

Samuel Rae

Victorian Branch Secretary

Australian Labor Party

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Dear Sam

This is a very hard letter for me to write. I first joined the Australian Labor Party in 1975.

Within a few years I had become a Branch Secretary, then Branch President, then delegate to the Victorian State Conference and President of the Wills FEA, Policy Committee member, and member of a number of local, State, and Federal Campaign Committees. I was later elected as a member of the Public Office Selection Panel and served for a time as its President.

In 1981 I was elected as an endorsed Australian Labor Party Councillor for the City of Coburg, and re-elected in 1982 and 1985, serving until 1988. In 1988 I was elected as an endorsed Australian Labor Party Member of the Victorian Parliament for the electorate of Pascoe Vale. I represented Pascoe Vale until 1996 and served as a Shadow Minister and Manager of Opposition Business during that time.

In 1996 I was elected to the Federal Parliament as the Labor Member for Wills. I was re-elected in 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010 and 2013, serving for over 20 years until I retired from Parliament in 2016. I served as a Labor Shadow Minister from 1998 till 2007. When Labor was elected to Government I became Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, and later on served as a Parliamentary Secretary under 2 Labor Prime Ministers.

It was an honour and a privilege to represent the Australian Labor Party in 2 Parliaments and 3 levels of government for a total of over 35 years. To say the Labor Party has been my life is putting it mildly. As you know, I received my 40 Year Membership Medallion a couple of years ago. Since retiring from Parliament I have continued to provide assistance and support to Labor MPs and candidates in my area.

So I am writing this letter of resignation with a very heavy heart. There are many things I could talk about, but I accept this is always going to be true of any large political organisation. The one thing I cannot overlook is this. The world is undergoing unsustainable population growth – it has more than doubled in the last 50 years. I can't do much about that, but Australia is one of the worst offenders. So too Victoria. So too Melbourne. The Australian Labor Party of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has embraced Australia's 21<sup>st</sup> Century rapid population growth, known by the shorthand expression of Big Australia. The 55,000 annual net overseas migration of the Whitlam years, when I joined, has turned into over 200,000 annual net overseas migration. Here in Victoria we have embraced Big Victoria and Big Melbourne.

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For a decade now I have set out what I believe to be the myopia, greed, vanity and ecological illiteracy that drives Big Australia. I won't insult your intelligence by repeating my arguments. Suffice to say that I have arrived at a point where there are irreconcilable differences between the course I believe Australia and the world needs to chart, and the course that the Australian Labor Party is charting.

It is true that neither the Liberal nor the Greens Parties have any more enlightened approaches to the issue, but there is a Party – Sustainable Australia – which does get it. As they say in the US, everyone has the right to the pursuit of happiness. It is well established that an important ingredient of happiness is the opportunity to spend your days doing something you believe in.

What I believe is that exponential population growth is not merely a problem, but that it is the problem that reinforces all others. I agree with David Attenborough – “I've never seen a problem that wouldn't be easier to solve with fewer people, or harder, and ultimately impossible, with more”.

I have been given an opportunity by the Sustainable Australia Party's Victorian MLC Cliff Hayes to do something I really believe in. It is an opportunity too good to pass up. Obviously that is not consistent with my remaining a Labor Party member, hence this letter.

I set out in my Valedictory Speech my great appreciation of the support I received as an MP from ordinary members of the Labor Party, and those sentiments remain true. I retain a hope that in time Labor will embrace views about Australia's population that are more in keeping with the needs of this generation, the needs of those who will come after us, and the needs of the many other species we have the good fortune to share this ancient, beautiful and fragile country with.

Yours sincerely

The Hon. Kelvin Thomson

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