
Joint statement of the Population 2040 Working Party

1. Historically, Australian governments have not developed policies to manage Australia's population. Concerns for national security and economic growth have led to policies of population growth, but the question of the optimal population of the continent has not been a factor in those policies. Recently, however, community concern and the work of governmental bodies such as the Ecologically Sustainable Development Process, the National Population Council and the House Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies, have raised the question of the size of population appropriate for Australia.
2. Economic analyses offer a range of views on the relation between population and prosperity. A conservative summary of these views is that population growth would be neutral in its impact on the economic welfare of families and individuals.
3. Demographic analysis from reasonable assumptions concerning the major determinants of population growth (fertility, mortality, immigration) shows that a population policy is of major importance. In the lifetime of our children, thus by the mid-21st century, Australia's population could be made as high as 37 million (and still growing), or kept as low as 23 million (and be stationary), by community decisions and governmental policy.
4. Australia's land mass, though large, is less rich than other continents in many biologically important elements. As a consequence, its ecosystems are relatively fragile, and human impact on the environment is particularly severe. This impact has been documented even for the relatively sparse, low-consumption Aboriginal societies. The impact of modern Australian society is much more severe.

5. If our population reaches the high end of the feasible range (37 million), the quality of life of all Australians will be lowered by the degradation of water, soil, energy and biological resources. Cities such as Sydney and Melbourne will double or triple in size, multiplying their current infrastructure problems and their impact on the surrounding regions of the continent. Alternatively, new cities of their present size and impact will have to be sited, built and serviced. Moreover, this large population would continue to grow for decades after 2040, and the quality of Australian life would continue to fall.
6. It is therefore essential that the issue of the continent's population become part of national debates over our future. From such debates, the Federal Government must develop a policy on population, which should include the issue of population size.
7. In our view, the quality of all aspects of our children's lives will be maximised if the population of Australia by the mid-21st Century is kept to the low, stable end of the achievable range, i.e. to approximately 23 million.

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April 1994