



## FECCA

# Australian Population and Immigration Policy Principles

September 2009

### Background

The Australian population is growing more rapidly than in previous years. The Federal Treasurer Wayne Swan released research in September 2009 which showed that Australia's population is expected to grow to 35 million people by 2049 based on higher fertility rates and increased net overseas migration. This is significantly higher than previous estimates of around 28.5 million by 2047. Population ageing is still significant with 22 per cent of people projected to be over the age of 65 in 2049 compared to 13 per cent today, and 5 per cent of people projected to be over the age of 85 compared with 1.7 per cent today.

This significant increase in Australia's population has drawn some criticism, particularly from some environmentalists who are concerned about the capacity of Australia's natural resources to carry a much larger population. On the other hand, commentators have pointed out that increased immigration has ensured that Australia has continued to grow economically and has also avoided recession unlike most other Western countries during the current global financial crisis. In addition the dynamism and creativity that migrants bring has enhanced our nation socially, economically and culturally. Environmental pressures can be mitigated by Australians adopting more sustainable environmental practices. Further, the Commonwealth and State Governments must develop stronger policies to protect our environment from increased population.

Increases in immigration have primarily been in the skilled migration and skilled temporary migration areas which has helped maintain economic growth. For instance skilled migration levels have more than doubled from around 45,000 per annum (pa) to over 100,000 pa over the last

decade and temporary migrant numbers have also increased rapidly. The family reunion and refugee programs, of which FECCA has been traditionally particularly supportive, have increased at lower rates and are at 60,000 pa and 13,750 pa respectively. While skilled migration relates primarily to the economic and labour market needs of a nation; family reunion and refugee migration relate to core human rights principles around the rights of Australians to live with their family members and Australia's international human rights obligations as a stable and prosperous country to offer refuge to those in need. Family reunion also assists migrants to settle more effectively.

Given the increased debate around Australia's population FECCA outlines the following principles for our immigration and population policy. These recommendations do not seek to prescribe specific numbers and detail around our immigration and/or population levels. Rather these are an outline of the key principles that FECCA believes the Australian Government should consider when forming its immigration and population policies. FECCA also released a detailed Environment Policy discussion paper (updated in 2009) which can be found at:

[http://www.fecca.org.au/Policies/1/policies\\_2007023.pdf](http://www.fecca.org.au/Policies/1/policies_2007023.pdf) .

#### FECCA AUSTRALIAN POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION POLICY PRINCIPLES

1. FECCA supports the continuation of a sustainable immigration program incorporating appropriately balanced workforce, family reunion and refugee components.
2. FECCA supports a non-discriminatory immigration program and is absolutely opposed to any discrimination against immigrants on the basis of race, nationality or religion.
3. Immigrants bring creativity, energy and productivity to our country as well as help drive economic growth and a diverse and dynamic community.
4. Despite recent small increases in fertility rates Australia's birth rate remains below replacement levels and we still have a rapidly ageing population and with ongoing skills and labour market shortages.
5. FECCA believes Australia can sustain a higher population subject to improved environmental, infrastructure, housing and employment planning.

6. FECCA believes that the Australian population needs to move towards more environmentally friendly practices at work and at home to minimise the effects of population growth on the environment. For instance, regardless of overall population levels, Australia cannot continue being one of the largest greenhouse gas emitting nations in the world per head of population.
7. FECCA believes the Australian Government should develop a detailed long term population policy with specific targets taking into account fertility rates, immigration levels, resource capacities and economic needs.
8. FECCA believes a government funded Population and Multicultural Research Body should be revived to consider these issues more deeply, utilising a much more sophisticated and thorough research and knowledge base.
9. FECCA believes that the family reunion program and the refugee program should be exempted from any cuts to the immigration program and these programs should be increased as proportions of the total immigration program. The family reunion and refugee streams relate to core human rights: that is the rights of people to live with their close family and Australia's international human rights obligations to refugees as a prosperous and stable first world nation. Family reunion also assists people to settle more effectively.
10. The level of skilled migration is ultimately a matter for the government of the day based on Australia's changing economic needs, current skills shortages and wider resourcing issues. It should be noted however that Australia's high levels of skilled migration have prevented the nation from going into recession unlike most other western countries and Australia is still facing the twin challenges of skills shortages and an ageing population.
11. The skilled migration program needs to be more appropriately managed to ensure that skilled migrants are getting work in the areas they are qualified in and are not performing work below their capabilities which leads to a diminished migration experience both for the skilled migrant personally and the host country economically.
12. The Government needs to develop policies to ensure that the skills of incoming skilled migrants are more widely recognised by employers to ensure that our skilled migration program is economically effective.

13. Further measures need to be implemented regarding the significant levels of documented employment discrimination against people from minority ethnic backgrounds in Australia.
14. Skilled migrants, refugees and family reunion entrants should all be given access to appropriate settlement, training, employment, housing, welfare, health, mentoring and other human services following their arrival in Australia.