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John Hawkins
Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability in Australia
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
housing.sen@aph.gov.au

Re: Gecko Supplementary Submission to Senate Inquiry on Housing Affordability

Gecko thanks you for the opportunity to participate in the Senate hearing in Brisbane on Monday 14 April. In addition to our submission of 31st March 2008, we would like to provide the following supplementary position, outlining the background for our previous submission and further recommendations.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Gecko is the peak regional environment Council for the Gold Coast and our mission is to protect, conserve and restore the natural environment and to improve the sustainability of the built environment of the Gold Coast region together with our member groups and the wider community. As such, we are continuously engaged in town planning and development approval processes and the legislation that guides these.
- 1.2. Our contention is that affordable housing must be sustainable and not at the expense of our natural environment and life support systems. Increased pressure on release of land for housing affordability impacts upon our natural areas. The legislation recently passed by the Queensland government, The Urban Land Development Act, designed to provide more affordable housing, overrides all protective restrictions in state government legislation and all planning provisions in local government planning schemes.
- 1.3. We ask that you consider our comments in the context of the term of reference (d) which relates to the impacts of Government policy on housing affordability. One of the key drivers of the housing crisis is rapid population growth that is being fostered by governments, with net overseas migration now at 180,000 per annum and the rate of natural increase, i.e., fertility, being artificially inflated with baby bonuses.
- 1.4. This increase in population is lobbied for by vested interests such as the housing industry itself, which also contributes to the campaigns of elected representatives and political parties, to increase demand and maintain developer profit margins. This results in capital investment widening in terms of housing and infrastructure instead of capital deepening, or investment in productive enterprises, and thus further lowers the affordability of housing for workers.
- 1.5. Further, if we continue this rate of high population growth there will be no hope of achieving housing affordability in future.

(For further background information about Population and sustainability, see Attachment 1.)

2. Summary

In summary, our contention is that it is within the power of all levels of government to contribute to reducing the housing affordability crisis in many different ways, including requiring that housing be built that is sustainable, accessible, near transport and workplaces, etc., all of which we support. However, unless there is a concerted effort to lower the pressure on housing availability by lowering demand, housing affordability will continue to be a problem, together with many other problems driven by unsustainable growth. We need to recognise limits to growth and live within these. In that context, we make the following points:

- 2.1. Australia is a continent, mostly desert, of extremely low carrying capacity due to its shallow, nutrient-deficient soils and low and erratic rainfall. This harsh environment has also resulted in high numbers of specialised species, many of which are put at risk because of housing development, as they occupy the same limited supply of coastal habitats that humans want to live in. Thus, Australia cannot continue to accommodate ever-increasing numbers of immigrants and higher natural increase and maintain its biodiversity.
- 2.2. Global population is at 6.7 billion and adding an additional 75 million per year, predicted to rise to 9 to 12 billion by 2050. Though Australia agreed at the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development to help lower the birth rate through donating a percentage of our GDP for overseas aid to family planning, maternal health and opportunities for girls and women, we have not honoured that commitment, and are thus increasing pressure on the world's natural systems.
- 2.3. The world is facing the four challenges of population growth, climate change, peak oil and biodiversity loss. It will be difficult to achieve greenhouse gas emission targets if we release more land for more clearing for housing and if we continue to add more population. (See Attachment 2 – Comments on the budget by Dr Clive Hamilton, The Australia Institute.) It will also put even greater pressure on other species that will need to move in order to survive in the face of climate change. In addition, future energy constraints may force us to limit growth, so we should be planning with this in mind.
- 2.4. South East Queensland is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia and has some of the highest biodiversity, much of it habitat for species of significance at national, state and local levels. This biodiversity should not be sacrificed in the name of affordable housing, yet current levels of development planned will result in the loss of 60,000 hectares of bushland in the next 20 years.
- 2.5. Carbon offsets - If Australia is to meet its targets, we cannot continue adding to the problem of greenhouse gases by continuing to destroy the land's vegetation cover. This is a factor which will in the future add yet another impost on the cost of housing. This is a fluid topic which is being studied at all levels of government. If Australia is to meet its carbon reduction targets, all sectors of the economy will have to contribute, including the housing market. The draft Queensland Green Invest Strategy presented for preliminary discussion in November 2007 stated that carbon offsets would have to be provided by developers in the near future to offset loss of vegetation that could not be avoided. The intention was not that developers could simply buy their way out of their obligations under legislation but, as a last resort could pay for the purchase of equivalent undeveloped land in reasonably close proximity to the project, or, failing this, fund the purchase of land elsewhere in the region. This cost will have to be absorbed by purchasers of the properties.

- 2.6. Queensland Government policies to address housing affordability, released in July 2007, have resulted in legislation, the Urban Land Development Act, that allows the government to override any environmental constraints, either in local government planning schemes or in their own state legislation to guard against heritage, vegetation and waterways destruction and to protect communities from contaminated land and natural hazards. This means that affordable housing is to be provided at the expense of our natural environment, our heritage places and community safety.

3. Our recommendations are:

- 3.1. That the Federal Government seek to stabilise Australia's population in keeping with the ecological constraints, biodiversity imperatives and environmental values of the land and its ability to support human populations, both by lowering the rate of immigration to net 50,000 per annum and by supporting lower, not higher, domestic fertility rates (as advised in the Australian Academy of Sciences high school text book (1994) on stabilising Australia's population).
- 3.2. That all levels of government should recommit to genuine ecologically sustainable development and real consultation about the future of our communities;
- 3.3. That we provide overseas aid to family planning in keeping with promises to help stabilise the global population.
- 3.4. That we train our own skilled workers and not continue to poach them from other countries resulting in brain drain from the very societies that have paid for these skills and that need them the most.
- 3.5. That infrastructure costs should be largely borne by the development industry and passed on in the cost of housing and that the existing ratepayers should not be expected to pay for this additional infrastructure, lest their own homes become unaffordable. We also support the call for a national database of infrastructure and an analysis of costs per capita of new development and maintenance of existing infrastructure.
- 3.6. That State and local governments should have more control over urban development and that density and overall numbers should be limited so as to sustain a desirable lifestyle and provide for the needs of residents.
- 3.7. That the Federal government sets minimum standards for housing affordability, accessibility, sustainability, biodiversity and liveability in keeping with the carrying capacity of each climate / region and require that these be met in State and local government housing codes.

4. Refuting housing industry claims:

Three reasons are given by the housing industry for the shortfall in housing: government policy on land release, high land taxes and government red tape.

- 4.1. Government policy on land release - There have been repeated calls in the media for more land releases by government. A study by the AEC Group, commissioned by the Local Government Association of Queensland and published in 2006, found that enough land had been supplied to the housing market but that the take up rate had lagged behind. Calls in the media for greater land releases ignore the fact that it is affordable housing that is in demand, which is not being offered in areas such as the Gold Coast. The buy-up of traditional beach side shacks and modest 50's dwellings for very high cost makeovers has seen the affordable housing market dwindle. Combined with the closure of caravan parks, a traditional housing choice for many low-income earners, we see an

increase in commuting time and costs for workers who cannot afford homes near their places of work.

- 4.2. Land and other taxes - the study also found that increased taxes have only played a minor direct role in increasing housing costs.
- 4.3. Red tape- What is referred to as “red tape” is in large part the necessary close scrutiny of projects to ensure that they are fully compliant in terms of local, state and federal legislation, particularly as regards the presence of state or nationally significant native species of plants and animals. The system already overlooks environmental values time and again in granting approvals that result in the destruction of habitat and wildlife corridors and to reduce this scrutiny even further will undoubtedly speed the decline of our natural systems at an even faster rate. The development lobby has even put forward suggestions that the industry funds additional assessment officers so that Councils can fast-track approvals. This hasty process would not allow due consideration of all factors and might pressure Councils into approvals that do not meet all criteria. This not only affects our environment but exposes future residents of those sites to hazards such as landslip, weather-related incidents and a reduction of social amenity. Queensland recently appointed an “independent” unelected body to decide on development approvals, overriding local governments, who were elected on the basis of their willingness to control development. This is undermining democracy in favour of a vested interest group, the development lobby.

5. Current shortfall in housing

- 5.1. The Committee needs to determine firstly what is the current shortfall in housing, i.e., what is the scale of the problem? An estimated 186,000 applicants were on public housing waiting lists last year (MBA). The shortage of housing is already estimated to be about a third of one year’s production and is growing by close to 30,000 dwellings per annum (MBA).
- 5.2. Production of new residential dwellings is approximately 153,000 per annum. HIA contends that underlying demand for housing is such that an additional 25,000 dwellings over current production is required (HIA).
- 5.3. 2008/09 production was 157,000 and that projected for 2009/10 is 167,596 (HIA)
- 5.4. Then we need to determine the demand due to current population growth. This is about 320,000 pa including migration of 180,000 pa (2007 Bureau of Statistics) and add that to the existing housing shortfall.
- 5.5. One way to address this shortfall is to reduce immigration by the amount needed to allow time to catch up and this requires modeling and a long term plan and forecasts for Housing affordability and a population policy under public scrutiny.

6. Infrastructure

- 6.1. There is much talk about infrastructure costs being met by Government instead of by Developers to improve affordability. But in fact no one really knows what the cost of infrastructure is per capita because the numbers are not available.
- 6.2. Infrastructure is a huge, important and essential part of all our lives, and yet we have no idea in totality and in detail of what it comprises and what it would cost us to replace.
- 6.3. Governments worldwide appear to be addicted to growth and present arguments as to why this is so desirable on economic grounds and in the national interest yet they never

factor into these arguments the infrastructure costs needed to support this growth. The true cost cannot be obtained because the total and thus per capita value of infrastructure is not known.

- 6.4. In an oil deficient future, how many resources will it need to maintain the highways systems, or how much infrastructure will be retained or recycled? Again this cannot be projected because we have no idea of the extent of our current system.
- 6.5. Planning development is another area, where Governments slice up more rural land for developers; some minor charges are put on it for local infrastructure, yet no consideration is given to cost to the nation of the wider infrastructure costs, including human infrastructure, needed to support this development. It is convenient for government not to have this information available since it is then easy for them to avoid discussions on the wider costs to the community of these dedications.
- 6.6. What is needed is a centralised database of all public infrastructure (including human e.g., doctors, nurses), including replacement value, maintenance costs, and life.
- 6.7. All this information is available now, e.g., held separately by Federal, States and Local Governments, but it needs to be centralised and organised so that it would be possible to mine it for any data of interest, e.g., number and capacity of hospitals within the Wagga Wagga catchment area; the length and number and maintenance costs of unsealed roads in Australia or sealed roads in Cape York; the value of water reticulation systems, etc. Without this information Governments cannot make sensible decisions on resource allocation.

7. Open Space for Recreation

- 7.1. Gecko members met with the Queensland Housing Minister Robert Swarten and the Urban Development Institute of Australia – Gold Coast about the need for affordable housing and raised the issue of how they were going to provide open space for all of these additional residents and were told that open space is where they were planning to put the housing.
- 7.2. Right now here in South East Queensland, the Premier is putting incompatible recreational uses in national parks to try and satisfy the outdoor needs of our current residents and visitors, yet the Queensland government refuses to allow an infrastructure charge for recreational open space.

8. Planning legislation

- 8.1. In Queensland, we have the Integrated Planning Act designed to speed up and facilitate development. We have undergone almost 20 years of planning to accommodate growth of another 1.5 million more people in the SE corner. We have seen past poor planning, without regard for our biodiversity or life support systems, carried through to current planning schemes.
- 8.2. Now the Queensland Government, without any consultation or communication, delivered the Queensland Housing Affordability Strategy last July, which sets up a supposedly independent authority, the Urban Land Development Authority, consisting of former Local Government Ministers, Director Generals, etc., which will have the power to declare areas to be Urban Land Development Areas, controlling zoning, height restrictions, density or even transport and service.

- 8.3. The provision of this new legislation to remove all constraints to development in areas the Minister declares to be 'urban development areas' or 'major development areas' goes against good town planning principles and natural justice principles and is not in keeping with ecologically sustainable development principles.
- 8.4. This will not only override local government planning scheme policies, but will also remove any restrictive provisions of state government legislation, including that which protects endangered vegetation, natural waterways, heritage buildings and high quality agricultural land or that which ensures the community's protection from contaminated land and natural hazards. Under this undemocratic legislation there are no appeal rights and no compensation can be sought.
- 8.5. Negative environmental outcomes include loss of koala habitat in Coomera North and, the loss of other regionally significant bushland vegetation which provides habitat for native species, many of which are already rare, threatened or endangered. People will see an undesirable level of development forced upon existing communities and have no idea what additional land will be released after the whole SEQ Regional Planning process.

9. Suggested strategy to create new settlements

One solution to the housing crisis has been a suggestion to "open up" Australia's dry centre and artificially create the conditions that will allow human survival in this inhospitable region or to develop the far north into new growth centres. We view both suggestions with deep apprehension for many reasons, including:

- 9.1. Loss of vegetation cover which currently provides a carbon sink
- 9.2. Loss of biodiversity in areas that are currently fairly intact ecosystems
- 9.3. Unknown environmental consequences of interference with the hydrology of river systems and the gross extraction from these ecosystems of water needed to sustain human populations through damming, capture and storage
- 9.4. Unknown impacts of reduced monsoonal rain that naturally flows into from the seas along our north coast and is an integral component of the marine and coastal ecology
- 9.5. Enormous cost of transporting materials and workers to isolated and distant communities
- 9.6. Cost of providing incentives to attract residents to areas that are inhospitable because of isolation, extreme climatic conditions and health hazards
- 9.7. Cost of providing necessary infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, policing and administration and recruiting the personnel to deliver these services
- 9.8. Incalculable increase in greenhouse gas emissions released through the transport of people and materials in the construction and maintenance of new cities and from the destruction of vegetation cleared for development

The deep reservation conservationists have expressed for such proposals is not some fuzzy ideology but is based on sound scientific information. We are not facing a choice between people and the environment but an imperative to protect the very systems that support all life and provide us with clean water and air, stable soils and habitat for other species.

10. Conclusion

Affordable housing must set the pace for everyone. McMansions might serve their purpose for some executive lifestyles but are not necessary, desirable or affordable for the majority of the population.. In order to be affordable, housing must be near work and/or have work space within for a home office and private outdoor space. It must also have play space for children or community facilities nearby and must be close to public transport.

Here in South East Queensland, the development industry has been providing stock at the luxury end of the market and has not made an effort to provide a variety of stock at different price ranges. In order for housing to be affordable, it has to be sustainable, not only in energy and water efficiency, but also in how it fits into the landscape, the lifestyle and the climate of the area.

It is our position that strategies to provide finance and other incentives to increase the supply of affordable housing will be negated by increases to our population, both from net immigration and the birth rate. The development sector has lobbied for an intake of skilled migrants to speed up construction rates, yet these workers will themselves have to be housed.

Other sectors have lobbied for migration to increase in order to supply carers for our aging population. This is yet another strategy that will produce exponential growth and place an impossible burden on future generations which will somehow have to meet the food, water, housing and other needs Australia is already struggling to supply.

Yours sincerely



Rose Adams, Secretary
Gecko – Gold Coast & Hinterland Environment Council

Enclosed: Attachment 1 – Population and sustainability
Attachment 2 – Hamilton: Climate Change should inform budget decisions
Attachment 3 – Australian Bureau of Statistics Media Release

POPULATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

1. Global population

Globally there are almost 6.7 billion (thousand million) people, increasing by about 75million a year, an additional billion every 13 years. In 1992, at the Rio Earth Summit on the Environment and Development all nations agreed we should be aiming for ecologically sustainable development.

At the 1994 Cairo United Nations Conference on Population and Development (UNCPD) it was agreed by all 179 countries attending that the population of the world should be stabilised before it reaches 8 billion, the lowest, most politically achievable target. Yet global population is now on track to reach 9 to 12 billion by the middle of the century.

The 2005 World Summit set Millennium Development Goals, some of which relate to affordable housing. For example, one of the goals is that by the year 2020, they resolve to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers. With the world's population increasing by 75million each year over those 15 years, or by over a billion people during that time, the achievement of this Goal will certainly be offset by there being even more slum dwellers.

Population growth, Peak Oil, Climate change, and the need to protect biodiversity, the four challenges to a sustainable future, all have impacts on the achievement of affordable housing.

2. Australia's population growth

In 1994, all levels of Australian Government committed to Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) through the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE). Also, in 1994 the Long Term Strategies Committee of the Commonwealth House of Representatives conducted an inquiry on the topic of Australia's long term human carrying capacity, which made many recommendations, none of which has been implemented to our knowledge.

Australia is a continent of very low carrying capacity both due to its lack of soil and erratic rainfall. It is also a continent of extremely high biological diversity – the only OECD country in the top 12 biodiversity countries in the world - that we have agreed to protect. Australia currently feeds 1% of the world's people (60million) and has over 21million residents and over 5 million visitor nights each year. Our resident population increases by about 320,000 per year, about 180,000 in net overseas migration (now increased to 190,000) and 140,000 due to natural increase (births minus deaths), or an additional million people every 3 years.

On 13 April 2008, the resident population of Australia was projected to be 21,271,842. This projection is based on the estimated resident population at 30 September 2007 and assumes growth since then of:

- one birth every 1 minute and 55 seconds,
- one death every 3 minutes and 58 seconds,

- a net gain of one international migrant every 2 minutes and 51 seconds
- leading to an overall total population increase of one person every 1 minute and 37 seconds.

The increase of 318,500 people (in the year ending September 2007) saw Australia's population rise to 21,097,000 people. Net overseas migration contributed 179,100 people (56%) to Australia's growth while natural increase (the excess of births over deaths) added 139,400 (44%) to the tally. Of the increase in immigration, only about 7%, or 13,000 places, is for refugees or humanitarian settlement, with the bulk being for business migrants and skilled workers.

In addition, we are expecting to accommodate refugees from climate change (which could be over a billion people worldwide) even though our own coastal and outback developments are at risk from increased sea level rise and/or storms, flooding and drought. Outback farmers are already moving to the cities, unable to sustain a living from the land during prolonged drought. The recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC Report) states that “ongoing coastal development and population growth in areas such as Cairns and Southeast Queensland... are projected to exacerbate risks from sea-level rise and increases in the severity and frequency of storms and coastal flooding by 2050”.

If our population continues to expand over the next 40 years as it has during the previous 40, by 2050 Australia will have a population more than 40 million. If that happens, all the solutions now being proposed by politicians and public figures to address housing affordability, greenhouse gas emissions and other aspects of sustainability won't work.

Clearly, we must not only lower our emissions per capita, but also stabilise our populations (the number of emitters) and invest in research to reverse the damage already done by our fossil fuel burning technology.

3. South East Queensland

SEQ is a region of extremely high biodiversity and we are struggling to maintain our forests, fields, farms, floodplains and foothills in the face of unprecedented rapid population growth. There are an additional 60,000 residents per year coming to South East Queensland, or 5,000 per month.

The demand being created by this rapid level of growth is resulting in not only a bottleneck of production of housing, but also a lack of infrastructure. The Queensland government is attempting to provide this infrastructure by overriding community concerns and the democratic process.

Recent legislation and mapping in Queensland has identified the South East Queensland region as being of high biodiversity. It also contains areas of good quality agricultural land and remaining patches of koala habitat, rainforests, coastal wetlands, etc., all at risk of being paved over by housing, a paradise lost.

Queensland Environmental Protection Agency mapping shows that large sections of our region contain significant vegetation and habitat for significant fauna. An

assessment by ecologist Dr Carla Catterall in 1993 shows that at the then rate of development we would lose all low-lying coastal vegetation by 2019.

The Gold Coast City Council Nature Conservation Strategy of 1997 shows large sections of significant bushland in our city that were subject to development, that is, they could not be saved. But it also showed areas that were significant and hadn't yet been committed to development, but had no planning protection – much of this is now gone. The Gold Coast recently made a decision to raise the Hinze Dam to its full height, despite it not being economical for water supply, which will result in the loss of over 400 hectares of land, much of it mapped as core habitat for significant species, being inundated.

We are watching farmlands and bushland turned over to provided more and more housing. Koala habitat is disappearing by hundreds of hectares despite the existence of the Koala Coast State Planning Policy and the Koala Conservation Plan. The Queensland Premier's recently announced compensatory habitat and greenhouse offsets policy may result in further losses of environmentally significant local areas with compensatory acquisitions being made in cheaper, less accessible and desirable areas.

We need to address the fact that there are limits to the productive and carrying capacity of the land. The recent local government elections showed that people are starting to make the connection between rapid population growth and the loss of natural values and lifestyle options.

4. Sustainability

Australia is also a high consuming western society and successive governments have advocated a growth economy, both in terms of numbers and size, which is clearly unsustainable in the long term. We are one of only three immigration seeking countries in the world and our program has more than doubled since the Hawke/Keating years from a net overseas migrant estimate of 80,000 per year to 180,000 in 2007. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0/>

See media release attached (Attachment 3):

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3101.0Media%20Release1Sep%202007?opendocument&tab>

Lack of housing affordability can be considered another measure of sustainability, especially if one has to override planning constraints and destroy values that you have only recently begun to protect in order to make housing more affordable.

High population growth is a major driver of many of our social, economic and environmental problems. In particular, it is the principle cause, as openly anticipated and welcomed by land speculators and property developers, of Australia's housing hyper-inflation.

The underlying assumption of most planning is that growth is inevitable, rather than a political decision. The politics and policies of engineering growth remain outside the discussion and slow or no growth has not been presented as an option.

A socially marginalised class of people have been created in the outer suburbs of our big cities where they are vulnerable to interest rate hikes and volatile petrol prices.

5. Demand

Governments at all levels have driven up demand for land through government-stimulated population growth. The Federal Government has significantly increased immigration to about 180,000 individuals as a net increase per annum.

The South East Queensland Regional Plan accommodates an additional 1.2 million residents by 2026. The Plan ensures that 575,000 dwellings will be built in South East Queensland in the next 20 years, over half of which will be in natural areas.

And this is what was happening before the housing industry and other vested interests started clamouring for more “affordable housing” after lobbying for more immigrants and large families to increase the demand for their product.

Now we have an unholy alliance of those concerned about social justice and sustainability joined with “growth at any cost” advocates pretending to care about home buyers.

ATTACHMENT 2

Hamilton: Climate change should inform every budget decision

Clive Hamilton writes:

The budget suggests that the Rudd Government still does not understand the seriousness of climate change. This is not because of the modesty of the greenhouse program allocation in the budget. In a way the absence of new spending is a good sign — the Howard Government for years bragged about its “\$2.3 billion greenhouse program”, which was no more than a veil for concealing its inaction.

The proof of the Government’s commitment will become apparent only when it delivers on its promise of an emissions trading system and, crucially, the target it sets in the medium term.

However, we will know the magnitude of the task has truly sunk in when every major government decision is taken only after consideration of its greenhouse implications. This is not happening.

In one of the more dismaying signs that the Howard Government refused to understand the issue, Peter Costello was genuinely mystified when it was suggested that his GST package — which cut the price of diesel, reduced taxes on cars and increased the cost of public transport — should have anything to do with the environment.

Despite its obsession with getting petrol prices down, the Rudd Government is not so blind. Nevertheless, the large increase in the migration program announced in the budget, to take the number of permanent migrants to a record high of 190,300 in 2008-09, will make the Government’s greenhouse gas reduction commitments substantially more expensive and difficult to achieve.

There is a direct and strong relationship between population growth and growth in Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions. In contrast to most other OECD countries, population growth in Australia has in the past been one of main factors driving growth in emissions.

The greenhouse gases of the average immigrant in Australia are about double those that would have been generated had that person not migrated. This is no surprise when we recognise that per person Australians have the highest greenhouse gas emissions in the industrialised world.

Modelling analysis a few years ago showed that, compared to a policy of zero net immigration, high immigration (set at 140,000 per annum) would see our emissions increase by an additional 16 per cent or 65 million tonnes by 2020. Since then, rates of immigration have increased to 177,000 this year and they are now set to grow even more.

Continued high rates of immigration will make it substantially more difficult for Australia to meet its medium and long-term emissions reduction target, the latter set by the Rudd Government at a 60 per cent reduction by 2050.

To meet our international obligations we will be required to meet an absolute emissions target. With a bigger population, this allocated level of total emissions will need to be spread across more people, thereby reducing the amount each of us will be able to emit. In other words, we will all have to do more; and with continued high immigration levels, we will have to do a lot more.

Yet as the Government looks down the barrel of major emission cuts between now and 2020, and even bigger cuts beyond that, population growth is the great unmentionable. No one will officially concede that there is a downside to high immigration.

In his interim report on climate change policy Ross Garnaut acknowledged the fact that population growth, in both fast-growing developing countries like China and mature economies like Australia, will mean higher rates of growth of greenhouse gas emissions. This will require more stringent, and more costly, programs to reduce emissions to the absolute levels required to minimize the chances of dangerous climate change.

However, Garnaut seems to accept that the rate of population growth cannot be one of the policy levers to be pulled to reduce emissions. I suspect he thinks it is simply not politically palatable so there is no point in talking about it.

If ever there were a policy problem that demanded a whole-of-government approach, climate change is the one. We are still a long way from it.

MEDIA RELEASE

March 19, 2008

21/2008

Australia's population continues to increase

Australia experienced an annual estimated population growth rate of 1.5% for the year ending September 2007, according to figures released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The increase of 318,500 people (in the year ending September 2007) saw Australia's population rise to 21,097,000 people. Net overseas migration contributed 179,100 people (56%) to Australia's growth while natural increase (the excess of births over deaths) added 139,400 (44%) to the tally.

Nationally, Western Australia recorded the fastest population growth at 2.4%, this was followed by Queensland and the Northern Territory both recording a growth rate of 2.2%. Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory both recorded population growth at the national average of 1.5%. New South Wales and South Australia both had population growth rates of 1.0%, followed by Tasmania at 0.8%.

Net overseas migration was the largest contributor to population growth for most states and territories, especially South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. Western Australia continued to have the fastest net overseas migration rate of all the states and territories.

Queensland remained a popular destination for interstate migrants with 102,200 people moving to Queensland from other states and territories (almost 2,000 people per week). Movement from Queensland to other states and territories was 75,200 (just over 1,400 people per week). This resulted in a net gain for Queensland of 27,000 people from other states and territories. Western Australia recorded a net increase of 4,200 people from other states and territories.

At 30 September 2007, the resident population for each state and territory was:

New South Wales 6,909,000;	Western Australia 2,119,000;
Victoria 5,226,000;	Tasmania 494,500;
Queensland 4,201,000;	Northern Territory 216,500;
South Australia 1,588,000;	Australian Capital Territory 340,300.

More details are available in *Australian Demographic Statistics, September Quarter 2007* (cat. no. 3101.0).

Media note:

Net interstate migration: The net gain or loss of population through interstate migration, being the change of a person's place of usual residence from one state or territory to another state or territory.

Net overseas migration: The net gain or loss of population through immigration to Australia and emigration from Australia.

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