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A POPULATION POLICY FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA?

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It is possible for a State Government to develop a population policy. If South Australia wishes to increase its population and re-balance its age structure there are a number of strategies it could adopt; for example it could try to persuade some young people who have left the State to return, especially couples with children, and it could improve gender equity in the workplace and thus help support fertility. In contrast, schemes designed to divert large numbers of international immigrants to the State are unlikely to succeed.

INTRODUCTION

Australia's Federal Government has eschewed the adoption of a population policy although there have been several calls by government initiated inquiries for it to do so,¹ most recently at a National Population Summit.² The communiqué issued at the latter involved each of the State/Territory Premiers supporting the proposal but in Australia the Federal government has greater control over most of the levers available to influence population processes. Nevertheless, there is increasing recognition at the State/Territory level of the significance of population trends for social, economic and environmental change. This raises the question as to whether there is scope for States to have effective population policies. The present paper is second in a series, in which the first analysed population trends within South Australia.³ The aim here is to explore whether there is scope for an Australian State or Territory to develop an effective population policy and to examine some of the elements which such a policy might include in South Australia.

A population policy is a coherent set of objectives with relation to future population size, distribution and structure, together with a series of initiatives designed to achieve those objectives. It partly involves governments seeking to

anticipate and respond to population trends but also includes attempts to alter demographic trends deemed to have negative consequences. A population policy should not be developed in isolation from wider economic, social and political policies and it should be part of the effort to move toward such goals as improved prosperity, increased equity, greater productivity, ecological sustainability and social cohesion.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S 'POPULATION PROBLEM'

South Australia is the State with the slowest population growth on the Australian mainland. Many South Australian policy makers see this status as a major constraint on prosperity and development. Thus, to the extent that population policy has been discussed at the State level, it has been in terms of the need to increase rates of population growth. This partly reflects a common perception among Australian politicians that there is a causal link between population growth and economic growth. It could be argued, however, that the State faces greater challenges due to other demographic trends — in particular, the increasing ratio of dependent older persons to the working age population and the net loss of young skilled people through interstate migration.⁴ Before

South Australia considers developing a population policy there should be a comprehensive consideration of existing demographic trends, the development of a vision of what the future population of the State should be and an evaluation of a range of policies and programs which can assist in working toward that vision.

The present outlook for the South Australian population is for the total population to begin to decline in the third decade of this century, for the labour-force age groups to begin to decline somewhat earlier and for the State to move toward what McDonald and Kippen⁵ describe as a 'coffin' shaped age structure with an increasing share of the State's population being aged 65 years and over. This scenario does not bode well for the future prosperity and wellbeing of the State.

Many analysts argue that Australia should work toward achieving a demographically stable population age structure. This would see Australia's population reaching 24 to 25 million in the next half century after which growth would be close to zero. Adopting a similar position for South Australia would mean that the State's population (currently 1.5 million) would grow to between 1.9 and two million and then stabilise. What policies might be considered to achieve this outcome?

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

International migration is an area of population policy squarely within the hands of the Federal Government. At different times, however, the States tried to channel immigrants to settle in particular areas. In the early postwar years the South Australian Government was active in attracting immigrants from the United Kingdom to settle in the State by offering a package of incentives. This involved

assisted passages provided by the Federal government's immigration program, housing supplied by the South Australian Housing Trust and a guaranteed job, usually in the State's rapidly expanding manufacturing sector. This package was highly effective in making South Australia a major destination of immigrants, especially those from the UK. In 1971 South Australia had only 9.2 per cent of the overall national population but it had 10.9 per cent of Australia's immigrants and 13.6 per cent of the UK-born.

A number of recent initiatives have been taken by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) to attract migrants to areas currently receiving small intakes. This applies not only to States and State Governments but to regions and regional development organisations. These initiatives are mostly via a number of new sub-categories of migration entry to Australia and in general DIMIA applies these sub-categories to all areas of Australia outside three designated areas which are currently attracting a disproportionate share of incoming migrants:

- the Sydney-Newcastle-Wollongong conurbation
- southeastern Queensland
- Perth.

All other areas can take advantage of a number of special regional immigration schemes.⁶ These provide the possibility for some migrants to gain entry even if they fall below the national points test cut-off mark. (They will usually need a sponsor, or recognised Australian qualifications, functional English, particular types of occupations, and to be under 45 years of age.) There are a range of programs as Table 1 indicates.

The South Australian Government has been one of the most enthusiastic backers of these schemes⁷ and 36.9 per cent of the

Table 1: Distribution of migrants granted visas under state-specific migration mechanisms, 1998-99 to 2000-01

Category	South Australia	Other States	Total
1998-99			
RSMS	436	329	765
STNI	169	0	169
Regional-linked	29	38	67
SAL*	396	1,348	1,744
SSBS**	4	55	59
REBA	0	0	0
Total	1,034	1,770	2,804
1999-2000			
RSMS	373	291	664
STNI	9	0	9
Regional-linked	16	179	195
SAL*	297	2,087	2,384
SSBS**	4	40	44
REBA	3	10	13
Total	702	2,607	3,309
2000-01			
RSMS	437	584	1,021
STNI	36	49	85
Regional-linked	67	935	1,002
SAL*	184	1,391	1,575
SSBS**	16	106	122
REBA	10	31	41
Total	750	3,096	3,846

* Refers to applicants under this category who obtained bonus points because their sponsor lived in a designated area.

** Includes applicants processed under offshore subclass 129 (State/Territory Sponsored Business Owner), offshore subclass 130 (State/Territory Sponsored Senior Executive), onshore subclass 842 (State/Territory Sponsored Business Owner) and onshore subclass 843 (State/Territory Sponsored Senior Executive).

Acronyms

RSMS – Regional Skilled Migration Scheme
STNI – State/Territory Nominated Independent

SAL – Skilled-Australian Linked
SSBS – State/Territory Sponsored Business Skills

REBA – Regional Established Business in Australia

Source: DIMIA, *Population Flows: Immigration Aspects*, various issues

1998-89 immigrants entering under these schemes went to South Australia. However, this was reduced to 21.2 per cent in 1999-2000 and 19.5 per cent in 2000-01. Nevertheless, the total Regional Migration Program accounted for only 3.6 per cent of the total intake in 1998-99, 5.4 per cent in 1999-2000 and 6.0 per cent in 2000-01. In the past there have been only small points bonuses in the points assessment for immigrants wishing to settle in the regional areas but now the new schemes set out in Table 1 (all introduced in the late 1990s) offer a more substantial bonus while still ensuring a skilled intake.

The Minister for Immigration has described the impacts of the schemes to attract immigrants to regional areas as 'patchy'.⁸ There is no doubt that the programs introduced in the past four years will divert some newly arrived migrants to regional Australia, and to South Australia, but the numbers are unlikely to be substantial. The greatest impact of regional immigration schemes is likely to come not from their demographic effects but in their economic impacts. The extent to which the new migrants attracted by the schemes are entrepreneurs and skilled so that they create new jobs in the destination is a crucial factor.

The South Australian Government has made a substantial investment in attempts to attract international immigrants. It has funded agents in several countries of origin and been heavily involved in the various Federal regional migration schemes. Despite this, the State's share of immigrants settling in Australia has fallen to 4.5 per cent in 2000-01. Research on immigrant settlement in Australia indicates that there are two major factors shaping settlement decisions:

- the presence of family, friends and compatriots who provide a support

- network during initial settlement;
- the ready availability of work.

In fact, South Australia is not able to provide either of these things with its small numbers of recently arrived immigrants and high levels of unemployment.

There is, then, little chance of South Australia attracting a substantial number of immigrants and large State investments in this area may be misguided. This does not mean that South Australia cannot increase its share of overseas migrants. Indeed, targeting particular groups who have existing linkages in South Australia could result in a small but significant increase. Newbold has found, in the United States context, that rather than international immigration being a leader to encourage economic growth and not internal migration, the opposite appears to be the case.⁹ If there is a shift in internal migration toward a particular new focus (for example, Phoenix) then international migration *will follow* sometime later. In Australia, Queensland has tended to follow this pattern. For most of the postwar period Queensland has not received its proportionate share of overseas arrivals. However, it has had the most dynamic economy of any of the Australian States and as a result has been the predominant focus of internal migration in Australia.¹⁰ Despite this for several decades, Queensland continued to receive less than its share of overseas migrants. Only for a few years in the late 1990s did it increase its share of the international immigrant intake. Substantial increases in the share of overseas arrivals *follow* rather than *precede* increased levels of internal migration gain.

INTERNAL MIGRATION

If governments of so-called lagging

regional areas such as South Australia desire to increase their share of the national population they may be more effective in attempting to attract people from elsewhere in Australia than from overseas. Some of the efforts currently expended attracting newly arrived international immigrants to low-growth regions might productively be redirected. Established Australian residents in areas experiencing population pressures, such as diseconomies of scale, environmental pollution, spiralling land and home costs, congestion and accelerating overhead costs, could be encouraged to move to low-growth areas.

States and regions may not need population growth to become prosperous but, given that some areas wish to reverse current net migration losses or to increase net migration gains, it may be more productive to attempt to attract established Australians from elsewhere than to focus purely on newly arrived migrants. To take the case of South Australia, for example, one could make the following argument for adopting this strategy:

- Compared to newly arrived migrants from overseas, the target populations are much more likely to have information about the State. Most will have visited Adelaide and many may even have originated from South Australia or have relatives and friends there.
- The targets are more likely to be aware of the advantages of living in South Australia in terms of cheaper house and land prices, lower operating costs for companies, less congestion and more lifestyle advantages in the State.
- The development of modern transport and information technology is making it less necessary for businesses to be physically located in downtown Sydney or Melbourne to interact effectively with others located in

those cities.

- The encouragement of interstate migration to the State would be best targeted at two elements:
- Attract small and medium scale entrepreneurs with the lower costs of labour and materials, lower costs of living, lifestyle advantages and so on and encourage them to take advantage of modern developments in information technology which allow them to maintain close contact with markets and suppliers in Sydney and Melbourne.
- There has been a substantial exodus of South Australians, predominantly as young adults, to the eastern States since the mid 1970s; thus there is potential to encourage a proportion of them to return to South Australia.

A recent study recommended that South Australia should consider developing a 'Bringing Them Back Home' strategy as part of its economic development plans over the next five years.¹¹ Such policies have become common in the United States for States which have recorded substantial net outmigration over the last two decades and which are peripheral to the main centres of economic and population expansion.

Surveys of South Australians living outside the State, and focus groups held with employers and employment groups and organisations, all point to the advantages which the State offers to potential migrants from other States. These are the elements which should be stressed in programs designed to attract workers from outside the State.

- South Australia offers a distinctive *lifestyle*. However, this type of lifestyle will not appeal to all groups. The crucial point involves the identification of groups most likely to be attracted by it. It is unlikely to be very attractive to

young adult singles or young childless couples; the major advantages lie with couples in the early family formation stages of the lifecycle. There also could be some attractions to baby boomers and recent retirees.

- A great deal of work has been done in South Australia to demonstrate the *lower overheads* which need to be met by companies setting up in Adelaide compared with eastern State cities. This information needs to be targeted also at small scale businesses. In fact these economies may be much more realisable by small scale entrepreneurs now located in the eastern States than by large companies.
- *Housing* is a major advantage. Lower housing costs are a crucial element, and are especially attractive to young families seeking to own their own house. It is not only costs of housing but the type and location of housing which is crucial and more research is needed to identify the type of housing to attract the likely target group of a 'Bringing Them Back Home' program — the young family formation group.
- Lower *living costs* need to be emphasised and researched to establish precisely what they are and how far they offset the fact that South Australia has the lowest income of any mainland State.
- One of the gilt-edged advantages that the State has is the *granny factor*, or the presence in the State of a network of family and friends. Migration research all around the world stresses that family networks are of crucial importance in shaping all migration. The advantage to potential migrants includes the opportunity to bring up children with regular interaction with grandparents. In addition, family and friends resident in South Australia can

be an important resource not only in encouraging the migrants to return but also to provide information on potential returnees who can be approached as part of the 'Bringing Them Back Home' program.

- Many of those who have left the State in recent years are second-generation Australian-born children of immigrant, mostly European, parents who came to the State in the early postwar era. For some of these groups there may be an important cultural imperative operating to unite the generations:

- An issue which arose in the study could be designated the *old school tie* factor. Some of the migrants indicated that they would like their own children to attend their old schools. Alumni organisations of South Australian schools (especially private schools) that have branches in Sydney and Melbourne could be incorporated into the 'Bringing Them Back Home' strategy.

- *Education opportunities* for children are of fundamental importance to the target group of the policy — young families. If the State can demonstrate that it offers a superior range or quality of opportunities this would be a strong selling point to the group.

What should be the precise elements to be involved in a 'Bringing Them Back Home' program? These can involve a number of relatively straightforward initiatives but no new bureaucracy need be created to deal with it; the program can readily be absorbed within existing structures and should make substantial use of the internet. The following initiatives are suggested:

- There should be a website containing details of the program plus a list of job opportunities, and presenting South Australia as 'The Family Friendly

State'.

- A database of potential returnees should be established. Some sources of names:
 - Alumni records from tertiary institutions and secondary schools which indicate former students who have left the State
 - Campaigns, including establishing of a 1800 service for families to nominate people for the list
 - Facility on the program website for people to self nominate and post a CV.
- The data base can be used to establish a mailing list. People could be asked if they would like to receive regular mail-outs of promotional material and bulletins of job and housing opportunities.
- 'Link Agencies' should be set up to match potential returnees with opportunities in South Australia, especially in employment and real estate services.
- Meetings of expatriate South Australians could be convened in key locations interstate to promote the program.
- To combat the loss of some of the brightest young people there needs to be a scholarship plan for undergraduates which will keep the best Year 12 achievers in the State.
- Expatriate South Australians who are employers or operators of businesses should be offered some of the package of incentives currently available to big employers establishing in South Australia.
- Young families should be the main focus of the program. However, two other groups bear investigation too:
 - baby boomers who are in the 'empty nest' stage of the lifecycle,
 - recent retirees who are not tied down to living near a workplace. Both

groups can be effective 'pump primers' of economies in some areas.

In the course of the study referred to above¹² enquiries were received from South Australians who had children and other family members living overseas and interested in returning to South Australia. Perhaps the program should have an international component? The database could include former residents living overseas. Australians are leaving the country on a long term or semi-permanent basis at a rate unprecedented in our history.¹³ This is to be expected in a globalising world where labour markets are often international. Initiatives at the national level could facilitate the return of skilled expatriates. Their experience, international connections and skills could prove a major asset to the country. Some nations (for example, Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan, Korea, Taiwan, China) have established programs to bring expatriates home. Consideration should be given to this in the South Australian 'Bringing Them Back Home' strategy.

FERTILITY

South Australia's fertility has followed a trajectory similar to that of Australia as a whole with one variation.¹⁴ For most of the postwar period its fertility has been significantly below that of the nation as a whole and of all other States and Territories. Indeed, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has employed special low fertility assumptions in its projections for South Australia. However, in the 1990s the decline in fertility has been faster in Australia as a whole than in South Australia so that some States now have lower fertility than South Australia. Nevertheless, all of the concerns about current and (especially) future fertility in Australia apply to South Australia.

It is possible to demonstrate a positive

relationship between fertility in More Developed Countries and the extent to which those countries facilitate employment of mothers and gender equity.¹⁵ As McDonald has pointed out:

The countries which through their social institutions make it difficult or unrewarding for women to combine work and family, or which provide incentives for mothers to stay at home rather than to be employed are the countries that have very low fertility. Faced with the choice between an uninterrupted career or having a child and withdrawing from the workforce for an extended period, women in those countries often make the decision not to have the child. In short, where countries continue to support or promote the male bread winner model of the family, fertility falls to very low levels.¹⁶

In countries with so-called 'family friendly' policies, there are definite indications that fertility decline has not been as great as it has in countries where there are low levels of gender equity and limited supports for those women who chose to have children as well as careers. Governments and industry can pursue policies which make having children and working outside the home a real option for women. They can do this through providing childcare, maternity and parenting leave, preservation of seniority and promotion prospects during such leave and so on. Where they do this fertility is likely to stabilise at TFRs between 1.5 and two.

Of course, such policies are more within the ambit of Federal than State governments. However, the State can play a role in developing family friendly policies. It can be, and indeed is, involved in childcare. It can bring together employers in the State in a summit to develop industrial situations to protect the work of women and develop work practices which are compatible with

women having children if they wish to. Indeed, practices adopted in Europe indicate that there are significant economic gains for employers in such innovations. If South Australia became the 'family friendly State' this would have a number of favourable consequences:

- It would continue the State's tradition of being at the forefront of social development, equity and lack of discrimination, especially in relation to women.
- All surveys in South Australia indicate that women on average want two children. Institutional barriers which our economy and society place in their way prevent them from achieving this. Removal of these barriers will see the TFR move toward two. Even small movements in the TFR will have much greater effects (negative or positive) on population growth than any feasible changes in migration — both international and interstate.
- A third advantage of the 'family friendly State' which is clear from the survey data¹⁷ is that it could be a major plank of a policy to attract people to South Australia from other parts of Australia or overseas. Moreover, such a policy would give the State an aura of progressiveness and attractiveness and do a lot to dispel the 'backwater' perception.

What is involved in becoming a 'family friendly' State? It does not necessarily involve a massive change in policies but it does mean a change in the attitudes taken in the private and public sectors. McDonald¹⁸ has presented a 'tool box' of public policies to influence fertility. Some might be best implemented at the Federal level but several are amenable to some involvement by the State. He classifies

these policies into three separate types:

- Financial incentives
- Support for parents to combine work and family
- Broad social change supportive of children and parenting.

The scope for the State Government to develop policies of the first type is limited but the second category of policies is more amenable to State Government involvement. These are initiatives which facilitate women combining having children with having a fulfilling career. The policy levers identified by McDonald here involve the following elements:

- maternity and paternity leave
- child care provision
- flexible working hours and short term leave for family related purposes
- anti-discrimination legislation and gender equity in employment practices
- having reliable work hours, which mesh well with family responsibilities.

Thus there is scope for a government-employer pact at the State level to produce 'family friendly workplaces'. While many of the owners of businesses are branches of interstate and international companies and there are many national awards regarding work conditions, it should be possible to forge an alliance between government, employers and worker's organizations to achieve more family friendly workplaces. The State Government can take a lead in this by becoming a more family friendly employer itself. It may be possible initially to involve only a handful of very large employers to demonstrate what can be done. The universities for example would be a good choice, as would large employers like General Motors Holden, Mitsubishi and so on. There are major dividends for them in these initiatives — a more committed and reliable workforce,

ensuring that talented and trained women remain in the work force and so on.

The State Government could review its ability to assist in providing child care in the workplace or providing incentives for employers to initiate family friendly practices. It could also offer support in designing and implementing such practices.

The third category of public policy initiatives identified by McDonald are what he designates 'broad social change supportive of children and parenting' and the State could play an important role here too. The types of initiatives he identifies are:

- employment initiatives
- child friendly environments
- gender equity
- marriage and relationship supports
- development of positive social attitudes toward child bearing and parenting.

This set of initiatives point to the fact that while State and Federal Governments can take important initiatives to help develop a family friendly context it requires a wider cultural change involving society more widely — employers, unions, community organisations but also individuals, couples and families themselves. There are a myriad of ways in which the State Government can facilitate this cultural change. For example it could do this through the policies it adopts within State Government agencies and departments, the ethos in the school, health and community services systems in which the State is the dominant funder, and in social and community planning throughout the State.

CONCLUSION

South Australia has experienced a decade of economic difficulty and this has had a number of consequences of which an

upswing in net interstate migration loss has been one. This loss has had negative consequences both economically and demographically. Economically the loss has been selective of young well-educated people, the lack of whom has been a constraint on the State's development and is reflected in job vacancies in some key professional, managerial and skilled areas.

Demographically the ratio of people in the key working age groups is the smallest of all the States and threatens to worsen substantially. The imbalances thus created are an important social and economic problem. While zero population growth and slow population growth do not necessarily mean lower prosperity, the spectre of a declining workforce and population and of the evolving age structure in the State are issues of concern. Even if the State were to aim toward eventually achieving a demographically stable population with a balanced age structure there would need to be further population growth in order to achieve that structure. There are several mechanisms whereby this can occur:

- Increased fertility, or at least stabilising it at the present levels
- Reduced internal migration loss or perhaps even reversing the flow
- Increased intake of overseas immigrants.

This paper has touched on each of these areas. It has presented material which suggests a policy to attract back to the State some of those who left it as younger people: The 'Bringing Them Back Home' program.

The program should focus on filling strategic skill shortages which currently constrain development in the State. It is unlikely to involve large numbers of people but could make a difference because of its strategic targeting. The recommendations presented here do not

make massive new demands on funding and should be able to be undertaken within the existing bureaucracy.

Australia also needs to have a family friendly population policy and, while many elements in such a policy are within the ambit of the Federal government, the State can play an important role in achieving gender equity in the workplace and in

society more generally. International immigration can also be part of State policy, although it should be highly targeted to specific skill or entrepreneurial groups and it should have a component which involves the attraction of former South Australians who have settled overseas.

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