



# VISION<sup>21</sup>

The Australian Population Institute Newsletter

October 2003

## NEWSFLASH - VANSTONE IS NEW MINISTER

You read it in the Apop Newsletter first!

A surprise ministerial reshuffle by Prime Minister has resulted in a number of moves including Amanda Vanstone taking over as Immigration Minister. Long standing Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock will move to the portfolio of Attorney General.

## THE POPULATION DEBATE IS ALIVE AND WELL



Bert Dennis—President

Australia's population is closing in on 20 million and newspapers in most states have been triumphantly announcing higher than expected growth. Our level of net migration has surged with figures reported varying between 110,000 and 140,000.

Earlier this month the Australian Bureau of Statistics released a new set of population projections through to the year 2051. With higher than previously expected immigration now factored in Australia's projected population at 2051 has increased since the last projections in 2000 by over 1 million to 26.4 million.

This is good news and the Institute is proud of its successes to date – but it does not represent the point at which we can relax.

The prospect of an ageing society, and the economic and social consequences this will bring, is still very much with us. It is important that the most severe impacts of an ageing society are mitigated through responsible population growth.

### GROWING WINGS

I am thrilled to be able to say the Australian Population Institute has now grown wings. Much effort has gone into the establishment of a South Australian affiliate and on November 21<sup>st</sup>, Apop (SA) will host the second National Population Summit.

Focussing on the topic of population distribution, the Summit features an impressive list of speakers including Phillip Ruddock, South Australian Premier - Mike Rann, Journalists Paul Kelly and Phillip Adams, and demographer Bernard Salt.

We thank Michael Hickinbotham and his hard working committee in South Australia for their efforts in what should be a most insightful event. Further details are included in this newsletter.

### LOOKING FORWARD

Beyond Adelaide planning is well advanced for a follow up to the successful National Regional Population Summit held in Albury in November 2002. To be held in Wodonga next April, the event will focus on the growth potential of Australia's regional cities.

In November of this year the Institute will be a presenter and minor sponsor at the National Local Government Conference in Canberra. The theme of the conference is appropriately 'Population Impacts – Old or New Age Regions'.

In Melbourne we have been taking the message of the importance of population growth to the people through a series of presentations to service clubs and conferences. A member of the Institute is only too willing to deliver an informative and thought provoking presentation to any organisation interested in this important topic.

The Institute's next Melbourne function will be held on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> October. A breakfast

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### Special points of interest:

- Breakfast Meeting Tuesday 21 October with Dr. Craig Shepherd—Principal Economist at National Economics
- Keep abreast of relevant developments via our website [www.apop.com.au](http://www.apop.com.au)

function, we are delighted to present Dr. Craig Shepherd – Principal economist at National Economics, who will speak on the topic of ‘Aged Migration, Employment Opportunities and Dying Regions’. I encourage you to attend and hear this most impressive and highly regarded speaker. For those in business in particular Craig’s presentations are

always insightful and informative.

On a research front, the Institute has been in discussion with several universities and is currently sponsoring a research piece on the topic of ‘regional migration strategies’ with a view to our Wodonga conference next April.

The Institute has an impressive list of speakers it is targeting to take us to the end of 2003 and into 2004. Despite recent good news in the population debate, there is still much to be done.

To repeat my opening point – the prospect of an ageing society may be inevitable, but through

continued and responsible population growth, we have it within our power to ensure there is a smooth transition and a greater Australia.

Bert Dennis, President

## SECOND NATIONAL SUMMIT TO FOCUS ON DISTRIBUTION



Michael Hickinbotham  
South Australian President

The serious, long-term implications of Australia's rapidly ageing populace and the growing population imbalance among States, cities and regions will be addressed at APop's second National Population Summit in November.

The summit, to be held in South Australia's Parliament House on November 21, will bring together some of Australia's leading thinkers to examine ways to:

- deal with problems arising from Australia's ageing population and declining birth rate;
- create a more even distribution of people across Australia; and
- encourage more newcomers to Australia to move to the smaller capitals or to rural and regional Australia.

Speakers include Philip Ruddock, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Mike Rann, South Australian Premier, Robert Champion de Crespigny, chairman of the Economic Development Board of South Australia, Helen Hughes, Senior Fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies at the Australian National University, and demographic trends commentator, Bernard Salt of KPMG.

The invitation-only summit will be moderated by broadcaster and commentator Phillip Adams.

The Summit, which is being hosted by the recently formed APop SA, with support from the South Australian Government, will come up with a communiqué designed to become a focus for ongoing national debate on the issue.

Chairman of APop SA, Michael Hickinbotham, said "The population trends we're currently seeing in Australia have profound implications for each and every one of us."

"So it's critical that APop continues its efforts in fostering an open, wide-ranging and sensible debate – not in five years time, but right now.

"Unless we want things to reach crisis point, we have no choice but to address the question, for example, of what should be the optimum geographical distribution of Australia's population.

"The Summit will aim to not only put the population issue firmly on the national agenda, but also to come up with workable ideas and policy recommendations, and practical initiatives."

Mr Hickinbotham said it was fitting that the Summit would be held in South Australia where the trends towards declining population numbers and an ageing population are moving faster than in most other States.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics predicts that South Australia's population will start to decline by 2023, however the population of Australia as a whole will not start to decline until 2063.

"This means we will need to move faster to identify the

economic implications and put in place appropriate policy responses."

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## ACTIVATING OUR COMMUNITIES IS THE KEY

Idle is not a word that can be used to describe Jane Nathan.

A former Councillor and Mayor of the City of Hawthorn, a Commissioner of the City of Brimbank, Chair of the Local Government Planning Council (1995-99), Chair of the State Bicycle Committee (1991-98), a former President of the Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association (VPELA, 1997-98) and Chair of the Local Government Industry training Board (1994-96) Jane's community involvement is extensive.

She is a current board member of VPELA, Victorian Relief Committee, Booroondara Foundation, the Hawthorn Community House and Camcare.

In January 2003 Jane Nathan joined the Committee of the Australian Population Institute.

Jane spoke to Chris McNeill on some of the complex issues in the population debate.

**On immigration**  
Immigration enhances and advances Australian communities. Contrary to the traditional view of some, all available evidence suggests that a well-targeted immigration program creates jobs and economic growth.

As a Commissioner at Brimbank City Council, (the amalgamation of Sunshine Keilor and St Albans Councils), I never ceased to be in awe of the

diversity of cultures and the economic and cultural opportunities that diversity offered. The knowledge and networks to expand our economic and cultural links and consequently greater opportunities for export are powerful. In Brimbank we experienced emerging business relationships with countries such as the former Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Somalia, Ethiopia, Poland and Hungary.

### **As a nation how can we better promote the benefits of immigration?**

It lies with the promotion of the tangible benefits – economic, social and cultural. Perhaps most importantly those benefits must be explained at a community level. In my experience there is a strong link between activated or energised communities and those that have successfully embraced cultural diversity.

### **Is population an issue that can be discussed in isolation from other issues of national importance?**

No. The population debate is sometimes separated from other aspects of the national debate because it is seen as contentious. But realistically the population debate is tied in with almost every other national issue. I see the question of population policies linked closely with those of economics, infrastructure, environmental management and service provision. In many respects the greater debate could almost be said to be about 'national development'.

### **The principal reason for Australia's (and Europe's) population dilemma – that is an ageing population – is a collapse in fertility rates to a level well below replacement. As a mother of five what is your view on this issue?**

It's a complex issue of course. In part the decrease in fertility rates is attributable to changes in our cultural outlook – and particularly the less structured way in which women enter adulthood. The consequence has been a far greater level of economic freedom for women and, as we know, couples are choosing to delay starting a family.

Having said that I sense that this may be changing perhaps ever so slightly. Time will tell.

Certainly expectations of the current generation are far higher than ever before. How they choose to accommodate family in their plans will prove to be very interesting.

### **Is there way of reversing the decline?**

Yes – over the past thirty years parenting has been portrayed by many as non-aspirational and simply too difficult. I believe parenting to be one of the great occupations – it requires management skills and logistical abilities that are above and beyond those required in most jobs.

Unfortunately the term 'workforce' is broadly defined as those in paid work and in that sense discriminates against those in the vocation of

parenthood – which is definitely hard work, but also richly rewarding (the editor agrees wholeheartedly with this view – as father to a six month old daughter. He is however in awe of his interviewee's ability to rear five children).

I firmly believe that, as a nation, we need to make the role of parenting one worthy of the highest aspirations – in a cultural, social and economic sense.

**Thankyou Jane Nathan.**

## REGIONS MATTER

**The following is an extract of a paper delivered by Chris McNeill at the 'Revitalising Gippsland Conference' held in Churchill in June 2003.**

*The paper recalled some of the lessons from the National Regional Population Summit held in Albury in November 2002 and examined the often difficult question confronting local government – how to think and act regionally!*

In November 2002 the Australian Population Institute in conjunction with Regional Cities Victoria convened the 'Regional Population Summit' in Albury. The event sought to elevate the issues of regional demographic change and regional development to a higher level in public debate.

With many of Australia's leading thinkers in demography and regional development in attendance for two days of discussion, delegates were in broad agreement on the historical and contemporary issues impacting Australia's regions. More importantly there was generally agreement on the specific actions needed at government level to encourage sustainable regional growth.

Key points of discussion and agreement were as follows;

- Population trends in regional Australia are not easily categorized. No simple or 'one size fits all' description captures the issues confronting the regions.
- The same applies to any conceivable approach to policy making. Addressing issues requires carefully tailored solutions accounting for significant regional diversity.
- For large areas of regional Australia population decline and ageing are not

new phenomena. In many wheat belt regions population loss occurred for much of the twentieth century often through periods widely regarded as prosperous for rural stakeholders (refer: Regional Matters – An Atlas of Regional Victoria, Average annual population loss for former local government areas, 1951-1961 and 1961 – 1971). At the same time rural areas have been losing large numbers aged between 18 and 25 seeking education and vocational opportunities.

· Media reporting on regional issues tends to focus on the negative leaving many urban based Australians with a bleak portrait of rural Australia and its future.

Such negative imagery does little more than reinforce the perception of inevitable decline and often deters potential residents.

· While delegates were divided over the degree of future growth, it seems at the very least that provision for 5 million additional Australians (and probably more) by 2050 is inevitable. With perceived overcrowding becoming an increasingly hot political issue in Sydney, several coastal locations implementing population 'caps' and declining housing affordability in Sydney and Melbourne opportunities for regional growth are at their highest for some time.

· For regional development to be sustainable initiatives must be 'owned' by the communities in which they occur. While there is a place for an integrated or 'whole of government'

approach to regional development it is imperative that decision making and responsibility for outcomes be managed at a regional level. The era of highly centralized planning, absent of community input and local knowledge, and driven from Canberra is well and truly over.

- Programs encouraging migrants to regional areas are sound in principal but must be adequately managed and funded.
- Finally, and in keeping with the previous point, as the twenty first century progresses Australia's traditional sources of immigration are likely to decline. The international market for migrants is likely to become more competitive.

With growth and decline occurring concurrently across regional Australia and with the ever increasing spectre of an ageing society it becomes critically important for local government areas to think beyond their immediate jurisdiction and work with neighbouring municipalities – to promote the region.

While the concept of 'regional' development is not new it becomes more important and more relevant with each decade. Changes in technology and mobility continue to expand the spatial domain individuals regard as 'local'. There is now more employment, retail, social and recreational movement between local government areas than ever. A sense of thinking 'regionally' has never been more apparent.

In the recently publication "Developing Regional Australia: Theory and Practice", Beer, Maude and Pritchard explore the issue of

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regionality in some depth. The question of how to define a region presents a challenge in itself.

In its simplest form a region “is a group of adjoining areas or places that have something in common” (Beer, A. et al, *Developing Australia’s Regions – Theory and Practice*. 2001. UNSW Press). In Australia regions can be (and are) defined by geography, history, climate or agriculture, by economic or social factors, by state or local government area, by federal or state electorates, by catchment management or tourism authorities or in a statistical sense by statistical division, statistical district or by statistical local area. In other words they can be, and are, sliced and diced in all sorts of different ways depending on the objective at hand. Successful regions are characterized by an open recognition that

interdependencies exist between the cities, townships and rural areas of the region. Put simply this requires an acknowledgement that what is good for one city is good for the region and vice versa. The economic, employment and social advantages of investments such as these should be carefully monitored and widely promoted in a regional sense and not just within the relevant local government.

This is of course nothing other than an expression of common sense but is too often forgotten in the wider world of inter regional rivalries.

The formulation of a regional population strategy as a fundamental component in a greater regional development strategy is critical. However in drafting such a document goals and objectives must be set that reflect international, national, state and local realities.

It is also vital that regional population strategies look at population not only in quantifiable terms but also analyses the qualitative situation and future objectives. A population strategy must address not just the issue of growth but also skill sets, gender balance, educational qualifications and of course ageing.

There is no avoiding the issue of ageing as a dominant issue in contemporary and future public policy. Its impact on the nation’s future will be profound. It is encouraging to see the federal government opening a dialogue on participation rates for the elderly – ageing will most likely see renewed debate about what it means to be elderly for it is only reasonable to assume the baby boomer generation, who have so often defined the times, will not slip into old age willingly.

Chris McNeill

## POPULATION SURGE CONCEALS THE IMPACT OF AGEING

*Recent media reports of an immigration fuelled building boom conceals Australia’s major population issue – ageing.*

“Overseas migrants to spark renewed construction boom”, declared the Courier Mail on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2003 – a not unfamiliar headline in the nation’s major metropolitan newspapers in recent months.

Such has been the impact of a significant expansion in Australia’s official migration program in the past few years.

Here in Victoria the state’s growth rate is proudly trumpeted by politicians and commentators as a sure sign of the state’s future prosperity. In many respects we have reason to be a little cocky – after all Melbourne not only outstripped arch rival Sydney in growth rate terms but also outgunned the emerald city in

absolute terms – 52,500 to 42,700 in the twelve months to June 2002 (ABS) – a rare feat.

Healthy net overseas migration figures along with a remarkable turnaround in interstate migration beginning in the mid nineties and continuing through to today underpins Victoria’s population resurgence.

Even regional Victoria looks relatively rosy if taken as a whole. An increase in growth from 0.2% between 1991 and 1996 to 0.9% between 1996 and 2001 suggests regional Victoria is sharing in the state’s growth.

So the population crisis foreshadowed by many as little as a year ago has been averted, right?

Well no, not really – while the net interstate migration figures are great news for Victoria there are doubts about their sustainability in the longer term and although they

represent positive growth for Victoria they come at a cost for several other states.

The underlying issue is and will remain ageing. This phenomenon, as we know, is fuelled by increased life expectancy along with a decline in fertility rates to a level below replacement – it is a long term trend and is apparent in nearly every western nation.

It is already being felt in many areas of regional Victoria due to the movement of younger people out of rural areas to regional cities and to Melbourne itself. In some areas it is compounded by an influx of retirees seeking lifestyle locations along the coast and in hinterland locations.

For many rural areas the pattern of population decline and ageing, which has provided the platform for rural discontent, is likely to accelerate.

In 2001 there were ten local

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government areas (LGA's) in regional Victoria where deaths exceeded births (*DOI – Victoria in Future 2000*). In other words these areas experienced natural decline. They were primarily in the Mallee and Wimmera areas as well as in the far east of the state.

By 2021 it is projected this figure will have increased to 30 LGA's. By then it will be simpler to note the exceptions – Mildura, Swan Hill, Gannawarra (all adjacent to the Murray River), Greater Shepparton, Wodonga, Warrnambool and Moyne and a small cluster of LGA's on the perimeter of the greater Melbourne Metropolitan area (including Ballarat and Geelong).

Another way of highlighting this change is to look at the number of regional LGA's in which the percentage of the population

over 70 exceeds say 15%.

In 2001 there was just one – the Shire of Hindmarsh in the Mallee.

By 2021 the exceptions are expected to be Swan Hill, Greater Shepparton, Wodonga, Moyne, Warrnambool and again a small number adjacent to Melbourne.

In the longer term ageing will impact on metropolitan Melbourne also. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates Victoria will follow Tasmania and South Australia into natural decline in the early 2030's – at that point deaths will outnumber births. If Victoria is still growing it will only be due to immigration but even that is likely to only delay not stop the process of ageing.

So beware the good news

population stories – while they represent good news in the short term and may in time alter future projections they will do so only at the margins – the mathematics of ageing will catch up with us eventually (individually and collectively). The only way to realistically slow the process will be to tackle the issue of fertility rates.

*(Note: This article first appeared in the June edition of Urban Affairs – the Victorian newsletter of the Urban Development Institute of Australia)*

Chris McNeill

## AN EVENING WITH MINISTER RUDDOCK

On the 11<sup>th</sup> June Chris McNeill and David Hawkins represented the Australian Population Institute at an informal gathering in Melbourne with the Minister for Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Phillip Ruddock MP. Titled 'Managing Migration' the evening provided an opportunity for around twenty five people representing organizations connected to the immigration sector.

The Minister briefly commented on the major issues and recent developments in immigration before taking questions from the invited guests.

The detail contained in many of the questions from migration agents and welfare providers specializing in assistance to new migrants revealed the depth of knowledge required in this difficult and often controversial portfolio.

Of interest to Apop members was confirmation by the minister that the federal government intends retaining an official migration program of over 100,000 for the foreseeable future.