



# Sustainable Population Australia

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21 July 2022

The Hon Anthony Albanese, MP  
Prime Minister of Australia

Dear Prime Minister

## Introduction to Sustainable Population Australia (SPA)

Congratulations on your recent election.

I am pleased to introduce you to Sustainable Population Australia (SPA). We are an environmental organisation, (not a political party), that was established in Canberra in 1988 and that now has well over a thousand members and supporters across Australia. SPA's patrons are Dr Katharine Betts, Professor the Hon. Bob Carr, Dr Paul Collins, Professor Ian Lowe and Professor Tim Flannery.

Our aim is to guide Australia to an ecologically sustainable population size and to assist others to achieve the same within their own countries. SPA seeks to reduce immigration to a level that will lead to the stabilisation of Australia's population below 30 million. While seeking to reduce immigration, however, we absolutely reject any migrant selection based on race, ethnicity or religion.

SPA is not alone in its views about Australia's population growth. Repeatedly, surveys have consistently shown that around 70 per cent of Australians do not want more people. Two recent examples are by the ANU Centre for Social Research in 2019 and The Australian Population Research Institute in 2021.

For many decades now respective Australian governments have committed themselves to a series of initiatives designed to protect the Australian environment from further decline and to facilitate significant regeneration in the diversity, abundance and health of the Australian environment. No initiative and no government has succeeded. Instead, the pattern has been one of unremitting decline, as the newly-released *State of the Environment* (SOE) report attests.

The new SOE report explicitly states: *'Human activity and population growth are major drivers of many pressures on biodiversity. Impacts are associated with urban expansion, tourism, industrial expansion, pollution, fishing, hunting and development of infrastructure. The impacts from population growth are extensive and increasing in many areas.'*<sup>i</sup>

While a reduction in population growth is critical for future environmental well-being, SPA believes it will also offer enormous social and economic advantages. It is well understood, for example, that high immigration over the past decade has contributed to wage stagnation. The end to an endless source of cheap labour will restore the bargaining power of Australian workers and ensure access to proper training. It is for reasons such as these that a number of economic commentators, including Professor

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Ross Garnaut, have called for a halving of net immigration from pre-Covid levels. It is undeniable that many of our challenges, such as shortages in education and health, infrastructure shortfall, congestion and housing affordability, have been exacerbated by the demand created by prolonged high immigration and not, as is often claimed, relieved by the skills and expertise this immigration is said to bring.

To do justice to future Australians, our government must pursue material well-being within the context of a stable population. This must be accompanied by an intense focus on technological change (never a satisfactory solution by itself), institutional reforms and public education to ensure Australian lifestyles become compatible with a safe climate and sustainable land use. However, even these initiatives may not be enough. The challenges are now so great that, to achieve a genuinely sustainable future, in which no environmental decline takes place, it is possible that a period of population de-growth will be necessary.

Australia is fortunate (but not unique) in having at hand the tool that could quickly set us on this journey to a sustainable future: immigration policy. It is high immigration that has driven the greater part of Australia's population growth over the past two decades and it is projected it will be high immigration that will produce the greater part of unsustainable population growth into the future.

Achieving population stabilisation below 30 million will not require that immigration cease, but it will require a reduction substantially below pre-Covid levels. Net migration of between 50,000 and 70,000 per year—approximating Australia's long-term average—would suffice. These figures would permit a generous humanitarian program, perhaps larger than present, and cover any real skill shortages and provision for spouse/family reunion for the smaller intake of primary migrants.

To ensure immigration is not used by employers to undercut Australian workers, SPA proposes the following policy changes:

- (1) make all Temporary Skill Shortage visas employer-sponsored and remove points-based self-sponsored and regional-sponsored categories which have a poor record of finding skilled employment
- (2) lift the Temporary Skilled Migrant Income Threshold (TSMIT) to 10% above the median full-time salary (i.e., \$91,300), rather than the irresponsibly low level of \$53,900<sup>ii</sup>
- (3) offer permanent skilled migration visas only to convert temporary workers to permanence, if their employer continues to sponsor their application
- (4) expedite the process surrounding the acceptance, or rejection, of employment visas. The slowness of the existing process is impractical for sponsoring employers and skews the migrant intake toward low-performing self-sponsored candidates.

Government should not capitulate to business demands to drop labour market testing. Priority must always be given to Australian job seekers before a migrant is sponsored to fill a vacancy. This can be done concurrently with international recruiting to avoid delays in recruitment.

SPA opposes policies intended to boost Australia's birth rate above current fertility levels of around 1.6. Unless our fertility rate is substantially below "replacement", the *sustainable* quota for immigration will be smaller than the figures mentioned above. Our level of immigration should do no

more than “top up the generations” to ensure young cohorts are no more numerous than their parents’ generation.

Globally, population growth is a major impediment to economic development and a driver of environmental crises, including food and water insecurity. SPA believes Australia must commit to a much larger Overseas Development Aid (ODA) budget, at least meeting the UN-recommended minimum of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income. At least 4 per cent of ODA should support family planning activities.

As part of its education program SPA has produced a series of academically rigorous but accessible discussion papers encompassing many important aspects of the population question. They address the misrepresentations and dispel the myths perpetrated by a powerful and self-interested growth lobby. Themes covered include why infrastructure never keeps up with growth, and why the workforce is not diminished by population ageing.


Our most recent paper, addressing population growth and climate change<sup>iii</sup> draws attention to the intimate (but frequently denied) link between these existential global threats. The evidence and views contained therein have been reinforced by the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (AR6)<sup>iv</sup> which identified population growth and the relentless pursuit of increased GDP as the principal drivers of emissions growth.

I also draw your attention to the recent United Nations *Global Population Growth and Sustainable Development Report*<sup>v</sup> which highlights the inescapable tensions between population growth, standards of living and environmentally sustainable development.

I encourage you to look at our website [www.population.org.au](http://www.population.org.au) for further information.

We are always available for discussion and briefings about population issues and the relationship between population, environmental, and immigration policy.

Yours sincerely



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<sup>i</sup> Australian Government (2021). *Australia. State of the environment 2021*.  
<https://soe.dccceew.gov.au/biodiversity/pressures/population#-assmt-bio-06-assessment-pressures-from-population>

<sup>ii</sup> van Onselen, L. (2022, 22 June). “How to fix Australia’s broken skilled visa system.” *MacroBusiness*.  
<https://www.macrobusiness.com.au/2022/06/how-to-fix-australias-broken-skilled-visa-system/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://population.org.au/discussion-papers/>

<sup>iv</sup> IPCC (2022). *Sixth assessment report*. “Climate change 2022: mitigation of climate change”.  
<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/>

<sup>v</sup> UN Population Division (2022). *Global population growth and sustainable development*.  
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/global-population-growth>