



## National Development and The Big Picture!

It's pleasing to be well into another year and to realise the population debate – the one we as a nation had to have – is still bubbling away.

As I've said before the debate takes many guises. It's a debate about fertility, about ageing, about regional development, about the growth of our cities, about immigration and many other things.

The point is, they all relate directly back to population.

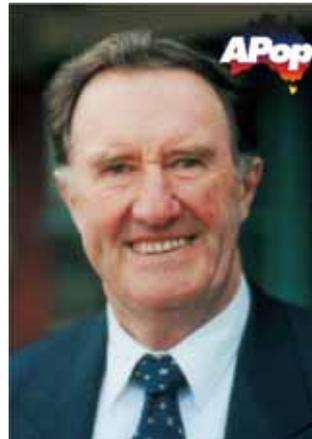
And that's where the Australian Population Institute continues to fill a critical position. Whether you're pro growth or opposed to it, few can deny the future shape of the nation is fundamentally tied to demography. The Institute continues to create opportunities

for the big issues to be discussed and debated.

This edition of 'Vision' provides coverage of the National Population Summit held in Adelaide (November 2003) as well as a profile of the Institute's goals and objectives in South Australia.

Included also are articles by Chris McNeill and Monash University student Leo Ostroburski that provide an overview of the 'Growing Our Regional Cities' conference held in Wodonga in May of this year.

Finally we provide a link to an acclaimed report by former RMIT student Kirsty Madden investigating the complex issue of regional migration strategies.



Mr. Bert Dennis

Going forward the Institute is embarking on a campaign to begin to pull together the big picture – a foray into national development if you like. It should be an exciting venture.

*Bert Dennis*  
President

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## Communiqué urges national population policy

There has been a flurry of activity focused on the issue of Australia's population imbalance since Adelaide hosted the National Population Summit last November.

More than 200 people attended the summit, which was addressed by a wide range of people with different areas of interest and expertise - business and

government leaders, academics, legal experts and conservationists.

"While they all had their own views on how Australia should tackle the issue of population, they all agreed there was an urgent need for a national policy supported by all governments," said APop SA president Michael Hickinbotham.

"Since the summit, both the Federal and South Australian Governments have announced population initiatives and allocation was made in the Federal budget to increase migration to regional Australia."

The National Population Summit 2003 was organised by the Australian Population Institute (Apop), ...continued



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## Communiqué urges national population policy (continued)

with the support of the South Australian Government, and followed the inaugural National Population Summit held in Melbourne.

It closed with a communiqué that urged a national set of policies to be in place by 2005, and this was sent to the Prime Minister and all State Premiers.

The communiqué said the social and economic well-being of Australia was dependent on population growth, with the effective distribution of people across regions critical for sustainability.

It called for a sharing of responsibility for immigration across the three tiers of government to be reflected in resource allocations and decision-making on migration policy. The commu-

iqué also recommended that:

- Urgent research be commissioned to establish an optimum population target and corresponding annual quotas for immigration, taking account of natural population increase, environmental sustainability, infrastructure requirements, skills and labour market issues, immigrant categories and regional distribution.
- Immediate attention be given to policies that address the effects of an ageing population and declining fertility,

in particular strategies acknowledging gender equity issues and the needs of families to combine work and family caring commitments.

- Research be commissioned into factors influencing natural population decline to enable a better understanding of appropriate policy options to maintain an optimum population level for Australia on a long-term basis.

A book is currently being prepared that contains all the papers delivered at the summit and this will be available at [www.apop.org](http://www.apop.org).



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## South Australia acts on population growth

South Australia has become the first State in Australia to release a wide-ranging population policy after conceding that the State's future prosperity is dependant on attracting more people.

Premier Mike Rann has set a population target of two million people by 2050 in a policy that promotes increased migration and better fertility rates.

"We are setting aggressive and ambitious targets to at least double the intake of independent skilled migrants by 2008, achieve a five-fold increase in business migrants and reduce the net outflow of interstate migrants to zero in that time," Mr Rann said

"We have already struck up a co-operative approach with the Federal Govern-

ment on population matters that will see them introduce two new regional visa classes later this year that encourage more skilled migrants into regional areas before they are given permanent residency.

"Population is especially important in regional South Australia. Part of our focus will be to market the business opportunities and life-style options in our regions."

The Government has committed more than \$10 million to the policy, which calls for joint government and community action to effectively double the current population growth rate. Strategic objectives include:

- Obtaining a higher share of national migration intake.
- Increasing the

number of expatriates and potential interstate migrants returning and relocating to SA.

- Reducing the net outflow of young and skilled people.
- Improving parents' abilities to balance work and family life.
- Responding to the needs and improving the employment prospects of mature aged people.
- Raising skill levels and encouraging talent.

The SA Government also wants the State to at least match national fertility rates and achieve a balanced and sustainable age structure through population growth.

Michael Hickinbotham, president of APop SA, commended the State Government for its initiative



but said such a policy could not succeed in isolation.

"It's imperative that all the States and Federal Government work together on an outcome that delivers population stability and an even distribution of people across the nation," he said.



## Growing Regional Cities Conference - Wodonga (May 2004)

By Leo Ostrobrski

You would not be overstating it if you were to describe our regional cities as needing our help. Regional cities compared to their metropolitan counterparts have reduced access to resources and opportunities, an ageing population, higher youth unemployment, lower average mean incomes and a smaller proportion of students enrolled in education. Australians residing in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane or Perth have failed to understand that the survival and prosperity of our non-metropolitan cities is fundamental to the Australian way of life. Regional cities are the backbone of our country supporting industries like agriculture that are essential in generating jobs and economic activity in regional cities, but contribute even more to the prosperity of the residents of our state capitals. It is time we all began to discuss how we can reverse the drift and save our treasured regional cities.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of May this year I became involved in this discussion when attending the Growing Regional Cities Conference in Wodonga in eastern Victoria. The conference, co-organised by the Australia Population Institute (APop), Regional Cities Victoria and the City of Wodonga, brought together those groups interested in discussing how we can reverse this drift. Delegates attended from the business community, all levels of Government and APop members. The conference provided an opportunity for delegates to learn from a range of experts who understand the impact of population

growth on Australia's regional centres.

There were many themes that came out from the conference. Transportation, migration, education and investment were just a few. Many essential services are not provided at a level that would be commonly accepted in the city, including a paucity of accessible public transport. During one of the day's morning tea I met a Local Government councillor who explained that her shire had a poor public transport service comprising of only one bus. This bus ran every hour and a half from 10am till 5pm Monday to Friday. Being from Melbourne this sounded quite bizarre. I enquired "what did people do when they did not drive



and wanted to travel outside of these times, like on the weekend"? She explained that they just couldn't travel.

This was a point echoed by Chris Corrigan, Managing Director of Patrick's and Tim Fischer, former Deputy Prime Minister. They explained Australia's road system had become so efficient that other

forms of transportation, such as rail, had been neglected. Tim Fischer spoke about his recent journey on the Ghan during its inaugural voyage from Adelaide to Darwin. His enthusiasm for the locomotive transportation was infectious, regaling delegates with photos from his trip. He also explained why state train networks were so badly interconnected due to differential gauging between single and double gauge lines, a problem that has existed since Federation. Meanwhile, Chris Corrigan suggested that the funds spent on the expansion of the Adelaide to Alice Springs line would have been better spent on railways between Melbourne and Sydney.

The lacklustre development of our regional cities also affects the make up of the Australian framework. Australians are living on only 3% of the land and most of us are living within 50 kilometres of the coast. With such a highly urbanised population it is no revelation that our metropolitan cities continue to grow while our regional cities falter. When the issue

of immigration is in the media, some groups often comment that immigrants should be directed towards regional cities to help turn around a decreasing population. This suggestion has been obviously taken up by the Department of Immigration. At the conference Senator Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration announced the launch of Regional Outreach Centres or Roos. The centres would aim to provide information to people in regional cities on attracting immigration. However the question is does an immigrant actually want to go to our regional cities. Eminent demographer Graeme Hugo says no. Speaking at the conference Graeme Hugo claimed nine out of ten migrants live in our capital cities. This is because migrants will usually go where other migrants are and immerse themselves in a similar community. As the regional cities do not provide this kind of support migrants are not attracted to moving there. Consequently Graeme Hugo suggested internal migration is really the key for regional development.

If we wish to attract people to our regional cities we must offer opportunities and incentives. Attracting domestic and foreign direct investment into our regional and rural areas is essential to the development of regional economies. Presenter Rob Morrisson, Director of Property from AMP, spoke on this issue and attracted particular interest from Local Government delegates.

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## Growing Regional Cities Conference - Wodonga (May 2004) (continued)

By Leo Ostrobrski

Morrison suggested that if you wanted to know where large financial institutions like AMP invested you just have to look where the big companies like Qantas, Patrick's and Woolworths are.

Investors will invest where they can attract the greatest return and rural and regional areas need to attract more investment by improving their capacity to attract investment through the provision of an investment friendly environment. An example of this is the partnership between numerous regional cities and Woolworths.

It is surprising to learn that one in fifty nine Australians are employed by Woolworths and they are the largest employer in rural and regional Australia. Regional cities like Wodonga had successfully attracted Woolworths in

setting up major distribution outlets in regional areas. It is these types of investments by large companies that regional cities must concentrate on.

The Conference did not just address the problems but also worked to propose pathways to solving the challenges facing our regional centres. Craig Shepherd from National Economics and Brian Haratsis, Managing Director of Macroplan, both contributed to solutions to assist our rural and regional centres. Craig Shepherd discussed the issues of education, observing that many school leavers depart from regional centres for better opportunities in education. Shepherd suggested governments could offer HECS scholarships to students to attract them to study in a regional institution. Brian Haratsis provided a solution through the development of indus-

tries where the tyranny of isolation would not be a hindrance, including industries that could effectively use the benefits of telecommunications such as software and electronic games development, film and television, performing arts, graphic design, marketing and advertising.

Addressing the challenges of population and development in Australia's regional cities is not simple. With a highly urbanised and ageing population, developing and sustaining our regional cities will only become part of a greater national problem if we maintain a low population. The task of addressing this problem is difficult, but not without a solution. Graeme Hugo claimed that while metropolitan cities in Australia were the fastest growing, this is not the case everywhere. In North America and Europe the regional

cities are the fastest as a direct result of improved transportation, changes in the economy and an increased lifestyle. The task of building our regional cities is not one just to be taken on by the populations within those cities. It is a task that needs to be shared by all Australians. Without a formulated strategy for the future we risk losing an important part of the Australian framework and a future that relies solely on our major metropolitan cities.



## What role for the Commonwealth in Regional Development?

In an election year the issue of regional development is back on the agenda with both major parties conscious of the volatility of certain regional seats.

As the distribution of our future population is a cornerstone of national development, the Australian Population Institute has encouraged this debate acting previously as a co-convenor (along with Regional cities Victoria) of the National Regional Population Summit in November 2002 and was again in successful 'Growing Our Regional Cities' Conference held in Wodonga in May.

As with most socio-political issues the regional development debate is characterised by a myriad of complex, conflicting and competing challenges.

In contemporary debate regional Australia is often characterised as

having a bleak future.

Needless to say regional Australia reflects all the complexities of urban Australia and to therefore generalise in such a way is nonsense.

Many coastal areas, and a large number of inland regions also, are experiencing vigorous population and economic growth and the associated problems of growth – most significantly insufficient infrastructure to cope with the pressures of growth.

In contrast many other areas are experiencing population decline. The fact that in many cases this decline has been going on for over fifty years suggests the problems facing those areas are more deep-rooted than the recent policy decisions often blamed. Their problems are often characterised by a desperate fight to retain under-utilised existing infrastructure or

to attract new industry.

The frequent accusation is that governments have abandoned rural and regional Australia. As is often the case the perception doesn't quite match the truth but arguing anything other than the notion that a total abandonment of regional Australia has taken place can be a futile and lonely argument.

Regional development has traditionally been seen as a state responsibility though the Commonwealth has in the century since federation fluctuated between centralised intervention in support of grand schemes, and less vigorous but nevertheless ongoing support.

The Howard government like its predecessor is active in the provision of transport and other infrastructure and of course the provi-

sion of funds to the states, but has not sought to elevate regional development as a core responsibility of the Commonwealth.

And this is the key question that fuels the debate.

Should the Commonwealth take a more active role in developing regional Australia?



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## What role for the Commonwealth in Regional Development? (continued)

Before answering with a resounding yes, it's prudent to ask a few more questions.

Firstly what exactly is regional Australia?

The simple response would be that it is everything beyond the metropolitan fringe of our capital cities. A fine assumption in principle but of course there are distinct 'regions' within the confines of our major metropolises that crave – and need – special assistance. Of the capital cities themselves, two, Adelaide and Hobart, would argue that due to their economic base and location, they deserve special consideration in their entirety.

So suddenly we have metropolitan 'regions' that are as needy as many beyond the urban boundary.

No easy answers there.

Secondly, and more importantly, what is it that regional Australia asks of the Commonwealth?

Presumably the ultimate answer is money in some form or another be it by way of direct funding, rebates, incentives, concessions.....which leads to the awkward question of how much and for what purpose?

In asking this one must acknowledge that regional Australians despise taxes as much, if not more, than their city cousins so

funds will need to be transferred from other sources. The alternative is to raise additional revenue and we know what that means.

Surprisingly at this point the questions get harder, not easier.

Should funds go towards growth regions for the proactive provision of infrastructure, or should policy be directed towards those areas most in need – small declining wheat belt townships and mineral processing centres that no longer fulfil their original role.

If the latter approach is chosen, how can we be sure that good money is not being thrown after bad? Are we simply trying to delay the inevitable or is there a successful model in which long term decline can be successfully reversed.

In short should funds be allocated with the primary aim of cushioning, and hopefully reversing, the plight of those areas most in need, or should an effort be made to accelerate the growth of those areas already booming?

Even when this decision has been made, the question remains is regional development all about grand visions, the proactive provision of infrastructure or the use of subsidies to encourage the relocation of private industry or the relocation of government services from the capital cities to regional centres.

Hard nosed practitioners warn against governments trying to 'pick winners' and point to a long legacy of failed projects when government ventures down this track. They argue however that if government really are determined to pick winners, its far better that they pick genuine winners – cities or regions that have exhibited long term growth and have an economic base with a strong and genuine competitive edge – rather than reverting to the tried and true method of selecting cities and regions that just happen to be located in marginal seats.

Irrespective of which type of regional development funding approach is adopted it becomes obvious quite quickly that not every area that feels deserving is going to be selected for special assistance. Funding is a finite resource. To spread it too thinly runs the risk of achieving little of substance.

And it is staggering how quickly one's appetite for large regional development schemes evaporates when 'your town' is not chosen as a recipient of targeted funding.

Of course the truly hard nosed argue that the Commonwealth is best advised to stay well clear of visionary schemes. Far better, they argue, that the Commonwealth simply concentrate on providing an economic environment in which regional businesses

can prosper. Fulfilling that duty will do more for economic development in regional Australia than all the government sponsored schemes of the past fifty years combined. The Commonwealth is better advised to continue with the funding of transport and other infrastructure for which it is responsible but should do so on a needs and orderly prioritisation basis.

Whatever the merits of this approach it should be noted that the Commonwealth's record in regional development is not particularly good. While many express a sentimental yearning for the Whitlam Government's visionary decentralisation program of the 1970's, others caution that the lessons taken from that program generally provide a catalogue of what not to do.

But none of this means the Commonwealth doesn't have a future role in shaping the future of our regions and couldn't do it successfully.

It's just that before proceeding it must have very clear goals, undertake affordable projects that will provide a real and measurable gain, and it must manage expectations carefully.

Not easy, is it?

*By Chris McNeill*

## The importance of regional migration strategies

*By Kirsty Madden*

A part of her studies at RMIT former student Kirsty Madden undertook a piece of research on behalf of the Australian Population Institute to investigate the structure and success of Regional Migration Strategies at a local and international level.

The result was a now acclaimed paper (since presented by Kirsty at on the international stage in Leeds!) titled 'Dangling the

Carrot: An analysis and discussion of immigration to Regional Australia.

Kirsty now resides in her native Tasmania working for the department of premier and Cabinet. She is looking to commence additional post graduate studies in the near future.

Kirsty's full report can be downloaded from the Apop website at : [http://www.apop.com.au/Kirsty\\_Madden\\_report2004.pdf](http://www.apop.com.au/Kirsty_Madden_report2004.pdf)