



The Australian Population Institute, Presidents Report to the 2009 Annual General Meeting

The Apop Institute has worked hard to keep the debate about Australia's Population from being undermined by short term arguments. We do not believe A Vision For A Greater Australia is being put into policy that can be understood and worked towards by the Australian population. We were disappointed that at The Prime Minister's Summit in 2008, population was not a key agenda item. We are concerned that the backlash to the growth in population by some politicians and interest groups may undermine the serious discussion about how Australia should look, feel and operate in 20 years from now.

On Tuesday the 20th of January 2009 The Australian Population Institute was again invited to attend Minister Senator Chris Evan's Round Table Consultation to discuss future migration and industry requirements. At the same Minister's Round Table Meeting in 2008 Senator Evans stated that he was committed to strong immigration programs remarking that societal changes are a good argument for Population Policy which he referred to as part of the Labor policy platform. We were wondering what the 2009 meeting would deliver.

Senator Evans stated in 2009 that the immigration programs needed fine tuning to manage how permanent migration will work, confirming that the government has 'a preference for long term permanent migration over short term programs.' Senator Evans then went onto say that "This long term planning cycle for migration will effectively be the start of a population policy. With the explanation that in 4 years time more will leave than enter the workforce we need to deliver the right skills in the correct numbers".

Pleasingly Sharan Burrow, President of the ACTU, talked of the ACTU and the Unions supporting a robust long term migration program combined with regional incentives.

Priming The Debate

Bearing in mind that The Australian Population Institute which was founded in 1997 with its aim to promote discussion to develop a shared strategic direction about population and the resulting infrastructure and social programs needed; Apop has much to celebrate.

For the last 50 years Australia has had an average growth in population of 1.2% per annum. As to the future, our dependence on migration over the next 50 years is unlikely to diminish and we will continue to rely heavily on migrants for our vibrancy and our vitality.

With the changes in the financial market from early 2008 causing stresses and fear in many of our communities combined with a higher fertility rate than projected and a massive increase in immigration we were seeing letters to the newspapers and participants in talk back radio using migration as the scapegoat. It is always an easy option when the difficulties are seen to be beyond the control of those affected. It is a similar story to what happened in the early 1990's which led to Apop being formed.

During any economic downturn it is important to consider the consequences during the inevitable economic upswing that follows. Any subsequent labour shortages will lead to upward wage pressures and ultimately upward pressure on interest rates.

Once again we need to move the debate to a discussion about the future. We need to investigate to identify what we need to do to create a vision with implementation plans for our inheritors. What is our legacy going to be? How will Australia look and feel in 30, 50, 100 years?

The Australian Population Institute is aware that population growth cannot not be discussed in isolation from a range of broader issues such as workplace practices, infrastructure provision, intergenerational funding arrangements, social cohesion, policies for protecting and enhancing our environment and national security.

We believe that Australia needs an Australian community that is developing infrastructure to continue to support a safe, sustainable living environment while providing adequate housing choices. This must be accompanied by a sense of inclusiveness with economic stability that allows for innovation and the desire to explore future opportunities.

Conversations About The Issues

To stimulate the debates about Australia's future, Apop with the support of The Dennis Family Corporation has organised Round Table Luncheons for creative thinkers. We invited people in positions of influence from the private and public sector to tease out what is needed in their geographic areas and workplace situations. We have done this to facilitate and stimulate ways which would give substance to our vision.

We continued to host Round Table functions for 12 participants that focused on gathering information and facilitating discussions around specific topics of importance. The 2008 topics included "Housing our Population" led by Ben McLean from The Reserve Bank of Australia; "What Can Australia Learn from China's Demographics and People Movements?" with Annie Chen a visiting researcher at Swinburne University of Technology.

In February 2009, we examined the "Economic Impact on Immigration" with a discussion led by Economist Geoff Bills on the current global economy and its effect on our communities. In April the theme led by Social Research Consultant with the Scanlon Foundation, Bruce Smith, was Housing our Population followed by "The Recession And Its Possible Effects On Immigration" with Dan O'Brien, Chief of Staff for the Premier. Later, Dr Paul Collits, Research Fellow in Regional Development, RMIT Hamilton was provocative with the discussion focusing on what had worked in the past and how we needed to rely and stimulate private enterprising regional areas and the best ways of doing that.

Finally in November, Mark Thomson from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in Canberra spoke to his paper "The Human Tide Demographics and National Security".

Our small but vibrant committee also ran Breakfasts at Royal South Yarra Lawn Tennis Club.

On the 14th May, Jeremy Reynolds, presented demographics to examine "But what of the future?" Jeremy discussed the prospects for different parts of Victoria, what impacts might the global economic downturn have on the amount and distribution of future growth.

On October the 1st, Dr Jeromey Temple, a Research Fellow in Economic Demography at the Australian National University, presented an informative and fascinating statistical overview on the role of migration in explaining the nation's economic performance.

Apop works closely with The Scanlon Foundation and in December we are hosting Prof Andrew Markus at RSY.

The Scanlon Foundation believes that the future prosperity of Australia, underpinned by population growth, will depend on our ability to maintain social cohesion in a society with even more cultural diversity than we have successfully accommodated historically. The Scanlon Foundation shares a common objective with Apop in supporting a larger Australian population and we will continue to work together to achieve a larger cohesive Australian society.

Bert Dennis has appeared on the 7.30 report and ABC Radio to put on the table what is actually happening and what our future needs will be with our ageing population and our present fertility rate. Bert argued that Australia needs a cohesive plan for a prosperous and healthy future, to do this we must know what our future expectations are economically, socially, culturally and environmentally to allow us to start planning and implementing now as to how this will be managed, we cannot do this without an expectation of what our population will be and should be.

Apop has worked diligently to keep the debate about Australia's population tied to reality.

Appreciation

My sincere thanks go to our committee, Brian Scantlebury, Frank Bosco, Chris McNeill, Doug Coomes, Bert Dennis, Tony Fry and Geoff Underwood with the support of Marilyn Underwood and Viv Meerman they have all been incredibly supportive of me and the Institute.

In summary The Apop Institute believes demographic change will continue to present Australia with challenges that can only be addressed by taking long term perspectives. The Australian Population Institute, in its dedicated commitment to 'Creating a Vision Of A Greater Australia' has a lot more work to do in 2010.



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