



Sustainable Population Australia Inc.

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Sustainable Population Australia response to Temporary Migration inquiry

Executive summary

Temporary migration serves many purposes and interests, but the scale of the program is first and foremost subservient to Australia's population policy. In recent years, temporary migration has been used to accelerate Australia's population growth, for a range of ill-justified reasons and to the evident detriment of Australia's quality of life, housing affordability, adequacy of infrastructure and both government and private debt levels.

Temporary migration has also been used to undermine wages and employment conditions, to the detriment of both migrants and Australian job seekers. These accumulated harms have been exacerbated in the pandemic response. The current closure of borders offers an excellent opportunity to review and reset immigration policies.

Sustainable Population Australia (SPA) argues for an end to population growth. A long-term stable population is crucial for many reasons, which include environmental sustainability, infrastructure, housing affordability and employment indicators. To achieve this, permanent migration (including humanitarian, employment and family categories) should be capped at 50 000 places per year, a rate which, long term, will achieve an approximately stable national population.

In addition, temporary migration should be limited in such a way that the pool of temporary migrants does not rise. This is important not only to limit population growth, but to ensure that Australian job seekers are not progressively displaced by the expansion of exploitative migrant employment schemes.

However, the size of the pool of temporary residents will depend on the relative demand for pathways to permanent residency and genuinely temporary purposes such as international students and working holidaymakers who return home, Pacific Islander seasonal workers and globally-recruited talent for fixed-term employment.

All non-humanitarian permanent visa recipients should be drawn from the pool of temporary migrants. Temporary migration is a useful way for both the migrant and Australia to test the suitability of the arrangement. The skilled independent migrants who have been granted permanent

visas offshore have lower employment outcomes than those who have already established themselves through temporary visas. Regionally sponsored permanent migrants have a poor record of settling in the sponsoring region. With the exception of refugees identified for resettlement in Australia, there is no justification for offering permanent migration to an offshore applicant who has not proven themselves as a temporary migrant.

The university sector has become increasingly reliant on income from international student fees, particularly over the last decade. The privatisation of the tertiary sector and reliance on overseas placements has resulted in some undesirable consequences. These include: a shift in focus of tuition and service-delivery to accommodate international students; conflict of interest leading to diminishing quality of education; and dependence on a narrow range of source countries for student enrolment leaving many universities vulnerable (particularly the Go8 group of universities). SPA recommends that overseas student places should be capped at 20% of enrolments at each institution, and 30% within any course (with the exception of preparatory programs designed to prepare foreign students for further study in Australia). Such a cap would ensure that universities select students with higher academic achievement and English language standard.

Temporary work visas are often justified on the grounds that there is an existing skills shortage in the Australian economy and that temporary migrants fill the jobs that Australian-born residents do not want to do. The argument of a skills shortage has been overstated by the business community for many years and now holds even less validity as Australia enters recession and unemployment climbs. As the job pool shrinks, so there will be even greater competition from Australian residents for the occupations formerly held by migrants on temporary work visas. Regarding the argument that migrants hold jobs that Australians don't want to do, this is due to the fact that much of this work, such as seasonal farm work and shift work, is inherently unpleasant and without sufficient remuneration to compensate for hardships. Furthermore, the exploitation of temporary migrant workers has been used to avoid the wage increases that would be needed to fill these jobs with Australian permanent residents. We argue instead there is a moral imperative for working standards to improve so that all work is fair and provides life satisfaction. The alternative, where undesirable work is palmed off to a massive underclass of exploited migrants should be unacceptable to Australia's egalitarian values.

Sustainable Population Australia's objectives

Sustainable Population Australia¹ (SPA) is an Australian, non-partisan, special advocacy group that seeks to establish an ecologically sustainable human population. It works on many fronts to encourage informed public debate about how Australia and the world can achieve an ecologically, socially and economically sustainable population. Internationally, we advocate for policies to enable family planning programs and access to affordable contraception services, while empowering women to have agency in their reproductive lives and in the size of their families. Domestically, we advocate for stable or declining population through lowering net migration to no more than 50 000 places per year, while honouring Australia's humanitarian obligations and avoiding selection based on race, ethnicity or any other cultural factors.

¹ Sustainable Population Australia website: <http://www.population.org.au/>

SPA's overall position on migration

(Addresses the inquiry's term of reference d: whether permanent migration offers better long-term benefits for Australia's economy, Australian workers and social cohesion)

We argue that Australia's current total immigration intake is excessive. In referring to total migration we include the capped permanent skilled, family reunion and humanitarian categories, in addition to the uncapped temporary migration categories.

We believe that it is in the best interests of Australia to achieve a steady-state or slowly declining population long term. This can be achieved by implementing a migration target (net overseas migration, or NOM) of around 50 000 migration places per annum (prioritising the humanitarian program) as this will roughly 'top up the generations' given our current fertility rate of around 1.7 children per woman.

A stable or slowly declining population is advantageous for many reasons. Below are a few examples:

- Population growth has an environmental toll. Successive state and national State of the Environment reports² have detailed declining environmental indicators. Urbanisation, human impact and population density are often cited as the most significant contributors. Australia is leading the world in some indicators such as land clearing and loss of native flora and fauna species – a dubious distinction. High ongoing population growth will exacerbate Australia's environmental decline unless per capita consumption declines quickly and dramatically. This would require significant government intervention that would not be popular with the voting public.
- Reducing population growth is easier to achieve when the main driver of population growth is economic migration (both permanent and temporary), which is determined by federal policy. A reduction in migration targets would be supported by the majority of Australians³. There is evidence to suggest that this view is also held by many first-generation migrants⁴.
- Economic migration is justified on the basis that there is a chronic skills shortage in the nation (economic migration includes the permanent skilled migration category and the temporary working and student categories). Past merit to these claims has been tenuous at best and such claims are becoming harder to justify in the current climate of national recession⁵ and rising unemployment⁶. There is evidence to suggest that Australia is unlikely

² For example: CES (The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria) (2018). *State of the Environment 2018*, CES, Victoria.

www.ces.vic.gov.au/reports/state-environment-2018

³ Katharine Betts & Bob Birrell (2019). *Immigration, population growth and voters: who cares and why?*, research report to The Australian Population Research Institute (TAPRI).

tapri.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Tapri-survey-2018-final-report-April.pdf

⁴ Michael Bayliss, Australia's recent migrants don't want more immigration. *Macrobusiness* [website], June 22 2020.

www.macrobusiness.com.au/2020/06/australias-recent-migrants-dont-want-more-immigration/

⁵ Greg Jericho, Yes, Australia is in a recession – but worse is yet to come, *The Guardian Australia*, 3 June 2020.

www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2020/jun/03/yes-australia-is-in-a-recession-but-worse-is-yet-to-come

⁶ Jack Derwin, The Australian unemployment rate shot up to 7.1% in May as another 227, 000 jobs were wiped out, *Business Insider Australia*, 18 June 2020.

www.businessinsider.com.au/australian-unemployment-rate-job-losses-may-covid19-2020-6

to return⁷ to past economic prosperity and employment levels for several years. Thus, higher levels of economic migration will only exacerbate the increasing competition of applicants in a diminishing jobs market. This is especially true of the current pandemic-induced recession.

- Migration has been widely perceived as a necessary prerequisite for Australia's booming economy. However, there is evidence to suggest that over the past two decades, during a time when Australia's migration intake has been at record highs, economic growth has been illusory. This is because, while aggregate GDP has been increasing modestly, per capita GDP has been stagnating⁸. The Productivity Commission even suggests that Australia's high migration program has not contributed substantially to economic betterment⁹. In other words, gains to big business have not translated to gains for the average resident.
- Arguably, any short-term economic gain from high population growth is dwarfed by the costs of providing the infrastructure for a rapidly growing population. A discussion paper, commissioned by SPA, explores this issue in great depth¹⁰. In essence, every additional person requires at least \$100 000 in public infrastructure; adding a new population growth the size of Canberra each year requires tens of billions of dollars of investment just to prevent congestion from eroding living standards and economic productivity. While infrastructure costs are claiming ever more of public and private budgets, there are still no signs of infrastructure keeping up with population growth. As a result, transport congestion, diminishing access to quality services and escalating housing and utility costs are a reality for most Australians.
- The ageing of our population has been used to claim that we need more 'working-age' people to counter the growing number of retirees. This is a false claim, since no country has seen a reduction in employment attributable to ageing. Instead, they see greater workforce participation of working-age people and those over the age of 65, and less underemployment. In contrast, Australia has endured rising levels of labour underutilisation since immigration levels were elevated. Youth has been especially hard-hit, with Australia leading the OECD in youth underutilisation levels. Hence our labour market is evidently oversupplied with job seekers (even before the pandemic).

⁷ Ian Verrender, Quick bounce back unlikely for Australian economy post-coronavirus despite political optimism, *Australian Broadcasting Commission* [website], 11 May 2020.

www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-11/why-the-coronavirus-economic-recovery-will-have-detours/12233242

⁸ Julian Lorkin, Australia in recession on GDP-per-capita basis, as 2019 federal budget nears, *University of New South Wales Newsroom*, 6 May 2019.

newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/business-law/australia-recession-gdp-capita-basis-2019-federal-budget-nears

⁹ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2016). *Migrant Intake into Australia*, Inquiry report no 77, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 343–360

www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/migrant-intake/report/migrant-intake-report.pdf

¹⁰ Leith van Onselen, Jane O'Sullivan & Peter G Cook (2019). *Population growth and infrastructure in Australia: the catch-up illusion*, discussion paper, Sustainable Population Australia.

www.population.org.au/sites/default/files/SPA_DiscussionPaper_Infrastructure_Nov2019_FullReport_1.pdf

Some of the challenges particular to the temporary migration system

Some facts on temporary migration:

Table 1. Temporary entrants in Australia at 30 September, by visa category, 2014 and 2019

Visa category	2014 ('000s)	2019 ('000s)	5 year change ('000s)
Students and graduates	410	729	319
Temporary skilled workers	196	139	-57
Working holidaymakers	166	135	-31
Bridging visa	95	229	134
Other	34	63	29
TOTAL	901	1295	394

Source: DOHA 2020¹¹

According to research¹²:

- 2 330 000 persons held a temporary visa as of 30 September 2019.
- 685 000 of these 'temporary' visa holders are New Zealand citizens who, because of a standing agreement between Australia and New Zealand, are permitted to stay indefinitely (and thus may stay permanently, though they do not have the same rights and entitlements as permanent residents or citizens).
- 350 000 are tourists or other short-term visa holders. Although these visa holders do not contribute to the workforce, the total size of this category is still a contributor to the current population of Australia in terms of the impact on infrastructure and the environment.
- 1 295 000 fall into the remaining categories: 'students and graduates', 'temporary skilled workers', 'working holidaymakers' and 'bridging visas'.
- The highest increase in temporary visas since 2014 has been 'students and graduates', indicating the increasing reliance of the tertiary education sector on international student enrolments.
- An increase of almost 400 000 in temporary visa holders with work rights in the five years from 2014 to 2019 has contributed around 80 000 per year to NOM, or around a third of the NOM.

¹¹ Department of Home Affairs, *Immigration and Citizenship* [website], Australian Government. immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/

¹² Peter McDonald & Helen Moyle (2020). A Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Temporary Migration. www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Temporary_Migration/TemporaryMigration/Submissions

- Temporary migration is uncapped and determined by the demands of the private sector rather than government quotas. Therefore, there is not currently any legally recognised limit to the number of temporary migrants coming into Australia at any given time.
- In terms of percentage of the workforce, the number varies according to the year and the research. However, it is expected to be between 7% and 11%¹³. Not all temporary migrants work, as a proportion are non-working full-time students or dependents.

The question of permanency of temporary migration

Temporary migration is not often considered as a long-term contributor to population growth. This is because, as the term implies, it is not permanent and therefore has an endpoint. However, this is untrue for several reasons:

- It is true that many temporary visa holders aim to transition to permanent visas or citizenship. This is particularly true for student visa holders. One study concluded that at least 70% of international medical students will remain in Australia¹⁴. This is similar in many other industries. Many of today's international students are on tomorrow's graduate visa, to become next year's permanent resident. To make the claim, therefore, that temporary migration has no long-term effect on Australia's population obfuscates the reality of the 'two-step' migration process.
- Even if temporary visa holders remained temporary, the fact that the number of temporary migrants has been growing steadily over the past two decades¹⁵ has contributed to population growth. It doesn't matter how long individual temporary migrants spend in Australia, it is the number present at any time that contributes to pressures on infrastructure, congestion, water security and environmental degradation.

¹³ Laurie Berg & Bassina Farbenblum (2017). Wage Theft in Australia: Findings of The National Temporary Migrant Work Survey, *Migrant Worker Justice Initiative*. static1.squarespace.com/static/593f6d9fe4fcb5c458624206/t/5a11ff31ec212df525ad231d/1511128887089/Wage+theft+in+Australia+Report_final_web.pdf

¹⁴ Kerry Breen & Bob Birrell (2020). Selling medical education to medical students: time for review. *Internal Medicine Journal* 50:635–637. tapri.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Selling-medical-education-to-international-students-IMJ-published.pdf

¹⁵ Harriet Spinks (2016). Migration—issues for Australia's migration program, *Parliamentary Library Briefing Book - 45th Parliament* [website]. www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook45p/MigrationProgram#:~:text=Unlike%20the%20permanent%20migration%20program,uncapped%2C%20demand%2Ddriven%20programs.

Concerns regarding international students and working holiday visas

(Addresses the inquiry's term of reference c: policy responses to challenges posed by temporary migration)

In terms of both gross numbers and the increase in numbers over time, international student visa numbers are higher than any other temporary migration category by a considerable degree.

According to research by The Australian Population Research Institute (TAPRI)¹⁶:

- There has been systematic deregulation in regard to the student visa system. For example, international students are now only required to bring in enough money to finance one year of study, with generous access to the labour market.
- The group of eight (Go8)¹⁷ universities have been the main beneficiaries of the surge in overseas student fee revenue, charging on average \$40 000 per year for bachelor degree studies. This has provided a significant boost in revenue to Go8 universities.
- Domestic enrolments at the Go8 universities have shrunk from 87 939 in 2012 to 85 529 in 2018 (a drop of 2410).
- In contrast, the enrolments of overseas students at Go8 universities have increased in the same years from 30 320 to 62 423 (an increase of 32 103).
- In 2018–19 the Australian government issued 142 098 higher education visas offshore.
- The revenue from international student enrolment fees has not been used to support domestic enrolment capacity. Instead, this revenue has been used to attract more international enrolments.
- Many universities have adjusted their teaching styles to accommodate the variable academic and language capabilities of foreign students. In other words, this is creating a conflict of interest in regard to the quality of education delivery, with arguably declining standards.
- For some of the Go8 universities, Chinese citizens have been the primary enrollees¹⁸. Relying on a small pool of countries for student enrollees leaves these universities extremely vulnerable when circumstances change; a disruption in political relationships or natural disasters can result in a sudden drop in student numbers. Many universities are expecting a loss in revenue of between \$300–\$400 million over 2020–21 as Chinese students are either unable or unwilling to come. Universities have requested bailouts from the government.

A tempting response might be to appeal for an even higher international student uptake if the global situation returns to past norms to make up for lost revenue. However, this will only entrench the universities into one source of funding, leaving them further vulnerable to future shock. There is every reason to expect shocks to the 'supply' of international students in the foreseeable future¹⁹

¹⁶ Bob Birrell & Katharine Betts (2020). *The Crisis in the Overseas Student Industry: How should Government respond?*, research report to The Australian Population Research Institute (TAPRI).

tapri.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Oseas-students-Covid-crisis-final.pdf

¹⁷ Group of Eight Australia website: go8.edu.au/about/the-go8

¹⁸ Natasha Robinson, Australian universities risk catastrophe due to over-reliance on Chinese students, expert warns, *Australian Broadcasting Commission* [website], 21 August 2019.

www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-21/australian-universities-too-dependent-on-chinese-students-report/11427272

¹⁹ Hannah Ryan, Coronavirus means Australia won't meet migration forecasts for a decade, *The Guardian Australia*, 7 July 2020.

www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jul/07/coronavirus-means-australia-wont-meet-migration-forecasts-for-a-decade

such as successive pandemic waves, international travel restrictions and worsening relations between Australia and China. The Australian economy will also be left vulnerable. Currently, the Australian GDP is being propped up by rapid population growth, despite stagnation in GDP per capita. Some of the most profitable industries – construction, property speculation and tertiary education²⁰ – require high migration to generate high demand, enabling inflated prices and profits. This is Ponzi scheme economics that has many social and environmental consequences. It cannot be sustained long term and leaves our economy extremely vulnerable to volatile global conditions.

An argument is often made that high levels of international student enrolments are a boon for diversity and for students themselves. The reality is that the majority of international students come from select countries and represent a particular socioeconomic status (ie higher socioeconomic families from China, India and Nepal)²¹. Therefore, international student enrolments bring with them less diversity than is often assumed. With regard to the benefits to the students themselves, there is evidence to suggest that they are regular victims of casual worker exploitation, discussed in further detail below. There is also a conflict of interest between universities being compelled to pass international fee-paying students with low levels of academic achievement, resulting in declining educational outcomes for them and often for their classmates.

On speaking to first generation migrants themselves, anecdotal accounts shared with SPA indicate that international students are particularly vulnerable between completion of their degree and when applying for their bridging visa and permanent residency. During this time, often two or more years, many become stuck in low-skilled casual work while waiting for their residency, only to find that their qualifications are no longer current. Informants said that further support is needed from the government during this transitional period – support that is hard to provide individually when there are over a million international students.

SPA argues that an over-reliance on international students from a few select countries leaves the tertiary education sector vulnerable, compromises the quality of education due to conflict of interest and is of questionable benefit to the international students themselves. Furthermore, this is to the detriment of domestic students as the revenue earned from international students may not be directed sufficiently towards domestic placements or research that prioritises national interests. We advocate for a review and overhaul of the tertiary system so that universities can refocus on providing quality, affordable education to domestic students, as has been the case historically. While there might be a place for a small quota of international students (or study exchange programs between universities) the revenue from this should not be so great as to distort the business model of institutions to the detriment of their important civic role in underpinning Australia's skills and innovation. Therefore, the quota of international students should be much lower than it is currently. We suggest below 20% of enrolments at an institution level, and no more than 30% within any program of study. An exception could be made for preparatory programs designed to prepare foreign students for further study in Australia.

²⁰ Leith van Onselen, Australia's \$37.6b international student export con, *Macrobusiness* [website], 25 November 2019.

www.macrobusiness.com.au/2019/11/australias-37-6b-international-student-export-con/

²¹ Leith van Onselen, Indian and Chinese international students enter double bust, *Macrobusiness* [website], 15 October 2019.

www.macrobusiness.com.au/2019/10/indian-and-chinese-international-students-enter-double-bust/

Temporary working visas and migrant worker exploitation

(Addresses the inquiry's terms of reference b: the impact of temporary skilled and unskilled migration on Australia's labour market; e: the impact of wage theft, breaches of workplace rights and conditions, modern slavery and human trafficking on temporary migrants)

According to economist Leith van Onselen:

“With the Australian economy facing its biggest decline since the Great Depression, and labour underutilisation surging, allowing foreign workers to compete against locals for scarce jobs would only worsen the unemployment queues and further depress wages, smashing Australia's working class.”²²

Further:

“Given the widespread rorting of Australia's 'skilled' visa system, as evidenced by skilled migrants earning less than the general population and suffering higher unemployment...Reforms would ensure that Australia's skilled visa system is used sparingly to import only the 'best of the best', not as a general labour market tool to undercut local workers.”²³

SPA concurs with these statements. This perspective is also carried by some in the migrant community. We recently consulted with an advocate for the migrant community in western Melbourne²⁴. He observed that there has been increasing competition in the workforce between *skilled migrants, temporary migrants, international students and domestic job seekers*. His response was that 'quality not quantity' of migrants would result in a better outcome for both migrants and local workers.

There is a persistent underbelly in Australia of immigration rorting and worker exploitation, which makes temporary migrants particularly vulnerable:

- New Matilda reported that “Young migrant workers, many of them on 417 visas supposedly meant for backpackers on 'working holidays', in conditions of bonded labour not much different from share-croppers of the American south.”²⁵
- Migrant workers working at franchise stores have had passports withdrawn and threats of being reported to authorities for breaches of their visa²⁶ As a result, underpayment is

²² Leith van Onselen, Australia's skilled visa system temporarily suspended, *Macrobusiness* [website], 6 July 2020.

www.macrobusiness.com.au/2020/07/australias-skilled-visa-system-temporarily-suspended/

²³ Leith van Onselen, A warning to Britain on Australia's immigration system, *Macrobusiness* [website], 26 June 2020.

www.macrobusiness.com.au/2020/06/a-warning-to-britain-on-australias-immigration-system/

²⁴ Michael Bayliss, A migrant perspective on living in Australia's growth corridors, *Independent Australia* [website], 20 June 2020.

independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/a-migrant-perspective-on-living-in-australias-growth-corridors,14017

²⁵ Ben Eltham, From Suburban Cafes To The Fields Of Queensland, Worker Exploitation Is Rife In Australia, *New Matilda* [website], 5 May 2015.

newmatilda.com/2015/05/05/suburban-cafes-fields-queensland-worker-exploitation-rife-australia/

²⁶ Staff Writers, More details have emerged of 7-Eleven's alleged 'half-pay scam' *News.com.au* [website], 3 August 2015.

widespread. 60% of students were paid below minimum wage. “By reporting their employers' breaches of employment laws, the workers risk detention and removal from Australia, sacrificing their studies and prospects of permanent residency.”

- In a submission to the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy Inquiry, Bob Birrell of TAPRI revealed the dependence of working holiday migrants and ‘undocumented’ migrants on the horticulture industry, in spite of the accompanying low pay and often exploitative conditions.
- Even Australia Post has been implicated. “The revelations about Australia Post also raise fresh questions about the long-standing failure of immigration authorities to combat syndicates who are suspected of rorting temporary labour or student visa schemes and exploiting overseas workers...The rackets often involve foreign student colleges, employers or migration agents who recruit foreign nationals willing to make large payments to obtain the qualifications or jobs needed to get Australian visas or permanent residency.”²⁷

These are a just a few examples of what appears to have become a widespread problem, to the detriment of migrants themselves. Yet the lure of eventual permanent residency ensures a steady flow of migrants into these exploitative jobs. It seems evident that these practices have been allowed to flourish under a deliberately blind eye of authorities, to ensure that the Australian economy manages to absorb the vast quota of total migration which the government has chosen to impose irrespective of conditions in the labour market.

Boosters of migration appeal to skills shortages and the vibrancy and diversity of multiculturalism, but there is little vibrancy around the notion of a vast underclass of underpaid overseas workers. These practices have been allowed to prevail for long enough for whole sectors to become dependent on underpaid work, such that those who offer above-board pay and conditions to Australian workers can no longer compete. This is largely the case in the horticulture, meat processing, warehousing and cleaning industries. It is unfair to say that locals won't do these jobs when the jobs are no longer offered in the open labour market but fed through employment agencies which double as migration agents. Bringing in large numbers of immigrants to do the dirty work for Australians does nothing to address the structural issues that make many jobs and work environments unappealing to locals. The present migration ‘solution’ has a subtext of classism and racism – slurs that, ironically, get thrown at proponents of lower migration. Maintaining high immigration targets just exacerbates the problem on a large scale.

There have been claims that migrants can be relocated to the regions of Australia where there is a perceived shortage of both work and people. However, much of the evidence²⁸ demonstrates that migrants rarely settle in rural areas, and in the long term resettle in the major capital cities.

Temporary migrants constitute around 10% of the workforce. This policy will become harder to justify as Australia's unemployment rate continues to climb. In June 2020, unemployment rose to 7.1% as 227 000 jobs were lost. If, looking forward, the intention is not to create a dystopia of

<https://www.news.com.au/finance/business/retail/the-7eleven-convenience-store-chain-has-been-accused-of-a-widespread-halfpay-scam/news-story/>

²⁷ Nick Mackenzie & Richard Baker, Australia Post link to visa crime racket claim, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 August 2015.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/australia-post-link-to-visa-crime-racket-claim-20150804-girbiw.html>

²⁸ For example: Graeme Hugo (1999). *Regional Development through Immigration? The Reality behind the Rhetoric*, Research Paper 9 1999–2000, Parliament of Australia.

www.aph.gov.au/About/Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp9900/200ORP09

exploited temporary migrants in conflict with unemployed residents, then a government policy to reduce temporary migration must be considered. The argument of a skills shortage has been thin for a long time. Where shortages do exist they are often self-imposed by inadequate investment in training.

SPA argues for temporary migrant worker visas to be included within the 50 000 migration placements per year. Furthermore, we suggest that temporary migrants only fill positions through employer sponsorship, after genuine labour-market testing (i.e. having been advertised domestically for a given period, and having demonstrably failed to find suitable domestic applicants). In addition, a limited number of student and working holiday visas should be permitted, but more resources are needed to police the employment conditions of these workers. With regard to undesirable, underpaid work (such as seasonal horticulture) alternatives should be explored, such as regulating the industry so that it can offer better conditions for workers or exploring mechanisation as an alternative.

Concluding Remarks

The recent pandemic and lockdown have changed the Australian labour market profoundly. Just as we need to flatten the curve of COVID-19 cases by taking unprecedented global action, so we need to make bold and brave steps to flatten the exponential curve of our collective impact on the planet.

The current economic hiatus provides an opportunity to reset economic policies toward an economic system that is not based on perpetual growth in population and our demands on natural resources. We must use this rare opportunity to help mould a society that can both weather the storms ahead and reverse the climate and ecological emergency. It is a window of opportunity that we must not ignore.

We ask the committee to consider the fact that the past 15 years of migration-fuelled population growth has not made Australia richer, fairer, or more resilient to environmental or geopolitical shocks. Its role in avoiding 'technical' recession has masked steady undermining of work conditions and access to sufficient, stable employment for Australians and migrants alike. This is a system that cannot last forever and is proving to have negative consequences for our national ecosystem, our day-to-day lives and on the experience and working conditions of migrants themselves. Temporary immigration plays an important role in optimising the selection of permanent migrants, and in facilitating Australia's diverse interactions with the wider world. But it can perform these roles at a much smaller scale than the current program. The roles it should not take are as an artificial crutch for an under-resourced tertiary education sector, a captured market for developers of cheap apartments and a battering ram to suppress the bargaining power of workers to seek better wages and conditions of employment.

Immigration above the sustainable level of 50 000 NOM per year pushes Australia along an unsustainable path of continuing, and costly, demographic growth. Growing evidence of environmental deterioration, urban stress, workforce exploitation and unemployment show that it is time to slow down.

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