cause the inundation of many neighbouring Pacific atolls such as Tuvalu, leading to the prospect of many more environmental refugees seeking refuge in Australia¹².

Global population

- Global population was three billion in 1960, six billion in 1999, and is expected to reach nine billion or more by 2050 with the extra growth almost all in the less developed world¹⁴.
- Looming water and oil shortages, however, may seriously affect the ability of some countries to feed themselves, and there may be insufficient food on the world market for them to buy food as global population continues to grow^{15, 16}.
- Indeed, many scientists warn of a massive die-off from famine unless there is strict and equitable rationing of the world's remaining reserves of fossil fuels^{16 b,c,d}.
- Some are emphatic that without cheap oil to sustain industrial agriculture, the carrying capacity of the planet may be less than two billion – even as low as half to one billion - and that a universal, non-coercive one-child family policy may be necessary (as in Italy and Spain) until a sustainable, low population is achieved^{16e,f,g}.
- Should the global population grow by another three billion, up to a billion hectares of natural ecosystems would need to be cleared to grow food, depriving the world of the ecosystem services they provide (absorption of carbon dioxide, purifying water, etc.) and hastening the extinction rate of other species¹⁷.

Ageing

- The average age of the Australian population is gradually increasing, however, it still has a healthy dependency ratio (the ratio of workers to dependents).
- Ageing is caused by the transition from an expanding to a stable population and also from increased life expectancy as health care improves.
- Immigration will not alleviate ageing, except at very high and socially unacceptable levels¹⁸.
- Several reputable studies have shown that the prospect of an ageing population is not a major problem for Australia, and potential labour shortages can be off-set by allowing those who wish to remain in the workforce longer to do so, or by absorbing the million or more unemployed or underemployed into the workforce^{19,19a,19b,19c19d}. Furthermore, technology may reduce the need for labour.
- Fertility is likely to be at least 1.8 births per woman for the next decade, acceptable from a purely demographic perspective^{20a}.

Economics

- An increase in GDP generally results from an increase in population but does not necessarily translate into better GDP per capita, nor an increase in quality of life, nor is it equally distributed²³.
- In 2004, 14 of the 16 wealthiest nations, based on GDP per capita, had populations and population growth rates lower than Australia's²⁴.
- Providing infrastructure and housing for an ever-growing population diverts money from investment in education, research and development, and in hi-tech industries that lead to real development²⁵.
- In world of finite resources, a dynamic steady state economy must replace the concept of economic growth.

- When the population of a country exceeds its natural resource base, that is, when it becomes unsustainable, the costs of providing infrastructure and basic services such as water supplies increase²⁶.
- Poorer members of society (often new migrants themselves) bear the brunt of high immigration through the downward pressure on wages and through increased costs of housing and services²⁷.
- Australia depends heavily on skilled migrants²⁸, often from poorer countries that cannot afford to lose them, because its educational and training institutions do not provide enough of the skills required for proper functioning of its economy.
- Thousands of skilled migrants are either unemployed or employed in low-skilled jobs such as driving taxis or working in restaurants and supermarkets. Many skilled arrivals who were supposed to settle in needy country areas are living in cities^{28a}.
- An increase in the supply of labour (through population growth and immigration) relative to the supply of capital and supply of natural resources will, in a free labour market, cause wages to fall.
- Thousands of low-cost information and communication (ICT) workers are entering the country and undermining the job prospects of new graduates, driving down salaries and contributing to high unemployment amongst ICT workers under 30^{28b}.
- Population growth, particularly caused by immigration, causes demand for housing to exceed supply, and inflation of land prices, leading to a shortage of affordable housing and an increase in homelessness.
- Population growth causes infrastructure such as roads, schools and hospitals, telecommunications networks, electricity and water supply systems and sewerage networks to become overburdened and requires expensive new infrastructure to be built at taxpayer expense.

Overseas Development Assistance (ODA)

- Despite a promised increase in ODA of \$4 billion a year by 2010, Australia still falls far short of the UN-recommended 0.7 per cent of GNI (gross national income) for overseas development assistance, which a number of Scandinavian countries do meet.²⁹
- In order to finance the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Program of Action, donors need to allocate four percent of ODA to ICPD activities, based on the minimum allocation of 0.7 percent of GNI. Australia's allocation has recently increased from 2.6 to 4.3 per cent, but because total ODA is less than half the recommended 0.7 per cent of GNI, the total amount going to ICPD activities is half what it should be.
- Well-directed aid can reduce the push factors that force people to emigrate.
- Greater distribution of wealth through various means including ODA is not only essential for humanitarian reasons but should reduce the threat of terrorism.

Principles

- The size of any population must be kept within the limits of its natural resource base.
- Trade may allow a given population to increase its carrying capacity beyond its natural resource limits

but, as fossil fuels become increasingly expensive, populations will have to depend increasingly on their local resource base.

- For any given level of consumption, the more people there are, the greater the environmental impact.
- Social and economic sustainability is dependent on the protection of ecological processes and systems and the preservation of biological diversity.
- Like other developed countries, Australia has a responsibility to help people in impoverished developing nations.
- Australia has only a limited capacity to alleviate the social, economic or political problems of more populous countries through immigration, but can and should do more to help others achieve sustainability through increased and better-directed foreign aid.
- The benefit per dollar of foreign aid far exceeds the benefit from money spent in resettling people within Australia.
- All nations have the right to determine who enters their country and not the prospective immigrants themselves.
- As a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Australia has an obligation to provide temporary refuge to those fleeing a genuine fear of persecution, but does not have an obligation to provide permanent residency for them.
- Australia has already passed the point where above average consumption adds to human happiness or greater wellbeing, but the extra consumption has a severe impact on the environment. For the sake of future generations and our global environmental responsibilities, Australians need to reduce their use of resources and improve energy efficiency dramatically.

Policy objectives

- To stabilise human population numbers both nationally and internationally as a matter of urgency,
- to determine what is an optimal population both nationally and internationally, that is, one that can be sustained in the long-term without degrading the natural resource base, noting that recent studies have shown that the Earth has already exceeded its regenerative capacity by 25 per cent, and
- to seek to achieve it in a humane, non-coercive manner as a matter of urgency.

Recommendations

That the Federal Government:

1. include a Minister for Population and Environment in Federal Cabinet, rather than a Minister for Immigration, recognising that immigration is but a sub-set of the broader issue of population;
2. implement an integrated population policy that is based on environmental sustainability and encompasses immigrant intake, natural increase, biodiversity protection, aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, tourism, foreign aid, internal migration, and education;
3. in developing this population policy, examine the consequences of different levels of projected populations and resource consumption on quality of life including affordable housing, clean air and water, and access to recreational areas such as beaches;

4. ratify the Program of Action arising out of the UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994;

5. establish and fund an Institute for Sustainability Research that will address all environmental, social and economic aspects of population;

6. end the use of the migration program as a mechanism to increase Australia's population. [Ultimately, our immigration program should be no larger than emigration. A reduced immigration program should maintain the humanitarian stream as well as the spouse and the aged parent categories. When migrants are accepted for non-humanitarian reasons, most of the costs of resettlement should be born by the migrants themselves];

7. give higher priority to the Humanitarian Program within this overall reduced migration program, focussing on those who cannot be supported by direct aid in their own countries or in countries of refuge, and on environmental refugees, such as those from South Pacific most at risk of inundation from global warming;

8. ensure that, within the Skills stream, Australia imports only those with expertise not available in Australia, and does not "poach" skilled workers from developing countries that cannot afford to lose their educated citizens;

9. tighten visa requirements substantially, particularly in the area of information and communication technology;

10. adopt an integrated population, training and labour market strategy;

11. ensure that Australia's educational and training institutions provide all the skills needed for the functioning of the economy and for the welfare of its citizens to minimise the need to import skilled workers;

12. adopt social and taxation policies e.g. maternity allowances, that allow couples to provide adequately for their children but at the same time discourage them from having more than two children;

13. through taxation and housing policies, ameliorate the present situation where land speculators reap excessive profits from population growth;

14. increase Australia's overseas development assistance (ODA) to the 0.7 per cent of GDP, or more;

15. ensure that the family planning component within ODA is at least 4 per cent, and that greater priority is given to other measures that reduce the birth rate, particularly primary health care and the education of women;

16. while recognising the right of asylum seekers to enter our territory under the 1951 Refugee Convention and other international agreements, maintain measures to deter those who do not qualify as refugees under international law or measures to discourage the pre-emption of official channels for gaining refugee status;

17. support humane and expeditious processing of asylum seekers' claims according to international human rights laws and agreements;

18. take steps to reduce our national economic dependence on tourism, recognising its vulnerability to rises in the world price of oil and the pollution caused by air and road travel;

19. adopt a consumption strategy that will encourage lower levels of resource and energy use while retaining a reasonable standard of living;

20. provide incentives for energy efficiency to reduce Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions and thus its ecological footprint;

21. legislate to remove the stimulus to domestic consumption by removing tax deductibility on commercial advertising;

22. ensure that sex education programs in Australia are adequately funded and that a wide variety of contraceptive measures are available and affordable to all who need them;

23. end pro-natalist policies including such initiatives as the baby bonus;

24. promote the education of children about ecological footprints and sustainability in general;
 25. count New Zealanders in the official migration program, or, where migration is positive in the direction of Australia under the Trans-Tasman Agreement, an equivalent number is deducted from the non-humanitarian migration program;
 26. ensure that Australia's population growth meets ESD principles as per the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (NSED) thereby protecting ecological processes and maintaining intragenerational and intergenerational equity;

27. ensure that the Precautionary Principle is applied with respect to Australia's population growth;
 28. reverse its decision to allow employers to recruit overseas apprentices and instead actively facilitates sufficient apprenticeships within Australia to adequately supply the needs of employers;
 29. prosecute and penalise employers who knowingly or negligently employ illegal immigrants.

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