



**Sustainable Population Australia**

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## **Population Position and Policy Statement**

This document summarises SPA's positions and policies on human population and its impact on the Australian and global environment.

SPA's vision, mission and objectives are as follows:

**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

**Mission:** To establish Australia as a global model of, and to assist other nations towards, a sustainable ecological life-support system, retention of species diversity and human wellbeing, by influencing public debate and policy with particular emphasis on population size.

**Objectives:** In order to advance this mission, the Association endeavours to:

1. Contribute to the public awareness of the limits of Australian population growth from ecological, social and economic viewpoints.
2. Promote awareness that the survival of an ecologically sustainable population depends in the long-term on its renewable resource base.
3. Promote policies that will lead to the stabilisation, and then to the reduction, of Australia's population by encouraging low fertility and low migration.
4. Promote urban and rural life-styles and practices that are in harmony with the realities of the Australian environment, its resource base and its biodiversity.
5. Support measures, campaigns and institutional reforms designed to more strongly protect Australia's natural environment.

6. Advocate low immigration rates while rejecting any selection of immigrants based on race, ethnicity or religion.

7. Promote policies that will lead to stabilisation, and then to reduction, of global population size, while rejecting involuntary population control.

## Positions

1. SPA accepts the following as well-established fact:

- 1.1 Earth is, materially, a limited, closed system, our only spaceship.
- 1.2 Human survival is underwritten by a healthy ecosphere providing essential biological products and ecosystem services.
- 1.3 Human activity grows largely at the expense of non-human species and their habitats. In the past 50 years, while human numbers have doubled, wild animal numbers have declined by two thirds. Humans and domestic livestock now account for 96% of terrestrial vertebrate biomass.
- 1.4 Human activity now exceeds the capacity of Earth's systems to sustain it for future generations (overshoot). This is evident in the rapid deterioration of many measures of environmental health. In effect, we are living on ecological capital rather than interest.
- 1.5 The human population has expanded eight-fold since 1800, and is continuing to grow at an as-yet unrelenting pace of around 80 million per year. According to United Nations projections, we will add between two and five billion more people this century, depending on the political priority given to ending population growth.
- 1.6 The longer we persist in overshoot, the more irreversible damage will be done to the biosphere and our life support systems, reducing the number of people sustainable in the long term and increasing the likelihood of large-scale mortality events such as famine, war and pandemic.
- 1.7 The environmental impacts of human populations are a function of both their size and their patterns of production and consumption, which are influenced by levels of affluence, cultural attitudes, the technologies they employ and the institutions they create to manage socio-economic systems and their impacts.
- 1.8 To achieve ecological sustainability, *both* drivers of environmental impact (population size and behaviours) must be simultaneously addressed. The vast scope for minimising the environmental impact of each person does not obviate the vast benefit of limiting the numbers of people. For changes in technology, consumption patterns or socio-economic systems to benefit the environment, they must not be negated by further population growth.
- 1.9 Population pressure underlies many social and economic issues including underemployment and exploitative employment, rising income inequality, infrastructure congestion, and violent conflicts.
- 1.10 People who are free to choose the timing and number of their children, and who understand the impacts of family size on their household wealth, their children's

prospects and the wider community, tend to choose small families. These freedoms and understandings are far from universal.

2. SPA regards the following as morally compelling:

- 2.1 All species and ecosystems have inherent value, regardless of their perceived usefulness to humans. We have a duty to minimise human impacts on natural ecosystems.
- 2.2 Future generations should inherit healthy life-supporting ecosystems that will permit them to flourish. The greatest human wellbeing will be achieved by ensuring the security of many future generations, each maintaining a modest and sustainable population size, rather than by maximising the number of humans alive at one time (e.g. the current century), at the expense of resources needed by future generations.
- 2.3 All humans deserve the opportunity to live without fear and deprivation. To achieve this requires addressing both the total demands by people on natural resources and their unequal access to them.
- 2.4 Involuntary or coercive measures to limit childbearing are never acceptable. SPA rejects arguments that the environmental crisis necessitates coercive birth control. The national family planning programs that most rapidly reduced birth rates have been entirely voluntary and based on the positive promotion of smaller family norms. In contrast, coercive measures tend to be counterproductive, lowering community acceptance of family planning.
- 2.5 The United Nations recognises that “couples have a basic human right to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children” (Tehran Declaration, 1968). This invokes both their right to reproductive health and family planning services, and their responsibility to their children, the wider community and future generations.
- 2.6 The suppression of discourse on population size and growth leads to ill-informed and ineffective responses to problems exacerbated by population growth, for which succeeding generations pay. Population should be given due consideration in decision-making to reduce overshoot and avert ecological crisis.
- 2.7 Public discourse and public policy must adequately inform prospective parents of the impacts of their procreation choices, to enable their responsible decisions.

3. SPA believes our global responsibilities begin at home:

- 3.1 Australia is a dry continent with fragile ecosystems of immense diversity and endemism (e.g., in fresh waters 95% of invertebrate species and 94% of frog species are found nowhere else). It is not well suited to an expansion of the human population.
- 3.2 Most environmental indicators (biodiversity, water quality, soil, etc.) are declining in Australia. This means that the current population is not living sustainably at the current standard of living.

- 3.3 Clearance of native vegetation for human settlement and agriculture has been the single most significant impact on terrestrial biodiversity, although in future its impact might be overtaken by climate change.
  - 3.4 Australia is acutely vulnerable to climate change and has already experienced a rise in extreme weather events. Because of climate change, rainfall has decreased in southern Australia where most of the population resides and where much of our agriculture occurs.
  - 3.5 Population growth makes it more difficult for Australia to meet its carbon emission reduction targets.
4. SPA aspires to eventual population reduction to ecologically sustainable levels:
    - 4.1 Humanity is currently in overshoot; population reduction is necessary as a means to restore ecosystem resilience and improve per person access to natural resources.
    - 4.2 Voluntary restraint of births is the only humane and viable means of reducing global population. Failure to do so risks a brutal population correction due to resource limits or ecosystem failures causing increased death rates via famine, disease or war.
    - 4.3 Global population decline depends on individual nations embracing an end to their own population growth. Any country that champions its own growth undermines global efforts. Non-discriminatory immigration-capping policies and encouragement of small families are legitimate ways for individual nation-states to stabilise or reduce population size.
    - 4.4 In the immediate term, policy settings should aim to end population growth quickly. After population has peaked, policies might be adjusted to manage the decline, and eventually to achieve population stability at a sustainable level.
    - 4.5 Although it is not possible to nominate a single level of global population size which is 'optimal', several studies suggest that one to four billion people is the population size that would best allow a reasonable standard of living for all and still be ecologically sustainable (assuming continuing climate stability, which is now in question).
    - 4.6 There is good evidence that the population of the Australian continental bioregion is already exceeding its sustainable level, in terms of the viability of ecosystems and biodiversity, water scarcity, declining soil quality, and declining quality of life.
5. SPA deplores racism:
    - 5.1 SPA seeks to stop population growth and keep Australia's population well within sustainable limits. We advocate for lower immigration because Australia's immigration rate has been much too high to allow population stabilisation. SPA seeks to influence the number of migrants only, not the racial composition of the migrant intake.

- 5.2 SPA unequivocally condemns extremist and racist groups that target and scapegoat migrants. Politicians, not migrants, should be blamed for the scale of the immigration program.
  - 5.3 SPA also advocates lower birth rates, and holds no view on the proportion of the next generation that should be Australian-born or immigrant. Whether a sustainable population path is achieved through a near-replacement birth rate and near-zero net immigration, or a lower birth rate and correspondingly more immigrants, is not relevant to sustainability.
  - 5.4 Employment systems should not facilitate or tolerate the exploitation of migrants, which is inevitable if immigration numbers are higher than the labour market can absorb without eroding terms of employment. Low immigration is pro-immigrant, allowing greater access to good quality jobs.
  - 5.5 Allegations that all or most opponents of high immigration are racist are as specious as are allegations that all or most advocates of high immigration are indifferent to the environment.
  - 5.6 Misplaced accusations of racism can alienate disaffected people, some of whom may gravitate toward racist views. SPA seeks to enhance social cohesion by ensuring that the negative impacts of high levels of immigration – such as overcrowded hospitals and schools, traffic congestion, downward pressure on wages, and upward pressure on the cost of housing – are not denied and left unaddressed.
6. SPA considers the following commonly-claimed objections to ending population growth to be invalid:
    - 6.1 *That there will be insufficient workers to support the elderly.* On the contrary, the economy will benefit from a tighter labour market which will lift workforce participation, reduce income inequality and raise productivity.
    - 6.2 *That population decline is unstoppable and will eliminate humanity.* While population decline has momentum, just as population growth has momentum, it is readily arrested by a slight increase in birth rates.
    - 6.3 *That open borders (unlimited immigration) is the only ethical response to global inequalities.* On the contrary, mass migration would do more harm than good for the poorest communities on Earth, causing a huge brain drain and providing an escape for only a small minority, while lowering international aid due to fiscal strains in the receiving countries. It would also override our duty to protect ecosystems within our own borders. The greatest good can be done by leading by example in limiting our population, enhancing political will globally for family planning programs, increasing development assistance to poorer countries and dispelling the unfounded fears of ageing and declining populations.
    - 6.4 *That population growth is unimportant because people in high-fertility countries have low greenhouse gas emissions per person.* This claim dismisses the suffering already experienced in those countries on account of population growth, and the intensifying threats to them from future growth (e.g., water and food insecurity

and underemployment contributing to civil and political volatility). It also wrongly equates environmental impact solely with greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Specific policies**

#### **7. Globally, SPA advocates for:**

- 7.1 A renewed global commitment to accelerate fertility decline using rights-based, non-coercive measures, to end global population growth at the lowest achievable peak, and to embrace subsequent population decline as a means to enhance human and environmental security. Existing commitments to universal access to reproductive health and rights, including family planning services and information, and the education and empowerment of women, expressed in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and in the Sustainable Development Goals, should be fully resourced and integrated into wider development programs. In addition, the benefits of small families should be actively promoted. Governments of developed and developing nations, the United Nations, development and health agencies, environmental organisations and the scientific community each have a role in promoting an earlier population peak followed by population reduction.
- 7.2 Strengthened policies which prevent natural habitat destruction, protect species, regenerate and expand the extent of wild ecosystems, and end the further encroachment of human activities into remaining natural ecosystems.
- 7.3 A cessation of the misinformation surrounding the economic consequences of an ageing or declining population. Concerns relating to so-called “dependency ratios” and labour scarcity are contradicted by evidence. These false arguments are misused to justify policies promoting population growth.
- 7.4 Improved access to contraception (availability, affordability and choice of method) for all who wish to use them. Even in Australia, the most effective forms of contraception (particularly “long-acting reversible contraceptives,” LARCs) are too costly for many women and unavailable from many health service providers. SPA is concerned that some governments deliberately neglect these responsibilities because they wish to prevent a fall in fertility rates, often due to misplaced fears about an ageing population. This is unacceptable for many reasons, not least because unplanned and unwanted children are potentially exposed to precarious circumstances.
- 7.5 Safe, legal and accessible abortion. SPA notes that places where abortion is illegal do not have fewer abortions, but they do have more deaths and lifelong disability from unsafe abortions.

#### **8. SPA advocates that the Australian Government:**

##### *Population and Migration*

- 8.1 Adopt an integrated population policy based on ecological sustainability and the wellbeing of Australians. This must include an aim to end population growth as a prerequisite for ecological sustainability. Such a policy should encompass

immigrant intake (both permanent and temporary), natural increase, biodiversity protection, aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, tourism, foreign aid, internal migration, and education.

- 8.2 Recognise that the flow of benefits (but not the costs and negative impacts) of high immigration are skewed towards a few powerful sectional interests such as property developers and large retailers. This does not maximise the well-being of the broader Australian community or secure the viability of Australia's ecosystems.
- 8.3 Adopt social and taxation policies (e.g., maternity allowances) that allow parents to provide adequately for their children but at the same time do not provide incentives for them to have more than two children.
- 8.4 Reduce immigration to a level that will lead to the stabilisation of Australia's population. Typically this would require net migration of between 50,000 and 80,000 per year, but it could be more or less depending on fertility and the annual levels of emigration. This reduction would still allow a generous humanitarian stream as well as the spouse/family reunion category while also providing for any real skill shortages.
- 8.5 Accept the Angus Houston (2012) Review's recommendation that the humanitarian refugee quota be 20,000 p.a., subject to periodic review in light of changing conditions.
- 8.6 Restrict eligibility for permanent migration status to people who have spent at least five years as a temporary resident, and can demonstrate continuing employment or spousal/family status consistent with their original entry visa (i.e. employment in the nominated skill area or cohabiting with the sponsoring family).
- 8.7 Limit chain migration by permitting only citizens to sponsor family reunion applicants. (Existing family units normally migrate together as primary and secondary applicants on temporary work visas.)
- 8.8 Cap temporary migration so that it does not add to population growth. Regardless of how long individual temporary migrants spend in Australia, it is the number present at any time that contributes to pressures on infrastructure, congestion, housing costs, water insecurity and environmental degradation. For instance, a cap might be set at 4% of Australia's population (around 1 million temporary residents).
- 8.9 Include New Zealanders when determining the size of the immigrant intake, and cap the Trans-Tasman Agreement so that a net flow above the cap would trigger constraints.
- 8.10 Require all skilled migrant visas to be employer-sponsored. Ensure that, within the skills stream, Australia imports only those with expertise not available in Australia, rather than using immigration to effect broad based suppression of wages. This requires demonstrable labour market testing, such as posting vacancies on a government job-listing web site where the pay rate and the qualifications of applicants can be scrutinised.

- 8.11 Ensure temporary residents are informed of their rights as employees, and have access to assistance if they are mistreated.
- 8.12 Prosecute and penalise employers who knowingly or negligently employ illegal immigrants.

#### *International relations*

- 8.13 Adopt comprehensive measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions rapidly to be consistent with achieving no more than 1.5 degrees C warming or, at most, 2 degrees. Ending population growth both globally and within nation-states is a vital part of any comprehensive strategy to reach this goal.
- 8.14 Increase Australia's overseas development aid (ODA) to at least the UN-recommended 0.7 per cent of GNI.
- 8.15 Ensure family planning support constitutes at least 4% of Australia's ODA and is a reported category of spending.
- 8.16 Ensure other aspects of reproductive health and rights, female empowerment and primary health care also feature prominently in Australia's aid program.
- 8.17 Focus Australia's refugee intake on those selected from UN camps. 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 travel through safe intermediary countries.
- 8.18 Ensure humane and expeditious processing of asylum seekers' claims according to international human rights laws and agreements.
- 8.19 Ensure media and regulatory transparency in Australia's migrant detention centres, whether on-shore or off-shore.

#### *Education*

- 8.20 Adopt an integrated population, training and labour market strategy ensuring 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, and thereby minimising the need to import skilled workers (cf. 8.10 above).
- 8.21 Limit enrolments of international students to a level that does not compromise educational standards and learning experiences for domestic students, and ensure that international graduates must compete with other applicants for limited skilled migration visas without automatic or privileged access. International education should be a true export of services, not a *de facto* pathway to residency.
- 8.22 Ensure sex education programs in Australia are age-appropriate and adequately funded.
- 8.23 Educate children about ecological sustainability, including population trends, their underlying drivers and the impossibility of endless population growth.



## *Economy*

- 8.24 Abandon GDP growth as the central metric for economic success, and adopt a dashboard of metrics focusing on reducing hardship rather than elevating the wealth of the already-rich. Indicators might include income inequality, household debt, wages share of national income, long-term unemployment, child poverty, housing stress, the status of natural capital (soil, water and biological resources) and the Genuine Progress Indicator.
- 8.25 Embrace population ageing as a positive evolution, reflecting advances in wellness at advanced ages, as well as easing oversupply in the workforce and facilitating greater wage growth and job security.
- 8.26 Adopt policies that will encourage lower levels of resource and energy use while retaining a high quality of life.
- 8.27 Provide incentives for energy efficiency and energy technology shifts to reduce Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions and thus its ecological footprint.
- 8.28 Allow any labour shortages to drive higher wages of Australian workers. An occupation should not be listed as a 'skill in demand' for immigration purposes until wages in that occupation have risen by at least 20%. A general labour shortage should not be declared before wage income as a percentage of national income has overtaken its previous peak. The Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT) should be raised to at least the 75th percentile of weekly full-time earnings to ensure temporary migrants are not used to undercut Australian job-seekers.
- 8.29 Adopt taxation and housing policies that stabilise housing costs and deny land speculators the opportunity to reap excessive profits from population growth.