

Australian Population Institute and Committee for Economic Development of Australia.
Darwin 14 October 2005

Tribute to Larrakia
Administrator's Welcome to Delegates

I keep getting invited to gatherings where I have little or no competence. I was asked to address a conference on Depression, when I have hardly known a negative moment in my life. I was asked to launch a website: I am the bloke who instructed his son to inscribe on his tombstone: Here lies Ted Egan. He knew nothing of computers. I was asked to address the various bodies that control liquor restrictions, and had to admit that I was the fellow who wrote the song; The Bloody Good Drinker of the Northern Territory.

And here I am today, among all of you population experts who can provide me with all sorts of bewildering statistics about fertility rates, the effects of ageing, and worker to population ratios. I feel somewhat out of my depth.

But only somewhat. I have never been afraid of venturing opinions, but only if I think I have something of consequence to offer. There is an important factor, in my present capacity as Administrator that I am required to be "apolitical". If I say anything controversial, criticism comes quickly. Sadly, the criticism is often leveled only on the basis that "He shouldn't make political statements" not "Is he saying anything sensible?" I tend to remind people that I know the parameters of my job, I understand the necessity for the separation of powers, but I feel I have the right to make sociological comment. So here goes with some socio – and hopefully logical comment.

I am 73 years of age, and I have traveled Australia as extensively as anybody I know, usually on a relaxed inquisitive, thoughtful basis. I constantly remind myself and other how blessed we are, living on an island continent in a temperate climate, and enjoying affluence, political stability and a health system that seems to be unparalleled in the world. At the same time there are local, regional, national and international concerns where we must at least get involved, at best take a positive lead.

There is not a great deal we can do to improve the rest of the world (where they seem to have more than their fair share of dills) except to show compassion and generosity to those less fortunate, and provide leadership by example in all things, especially environmental matters. We can, and must create a better Australia, for what is the point of living if we don't leave the country in a better shape for our inheritors than it was at the point of our birth? So, in respect of this conference, we must establish and achieve population goals that are the best for our future. I'll that exact figure to the experts among us. But many other factors will affect your choice of the optimum.

We must measure all our natural resources, and refuse to accept any action that diminishes our present status, while at the same time we must implement action to improve, enhance, and rehabilitate forests, rivers, water storage and reticulation. We must curb, and strictly control the growth of cities. We must bolster the rural regions, but

not to the point of propping up dead enterprises. We must stop subsidising any arid-zone farmers and graziers who shouldn't have been where they are in the first place. Pay them to get out, and help them get a real job. Then rehabilitate the land they and their forefathers stuffed up. The people we label as "battlers" are more often than not idiots. At the same time we should support to the hilt those Australian farmers and graziers who are leading the world in food production techniques, on land capable of being farmed.

We must really take stock of diminishing natural energy resources like fossil fuels, gas, uranium, even coal, because – and let's spell it out in capital letters – **THEY ARE NOT GOING TO BE REPLACED**. If the diminishing factor does not frighten us, the rate of global warming should, and must.

At the same time we must encourage all over Australia the quest, for and use of all sources of replaceable energy, particularly solar power, but including ethanol and methanol. Let's rehabilitate those stuffed farms by growing trees, require no reticulated water, but capable of absorbing carbon dioxide, and suitable for harvesting for methanol.

In a puny but demonstrative way, Nerys and I plan to do a bit towards the above. We have a delightful home in Alice Springs. 100 squares under roof, on a five acre block. When we return to Alice next year, we plan to try and make our entire house, outbuildings, air-conditioning, and the heating of our swimming pool, totally dependent on solar energy. With the roof space we have, and the appropriate climate, who knows it may be possible to generate electricity for sale?

On motor vehicles, I have started to save up in order to trade-in my Toyota diesel 4 wheel drive for a Prius. Why? Because I know that there will be no oil, gas, uranium, or coal in the world in x years time. How many years equals x ? I don't know. But, just as an aside, I wonder if Geoff Dixon and the shareholders of Qantas have worked out their contingencies for the fuelling of Jumbo and bigger jets in the same x years time. Solar panels won't be much help.

At the same time, we need to balance our population numbers to provide productivity incentives in certain areas. I am sold on the notion to industrialise our northern regions. Industrialise on real, environmentally sound terms. Reticulate water. Produce solar electricity in the Gibson, Victoria and Simpson deserts where the sun shines for 350 days per year.

In the north we should encourage suitable crops and horticulture, where appropriate, but only on a responsible, pay for your water basis.

I keep telling my friends that our immigration programs should require as many New Australians as possible to live north of the Tropic of Capricorn for their first five years in their new country. Let me demonstrate that they are grateful, I say. They'll come to love the north, as so many of us do, I say.

My friends keep saying to me, Ted, you can't infringe on people's liberty in that way. And I respond with some stunning, rhetorical reply like: "Who's running the country? What do you think?"

By whatever means, I am still sure we need to get more people into the north. Perhaps we try hefty taxation incentives? I think it's pathetic that we Australians, owners of such vast mineral resources, are happy to accept the role of dumb, passive quarry owners, and sell our irreplaceable mineral stocks – at rates *they* set – to Japan, China, and other countries. We could sell them some lesser quantities, on our terms, and be smart entrepreneurs and ourselves use some of our minerals, most of which are conveniently in the north.

Connect the following places by rail links – Port Hedland to Mt Isa, Melbourne to Broken Hill, Broken Hill to Tennant Creek, and what have you got? Every mainland capital and every major mineral source in Australia is now linked to the existing railhead and international port at Darwin. Think about it: iron ore, silver, lead, zinc, manganese, bauxite, gold, copper, even coal. The markets of Asia are just across the water. Tennant Creek by 2100 becomes a town with population of around 1 million people, all employed in servicing the various industrial projects that are spaced appropriately along the 20 degree parallel of latitude, and additionally maintaining the hub of the electrified national rail service, all energized by the sun.

We have factories to manufacture things like glass, ceramics, bricks, concrete sections, aeroplanes, motor cars – that's *electric* motor cars. We have smelters and armament factories, all state-of-the-art, with wondrous housing for the employees, in smart, sophisticated towns. Everything required for our northern-based defence forces is manufactured locally. Fertiliser plants are established using the demonic byproducts of industrialisation, like sulphur dioxide, to advantage. Ingenious schemes are implemented to provide back-loading to the southern capitals, for we must fill the trains that deliver whitegoods, IT products, crops and other foodstuffs from our fertile southern states, to our less fortunate Asian neighbours.

There is a saying in the grape-growing industry: any water from God is good, water from the tap must be controlled. To that we should add: water from God is free, but every drop from a reticulated source must be paid for. Our biggest single need, and the *raison d'être* of this gathering, is to balance reproduction and immigration factors against the workforce required to create the ideal Australia. From now on, the biggest relevant factor in discussions about population, and the dominant election issue at every level of politics, will be water. We must capture and store it more efficiently. Goyder-type lines must arbitrarily drawn all over Australia to stop wankers insisting that they have the right to farm this fragile land. At the same time we must create and manage effectively more and better National Parks, for tourism will be our biggest earner in our better managed, stable Australia. We must have huge, national pipeline grids to enable water to be sold from the north to the south during summer. We must replace all those disgraceful earthen irrigation channels and bore drains with piping, and charge for every litre supplied to every user. We must rehabilitate our rivers. That says we must put an end to the insanity

of allowing mindless irrigation, and the consequent pollution of our irreplaceable rivers, by chemicals and fertilisers.

It's all relative easy. All it needs is the national will, and the forward planning.