

# Australia's People, Australia's Future

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On 23 January 1950, a few weeks after winning the December 1949 election, Prime Minister Robert Menzies addressed a Citizenship Convention welcoming new migrants to Australia. He said this:

If everyone one of us in Australia understood that migration was vital to our existence, growth and development, then we should regard every migrant as our friend, and we should go to no end of trouble to make every migrant feel at home  
... .

We must also keep in mind ... no matter how much we may dislike it, however great our goodwill towards other countries, however unquestioned our desire for peace, this is not at present a peaceful world.

If we want to make a contribution to the pacification of the world, it is our duty to present to the world a spectacle of a rich country with a great people, with an adequate population, with a population which may justly say to the rest of the world: "we are here; we propose to maintain our integrity as a nation; and our warrant for that is that we are using the resources which God has given into our hands.

Eight years before Prime Minister Menzies made that speech, Australia was facing the prospect of imminent invasion. On Sunday morning 7 December 1941, the day of infamy, Pearl Harbour was attacked without warning and 18 warships of the US Pacific Fleet were sunk or severely damaged. Three days later, on 10 December, HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse were sunk by Japanese planes off the Malayan coast. Hong Kong was taken on Christmas Day. Prime Minister John Curtin's New Year's Day message, containing the famous line:

Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom

was published in the Melbourne *Herald* on 27 December.

Six weeks later, on 15 February 1942, Singapore surrendered and 100,000 Australian and British troops were taken prisoner by a Japanese force of 30,000 men. Darwin was bombed four days later on 19 February. From the 27 February to 1 March, the Battle of the Java Sea resulted in a major allied defeat with the sinking of five cruisers, including HMAS Perth, and nine destroyers. The Battle of the Coral Sea, in which the US Pacific Fleet turned the tide of the Japanese advance towards Australia, took place from 4 to 8 May 1942.

The very real fear of invasion, which gripped every Australian for six months, laid the basis for the post-War immigration programme. After the War, Arthur Calwell used the new understanding of Australia's vulnerability to bring to Australia refugees from Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, as well as large numbers of Italians, Greeks, and refugees from the Balkans. There was also a large influx of migrants from the UK. The Australian people supported this immigration programme because they realised how desperate had been their situation in 1942, and how essential it was to lay the foundation for a more secure Australia.

That massive post-War injection of human capital into an Australian population of then fewer than seven millions, provided the foundations of today's Australia, with a population of nearly 20 million, and capable of playing a much more important role in world affairs than that small figure might imply. Our capacity to play a role on the global stage, however, is dependent upon our relative economic success. Because we are a prosperous nation we can afford to maintain an army, navy and air-force which have played an important role in two world wars, and in Korea, in Vietnam, and more recently in East Timor. Even in Afghanistan, our contribution, although small, has been significant.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Australia's population increased by a factor of 2.5. It has done so with great success, and the ultimate test of that success is the degree to which the new arrivals have intermarried across ethnic and religious lines. Some immigrant groups have resisted out-marriage and sought to ensure that the next generation marries only within the immigrant or ethnic community. Fortunately, these groups are a minority, but they carry a warning about the dangers which unwise immigration policies can bring.

A nation which faces the possibility of external threats cannot afford to become a 'nation of tribes', beset with internal divisions and suspicions. The best insurance against such an

outcome is to adopt an immigration policy which discriminates in favour of people whose capacity to intermarry with the existing Australian population has already been demonstrated.

If the Australian people wish to ensure, as much as humanly possible, the continuing independence and sovereignty of this nation, with its long traditions of democracy and freedom under the law, then a bipartisan commitment to a high immigration programme, biased towards immigrants who are culturally and socially capable of rapid assimilation into mainstream Australia, is essential. Given current fertility rates, an Australian population of 50 million by the year 2050 will, under normal circumstances, be impossible to attain, but that fact should increase our determination to pursue a rate of immigration which is as high as our political and economic circumstances allow.

Immigration, and what kind of immigrants we bring to Australia, is central to our future national security. Over the next 20 years, the global strategic situation will be such as to give us a world made up of two groups of nations. The first group of nations, a small group, will be those countries which can afford to buy and to operate competitive weapons systems and platforms in the three traditional spheres of warfare—land, sea and air. Most of these weapons, and the platforms which support them, will be designed and made in the US, and they will be expensive, particularly for countries with poor exchange rates. The other and much larger group of nations will be like New Zealand. They will make little effort to contribute to their national or to regional security. They will be completely dependent upon alliances with other countries to provide that security.

If Australia is to continue as an independent and sovereign nation, located in a region inhabited by billions of people, it must remain a member of that small group of nations which owns and operates competitive weapons systems. In regional terms, our population will, regardless of immigration, continue to be very small. There are, however, significant economies of scale in defence equipment and defence capability, and a nation with 40 million prosperous people is capable of much more than twice the defence effort of a nation of 20 million prosperous people.

There are substantial, and positive, wealth impacts simply from having a higher population. If, by waving a magic wand, our population were today 40 million instead of 20 million, everything else remaining the same, we would, of course be substantially richer. One of the

reasons why the US is the world's richest nation is that it has a population of nearly 300 million, and it is also a growing population, much of it from migration.

The reason for this scale effect is that the transaction costs involved in trade within national boundaries are less than the transaction costs associated with international trade. Other things being equal, therefore, a nation which enjoys the benefits of the rule of law, particularly respect for property rights, and enforcement of the rights of parties to lawful contracts, will be more prosperous with more people, than with less. Trade within the domestic borders of a country such as the US, the UK, or Australia, is easy, and the degree with which specialisation and the division of labour can take place within the borders of such countries is dependent upon the number of people engaged in economic life.

Australia's defence budgets are going to have to grow, both absolutely and relatively, during the next 20 years. A large-scale immigration programme which brings contributors to Australia, rather than dependents, is an essential corollary to this defence investment.

Australia is an active player on the global stage and we have much greater influence in international affairs than our population and wealth, alone, would justify. The influence we can bring to bear in international debates is, in significant measure, determined by the opinions and the perceptions of Australia held by political elites in other countries.

The belief that Australia is grossly underpopulated is widely held throughout Asia, but also in other parts of the world. A characteristic example of this view was manifested some years ago by Dr Noel Brown, Regional Director of the United Nations Environment Program, UNEP, for North America. Dr Brown is Jamaican born and had worked for the UN for more than 20 years. At a conference held in 1991 to promote fears of global warming and rising sea levels, Dr Brown argued that as a result of these developments, 300 million people, living today within a few hours' flying time from Australia's shores, would be looking for somewhere else to live.

Dr Brown told us that Australia was underpopulated, rich in resources, and with plenty of space. Were we prepared, he demanded, to take on board 300 million climatic refugees?

Whether there is any real evidence to justify fears of either global warming or rising sea levels is irrelevant in this situation. It is this widespread international perception of a continent that

is grossly underpopulated, but at the same time occupied by a nation enjoying enviable prosperity, which requires Australia to make a response. Unless we do so, our legitimacy as a nation will be undermined, and we will find ourselves targeted as a nation not serious about its sovereignty and security. Any response which seeks to deflect criticism by pleading that the Australian environment is too fragile to sustain a higher population will be treated with bemused contempt. Our response to those who question our legitimacy must be to use the words of Robert Menzies:

We are here; we propose to maintain our integrity as a nation; and our warrant for that is that we are using the resources which God has given into our hands ...”

... and at the same time to demonstrate our strength of purpose by establishing a serious immigration programme which is explicitly and unashamedly determined by our security requirements and our national interest.