



Better, not bigger

11/9/19

Dear Joint Standing Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to your enquiry into Migration in Regional Australia.

The Sustainable Australia Party believes that regional migration is a policy smoke-screen aimed at diverting attention away from the real issue – that Australia's immigration is simply too high, at roughly triple the historical average.

We say this because 100 years of empirical evidence shows that migrants overwhelmingly choose to live in a major city. The Productivity Commission Report of 2016 is a good example of this evidence, but there are many others.

The work of the Census and The Australian Bureau of Statistics has found that 85–86% of new migrants settle in capital cities - 65% in Sydney or Melbourne.

Research by the Australian National University found that more than 60% of migrants move to a capital city after about 5 years of living in a regional or remote location. State-based regional migration programmes have been effectively exploited – initially people settle in Tasmania or Canberra but then they go to Sydney or Melbourne.

We are aware of the Government's intention to introduce two new regional visas in November. However we are sceptical that they will prove any more effective in increasing regional population than previous measures. Short of border walls or electronic bracelets (neither of which we advocate!) there is no effective means of requiring people to stay in regional areas.

Both city and country people end up being disadvantaged by mass-migration programmes. Country people lose out because the urbanisation which follows these programmes diminishes their political influence and their opportunity to have government funds directed at regional infrastructure. City people lose out because the rapid population growth means that infrastructure simply cannot keep up, congestion increases and their quality of life declines.

This Inquiry comes at a time when Australia's population growth treadmill is speeding up. Figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the end of December 2018 show that in 2018 our population increased by over 400,000 to pass 25 million.

Net migration contributed around 250,000 of this increase. Natural increase (births minus deaths) contributed around 150,000 of this increase. Both net migration and natural increase are rising. In 2018 net migration was 248,400. The year before it was 241,000. Natural increase is also rising. Last year it was 156,000; the year before it was 144,000.



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For the sake of completeness, and as you will be aware, Australia's rapid population growth is not caused by refugees or asylum seekers. Refugees make up only around 5% of Australia's population growth. The Sustainable Australia Party supports our current intake of refugees.

Australia's population growth rate is 1.6%, which is higher than other OECD countries and not sustainable.

Against this background there are major questions around whether population increase in rural areas is desirable. Many of these areas already have up to 17% youth and 12% mature age Australian unemployment. There are also serious issues around water availability and the destruction of natural habitat. The problems of the Murray-Darling Basin are well known, and the evidence suggests that water shortages are becoming more acute. In August a New York Times report said that World Resources Institute researchers had found that among cities with more than 3 million people, 33 of them, with a combined population of over 255 million, face extremely high water stress, with repercussions for both public health and social unrest.

Even worse, by 2030 the number of those cities in the extremely high stress category is expected to rise to 45 and include nearly 470 million people. Clearly the World Resources Institute doesn't believe that either the engineering solutions of the technological optimists or the 'consume less and waste less' exhortations of the social justice campaigners, are actually going to prevent this debacle.

It is Sustainable Australia's view that the mass-migration policy that Australia has embarked on for the past 15 years has served Australia poorly. We believe that the real issue is not "where are migrants going?"; the real issue is "is our addiction to rapid growth, and the mass-migration we use to achieve it, good for us or healthy for us?". The Sustainable Australia Party believes it is not. We note that Infrastructure Australia says that for all the billions of dollars we are spending on roads, in 2031 our roads are going to be even more congested than they are now.

The Sustainable Australia Party strongly supports evidence based action to tackle climate change. In this regard we note that it is very hard to cut our carbon emissions while engaged in rapid population growth. In 2017 Canadian researchers found that having one fewer child is 24 times more effective at reducing CO2 emissions than going car-free, 36 times more effective than avoiding plane travel, over 70 times more effective than adopting a plant-based diet, and over 500 times more effective than changing your household lightbulbs!

We note the widespread public concern with stagnant living standards, which is in part a consequence of the downward pressure on wages exerted by our mass-migration programme. Migration fuelled population growth has enabled governments to pretend that



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we have been recession free and that the economy is improving, but it has not delivered rising living standards and Australians are well aware of this.

The Sustainable Australia Party believes that our policy priority should be 'Better, not Bigger'. We should return the migration programme to its historical levels, which were more like 70,000 per annum. We should focus on problem-solving, rather than growth, as New Zealand is now doing, and seek to tackle the key issues of our time, such as homelessness, mental health, the ice epidemic, the extinction of species and climate change.

Yours sincerely,

The Hon. Kelvin Thomson,
National Media Spokesperson,
Sustainable Australia Party.