



Plenary Session 2: Population Change and Policy at the Local and regional Levels

Napier 102 -Thursday 7th December, 10.45am-12.15pm

Influencing Population Policy to Sustain Regional Australia - The Story of APOP SA

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Some five years ago a small group of moderately influential South Australians came together out of a concern that no one else seemed to be moved to action given the dire population projections for their State. As a first step they formed a branch of the Australian Population Institute.

South Australia's population will increase but well below the national average until 2027 and then decline at first slowly but then in the decade to 2050 quite steeply. SA's share of the national population has fallen from 9.2% in 1961, 7.7% in 2003 to a predicted 5.6% in 2050. South Australians are older than other Australians (14.7% over the age of 65 years c.f. 12.7% (nationally) with the SA figure rising to some 31% by 2050. This scenario sent shivers up the collective spine of the APOP committee. South Australia faced a bleak future sustaining its enviable quality of life, indeed sustaining for the next generation basic health, education and community services. To care for our fragile environment amongst other things a robust taxation base is necessary, to carry out the research, provide the incentives and develop the infrastructure required to secure a soundly based future. A declining revenue base was an immediate challenge for the medium to long term strategic planning underway through the State's Economic Development Board. We also need to maintain political clout and less people means less seats in the Parliaments. Over the years SA has relied heavily on government for the stability of its economy. All in all the APOP committee were highly motivated, reasonably well informed and accepted the challenge of achieving responsible and environmentally sustainable population growth as worthy of their serious support. The committee quickly raised \$250,000 and embarked on a strategy of engaging the broader community in and understanding of this issue and encouraging debate publicly but also within peak industry bodies and at all levels of government.

In 2003 a National Population Summit was held at Parliament House, Adelaide. The aim was to focus attention on population policies for regional Australia. The summit was well attended and supported and without doubt crystallised a series of policy and program decisions by both the Commonwealth and South Australian Governments. The paper will outline some of the developments that have occurred in the last three years that have impacted on population policies for regional Australia with Adelaide as the example. New visa categories for students, skilled workers, and state sponsored migrants have all contributed to South Australia's major increase in new settlers in the last two years. Overseas students studying in SA schools and tertiary institutions have increase against a national trend. Outbound migration from Adelaide in particular has slowed. What degree of success these policy and program changes can be attributed to an action group is debatable, but there has been a dramatic turnaround in the key indicators of population growth in SA and it is fascinating to explore how this has been achieved and what of the future.