



Vol 1 No. 1 February 2005

Welcome to a new year in population – the continuing debate about the Australia of the future. A debate about people, places, growth, birthrates, immigration, regional development, infrastructure and sustainability!

A NEW YEAR AND A NEW PRESIDENT

The Australian Population Institute has a new President – Jane Nathan.

Elected unanimously at the Institute's AGM on the 17th November, Jane said she was proud to be elected to the position.

“As President of the Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association (VPELA) in 1997, we co-hosted with the Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) a seminar promoting the population debate. These early discussions profiled the need to move the debate from one focussed purely on immigration, to one focussed on the resources needed to create a vision for a greater Australia.”

Jane paid tribute to long-standing president Bert Dennis.

“The energy and enthusiasm Bert has brought to the population debate should not be underestimated. The Australian Population Institute has had a major role in elevating the population debate at a national level. Bert has been instrumental in driving this vision.”

Bert will remain on the Institute's Committee of Management, and retains an active interest in the population debate.

He noted “when we began on our journey in 1999, there was very little discussion about population related issues in the media. Now barely a week passes without public comment of some sort focussing on the demographic challenges Australia faces. I'd like to think the Australian Population Institute has played a small part in this.”

“It's a debate that we as a nation had to have. I wish Jane all the best in her role and look forward to remaining an active participant in the debate.”

CONGRATULATIONS BERT DENNIS OAM

Long standing Institute President Bert Dennis was recognised in the Australia Day Honours list with an Order of Australia Medal for “service to the land and housing industry, to the community through contributing to debate on urban planning and to support for charitable organisations.”

Rarely has an honour been more deserved. Well done Bert!



OUR OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

Our October 2004 Newsletter covered a number of issues of interest including the second National Regional Population Summit held in Wodonga in May 2004 and the second National Population Summit held in Adelaide in November 2003.

It can be found at <http://www.apop.com.au/Vision21Oct2004.pdf>

VICTORIA BURSTS THROUGH THE 5 MILLION BARRIER

Just prior to Christmas Victoria's population broke through the 5 million mark.

While the milestone is not unremarkable in itself, few would have believed ten years earlier it would have been achieved so soon.

With Victoria's growth rate having rebounded strongly since the early 1990's and the state now regularly outstripping arch rival New South Wales in annual growth rate, the state government has now set its sights on the next landmark – 6 million.

BRACKS GOVERNMENT RELEASES POPULATION POLICY

The Bracks Government in Victoria has released a detailed Population Policy outlining its vision for future growth of the state and the policies, which it hopes will achieve future growth.

With an growth target of 6 million people by 2025, the policy is well written and realistic, and the Bracks government is to be commended for its positive approach to the issue.

The policy focuses on six key strategies:

1. Seeking to increase Victoria's low fertility rate by reducing obstacles to raising a family and providing more support for children as they grow.
2. Increasing the overall level of migration from overseas, with a focus on attracting more skilled migrants, particularly into regional areas.
3. Achieving a balance in interstate migration with a focus on retaining and attracting young skilled people.
4. Maintaining population growth in Provincial Victoria.
5. Preparing for the changing need of an ageing population, encouraging workforce participation, and addressing skills shortages.
6. Ensuring population growth is sustainable and manageable by reducing wastage of energy, water and other resources.



The policy can be found at www.dpc.vic.gov.au. Type the words 'population policy' in the 'Key Word Search' to be taken to the actual document.

20 MILLION AND STILL GROWING

At the end of January 2005 Australia's population was just over 20,250,000. For an update anytime Australia's population clock can be found at www.abs.gov.au. Just click on "Australia's population" under National Statistics on the left hand side of the page.

A MEETING WITH A MINISTER

Institute President Jane Nathan and Executive Chris McNeill met with the Federal Minister for Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs Amanda Vanstone on Monday 31st January.

At a roundtable for business leaders the Minister outlined the government's vision for the 2005/2006 Migration Program and sought feedback on what changes, if any, should be looked at going forward.

The Minister confirmed the Howard Government's ongoing support for a robust program built around the key pillar of skilled migration.

In 2003-04 Australia's net overseas migration was 117,600, an increase of 1,100 on the previous year.

Of the 2003/04 intake the largest group by country of birth was the United Kingdom (16%) followed by New Zealand (10%), China (9%), India (8%), South Africa (5%), and Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Sudan on 3% each. Reflecting the diversity of Australia's immigration program "other countries" comprise the other 40%.

WHY WE'RE NOT HAVING KIDS

A Federal Government funded study into the nation's fertility rate has found that young Australian adults want to have children but job and relationship insecurities are holding them back.

Australians in their 20s and 30s would like two children and a sizeable minority want three. In fact according to the study only 8 per cent say they never want children. This is despite Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that a quarter of women in their reproductive years will stay childless.

The study, undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, interviewed a random sample of 3201 Australians aged 20-39. It provides what is probably the most comprehensive insight yet into the decisions making process to have - or not have - children.

Funded by the federal Office for Women, the study concluded that "the most common pre-conditions people nominate for having children are a secure, stable and adequate partner, and a secure, stable and adequate income stream."



While increasing the nation's fertility rate has become a federal government objective finding the right mix of policies to reverse the long and period of slow decline has, to date, proved elusive.

With a national total fertility rate of around 1.75 Australia is by no means in the dire predicament of many European nations but we remain well under the replacement level figure of 2.1

In recent years however there have been signs that the rate may be close to stabilising.

More details about the report can be found at <http://www.aifs.gov.au>

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