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The Borrie Lecture

Emeritus Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki AO CBE FASSA

The Borrie Legacy: a foundation for an Australian Population
Policy

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Jerzy Zubrzycki, The Borrie Legacy: a foundation for an Australian Population Policy

The organizers of the tenth biannual conference of the Australian Population Association decided to make the life-long work and legacy of the Founder and Patron of the Association the theme of the Borrie Lecturer. Moreover, in the year of Professor Borrie's death, they resolved to invite as the lecturer one of Borrie's close associates.

I am honoured to speak today on Borrie's work and legacy with special reference to population policy in the 21st century. The task is truly daunting because of the immense range of Borrie's published work and of his activities in the academe, in public life and on the international scene. For this reason I shall select only those aspects of Borrie's legacy which, from my professional perspective and from the experience of my long association with Borrie, I can judge to be critical in the debate on population policy which is gathering momentum in Australia.

My association with Professor Borrie— or Mick as we knew him— started in 1955 when he came to the London School of Economics to hold interviews with candidates for the position of Research Fellow in the Department of Demography in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University in Canberra. A few months later I and my family sailed from Tilbury and in January 1956 Borrie met us at the railway station in Canberra, population 25,000!

The scholar who recommended me for appointment at the ANU was David Victor Glass, Professor of Sociology and Secretary of the Population Investigation Committee at the London School of Economics (LSE). As a graduate student I had studied under Glass and his colleague, Eugene Grebenik. To this day I owe a debt of gratitude to Glass, a debt also acknowledged by Borrie in the posthumous tribute published in the Proceedings of the British Academy. Glass was one of a handful of social scientists elevated to membership of the British Academy. He was also Fellow of the Royal Society, an even rarer honour.

Borrie's style of work — concentration on historical and sociological aspects of the field of population studies — was modelled on Glass who approached demographic phenomena from the standpoint of their role in improving understanding of the operation of complex societies. As Borrie put it in his tribute: “[Glass] did not set out to test any grand theory or even middle range theory, but was concerned to measure, record and explain. He also set down his findings in immaculate prose, with a neat balance of illustrative material and with every significant fact fully documented.”

Long before writing *Population Trends and Policies*, Borrie had read Glass' *Population Movements and Policies in Europe* (1940). It was in this seminal study that Glass explained through historical analysis how, in the 1930s, reproduction rates in Britain and Western Europe declined to below replacement level. It was in this book that Glass noted the trend which the American scholar Kingsley Davis, writing in 1945 in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, labelled the “theory of demographic transition”.

As a holder of one of the first, if not the first ANU Social Science Research Fellowships, Borrie spent the Northern academic year 1947-48 working at the LSE. There he got to know the group of brilliant students of population whom the then Director of the School, Alexander Carr Saunders, assembled in the Population Investigation Committee. Besides Glass, then Reader in Demography, those working on the data assembled by the Royal Commission on Population and the Family Census included Grebenik, R R Kuczynski, and Enid Charles, whose career had begun in the 1930s in the then Research Department of Social Biology.

The mention of Enid Charles and Borrie's brief acquaintance with her has special significance to Mick's subsequent work on demographic transition which I judge to be his major contribution to population studies in Australia. I can explain how this came about by digressing on my own experience.

The graduate students attached to Glass' Population Committee were a strange group of men and women, mostly ex-service people, and usually referred to as mature age students. We were supposed to present Glass with reports on progress of our theses but also to contribute research papers based on re-analysis of published monographic material. By some strange quirk of fate, my assignment was to evaluate the article that Enid Charles published in 1937 in the journal *Economica* titled "The Changing Structure of the Family in Australia"! This was my first exposure to Australian population data some five years before I got to the country.

Charles analysed Australian census statistics as well as data culled from the annual *Demography Bulletin* to trace the trend in decreasing fertility over a 25 year period: 1909 to 1933.

To this day I share Borrie's judgment that Enid Charles' article was a milestone in the analysis of the dynamics of declining fertility in industrialised countries. Demographers wanted to know how far the fall had been accompanied by a reduction in the number of large families and to what extent it entailed an increase in the number of women who postponed births or had no children. But the existing system of birth registration in Great Britain did not allow measurement of spacing of children in the family. Charles selected Australia as the one country whose unique statistical system was capable of providing the data that enabled her to study the size of families from year to year by giving records of births by age of mother and order of birth of child.

In doing that she questioned the utility of the gross reproduction rate as an indication of demographic trend and highlighted the excellence of the Australian vital statistics published in the annual *Demography Bulletin* in conjunction with the Population Census. No comparable historical statistics could be found in other developed countries — a point frequently underscored by Borrie. As Ching Choi later recorded, "Borrie was a strong supporter of the Census; he considered it a national treasure, the most comprehensive, continuous source of information which newer sources can complement but never replace." And for the benefit of the younger generation of Australian demographers I am obliged to note that Enid Charles' research was quickly followed by Peter Karmel in a paper published in *The Economic Record* of June 1944 titled "Fertility and Marriages — Australia 1933-42". Karmel was the first scholar in Australia to demonstrate that the rise in the crude birth rate and the gross reproduction role in the 1930s obscured decline in inherent fertility. Like Enid Charles, he used annual vital statistics published in the *Demography Bulletin* in order to show a steady decline in what he called the Index of Current Marriage and Fertility.

I make no apology for recounting for the benefit of this young audience the origin of Borrie's preoccupation with the dynamics and consequences of the historical trend in declining fertility. This will enable me to concentrate later on what I believe is his legacy, namely his interpretation of the final stage of demographic transition, his belief in what he called the evolution of the unique human being, and the policy implication of these trends. But first one more personal, and I trust relevant, recollection of Mick Borrie.

I saw Mick for the last time in the middle of December 1999, just two weeks before his death on New Year's Day, 2000. He had been confined to a nursing home in Canberra for the previous several months. Blind and frail, he was unhappy and confused. I would normally visit Mick on Tuesday, the day when Alice, herself extremely frail, was not able to visit her husband. The hour before lunch was the best time to see Mick as he was least likely to suffer from confusion and loss of memory. He was glad to receive visits from his friends and conversation invariably turned to the

memories of the past and only rarely on current events. Demography was the topic on which he could still speak with a remarkable degree of lucidity which virtually vanished as the day wore

On this occasion I told Mick about the Cunningham Lecture that Jack Caldwell gave at the annual meeting of the Academy of Social Sciences. Caldwell's topic, "Pushing back the frontiers of death" was the subject on which he and his wife, Pat, had worked for a quarter of a century, namely the theory and practice of health transitions, mainly in developing countries. But in his introductory comments he touched on Australia's record in pushing back the frontiers of death — the progressive increase in life expectancy which at the beginning of the 20th century was only matched by one other country — Sweden.

Mick listened carefully to my report on Caldwell's lecture and suddenly his face lit up and, in one of those fleeting moments of alertness, he began to talk about his own work, the work of his scholarly life, on the growth and control of population in a comparative and historical perspective. With unexpected clarity of expression he recalled the contribution of Australian scholars who worked on mortality statistics and longevity — the mathematician M B Pell who published life tables in the 1860s, C H Wickens, the Commonwealth Statistician in the 1920s and, in his own lifetime, H O Lancaster, as well as his close collaborators, Lado Ruzicka and Chris Young.

This flood of brilliance did not last long. After a while he appeared extremely tired and I knew that this was the time to leave. As I stood up to embrace him, he murmured something about "longevity" and added "Catherine and her family will be here for Christmas". He rose from his chair to follow me but was gently restricted by the nurse who kept a watchful eye on him and the other dementia patients.

Mick died two weeks later in the early hours of New Year's Day 2000.

There is something symbolic about that date. Mick's life spanned most of the 20th century, his work spanned all of Australia's population history with special reference to the post-Federation period. His population projections -- he always avoided the word 'prediction' — looked to the 21st century. The rich canvas of history inspired his writings in the peopling of Australia and his native New Zealand. His legacy resides not only in the vast record of publication but also in the influence he had on his brilliant students, now occupying chairs of demography on the six continents.

Part of Mick's legacy is his pioneering effort to establish population studies as a discipline in Australia. As two of his students and successors, Jack Caldwell and Gavin Jones, put it in the book *The Founding of Australian Demography*: "Mick's genius for institution building led to the establishment of a larger demographic presence at the ANU." I should add that Mick exhibited the same genius in the establishment of the Department of Sociology in the Research School of Social Sciences (1962), in presiding over the foundation of the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand (1963) and in establishing in 1964 an MA Program in Sociology which subsequently (1970) became the Department of Sociology in the Faculty of Arts of the Australian National University.

I now come to the central point of this lecture: Professor Borrie's major preoccupation and legacy in his work on population trends encompassed in what Kingsley Davis somewhat pretentiously called 'the theory of demographic transition'. The theory assumes that the first stage of demographic development in pre-industrial societies is characterized by the near balance of high rates of birth and death. Consequently the rate of growth in such societies is slow and subject to catastrophic events such as the Black Death. In the second stage of transition under the impact of modernization, death rates begin to fall with improvements in nutrition, Sanitation and food distribution. Since the birth rate remains high relative to the declining death rate, there is a rapid

increase in the size of the population. Many developing countries today are in this stage of demographic development.

In the third stage, the final phase of transition, changes in social attitudes, the introduction of cheap forms of contraception and increases in life expectancy combine to create social pressures for smaller families and a reduction in fertility. The process of transition is completed through the return of low growth rates.

Borrie was somewhat sceptical about the use of the word ‘theory’ to describe the historical process of transition: “It is not so much a theory in the sense that it has identified crucial variables in a manner that gives precise understanding of the nature of demographic processes in all places at all times, as an attempt to provide a generalised explanation of the historical experience of Western countries which have moved from the phase of high fertility and high mortality, to low fertility and low mortality” (*The Growth and Control of World Population*, 1970, p. 22). His own research in historical demography convinced him to place more emphasis on cultural factors such as marriage practices and family structure rather than simple technological explanations — a deterministic explanation — of population growth.

Time and time again he pointed to the cases of the United States, France and Australia where the birth rate showed a declining trend long before and not after the onset of industrialization and urbanization. As a generalized model of demographic transition the theory was not heuristically adequate to the task of explaining the complexity of individual variables occurring at any one time in the structure of the societies. He put it bluntly in his last book:

Whether a trend in one or more variables is termed a “transition” or not is substantially a semantic matter; the view expressed here is that there were transitions of individual variables within transitions involving multiple variables, and that the factors bringing about those “transitions” have to be related to the structure of the societies at the time of their occurrence — sociological, economic, educational, political, and so on. In other words there are many different paths by which societies are moving towards common goals, and for most societies now the ultimate ambition is lower mortality and increased longevity, better health and living standards, as well as effective control over fertility. The ultimate and unassailable goal is the continuation of, and even further extension of longevity. (*The European Peopling of Australasia*, p.340)

As an example of Borrie’s stress on the cultural factor in population transition, it might be worth recalling that the NSW Royal Commission which set out to examine the reasons for the decline of the birth rate concluded in 1904 that it was due to the “selfishness of women”.

At the same time, but in a less moralistic mood, the NSW Statistician, Timothy Coghlan, viewed with equal alarm the declining trend in rates of natural increase in his own State and in Victoria and concluded that in a young country such an experience was “novel and astonishing”. He went on: “[l]arge as is the area of the Australian continent, it is impossible that the people will ever become great under the conditions affecting the increase of population which now obtain.”

Borrie was fond of quoting the NSW Royal Commission in his oft repeated comments on the population debate around the time of Federation. He returned to this theme in the Report of the National Population Inquiry published in two instalments, *Population and Australia*, 1975 (2 vols) and *Population and Australia: Recent Demographic Trends and their Implications*, 1977. This wide ranging inquiry which he conducted over a period of six years represented a climax of Borrie’s lifelong study of population change in Australia and its implications for social policy at all levels of society. In terms of excellence of analytical skills, it is at least as good, if not technically more advanced, than the work of Timothy Coghlan, C H Wickens and George Knibbs, to mention some

of the leading students of population in Australia of the earlier period. But in terms of the urgency of the issues the Inquiry covered — social, economic, political and moral — Borrie's National Population Inquiry must be judged as important as comparable scholarly reports in other areas of national life: defence, the economy, education or the environment.

There is not the trace of a moralistic mood in Borrie's treatment of demographic transition in Australia. His early training in social history, reinforced by years of research in population development in Britain and other countries of Western Europe, North America and Asia, gave him a useful comparative perspective within which to trace Australia's population history and the problem of declining fertility which he traced right back to the 1860s. The downward trend continued in the twentieth century: from the average size of five children per family, fertility declined at each census to 1954 when it was only 2.4 and was still declining when the Inquiry analyzed census data for 1971. At the same time the expectation of life rose from 50 years at the time of Federation to 68 for men and 75 years for women in 1971.

"Was this to be the return to equilibrium of the pre-industrial age?" asked Borrie in his Presidential Address to the ANZAAS Congress in Hobart in 1976. His answer was in the affirmative, showing that in the majority of Western societies where reduction of fertility first occurred in the second half of the 19th century, "the underlying trend ever since has been a return to equilibrium or ultimate zero growth".

"A demographic metamorphosis" was the phrase used by Borrie in 1978 in presenting the Report of the National Population Inquiry to the Commonwealth Government. Its essence was the slowing in the rate of reproduction due — as had first been noted by Enid Charles — to the postponement of births, leading to the seemingly inevitable reduction of completed family size, and to the fall in total fertility to a level well below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman.

Borrie repeated this conclusion in his last book *The European Peopling of Australasia*, published in 1994, that the victory of the two-child family was virtually complete already in the mid 1880s and fertility had been brought under control to match the prevailing and expected levels of longevity. He concluded: "This is perhaps the end of the demographic transition that began [in Australia] up to 150 years ago. The ripples on the way, the post war baby and marriage boom ... were temporary interruptions, or hiccups which temporarily interrupted the general long term trend, a trend associated with total transformation in economic structure, access to resources, class structure, literacy, health and longevity, population distribution and almost every sociological indicator that could be chosen."

Nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed since Borrie completed his sophisticated analysis of demographic transition in the Report of the National Population Inquiry. How do his findings apply to Australia as we enter the 21st century and what are the policy implications of his legacy of sustained study of growth and control of population?

Australian vital statistics published by the ABS give us part of the answer as do sensational newspaper reports with headings like "Australia is looking down the barrel of a birth rate crisis". We know from the annual demographic statistics that the rate of decline of fertility has accelerated since the 1977 Report of the National Population Inquiry. The Report noted that the total fertility rate — or the average number of children to a each woman over her life time in the period 1970-75 was 2.54. More recently the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that the total fertility rate in 1994-95 dropped to 1.844. The figure for 1998-99 is 1.757, well below the replacement level of 2.1.

Clearly Borrie's conclusion that Australia has reached the end of demographic transition has proved far fetched. What then is the likely outcome of the most recent trend of ever lower infertility and, I should add at the same time, greater longevity?

Borrie maintained that to understand the reasons for fertility decline we must look into sociological factors that affect the pattern of reproductive behaviour. One of his students, Professor Peter McDonald, has done just that. In two papers published this year he warns that the nation's fertility will continue to fall. McDonald examined the trend in age specific fertility rates to demonstrate that contrary to the findings of the National Population Inquiry and other studies in the 1970s and early 1980s, women who delayed childbirth in their 20s are no longer likely to be reproducing in their 30s. In other words, women in their 30s are not compensating for increased childlessness in their 20s. Recent estimates suggest that twenty per cent of women will go through life childless.

These figures are paralleled by statistics showing the rising age at marriage. For example, for people marrying for the first time the proportion waiting until after their thirtieth birthday has dramatically increased. In 1978, when Borrie presented the final part of the Inquiry report, only 13% of men and 8% of women married for the first time after their 30th birthday. Twenty plus years later, the proportion for men rose from 13% to 34% and for women from 8% to 21%. For all marriages the median age at marriage rose by 4 for men and 5 for women, an average increase of 20 points. Moreover, in the space of two decades, the proportion of people who will ever marry declined by 13% for men and 10% for women. In 1988 the crude marriage rate was 5.9 per 1000, the second lowest in the twentieth century.

Population policy for the 21st century

Borrie's experience in handling policy issue and his deep interest in social history and social welfare led him to emphasize demographic factors with policy implications for governments to "service the social and economic needs generated by demographic change rather than trying to alter the course of demographic change". He wrote this in the Report of the National Population Inquiry at the time when it seemed that falling fertility was not a pressing issue. In terms of the newspaper headline, Australia was not yet looking down the barrel of birth rate crisis. But today we are being confronted by the spectre of insufficient rate of natural increase with its consequences aggravated by an equally threatening prospect of the ageing population and higher dependency burden.

It is time, therefore, to critically evaluate Borrie's dictum that the object of social and economic policy should be to service the consequences of demographic change rather than to forestall demographic change. Should population policy be at all times reactive and not proactive? And in addition, is it to be understood exclusively in terms of its service role at the hands of a government subject to pressures of the electorate?

I do not accept the reactive model of population policy for this century. Given the urgency of problems on the horizon, it would be unwise, as Geoffrey McNicoll argues, to relegate population to being a by-product of all other decisions in a liberal democracy.

I am well aware that the principle of the priority of population in anticipation of problems in the long term and well beyond the short term focus of the electoral cycle may not be readily accepted by myopic governments in liberal democracies. The approaching centenary of Federation, however, should be the occasion for a systematic assessment of what Australia will be like over the long term — well beyond the life of one or two Parliaments. The population debate we have to have needs to treat the growth and distribution of population at a serious level. The outcome of such an examination must be seen as not just a confident celebration of the original vision of the Fathers of Federation but its radical revision.

To neglect this function by the government of either political persuasion would amount to neglect of many grave problems that are looming on the not too distant horizon and are not being adequately confronted at the political level.

Geoffrey McNicoll in his paper on institutional impediment to population policy lists “problems of scale in particular the implication of size of population — aggregate and local — for the quality of life”. In addition, poor resource pricing, particularly of water and energy, is clearly another problem of population policy. But in my judgement the problem which merits high priority is the future of the family in Australia — the issue to which I shall now turn.

There are recent precedents for debates of serious and pressing problems. For example, we are now belatedly launching into the debate about wealth distribution under the free market which continues to deliver sharply different outcomes for different participants. Why not promote similar debate on an issue which will provide an instant response such as the assumed interaction between family instability and declining levels of trust and social capital or falling fertility and second levels of family breakdown, the startling rise of ex-nuptial births and the radically changed roles of women — all of these the subject matter of popular sociology.

At a more serious level, following McNicoll, we could attribute the trends that I have listed to the “post-materialist value of self-fulfilment”. I prefer to link these developments with a deep moral crisis based on the social disorders common to all Western countries — rampant individualism and secularism — eroding the foundations of family and public life. This is the idea that there are no moral absolutes, that the individual is the final arbiter of what is right and wrong, that “I have the right to do as I please” that has its foundation in the French Enlightenment in the 18th century, became a sub-culture in Western societies and then the dominant pattern of belief in the late 20th century.

Earlier in this lecture I recounted the views of the Royal Commissioners in NSW who, in their study of declining birth rate at the time of Federation, spoke of moral degeneracy and the selfishness of women. One hundred years later we do not use sexist language. Rather than blaming women we should be talking about all of us contributing to the profound crisis in modern thinking, about parenthood and the value of children. Dr Don Edgar, formerly head of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, speaks of us as people “preoccupied with our lives and with the therapeutic pursuit of our own happiness as our greatest goal”. Clearly ours is a rampant individualism, a selfish narcissism which contributes to the undermining of the family unit and, in its extreme manifestations, leads to an assault on the most vulnerable human beings at the beginning and end of life.

Kate Legge, a senior writer in The Australian newspaper put it all better than I can:

On the very biggest of social issues — breakdown of kinship ties — self-fulfilment at the expense of family unity remains the first commandment. Codes of behaviour are muddled. There are pedantic rules on recycling waste and no speed limit on the freeway of personal liaisons. (22 June 1996)

What should be the policy response to the trends I have listed? Please remember that I am talking about what I consider to be the central problem in the debate on population policy we have to have: the decline of fertility in Australia to levels never even hinted at by Professor Borrie a quarter of a century ago, the decline which I am linking with the malaise surrounding the family as a basic social institution in society and its role in promoting parenthood and the value of children.

The key factor at work in the conundrum of fertility transitions as analysed by Borrie is the family-size preference. Borrie, following Carr Saunders and Glass, examined pro-natalist policies in Europe in the 1930s and concluded that large transfer payments linked to family size have had only marginal impact on fertility rates. Such policies and their high budgeting costs do not appear to be feasible. But there is — to use the phrase from McNicoll's study "a cognate area of social policy [which is] concerned with society's interests in the upbringing of the next generation". Its elements include family law, promotion of the rights of the unborn and a strategy designed to ease the cost of raising children, legislation providing income replacement and parental leave, child care, flexible working hours — to mention only a few possible approaches to the family friendly society.

The questions that must be debated in formulating suitable family friendly population policies are complex and go to the heart of the society we want to encourage in Australia — and the stability of the family is one of them.

We know already that the incidence of family break up, sole parenthood and the absence of natural fathers from the homes of children has been rising in tandem with the introduction of the "no-fault" divorce in the Family Law Act 1975. What has to be explored is the extent to which divorce and family instability may be exacerbated by unemployment and the availability of welfare options. There is plenty of scope there for the design of a remedial policy. All we know is that along with divorce (though not necessarily causally related to it) there has been a retreat from marriage, a sixfold rise in unmarried motherhood, a threefold rise in the number of de facto families and a huge rise in welfare dependency and in the number of sole-parent families — overwhelmingly mothers.

We also know that there are other social and economic policies in Australia that push in the direction of lower fertility. Taxation is the prime example and has been since changes to the tax system were instituted in the early 1980s. This puts families at a considerable disadvantage compared with the childless and has kept them there since. I am old enough to remember that back in the previous decades families had enjoyed a range of tax deductions for the cost of children, for medical and educational expenses and rates, all of which made it possible to maintain some comparability of purchasing power between families with children and the child-free. I have only briefly sketched what I mean by family-friendly population policy in order to demonstrate the range of measures that will produce material incentives to women who have not given up on having families. Research published in 1999 in the University of Melbourne journal *Australian Social Monitor* reveals a clear preference among all age groups for two, three or even four children, over and above one child. A representative survey of 2,100 women showed that one child is an extremely unpopular option rejected outright by almost 80 per cent of respondents. But what women want is to have both career and the family and they are ready to do considerable juggling of home and work to make that possible.

Peter McDonald sums up the dilemma of work-motherhood by stressing one causal factor which is common to advanced countries with very low levels of fertility — he speaks of gender equity: "If women are provided with opportunities near to or equivalent to those of men in education and market employment but these opportunities are severely curtailed by having children then, on average, women will restrict the number of children that they have to an extent which leaves fertility in a precariously low, long term level." It is for this reason so succinctly stated by McDonald, and given what we know about the desired fertility levels revealed in surveys that incentives are needed to combine motherhood and job without detrimental impact on earnings and career. Evidence from Nordic countries in Europe where family friendly gender equity policies are in place shows levels of fertility well above those that prevail in countries where such principles are not to be found. Norway and Finland both experienced significant increases in their total fertility rate — between 0.3 to 0.4 in the space of the past twenty years, whereas Italy, the country with no gender equity in place, has seen its fertility rate plummet from 2.28 in 1970 to 1.20 in 1995. If this

trend continues, the population of Italy will decrease by five million in 2025 and by a further II million in 2050.

Where does Australia fit into this picture, given what I had to say about our less-than-family-friendly policies? Two issues must be considered in answering this question: first the rate of fertility decline and second, whether immigration can be used to compensate for low fertility and produce the age structure that would support steady population growth.

We are now 19 million and the present social and economic policies are pushing us in the direction of ever lower fertility. From the 1975 level of 2.1 children per woman — the level which ensures replacement of the population in the long term — fertility has not stabilised but dropped to 1.6 in 1999. There is every indication that the rate of fertility decline will increase in the near future. The reason for this was demonstrated by McDonald in his analysis of birth by age group. Until recently it was assumed that the alarming trend in the postponement of births to women in their 20s was matched, almost exactly, by rises in the number of births to women aged 30 and over. This expectation was derived from the observed gradual development of a new pattern in which women defer their births well into the end of their reproductive age. However the latest data show that since 1990 the fall in the number of births to women in their 20s has exceeded the rise among women aged 30 and above.

The implication of these findings is that women will defer reproduction and reduce the number of children born. The ultimate step is to remain childless in the face of overwhelming evidence of the ever-widening gap between the number of children we want and the number of children we have.

The accelerating trend in fertility decline is not a temporary phenomenon but, as McDonald has shown, is “indicative of a longer term cultural change in the level of completed fertility”. Is it not then a manifestation of the cultural revolution that I identified in the rampant moral individualism? We want the benefits of order and stability in community life but at the same time are unwilling to pay the cost of giving up any degree of personal freedom.

In saying this I must be careful not to be misunderstood in much the same way as Jeff Kennett was when addressing high school girls. He spoke — and I quote from the newspaper report, about “women not producing enough offspring”. I accept the attitude of feminists who are wary of politicians who appear to be encouraging women to have more children without giving any thought to the urgent need for a family friendly policy. I firmly believe that such talk smacks of a conservative agenda to downplay women’s educational and career achievements of the past three or four decades. But the larger cultural issues remain to be addressed: procreation is rewarding; offspring are a necessary burden; motherhood (or fatherhood for that matter) is the greatest gift we have and for it to be seen as a permanent intrusion upon career is heart-breaking. Thus families should be affirmed, not because of a particular set of moral beliefs, but because of the central role they play in the functioning of society.

If the Howard Government is really genuine in its stated aim of supporting the family as a basic institution in society, then it must develop strategies that enable people to be decent parents as well as economically solvent children. This argument features prominently in Borrie’s report of the National Population Inquiry where he showed how, in the absence of pro-family strategies, a downward trend in fertility may be a reaction “to unfulfilled economic expectations ... decline in real income, higher interest rates ... tighter finance affecting ability to purchase housing and consumer durables, all associated with greater caution before entering a registered marriage, both before having a child and with respect to the spacing of children.” And he adds caution that “the changes affecting the family clearly go beyond these rather narrow factors.”

The behavioural motor force of the demographic transition is not just economic but social and cultural. This is the essence of Borrie's legacy. In the domain of fertility within the limits of human biology, the sense of personal choice is far wider, but such choice is severely restricted by internalised values and by social institutions regulating individual behaviours.

The impact of these conditioning circumstances among individuals explains why fertility behaviour can change, in particular, how changes in objective economic circumstances are reflected in human consciousness and are powerfully influenced by cultural factors. Thus, for example, parents' perceptions of their obligation towards the upbringing of their children and the perception of the value of children are bound to influence fertility behaviour profoundly. These are matters that are culturally as much as objectively determined. One striking example of such dual determination is an area of human behaviour of which Australia should not be proud — and one which affects the potential lives of some 90,000 children annually. How often do we justify abortion as a matter of choice seen as a morally and neutral concept to be upheld at all costs even if the choice is a very bad choice. Here and in other areas surrounding the family as an institution our actions reflect a profound crisis in modern thinking about parenthood and the value of children.

Governments — even those acting in good faith in the promotion of family-friendly population policy — cannot, in one sweep, change the culture of moral individualism. But they can, as Gary Becker, the Nobel Prize winner in Economics argues, use their leadership position to promote the family as the real molecule of society.

Finally I turn to immigration as the other prong of pro-active population policy. In the report of the National Population Inquiry, Borrie spoke of immigration as “the most effective method of attaining levels of population that may be judged desirable”. This was his dictum a quarter of a century ago when the reality of an accelerating rate of fertility decline did not loom as large as it is today.

As we enter the new century with the fertility rate hovering around 1.6 to 1.7 — well below the replacement level of 2.1 — we have to define the goal of population policy in a manner that would articulate the age structure, size and composition of immigration as a method for compensating for inadequate levels of fertility.

The most recent and comprehensive study of population futures for Australia was completed last year by Peter McDonald and Rebecca Kipper in the Demography Program of the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. The study shows that our population cannot be kept young through immigration. Immigrants, like the rest of the population, get older. To keep the population young would need an increasingly higher number of immigrants.

How high a number? Many supporters of high annual immigration targets argue in favour of a constant rate as the population grows larger. A constant rate of immigration of one per cent when proclaimed by Arthur Calwell may have been appropriate in the short term after 1945, but is not appropriate as a long term target. If applied today we would have to raise the target from a net annual intake of around 100,000 to 190,000. I emphasize that we are talking here of net migration targets bearing in mind that, as Charles Price showed in the last Borrie Lecture, in the fifty years since the beginning of the planned migration program, five million new settlers had arrived but in the same period 1.2 million settlers or 20 per cent of permanent arrivals left Australia. To this figure we must add the loss of some 500,000 Australian born who left the country during the same period.

A pathway to a larger population discussed as an option by McDonald and Kippen assumes a 50 per cent increase of the current target or the annual net migration of 120,000. Assuming the current level of fertility of 1.7 per woman the population rises to 22 million in 2018 and just under 24 million in 2038. This particular projection is based on the assumption that fertility would not fall

below the present level. One needs to be somewhat sceptical about this. Again we must be reminded of the need for a positively friendly family policy.

Two points have to be made about the composition of an immigration policy. The present Migration Program, i.e. that part of the total migratory movement over which the government has control, includes a significant and latterly increasing component of skilled migrants for the country's economic advancement. And yet we know that the world-wide pool of skilled labour is limited in the dot com age. Much of Europe is facing population decline and labour shortage and before long Australia will be in a seller's market, competing with other developed countries for skilled labour. There is not an endless queue of skilled migrants waiting to come to Australia. In the longer term, and given the loss of Australian born and of settlers departing in search for better job prospects, we will be hard put to offset such losses and maintain stability in the labour market.

The chances of attracting migrants of the right age and commitment to permanent settlement are likely to be further compromised if plans announcement last July by the Minister for Immigration are put into effect. Mr Ruddock has evidently accepted the challenge of a globalized economy in advocating a more flexible approach to the migrant intake: the acceptance of skilled long-term temporary entrants whose proportion in our annual intake has already risen from 20 to almost 50 per cent in the last six years to almost 50 per cent of net overseas migration. So we will be accepting an increasing number of people who want to work in Australia but may never settle permanently or take out citizenship.

Is this a retrograde step, given our long-established principles fixated on permanent resettlement and concepts of population? In answering this question we must bear in mind the underlying argument of this lecture, namely that any consideration of the level and composition of immigration must at all times take into account its impact on the birth rate and the age composition. It seems that the Minister has come only so far. He has not moved towards defining the future of the population. Is this not yet another argument in favour of the debate we have to have? Is it not also a challenge to those of us who, in the spectrum of supporters of immigration in Katharine Betts' terminology, belong to the economic policy argument rather than seeing immigration as an act of international altruism? We have to be reminded, time and time again, of the wisdom of the Fitzgerald Report and its evocative title: *Immigration: A Commitment to Australia*. We should also be reminded that Fitzgerald's cold economic argument was shabbily treated by the Government of the day. Evidently the Report's criticism of multiculturalism, seen by many in the wider community as something for the "ethnics" and not for all Australians, was anathema to some sections of the ethnic lobby.

The issue of the social composition of immigration is the third aspect of immigration policy which may, but need not, feature in the debate on population. I take great pride in my association with Professor Borrie in the joint report which we wrote at the request of the then Minister for Immigration, Michael MacKellar, in 1979. The report titled *Multiculturalism and its Implications for Immigration Policy* (better known in the trade as the Blue Book on Immigration) was written by us as the respective Chairmen of the Australian population and Immigration Council and the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council. It concludes with a statement listing the fundamental requirements for the success of immigration policy in Australia: first that there be an integrated "system of eligibility and selection that grants admission to persons who are most suited by the ability and motivation to settle in Australia" and second, that there be "a society that welcomes settlers of diverse cultures and provides equality of opportunity and the prospect of social and economic advancement for them and their children". There is nothing that I could possibly add to what Borrie and I wrote two decades ago except to note that these principles were reiterated in the 1999 report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC) under an evocative title *Australian Multiculturalism for the New Century: Towards Inclusiveness*.

No discussion of Australia's immigration policy can conclude without specific mention of refugees. There was a time, back in the 80s, when we prided ourselves on having welcomed to Australia more refugees per capita than any other country. But today our actions and rhetoric have an unnecessarily negative cast of which the introduction of a three-year temporary visa for refugees who arrive in Australia by boat or about 20 per cent of people who are acknowledged as having fled their countries because of persecution or a well-grounded fear of persecution. We no longer give them permanent residence status, despite having classified them as *bona fide* refugees and we add insult to injury when we call them illegal immigrants. If Borrie were alive today he would be the first person to proclaim this practice as an unjust and offensive provision contrary to the declaration he articulated in better times.

Conclusion

The organizers of the tenth biannual conference of the Australian Population Association invited me, as Professor Borrie's close collaborator and a friend of his and his family, to give this lecture highlighting the contribution of the founder of demography in Australia.

I spoke from personal experience in which Borrie's scholarship is seen as focused on the consequences of demographic transition and of migration, both affected by economic, political and above all cultural factors at work.

I have argued that immigration alone cannot halt population decline and the rapid incremental increase in the aged population. If the present trend in fertility continues, then roughly one in four women will remain childless. Women who defer becoming mothers till they are in their mid-thirties face the stark fact of biology that it may be too late. The issue is how to juggle career and family.

The negative attitude towards children and marriage is, as I pointed out, fostered by the weakening in society of any expressed interest in the institution of marriage. This is reflected in the absence of a well articulated policy favouring the family and enabling parents to combine work and parenthood. We know that the pressures imposed on the family unit of working parents and the cost of rearing children deter others from taking on parenthood.

Borrie rightly rejected the 1930s model of pro-natalist policy. I maintain that an integrated population policy should stand for something far more profound than the social engineering of income transfers. What is at stake is the introduction of a family-friendly social policy reflecting an attitude based on a sense of self respect that regards fertility as a precious gift and marriage and parenthood as true vocations. Such an attitude must be justified in the political process not only because of increased fertility but valuable in its own right. I see this conclusion as a logical extension of the legacy of Professor Borrie, whose memory we honour today.