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## **Population policy: could it work in a Neoliberal World?**

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*Abstract*

During the UN Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in September 1994, and subsequently at all follow up meetings generally known as the Hague Forum and Cairo +5, it was agreed that all countries participating would develop a population policy. While many countries in the developing world have completed this task, some developed countries have not. Australia is one of those who have not.

There is no general agreement on what a population policy for Australia would look like. While developing countries are usually concerned with excessive population increase, Australia, together with a number of other developed countries, is tied to the concept of economic growth above all else. Matters of immigration, falling fertility rates cloud the issue even further.

This has meant that neither major political party has addressed the issue adequately. There are staggeringly different estimates of the carrying capacity of Australia's fragile environment. There are some who argue that the concept of "carrying capacity" is not viable. There are some that do not even bring environmental concerns into the concept of a population policy.

This paper will discuss some of these issues. It will particularly focus on Australia's need to at least have a working idea, acceptable to all, of what a population policy should contain and will take into account the global perspective, where with a population expected to increase to at least 10 billion, can some countries, legitimately and morally to be working to increase their populations whilst others are overburdened with people to whom the most basic services are unavailable. Where does resource usage and management fit into this equation?

While this paper will not answer these questions, it is hoped that it will give the basis for some rational debate on the issue of possible approaches. I will suggest that at the very least, the "precautionary principle" should apply to the development of a population policy for a developed, ageing population and that the global situation cannot be ignored.

*Dianne Proctor, Population policy: could it work in a neoliberal world?*

### **Australia – a snapshot**

Australia has one of the highest population growth rates of any OECD country<sup>1</sup>, one of the worst rates of biodiversity loss in the world, and no population policy.

Australia agreed at the 1994 Cairo UN conference on Population and Development, along with other nations, that it would develop a population policy. It has not. Australia also agreed that it would raise its overseas development aid to the UN recommended level of 0.7 per cent of GDP and that 4 per cent of this would be devoted to population issues. It has not.

Australians are not yet fully able to control their own fertility or to maximise their sexual and reproductive health in the way they would like. Many Australian women are having children they have not planned, and around 100,000 surgical abortions are carried out each year. Yet addressing these issues is not a national priority, and rarely makes the headlines – ironically, it is concern about falling fertility and the extension of IVF (in-vitro fertilisation) facilities that gets the column inches and the TV and radio coverage.

The simple fact is that Australia has a high rate of unintended pregnancies, and Australians do not have access to the full range of modern contraceptive methods available in many other comparable countries. For some Australians, contraception is unaffordable, and in remote and rural areas, access to proper family services is limited. The underlying causes of sexual transmitted disease are not being fully addressed, nor are services for their treatment fully available to all Australians.

The reality is that, compared to many other comparable countries, Australia is backward when it comes to population policy issues:

- **backward in making contraception affordable.** For example, New Zealand has committed NZ\$20 million over 3 years to subsidising contraception and contraceptive services to ensure contraception is affordable for New Zealanders on lower incomes.

Research in developed countries shows that for every \$1 governments spend on subsidising contraception, \$10 of government expenditure is saved, through lowered demand for government subsidised surgical abortions, maternity wards and the like. One study in the UK found savings of eleven British pounds for every one pound outlaid. In other words, making contraception free or almost free delivers dramatic net savings in government expenditure, in addition to giving citizens the ability to control their own fertility and thus the direction of their lives.

- **backward in ensuring that the full range of safe, modern contraceptive methods are available to all its citizens.** For instance emergency contraception (the ‘morning after’ pill, which – when taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex - prevents pregnancy) is not widely used in Australia – many women are unaware of this option and thus do not seek it out after unprotected sex, and many doctors are either not offering it to patients or are not fully informed on its application. In remote and rural areas in particular, the fact that emergency contraception cannot legally be sold without a doctor’s prescription means that timely access to it is impractical if doctors are not available nearby or work limited hours. Try getting emergency contraception on a Saturday night in a small country town! By contrast in the UK, the largest chain of pharmacies – Boots – is trialling selling emergency contraception over the counter, without a doctor’s prescription. Why should a woman in Birmingham have better means of preventing an unwanted pregnancy than a woman in Maitland or Bendigo?
- **backward in seeing overseas aid for population work, and overseas development aid generally, as an outstandingly cheap and cost-effective investment** in global ecological sustainability and a less troubled and impoverished world. For example, the Netherlands gives, per person, around four times what Australia gives to population aid.
- **backward in seeing halting population growth as a measure of success** rather than of failure. Bangladesh takes this issue more seriously than Australia. For example, Western Australia’s population growth rates in recent years have often exceeded those of Bangladesh<sup>2</sup>. These high rates of growth, and the environmental decline scientists say they drive, have led a recent WA State of Environment Report to warn that WA should develop a population policy and consider halting its population growth, to

avoid worsening biodiversity loss. Yet the WA Government has traditionally seen its high population growth rates as a measure of its success, not a reason for concern.

#### Understanding our continent and our 60,000 year history

At the heart of some of this backwardness is a failure by Australian governments over 210 years to understand the nature of its continent, and a tendency to cling to an outdated colonialist notion of what constitutes ‘success’ as a nation – unlimited expansion, and a quest to colonise and transform every corner of the continent.

The University of California’s Professor Jared Diamond has described our continent as being on the absolute outer limits of land capable of habitation by humans<sup>3</sup>, in view of its low-nutrient land mass, surrounded by low-nutrient oceans, and dominated by El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) weather systems which make its rainfall not only low but highly variable.

Indeed, the extraordinary achievement of indigenous Australians in learning how to make a living on this marginal continent, and of sustaining that for nearly 60,000 years, is arguably the greatest achievement in Australia’s history, and one inadequately acknowledged in modern Australia.

By contrast, in the last 210 years Australia has destroyed much of this continent’s natural values – and along with them, the spiritual, cultural and practical life-support connections which those natural ecosystems had provided to Aboriginal nations over the preceding 60,000 years.

The extent of this loss, and the role which population growth has played in driving that loss, led the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (under the then chairmanship of Dr Lowitja O’Donoghue), to argue in 1994 in its submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies’ inquiry into Australia’s population carrying capacity (the Jones inquiry), that:

*For the last 200 years ... we have had to watch, in dismay and despair, the havoc wreaked on our precious and fragile land in the name of development and progress. The Standing Committee’s reference scenario for the year 2045 has only worse yet to come*

*– a population almost doubled in size, taking over more and more of the best land for housing, suffering greater pollution and congestion and natural resources under increased threat of depletion and degradation. Such a prospect must be alarming to all Australians. For indigenous Australians it is doubly so because the damage that will inevitably be caused to the land threatens our culture and our very being.*

### **Religious conservatism**

Other aspects of our backwardness are, I think, driven by an unwillingness to confront squarely the ongoing attempts by conservative religious elements to constrain the free choice of Australians when it comes to matters of gender equity, sexual orientation, and control and healthy enjoyment of their own sexuality and their family lives.

By contrast, New Zealand for instance has been much less willing than Australia to subjugate the needs and aspirations of New Zealanders to minority conservative views. There is a highly undemocratic aspect to the way in which Australian governments remain unwilling to chart any course that would attract strong criticism from such quarters, and it is about time ordinary Australians were told more about this and began to demand more courageous action from their governments.

Australia's refusal to provide any overseas aid for emergency contraception - even for women who are the victims of systematic war-rape in conflict zones - is another example of how this conservatism and over-sensitivity to minority views plays out in practice.

Another is the fact that Australian women seeking termination of pregnancy have access only to the most invasive form – surgical abortion – and not to the less invasive choice of using RU-486 to secure a non-surgical termination, which overseas experience shows some women prefer and which also reduces costs to governments. Non-surgical abortions using RU-486 are available in the UK and many other countries across Europe, but not here. (Recently, the US joined this group – but only time and politics will tell if sales of RU-486 actually go ahead.)

## Why no population policy?

In 1994, the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies recommended – in its final report on Australia’s population carrying capacity, titled “*One nation – two ecologies*” – that responsibility for population policy be given to the Prime Minister’s Department, to separate it from immigration policy which would remain with the Immigration portfolio.

The Government has chosen not to do this, and population policy rests - de facto - with the Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, who has repeatedly says that Australia should not develop a population policy. In round-table meetings, Minister Ruddock has said that Cabinet opposes the idea of a population policy because it wishes to retain the flexibility to make short-term decisions.

But is short-term thinking in Australia’s interests?

Do we, as a high-nutrient species – the large *Homo sapiens* brain requiring vast amounts of energy to power it, in sharp contrast to the mainly low-nutrient species which evolved in response to this continent’s geological and climatic limitations – have the *right* to think short-term?

With global population size likely to almost double before it peaks – growing from today’s 6 billion to at least 10 and probably 11 billion - does *any* nation have the right to think short-term where population policy is concerned?

If affluent nations like Australia were to fully meet their Cairo commitments, we would have a chance of having world population peak at 9 billion. If things go badly, and wealthy countries do not come to the party, we could peak as high as 12 billion. We are talking about a potential difference of 3 billion – half of today’s 6 billion – that is in the power of countries like Australia to influence. Why would any nation, understanding what is at stake, not fully commit to its Cairo promises?

## **Australia's future population size**

Of Australia's future population increase, Minister Ruddock has repeatedly said that our population will likely stabilise at around 23 to 24 million (more recently he has mentioned 25 million), and that such a prospect would not be alarming to most Australians.

However unless our Net Overseas Migration (NOM) levels or our Total Fertility Rates (TFR) go into freefall – and the Government is taking no steps to achieve either - we will not in fact stabilise at 23 or 24 million or anything like it.

The latest population projections from the Australian Bureau of Statistics<sup>4</sup> show that on present settings – Net Overseas Migration of over 100,000 (111,200 for 1999<sup>5</sup>) and a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 1.74 children per woman – Australia's population in 2101 would be close to 31 million, or nearly three Sydneys larger than today's 19 million, and still growing.

Of likely future trends in TFR, ABS acknowledges that TFR could fall to 1.6, but says (page 46) that “Despite the small falls in the 1990s, it is reasonable to assume that the TFR could stabilise in the 1.7 to 1.8 range, say 1.75”.

In other words, while a fall in TFR is possible, it would be unwise – and contrary to the precautionary principle – to assume that it is inevitable. For example, if Governments were to introduce more family-friendly policies – as ANU (Australian National University) demographer Professor Peter McDonald and others are urging – TFR may not fall, and could even rise.

There is much evidence from European countries with very low TFR that this is NOT the choice of the couples concerned, but is rather forced on couples by economic necessity. This flies in the face of a civilised society such as Australia, which purports to be allowing couples to choose their family size.

It is also important to remember that births still outnumber deaths in Australia by almost 2 to 1, and will continue to outnumber deaths for another 30 years, boosting Australia's population by around 2.5 million over that time, even if we had zero net migration for the whole 30 years.

As for Net Overseas Migration, Minister Ruddock argues that it will average around 70,000 despite the fact that it has been running at around 100,000 for some time. Professor Graeme Hugo has argued<sup>6</sup> that in fact it will average around 100,000, based on current and likely future trends and Government policy settings – a figure that seems more realistic.

### **Our immigration intake – who comes, and could it be cut?**

Australia's permanent arrivals are dominated by those coming from the UK and New Zealand. Refugee and other humanitarian arrivals account for only a small percentage (around 11 per cent) of Australia's annual Net Overseas Migration.

Net long-term movements (those who come – or go - for a year or more but not permanently) now make up well over 40 per cent of Australia's Net Overseas Migration and have done for some years. Minister Ruddock has signalled his willingness to allow unlimited increase in some (non-humanitarian) components of long-term arrivals, describing those numbers as 'demand driven' – in other words, Australia will take all it can get.

Australia's overseas movements program is not, therefore, predominantly based on humanitarian considerations. It is based (in the Government's assessment) largely on attracting to Australia people who can bring either wealth or skills or both.

Australia's Net Overseas Migration could be cut substantially without in any way reducing our humanitarian effort. Indeed we could even boost our refugee intake and still make deep cuts in net migration.

### **Does population size affect environmental outcomes?**

Several Government spokespersons have repeatedly claimed that most of Australia's environmental damage was done long ago, when Australia's population was small – implying that there is no causal nexus between population size and environmental damage.

However research does not bear this out. For example clearance of remnant native vegetation – the leading cause of biodiversity loss on land – has soared as our population has grown. See

for instance Environment Australia's Biodiversity Unit, in its 1995 report "*Native Vegetation Clearance, Habitat Loss and Biodiversity Decline*"<sup>7</sup>.

Australia's Environment Minister, Senator Hill, in a major policy statement ("Investing in Our Natural Heritage"<sup>8</sup>), has rightly described biodiversity as underlying all environmental issues.

"*Australia: State of the Environment 1996*" has identified biodiversity loss as probably Australia's most serious environmental problem, and has warned that our population growth is a major driver of that loss.

I would argue that no nation can claim to have achieved ecological sustainability if it has not halted biodiversity loss. By that I mean that a nation whose population's activities are driving (directly or indirectly) loss of biodiversity anywhere on Earth cannot, by definition, claim to be ecologically sustainable.

Every Australian government has signed an agreement committing them to "Ecologically Sustainable Development". Yet Australia has no population policy, nor any plan to develop one.

Griffith University's Professor Ian Lowe, who (as Chair of the State of the Environment Advisory Council) oversaw the preparation of Australia's first national state of the environment report, put the causal nexus between population size and sustainability this way:

*"There is no prospect – even in principle – of a sustainable pattern of development unless we devise a socially acceptable way of stabilising the human population"*<sup>9</sup>.

### **Economic growth without population growth**

The failure to distinguish, in Australia, between growth in the total size of the Australian economy and growth in economic activity *per person* has led to unnecessary confusion over whether continued population growth would be good or bad for the economic welfare of Australians.

Economist and former TNT chief, David Mortimer, in his report “*Going for Growth*”<sup>10</sup> to the Federal Government slammed Australia for failing to make this distinction and for pursuing growth in aggregate economic activity rather than *per capita* economic activity, when it is the latter that counts if one is trying to reduce unemployment and generally enhance the economic prospects of Australians.

Indeed he made clear that growth in the *total* size of the economy – driven by population growth – is illusory. He recommended that Australia set itself the goal of boosting *per capita* economic activity, and population growth was nowhere to be seen in his recommendations as to how to achieve that.

Associate Professor Frank Stilwell of Sydney University’s Economics Department goes further, arguing<sup>11</sup> that by growing its population, Australia is actually eroding its international comparative advantage by destroying the very things that can give Australia an edge in world markets. He argues that halting population growth is in fact our best way forward, economically.

Senator Nick Minchin, the federal Minister for Industry Science and Resources and himself an economist, has repeatedly pointed out that population growth does not of itself deliver economic benefits, and that “unless the economy is growing faster than our population, we’re all going backwards”. He has warned Australian business not to expect the Government to deliver to them an endlessly expanding domestic market through population growth, urging business to turn instead to exporting if they want access to a growing market.

### **Population ageing**

Population ageing is a necessary but temporary transition that all nations must make to a stable population of balanced age structure

Australia’s population is ageing later, and more slowly, than many nations (eg in Europe, and China). Our situation is thus much easier to handle and to plan for.

The Economic Planning Advisory Council, the National Commission of Audit, and the Productivity Commission have all said that there is no reason to panic regarding the economic

consequences of Australia's population ageing, and have recommended a raft of sensible policies (NOT including boosting migration or population size) to secure a 'soft landing' with no adverse consequences and many benefits.

Population ageing is no barrier to development of an economically, ecologically and socially sustainable population policy.

### **Building a population policy**

So, if we accept that –

- Australia's population is growing strongly, and could well grow by the equivalent of another three Sydneys before it peaks
- population size is a key driver of biodiversity, and biodiversity loss is Australia's most serious environmental problem
- population ageing is inevitable and can be planned for without population growth
- Australia is not meeting its international promises on the level of its population aid
- Australia is failing to provide Australians with affordable, modern means of controlling their own fertility and maximizing their sexual and reproductive health

- how, then might we build a population policy that meets our domestic and international aspirations and is ethically supportable?

I suggest, as a starting point, the following.

First, we must as a society define the *goals* of a population policy – what actual outcomes do we want it to achieve?

Second, we must devise *strategies* to achieve those outcomes.

And third, we need to set *performance indicators* by which we can judge whether or not our population policy is actually delivering on our goals.

### **Goals of a population policy**

If we combine what we know about the aspirations of Australians at large – and especially of young Australians, whose aspirations must be given particular weight not only to ensure intergenerational equity but also because they represent the fore front of future thinking in society at large – with what we know Australia has undertaken to the international community that it will do, the following goals emerge fairly naturally.

The ideal population policy for Australia will be one which delivers the following outcomes, in the shortest time frame possible –

- **complete cessation of biodiversity loss** arising directly or indirectly from the activities of the total Australian population. By ‘total population’ I mean all persons in Australia at any given moment, including not only permanent residents but those here for a long-term visit or a short-term stay. By ‘biodiversity loss’ I mean loss of biodiversity anywhere on Earth, in terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems not only on and around this continent but overseas. It is important to remember that, as a typical Aussie, my impact has never been confined to Australia, and that with expansion of world trade my impact on overseas ecosystems will also expand further.
- **intergeneration equity within Australia.** By that I mean that each generation will limit its activities to ensure that future generations will enjoy no less a per capita share of those things which matter most to Australians than did the preceding generations. Why should an Australian in year 2500 be expected to put up with less natural beauty, less access to unspoiled beaches and woodlands, less enjoyment in the wild of Australian flora and fauna, than our generation – simply because our generation chooses to expand its population, its per capita resource consumption, or both?
- **dramatically improved global equity.** Today, the average Australian appropriates, directly or indirectly, nearly 40 times more resources in his or her lifetime than the

average person in Bangladesh<sup>12</sup>. Australia (and other high consuming nations) must shrink its per capita use of global (and national) resources dramatically, if we are to achieve global equity, yet our per capita resource use is rising on many key indicators. Another crucial aspect of global equity is equal access to reproductive and sexual health and the ability to control one's own fertility – a matter on which there is enormous inequity at present. Many women around the world today do not have access to safe, effective means of choosing the size of their families and many are so disempowered by their societies or their male partners that they are not free to use such means even were they available. Gender equity and the empowerment of women and girls is thus a key element of global equity, and one which can and will play a vital role in having global population peak at the lowest possible level.

- **a secure economic future for Australians**, in which all Australians have the power to control their own destiny and in which the gaps between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' are dramatically reduced. A secure economic future for Australians will also be one in which Australians are able – and willing – to give through their taxes a generous amount towards overseas development aid - including aid designed to ensure that all women and girls have access to education, empowerment, sexual and reproductive health, and the ability to control their own fertility, and that these rights are respected and welcomed by their menfolk and their society.
- **minimizing unintended pregnancies and maximizing sexual and reproductive health** for all Australians, regardless of their location, circumstances, age, gender or sexual orientation.

### **Strategies to achieve the goals**

The following strategies, while by no means exhaustive, would be an excellent starting point to get us moving towards these goals:

- first, aim to have Australia's total population (comprising visitors as well as residents) peak at the lowest possible level - which is probably around 21 or 22 million – by reducing our Net Overseas Migration (but not our refugee intake) and by making contraception free to minimize unintended pregnancies. The level of NOM could be

linked to the level of natural increase in any given year, so that as natural increase declines and eventually goes into the negative, we are able to increase our NOM – especially our intake of those fleeing persecution and ecological disaster. This will allow us to respond more generously to the worsening global situation as world population approaches its peak, which will be a time of exceptionally deep challenge for all nations, with global resources stretched to the limit and intensifying conflict over shrinking supplies of water and arable land.

- second, invest far more heavily in the education and training of Australians, to ensure that skills shortages do not require us to use immigration to meet our skills needs.
- third, dramatically expand incentives for Australian business to invest in research and development, to ensure that we no longer feel compelled to turn to immigrants as a major source of business capital.
- fourth, as indicated above, invest deeply in the sexual and reproductive health and happiness of every Australian including by making contraception free to every Australian, by ensuring that the widest possible range of safe, effective, modern contraceptives and abortion methods are available to every Australian no matter what their circumstances, and by giving every Australian access to the best possible education and information on these issues, starting in primary school . The result would be –
  - every child a wanted child
  - lower long-term health costs, and a healthier population
  - greater ability of ordinary Australians to control their own destiny, including to plan child-bearing around the need to invest deeply in their own education and training and to maximize their employability and career potential. Research by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (eg “*Fertility in Australia*”) shows a correlation in Australia between smaller family size and higher attainment on education, training, employment and income levels. While one cannot be certain which is chicken and egg here, it seems reasonable to assume that – all other things being equal – women and men who have children later, and have fewer children overall, are more able to invest in their education and

career-building, and thus to provide themselves and their children with greater financial security. This, in turn, is likely to mean lower costs to government, through reduced reliance on welfare.

- fifth, as recommended by the Economic Planning Advisory Commission and many subsequent economic bodies and inquiries, restructure our health spending by cutting the massive amount that is currently spent at the end of life to extend life by a small amount through heroic, high-tech, high-cost measures – measures that surveys of older Australians show most do not want, preferring instead basic care – and reinvesting those funds in preventative measures to ensure whole-of-life health for all Australians, including by encouraging all Australians to lead healthier, stronger, more active lives. The result will be a population that is more able – despite population ageing – to maintain its health, independence and quality of life into its 70s and 80s, and to continue to contribute to society and the economy through paid and unpaid work until much later than is now the case. This will deliver massive economic benefits, but also huge societal and intellectual benefits by allowing older Australians to contribute fully in the life of the nation.
- sixth, increase Australia’s overseas development aid to at least 0.7 per cent of GDP, ensure that population-related aid makes up at least 4.0 per cent per cent of the ODA budget, and remove the current bans on applying that aid to emergency contraception and abortion. Such aid will include aid designed to ensure that all women and girls have access to education, empowerment, sexual and reproductive health, and the ability to control their own fertility, and that these rights are respected and welcomed by their menfolk and their society.
- finally, use pricing signals to shrink Australia’s per capita consumption of key resources. By pricing many resources at levels that do not reflect either their ecological value to other species or their true scarcity, Australia is destroying irreplaceable biological capital both here and offshore and worsening global inequity by having Australians use more than their fair ‘share’ of global resources. For example, by pricing water too cheaply, we have caused vast biodiversity loss in our freshwater ecosystems as water is drawn out of them for human use, and also

biodiversity loss in our coastal marine ecosystems as run-off from the land takes nutrients and silt into marine ecosystems.

**Complementing such measures, Australia should also –**

- support fair, rather than free, trade policies, to ensure that the ability of global capital to exploit the natural resources of any nation is restrained by the over-riding need to conserve both biodiversity and the resources upon which the nation's own people depend for their future existence.
- take a lead in developing – and assisting other nations to develop – less environmentally damaging technologies and world-class environmental education
- actively support, and contribute to, any international efforts aimed at halting the societal and environmental deterioration that drives people to become political, ecological or economic refugees. Most refugees would prefer not to leave the land of their birth. Any investment by Australia in reducing the need for them to do so is an investment in stemming the ever-increasing number of refugees – currently estimated at over 23 million – and thus easing the pressure on all nations to take ever increasing numbers of refugees

### **Performance indicators**

How will we know if our population policy strategies are working? Let me suggest the following performance indicators as the basis for debate.

I would score Australia 10 out of 10 on population policy if and when it has achieved the following concrete and measurable outcomes –

- complete cessation of biodiversity loss in Australia, for example a complete and permanent halt to clearance of remnant native vegetation on land, and restoration to all freshwater ecosystems of sufficient water flows to guarantee the future health and further evolution of all their remaining constituent species.
- the lowest unintended pregnancy rate in the world, regardless of which part of Australia one lives in or one's circumstances.
- the highest rate of sexual and reproductive health in the world, regardless of which part of Australia one lives in or one's circumstances.
- the highest contribution per person to population-related overseas aid of any country in the world, with no exemptions for emergency contraception and safe abortion services. That level will be at least the level recommended by the UN.

You will notice that I have not set achievement of a particular population target as a performance indicator. That is because limiting one's population size is not a goal in itself – it is merely a means to an end.

We could debate all day the merits of any particular population target.

What I invite you to do instead is to think about the *outcomes* you want – the tangible, measurable goals that Australia should set for a population policy.

Once we have agreed as a nation on the goals, formulation of the strategies can begin.

**In conclusion**

The process of setting long-term national goals must involve all levels of the Australian community – not just so-called ‘experts’ – because unless those goals are strongly in synch with the aspirations of ordinary Australians, and especially younger Australians, they will not receive widespread electoral support and no major political party will see mileage in pursuing them.

Can we make the development of a truly enlightened and truly long-term population policy one of the top 10 ‘vote switcher’ issues in Australia?

I believe the answer is ‘yes’, but only if we fully understand the kind of future that Australians long for.

Let me finish by quoting from the Australian Science, Technology and Engineering Council’s study<sup>13</sup> of the views of 15 to 24 year-olds, in which young Australians were asked to describe in detail the future they aspired to (both globally and domestically) and the future they believed they would inherit.

Of the future they wanted, young Australians were unequivocal – it must first and foremost be environmentally sustainable, and it must be far more equitable and cooperative, with a reduction in the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’. The future they expected to face was, however, just the opposite.

Asked about population in this context, they were equally unequivocal: they wanted “A population that stays constant or decreases, to minimize harmful environmental consequences”.

The fact that neither major political party has come to grips with the electoral implications of these aspirations says something about their unwillingness to fully engage with younger voters and soon-to-be-voters.

This must change, if Australia is to develop a population policy which commands the respect and endorsement of the generations that will carry it to fruition.

*Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> Of the 29 OECD countries, only Turkey and Mexico have higher population growth rates than Australia. *Source*: OECD Website, and UNFPA's 'the State of the World Population 2000'.

<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh 1.7 per cent, WA 1.85 per cent. *Sources*: Re Bangladesh - average population growth rate for period 1995-2000, according to United Nations Population Fund's *The State of World Population 2000*, released 20 September 2000, page 71. Re WA, population growth rate for 1996-1997, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Australian Demographic Statistics December Quarter*, released 8 June 2000, page 13.

<sup>3</sup> Keynote address to ANZAAS (Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science) conference in Canberra, October 1996. Professor Diamond is Professor of Physiology at the University of California. His books include *Guns, Germs and Steel* and *The Third Chimpanzee*.

<sup>4</sup> *Population Projections, Australia, 1999 to 2101*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, released 17 August 2000, ABS Catalogue No. 3222.0. See Series I projection eg page 5. Series I is based on 110,000 NOM and 1.75 TFR.

<sup>5</sup> Preliminary Net Overseas Migration for year ended 31 December 1999, as reported in ABS' *Australian Demographic Statistics, December Quarter 1999* (ABS Cat. No. 3101.0), released by ABS on 8 June 2000. Preliminary Net Overseas Migration figures include an estimate for category jumping (the net effect of changes in people's travel intentions). Such estimates are subject to revision, which can result in final Net Overseas Migration figures being different from preliminary Net Overseas Migration figures. *Postscript*: On 14 December 2000, ABS released its *Australian Demographic Statistics, June Quarter 2000*, which reported that preliminary Net Overseas Migration for year ended 30 June 2000 was 99,100.

<sup>6</sup> Oral statement at expert workshop on population/demography as part of a series of expert workshops in Canberra in 2000 for work undertaken by CSIRO's Resource Futures program for the Immigration Department on the Australian Stocks and Flows Framework project.

<sup>7</sup> Biodiversity series, Paper No. 6

<sup>8</sup> 20 August 1996, page 5 (AGPS)

<sup>9</sup> Keynote address 30 August 1997 to AESP (Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population Inc.) national conference, Sydney

<sup>10</sup> Report to the Department of Industry Science and Technology

<sup>11</sup> Address 30 August 1997 to AESP (Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population Inc.) national conference, Sydney

<sup>12</sup> Per capita energy consumption is generally considered to be a good guide to overall resource consumption. When factored by life expectancy, a comparison of lifetime resource consumption can be made. The United Nations Population Fund's *The State of World Population 2000* shows as follows:

- per capita energy consumption (sourced from World Bank 1999), expressed as annual per capita consumption of commercial primary energy in kilograms of oil equivalent per capita, is 197 for Bangladesh and 5,494 for Australia (see pages 71-72)
- life expectancy is around 58 years for Bangladesh and around 78 years for Australia (see pages 68-69).

To estimate lifetime resource consumption, compare (197 X 58) for Bangladesh with (5,494 X 78) for Australia. Australia's lifetime resource consumption is thus estimated as 37.5 times that of Bangladesh.

<sup>13</sup> *Having Our Say about the Future*, January 1996 (AGPS Catalogue No. 95 14139)