

Australian Population Institute Inc.

## **"A Vision of a Greater Australia"**

Populate and Prosper



### **35 Million – A Vision of a Greater Australia**

A bigger Australian population and a sustainable Australia are not mutually exclusive. The constructs of a sound sustainability argument include the sustainability of the environment, economy and social cohesion. The failure of one has an impact on the other and the current public debate should be about the balance of those critical issues and the quality of life of Australians. This argument has both local and global perspectives.

What needs to be understood is why we will have a bigger Australia, the advantages of scale and how we can embrace this growth in a sustainable manner with enough working age people to support those not working.

The projection of an Australian population of 35 million by 2050 is an outcome of assumptions about future fertility rate, net overseas migration and life expectancy. The level of immigration set by government accommodates refugees, family unification, temporary, long-term temporary and skilled migration. This honours our universal and community obligations and provides our economy with enough working age people to support and progress the nation. Sound planning will ensure we will build our national infrastructure, maintain economic prosperity, overcome the burden of an ageing society, take care of the environment and achieve higher sustainability.

We face unprecedented intergenerational issues with an ageing population caused by the baby boom of 1945-1960 and the drop in fertility in the 1960's from an average of 3.6 to 1.7 children per woman. The outcome projected by ABS<sup>i</sup> is the proportion of older Australians aged over 65 will double from 13% to 23% by 2050 potentially doubling pension costs. The IGR(2007)<sup>ii</sup> estimated there are 5 people of working age to support every person aged 65 and over, but there will be only 2.4 by 2047. It also concludes that with less people in the workforce the rate of economic growth will slow. Recognition of this issue by the previous Howard and now Rudd Governments has led to current programs to stimulate the economic conditions for women to have more children, maintain a strong immigration intake particularly of skilled migrants and improved productivity. This is the only way to meet the nation's social obligations as participation of older Australians declines.

This is a time to seize a great opportunity for nation building and long-term improvement of living standards for all Australians. Over the next 40 years, 11m of the 13m people that will build our tiny population from 22m to 35m will derive from immigrants and their Australian born children. Access Economics<sup>iii</sup> figures show benefit to the Federal Budget from the 2007 migrant intake at more than \$500m in year one growing to \$1.3B by year 20 in 2008 prices.

The benefits we enjoy from offering a home to these new Australians and continued population growth provides our capacity to responsibly pay for social and environmental programs that would not otherwise be possible.

Australia is an innovative and progressive nation. Its people expect governments to deliver our aspirations for jobs, safety, wealth creation, physical and social services and national security. Reflecting on the history of infrastructure development and the heavy lifting of previous generations it's no different now. Governments are planning and building new infrastructure in transport, ports, water, hospitals and energy generation. This effort requires more working-age Australians.

Such development is not exclusive of environmental aspirations. We have a rigorous regime of environmental controls and a politically active society ensuring we can only build with consideration to environmental standards and amenity requirements.

From a global perspective the UN predicts the world population will grow from 7 billion in 2010 to 9.1 billion by 2050. Australians have to accept this fact. Where a person lives, consumes, emits and impacts on the planet is of no net consequence to the planet. From a global perspective, the outcome of Australia having higher or lower population growth is insignificant.

Our perceived limitations are water and land which we have available in abundance. The latest long Australian drought created a sense of urgency reminding us of the fragility of our land and all its inhabitants, flora and fauna alike. Technological advances made it possible for desalination to supply as much water as we need and most cities have built or are building substantial plants. The removal of outdated State government subsidies on harvested water has increased its consumer price and public awareness of its value and appropriate use. Recycling and desalination now are part of the solution to the water security we need for growth and the environment. More water infrastructure will be built to supply and distribute water around the nation under increasingly stringent environmental and political constraints.

The good use of land gets blurred in the issues of native habitat protection, ecological footprint, urban planning and a perceived shortage of arable land and water in a vast continent. We are however a major food producing nation and it is imperative we invest further in agricultural technology, stimulate greater worker participation, continue the pursuit of sustainable practices and be more committed to improving important production areas like the Murray Darling system among others.

Australian cities are going to grow larger and taller as we adopt a more sustainable, higher density development as seen elsewhere in great world cities. The average size of households (ABS 2006) is now only 2.6 persons per dwelling with many single person occupancies, hence a variety of dwelling styles is required including apartments and suburban homes. Modern suburban communities are meticulously planned for amenity, employment, community facilities and transport with strict environmental

controls. Regional cities and towns will also come into their own in catering for our population growth.

The ATSE Report 2007<sup>iv</sup> on the Technological Implications of an Australian Population of 30 million by 2050 concluded there are no inherent physical, resource or technological barriers to grow to a population of 30m by 2050. Commitment to long-term planning and orderly provision of infrastructure is however imperative. It also concluded climate change should not be a barrier but Australia must pursue strategies to mitigate and manage the effects of climate change.

Energy generation, consumption and emissions are of great concern to world communities. Australia has abundance of fossil fuels coal and gas, and alternative sources such as uranium, geothermal, solar, wind and tidal. We have great generational capacity. The consumption of these sources and priorities we place on any number of them over time will be a continuing political debate, but we certainly have plenty of options. A bigger Australia will have a negligible proportion of global emissions. Our best impact on the global problem can only be made through investment in the technology for cleaner coal and other energy sources.

The Monash University Social Cohesion Surveys<sup>v</sup> of 2007 and 2009 found Australians are positive and have a sense of belonging, social justice and worth. The report indicates strong positive attitudes to immigration in Australia at a time where we are taking in unprecedented numbers of migrants to assist our shortage of working age people.

The Australian Population Institute remains committed to its Vision of a Greater Australia and Australians will continue to benefit from strong population growth.

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<sup>i</sup> *Australian Social Trends, March 2009*, Australian Bureau of Statistics

<sup>ii</sup> *Intergenerational Report: 2007- Assessing the long-run sustainability of government policies*, Australian Government.

<sup>iii</sup> *Migrants fiscal impact model: 2008 update*, Report by Access Economics for The Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

<sup>iv</sup> *30/50 The Technological Implications of an Australian Population of 30 Million by 2050*; Report of a study for the Scanlon Foundation by the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE), 2007.

<sup>v</sup> *Mapping Social Cohesion - The Scanlon Foundation Surveys Summary Report: 2009* by Professor Andrew Markus.