

A SUSTAINABLE POPULATION FOR AUSTRALIA:

DILEMMA FOR THE GREEN MOVEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to examine the orientation of a section of the Green movement in Australia to the issue of an ecologically sustainable population for Australia. The methods used include a literature search and interviews with two executives and several councillors of the Australian Conservation Foundation and a spokesperson for Australians Against Further Immigration. In addition, I have corresponded with the organization Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population and three academic experts in the field of immigration and population. The results of this study indicate that Greens are in a dilemma over the issue of a desirable population size for this country. This dilemma arises out of conflict between the Greens' commitment both to social justice and to ecological sustainability.

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Henry Teltscher was kind enough to supply me with a copy of the ACF submission to the Fitzgerald Inquiry.

PREFACE

I chose the topic of a sustainable or desirable population for Australia because I think it is an important one for those who care about the environment. Unlike most environmental issues, there seems to be enormous disagreement over the issue of population. The population debate has a long history. It flourished in the early 1970's but until very recently few people seemed to want to consider or talk about it.

There has been a revival of debate on population in the late 1980's due to debate on ecologically sustainable development. This thesis attempts to review that debate and to contribute to it.

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| AAFI | Australians Against Further Immigration |
| ABC | Australian Broadcasting Commission |
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ACF | Australian Conservation Foundation |
| AESP | Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population |
| ALP | Australian Labor Party |
| APD:HR | Australian Parliamentary Debates: House of Representatives |
| CAAIP | Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies (the Fitzgerald Inquiry) |
| CPD:HR | Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates: House of Representatives |
| CSIRO | Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization |
| ESAC | Endangered Species Advisory Committee |
| WCED | World Commission on Environment and Development |

INTRODUCTION

This country has already experienced an invasion of rapacious immigrants, who saw 'nature' as an object for exploitation, profit as the chief principle of value, the natural order as expendable in the interests of industry, and today as far more important than any consideration of posterity and the future. These people have already exploited the land and greatly lowered its productivity, its environmental amenity, its natural resources. They are, of course, ourselves.

(Judith Wright 1988:169)

Aim and Hypotheses

This thesis aims to examine the orientation of a section of the Green movement¹ to the idea of an ecologically sustainable population for Australia. One hypothesis is that this issue presents a dilemma for the movement. The outward sign of the dilemma is seen in the division between those Greens who want a reduction in immigration to slow the rate of population growth and the Greens who oppose this. It has divided the movement. It is suggested that this disagreement is a dilemma because it arises from ideological and ethical concerns and differences within the Green movement about reducing immigration into Australia. While continuous population growth does not seem compatible with the long term ecological sustainability of a society, reducing immigration to slow population growth conflicts with a commitment to social justice which the Green movement has

1. The Green movement is defined as the peak environmental groups, the Australian Conservation Foundation, Greenpeace (Australia), World Wide Fund for Nature - Australia, the Wilderness Society and two groups with which I communicated and which were vocal in the population debate, Australians Against Further Immigration (AAFI) and Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population (AESP).

developed in recent years. The thesis will explore these claims in details.

Background Information

Over the last twenty-five years, Australia's average annual rate of population growth has been higher than that of any of the countries classified by the World Bank as industrial market economies and among the Eastern European non-market economies, only Albania grew faster (Hugo 1988:15). Since the end of World War II, 4.8 million people have settled permanently in Australia and net migration has accounted for over 58 per cent of population increase in this period (Bureau of Immigration Research 1989:vii; Betts 1984:53).²

Australia's population is a comparatively young one due to the large number of people born in the post World War 2 'baby boom'. A large number of women born in the post war period are still in their prime reproductive years and for this reason, the population is still growing strongly. Despite a lower rate of fertility in recent years, the population in Australia would continue to grow by some 2.2 million over the next 40 years without any immigration. With its current rate of net immigration at about 140,000 a year, however, Australia's 17 million population is projected to reach some 27 million in the next 40 years - an increase of some 10 million (Betts 1990b:21).³ Growth is unlikely to stop there (Young

2. The Bureau of Immigration Research maintains about 40 per cent of post-war population growth has been due to immigration. The figure of 58 per cent includes the Australian born children and grandchildren of migrants.

3. See Appendix 1 for Australia's net migrant intake in recent years. See Appendix 2 for population projections with different levels of net immigration.

1989:6). Will 27 million or more be an ecologically sustainable population for Australia?

Among the developed countries, only Australia, Canada and the United States of America still maintain a significant level of migration, but Australia's rate of net migration per head of population is two to three times higher than that for Canada or the United States (Young 1989:4). In the last few years, immigration has accounted for over half of Australia's yearly population growth.

It is difficult to keep the issue of race out of the immigration debate. From the 1970's the term 'racist' has been used against those who criticized the government policy of encouraging relatively large numbers of migrants into Australia. Racism is the belief that one race is genetically and intrinsically superior to another. Questioning the wisdom of immigration levels on economic or environmental grounds can be done without considering race. Nevertheless, fear of the 'racist' label has suppressed debate on the important issue of a sustainable population in Australia. Migrants have contributed much to Australian society and the debate on the wisdom of continuing with the current rate of immigration should not be equated with questioning the worth of existing migrants.

World population is now increasing by about 90 million people a year (ABC 1990g; Brown 1990:4) This is a source of some concern.⁴ Most of this growth is occurring in Third

4. The world's population is estimated at 5.3 billion. This number is expected to stabilize at 11-14 billion towards the end of the next century (U.N. Population Fund cited on ABC 1990g). Climate changes may intensify difficulties in coping with rapid population growth (International Panel on Climate Change 1990 cited in Hare (ed.) 1990:19).

World countries. However, while the industrialized nations make up some twenty per cent of the world's population, this twenty per cent consumes some eighty per cent of the world's resources (WCED 1987:33). It is clear that the impact of the developed countries on the planet's environment is out of all proportion to their population numbers. But this does not mean that population numbers in developed countries are not an important issue. In terms of environmental impact, controlling population numbers may be an even more important issue in richer countries than in poorer ones. This is because, on a per capita basis, humans in developed countries use large amounts of resources, produce large amounts of garbage and pollute the biosphere much more than do people in poorer countries.

The ecology of the earth - its streams, woods, animals - can accommodate itself better to a rising poor population than to a rising rich population.

(Mayer 1971:153)

On average, each Australian consumes fifty times the resources that an average Chinese or Indian person consumes (Suzuki 1990b). Australia's population is projected to reach 20 million within ten years. Using Suzuki's statistics, when population reaches this number of 20 million, with present consumption levels and present technologies, this population will have an impact on the environment approximately equivalent to one billion Chinese people (ABC 1990a).⁵ While

⁵ The original Ehrlich and Holdren (1971:23) formula is:

$$\text{Environmental Impact (e.g. pollution)} = \text{Population Size} \times \text{Resource use per person} \times \text{Impact per unit of resource used}$$

this impact could be reduced by less polluting and wasteful technologies and lower consumption, desirable changes in our lifestyles seem to be slow in coming.

The concern with the environmental impact of human populations can also be related to the concept of limits to population growth. Greens generally believe that there are physical and biological limits to continued population increase. The population of one country, or of the world, can obviously not continue to expand indefinitely. While the debate over limits to economic growth in the 1970's focussed on non-renewable resources, environmental concern today is focussed more on ecological sustainability - maintaining the earth, water and air, which are the basic resources for all life, and maintaining biodiversity in the face of increasing threats from human activities (Suzuki 1990a).

In Australia, there has often been optimism about continued population growth in this continent. Many people in Australia believe that the benefits of population growth continue to outweigh any costs. They believe that if there are any limits to population growth in this country, then we are nowhere near them. Some Greens, however, believe that continued rapid population growth in Australia will incur real environmental costs because we are closer to the physical and biological limits than population growth supporters concede (Betts 1988:20). The debate on ecological sustainability has brought increased attention to population concerns.

Terminology:

Debates on population involve different variables and sometimes it is easy to confuse them. Both terms, rate of population growth and absolute population size are important in this thesis. While population size is important in terms of the idea of an ecologically sustainable population, rate of growth is also an important variable because a high rate of growth can lead to physical and environmental strains.⁶ In addition, population growth cannot be turned on and off like a tap by planners. A rate of growth can have long term implications for any eventual stable population size (Young 1989). Such implications may be grasped by few, as demographic information is complex and few people have access to it.

Whereas in the early 1970's there was much debate in the developed countries about an optimal population (Pitchford 1974), today's debate about population reflects current concern with ecological sustainability. In this thesis, an ecologically sustainable population for Australia is defined as a population whose size and rate of change allows:

- (1) a good quality of life for its people;
- (2) protection of the natural environment; and
- (3) a long term use of Australia's renewable resources which does not degrade those resources and leaves as many options open for future generations of humans as are enjoyed by current generations.⁷

6. For example, Australia's rapid rate of post war population growth created strains in the provision of public infrastructure. This became a political issue in the early 1970's.

7. Non-renewable resources, such as coal and oil, obviously, cannot be used sustainably. Nevertheless, the distinction between renewable and non-renewable can be blurred. Soil, for example, is theoretically renewable but soil loss can be

While there are more terms here that could be defined, these criteria will prove sufficient for the argument to be advanced later in the thesis.

The Study and the Methodological Approach

The chief methods of gathering information for this study of the dilemma of the Green movement over the issue of an ecologically sustainable population were a literature search and structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with the Assistant Director of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), the Policy Director and three elected councillors of the ACF, a spokesperson for Australians Against Further Immigration (AAFI) and the secretary of the federal Australian Labor Party (ALP) Caucus Committee on Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. These interviewees were:-

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| (1) Bill Hare | Assistant Director of the ACF. |
| (2) Karen Alexander | Policy Director of the ACF. |
| (3) Senator John Coulter | A South Australian ACF councillor, Vice-President of the Australian Democrats and Senator for South Australia. |
| (4) Dr. Geoff Mosley | A Victorian ACF councillor and former director of the ACF 1973-86. |
| (5) Heather Aslin | A South Australian ACF councillor. |

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| (6) Denis McCormack | Spokesperson for Australians A g a i n s t F u r t h e r Immigration. |
| (7) Dr. Bob Catley | ALP member for Adelaide, Secretary of the ALP Caucus Committee on Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. |

The two staff members of the Foundation were interviewed because they have an intimate knowledge of ACF policy and they also have some influence on policy changes in the Foundation. The first two councillors were chosen because they have spoken publicly on the population debate. The third councillor was chosen because she was accessible. The spokesperson for AAFI was chosen because he is an anti-immigration activist and as an ACF member, he has tried to raise the population issue within the Foundation. The ALP member for Adelaide, whilst clearly not a member of the Green movement, was chosen because he was an accessible former government adviser on immigration.⁸

Structured interviews were conducted with relatively open-ended questions. Interviewees (1) - (6) were asked similar questions about population growth, environmental impact and ecological sustainability. Interviewee (7) was asked questions which related more to the economics of public expenditure to cater for population growth as well as to quality of life issues. Interviewees (3) - (5) provided information about debate on population within the ACF.

8. Dr. Catley was known personally to the writer to have commented a few years ago that if Java could hold over 100 million people, then Australia could obviously hold a lot more. This attitude seemed to be a good example of the tendency of some in the political elite to dismiss the possibility of environmental limits, or even environmental costs, to population growth.

Information was obtained through written correspondence with the organization Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population and three academics with specialised knowledge of population and immigration.

Despite concentration on the immigration debate within the ACF, this thesis is not a formal case study. The ACF was used as an example of a Green group that was caught in the dilemma of the population debate. The ACF is the oldest conservation organization in Australia and it was chosen because it has a history of involvement with the debate on population and immigration in this country. Conflict within the ACF over immigration became public in 1990 when this research was under way. While this aided the research in some respects, it also hindered it in others because some of the leaders in the ACF were reluctant to speak about the issue.

At the same time as a somewhat heated debate was going on within the ACF, a similar struggle over population policy was going on in the Australian Democrats. Perhaps similar debates were being conducted, to a greater or lesser extent, in other environmental groups in Australia.

Recent debate within the ACF on the relative contributions of population and per capita resource consumption to environmental problems parallels one debate on population in the developed countries which occurred in the early 1970's. This was conducted between 'neo-Malthusians' such as P. Ehrlich, on the one hand, and 'anti-Malthusians' such as B. Commoner on the other. This debate raged over the relative contributions to environmental deterioration of what was considered the main causes -

population size, consumption and technology.⁹ Some similar themes occurred in the ACF debate on population in 1990, with some arguing that reducing resource consumption should be the first priority in Australia while others argued that population growth, via immigration should be slowed. This was one ideological disagreement within the Foundation.

To regard all environmental problems as a product of human population size, consumption levels and technology types may be somewhat simplistic. What about human values? How does the Greenhouse effect fit this scheme? What about the introduction of rabbits and foxes into Australia? These do not fit easily into the population-consumption-technology triad. The fragility of the Australian landscape is another factor, as is the sensitivity of rangeland vegetation to millions of browsing sheep. Nevertheless, the population-consumption-technology debate is a persistent one and it provides a framework for much of the recent Green debate on population in Australia.

Limitations of Study

A survey of the orientation of Green groups, in addition to the ACF, on the ecologically sustainable population debate would have broadened the focus of this study. The single Green group focus is a clear limitation of the study. While a survey of other groups would have been desirable, the scope of this thesis is relatively small and it was desirable to focus

9. R. Malthus (1766-1834) argued that human population growth would outstrip the earth's ability to produce food. K. Marx was a fierce critic of Malthus and argued that capitalism alone created a reserve army of unemployed people and it was capitalism, not agricultural limits, which caused poverty. For a discussion of the 1970's debate between Ehrlich and Commoner, see O'Riordan 1981:65-67.

in as much detail as possible on the most prominent of the Green groups involved, the ACF.

Definitions

'Ethnic' (as in 'ethnic lobby') is used as shorthand for first and second generation migrants of non-English speaking backgrounds. The term 'Asian' is used in Chapter 2 as shorthand for people born in Asian countries.¹⁰

An 'intellectual' is defined as a person who has completed a university education (after Betts 1988:39). A 'parochial' is defined as a person who is politically conservative and has no tertiary education (after Betts 1988:49-50).

Summary

Chapter 1 considers the concept of an ecologically sustainable population for Australia. Consideration is given to sustainable population options and their implications for immigration levels. Chapter 2 surveys immigration issues in an attempt to outline the major themes of the post war immigration debate. These themes provided the context in which the Greens found themselves as they entered the immigration arena. Chapter 3 examines the ACF's policy shifts and conflict over population and immigration. Chapter 4 analyses the ACF's current dilemma over population and immigration.

10. Like the term 'European' the term 'Asian' includes a diverse group of people. There is no 'Asian' race.

CHAPTER 1

A Sustainable Population for Australia

An ecologically sustainable population for Australia may be defined as a population whose size and rate of change allows

- (1) a good quality of life for its people;
- (2) protection of the natural environment; and
- (3) a long-term use of Australia's renewable resources which does not degrade those resources and leaves as many options open for future generations of humans as are enjoyed by current generations.

Each of these criteria raises many questions. What size population could satisfy these criteria?

Choosing a Number

Selection of any figure for a desirable population involves making value judgments about the kind of life we wish to lead and the kinds of choices that we want to be able to make in the future (Betts 1990e:22). How much value does one place on clear air? How much value does one ~~place on~~ ^{accord to} uncongested cities? How much on quiet and privacy? How much value is placed on the survival of native species?

Where the limits lie will depend on the underlying land ethic: whether, to put it in terms of a crude contrast, we value a land rich in wildlife and natural ecosystems or one teeming with humans and covered with their cities and factories.

(Routley 1984:335)

C. Birch, for example, has argued that the east coast of Australia, which is an ecologically vital area for the whole Pacific region, should consist of long stretches of preserved nature with pockets of development. Instead, it contains long stretches of development with small pockets of preservation

(Birch 1975).¹ While Greens may agree with Birch, others will not agree with his argument.

Even if there were some agreement on values, it is difficult to arrive at a single figure for an ecologically sustainable population. Dr. Chris Watson, President of Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population, has argued that it is meaningless to talk about a sustainable population when the natural resource base is being eroded (Watson 1988:62). While there are difficulties, the idea of a sustainable population is still a useful concept. Although it may be difficult to arrive at a single figure for such a population, some approximations can be made.

Deciding on a desirable population size is not an issue we can avoid (Wood 1990d). If current levels of net immigration, approximately 140,000 per annum continue² and Australia's net reproduction rate remains at about 0.9, the population will approach 30m by 2045.³ With no immigration and constant fertility, the population would eventually peak at under 20 million and decline slowly afterwards. A net immigration level of 50,000 with unchanged fertility, would lead to a population stabilizing at about 22 million towards

-
1. This trend is likely to be accentuated in view of plans for several private multi-function polises between Sydney and Brisbane (Sugimoto 1990).
 2. The federal government has recently announced a reduction in the annual immigration target from 140,000 a year to 126,000, probably in response to the economic downturn. But, in addition, 20,000 Chinese students in Australia were recently given permission to apply for refugee status. So the cut in intake may be a small one.
 3. The net reproduction rate (NRR) is a commonly used measure of fertility. It is the total number of daughters that a woman would bear in her lifetime if she experienced a given set of age specific fertility rates and a given set of mortality conditions. An NRR of 0.9 means that women on average leave 0.9 daughters. Many people think this must mean the population is declining but this is not necessarily so if there are a large number of fertile women in the population. But at some time, if NRR is less than one, without immigration, a population will decline in size.

the end of the 21st century (Young 1989:5-6) (See Appendix 2). These are the choices facing Australia.

Factors which may be considered in arriving at an approximation of an ecologically sustainable population size include:-

1. natural constraints and environmental choices,
2. technologies in use and the process of technological change,
3. levels of consumption,
4. variations in the terms of trade on world markets, and
5. discovery of new resources.

Economists have pointed out that factors 4 and 5 make it difficult to select a desirable population size (Pitchford 1974:52).⁴

If Australia over-shoots its sustainable population size, it will have to live with the results of this for a long time. Given that we do not know what technological changes are around the corner, how the terms of trade may vary on world markets in the future or what new resources (if any) may be discovered, it may be wise to be cautious (Young 1988:228; Maude 1989:54). Australia still does have the option of not following other countries down the path of over-population (Bennett and Sylvan 1988). What is known is that in the post war period rapid population growth, in combination with increased levels of resource consumption, has been associated with large environmental impacts.

4. Pitchford was considering an optimum population, but these considerations also affect an ecologically sustainable population.

Ecological Limits and Environmental Choices

The limits imposed by natural resources do not preclude population growth. But such growth may incur real costs because we may be closer to these limits than supporters of population growth concede (Betts 1988:20). While rich in non-renewable resources (such as minerals), Australia is not well-endowed with the potentially renewable resources of water and land.

(a) Water

Much of Australia is arid or seasonally arid. Except for the higher rainfall regions of southern and eastern Australia, run-off is low and stream flows are highly variable by world standards. Other factors which limit water resource development are high evaporation rates and the mismatch of existing population, potentially arable land and water resources. Northern Australia has 2 per cent of present population, 4 per cent of potentially arable land and 52 per cent of annual mean surface run-off. Southern Australia has 82 per cent of the population and 65 per cent of potentially arable land, but only 27 per cent of annual mean run-off (Nix 1988:72). Including ground water most of Australia's uncommitted water supplies are in isolated and rugged areas of the Northern Territory and western Tasmania. Based on potential regulated supply, each Australian has 7,300 cubic metres of water a year. A doubling of population would reduce this to less than the figure for China which by world standards is low (Nix 1988:72). In the most heavily populated regions of south-western and south-eastern Australia, surface

water resources are committed to a high degree and the consequences of climate change are potentially serious (Pittock and Nix 1986). Taking into account the distribution of population and potential regulated supply, mainland southern Australia is already below the Chinese national level of 3000 cubic metres per person per year (Nix 1988:72). Water quality can be a problem in Australia due to saline underground water.⁵ The capital cities of Adelaide and Perth already have difficulty with the quality of their water supplies. Provided improvements were made in water usage and storage, water supply could match a population of 25 million. Theoretically up to 50 million could be provided with water, but this would require massive investment in water development in northern Australia and Tasmania and a major population redistribution (Nix 1988:73).

(b) Land and Soils

Australia is an old continent with poor and weathered soils. It is subjected to extremes of weather. It is therefore sensitive to human use (Saunders et al 1990). In agricultural terms, Australia is not a large country. In agricultural terms, it is about the size of France, but with much less fertile soils (Seddon 1979). Less than 10 per cent of Australia's area is arable and much of this is marginal with respect to water and nutrient regimes (Nix 1988:75-6). If all the remaining potentially arable land were brought into production, Australia could possibly support 25 million while maintaining food exports. To put all this land into production would require enormous investments in water resources and land

5. Water tables raised by deforestation have salinized valley floors in many wheat-belt areas and over-use of water has salinized irrigation lands.

care. Current levels of food production in Australia could sustain a population of about 32 million at current dietary levels. But sources of export income other than agricultural products would be needed (Nix 1988:68).

Degradation of existing crop and pasture land is a serious threat to the sustainability of production systems. Almost two thirds of this area has been degraded through water and wind erosion, salinity and vegetation loss (Nix 1988:67).

Other things being equal, a larger population requires a larger quantity of exports to earn the foreign currency which allows Australia to import the goods which a modern urban population demands, such as cars and computers.⁶ Some Greens have refused to accept that population size has increased land degradation in Australia and have argued that world demand for products such as wool, beef and forest timber determines supply.⁷ While world demand is one factor, this view ignores the reasons why export industries in Australia have developed enormous political power. It also ignores the pressures on Australia to increase exports to correct its balance of payments deficits which are increasing its foreign debt. There is little doubt that the material standard of living enjoyed by most, if not all, of Australia's urban population has been under-written by the exploitation of its natural resources.

6. Australia relies on exports of low value-added primary products to earn the foreign exchange to pay for imports of high value-added manufactured goods. Australia's recent chronic deficits in its balance of payments reflect the difficulty it has in earning enough foreign exchange from the primary products it exports to pay for manufactured imports.

7. For example, Alistair Graham of The Wilderness Society (Alcorn 1990:10).

Exploitation of resources on a non-sustainable basis has helped build a high standard of material welfare for Australians.

(Nix 1988:76)

The joint Green groups' submission to the federal government on sustainable development came to a similar conclusion.

... the current generation of Australians are paying for their present consumption at the expense of future generations.

(Hare (ed.) 1990:30)

(c) Native Vegetation and other Species

Since European colonization, at least half of Australia's forests and woodlands have been cleared. Over 90 per cent of vegetation has been removed in the eastern grain belt (Saunders et al 1990). 20 species of mammals and about 100 species of vascular plants have been driven into extinction (Flannery 1990; ESAC 1989). Nearly half of Australia's remaining mammals, some 123 species, are considered to be either endangered, vulnerable or potentially vulnerable (Kennedy (ed.) 1990:28). 3,329 species of vascular plants are listed as rare or threatened in Australia.⁸ This is about 17 per cent of the country's vascular flora. This is similar to the situation in Europe, but a higher figure than that in the United States where 10.3 per cent are listed (Benson 1990:148). According to Nix, Australia's record in the last two centuries is

8. Many plants threatened with extinction are outside our existing reserve system (ESAC 1989). While extinctions can occur naturally as part of evolution, there is agreement that human activities have greatly accelerated the rate of species loss.

the worst in the world. The loss of genetic diversity through extinction has been higher than in other countries of a similar size and with a similarly recent history of European settlement (Nix 1988:73).⁹

The clearing of habitat for agriculture and urban and other development is a major cause of extinctions in Australia.

(ESAC 1989:12)¹⁰

Continued rapid population growth in Australia will see urban development take up more agricultural land and this will lead to more encroachment on native habitat. For example, over 13 per cent of cleared land in Australia is taken up with urban development. Most of this land is prime agricultural land and population growth will continue to remove good agricultural land from production (Betts 1988:18). Urban development continues to remove the best agricultural land in South Australia (Environmental Protection Council of South Australia 1988:80).

(d) The Urban Environment

Historically, decentralization efforts in Australia have failed. Our cities are destined to keep growing. Most migrants settle in capital cities. When Australia's population doubled

9. Australia has suffered rates of extinction more like those of small islands than those of other continents (ESAC 1989). Geologically Australia has been isolated for a long time. Hence some of its native species were vulnerable.

10. The chief causes are (in order of importance): habitat destruction, habitat change and degradation, introduced animals (foxes, rabbits etc.), introduced plants, direct exploitation (hunting, fishing and collecting for trade) (ESAC 1989).

between 1947 and 1986, 74 per cent of this increase occurred in capital cities. Sydney's population increased from 1.5 to 3.5 million and Melbourne's population increased from 1.2 to 2.9 million (Young 1989:4). On a net intake of 125,000 a year, Sydney's population will reach 4.5 million within 20 years. Pressure will be placed on air and water quality, noise, radiation and safety standards (Havas 1988). Other cities are experiencing pressures too. Population growth can reduce access to uncrowded parks and beaches and low density housing. It can increase travel times to work and shops (Betts 1988:23). There are now housing shortages in Australia's larger cities. There are strains in the provision of public infrastructure and government services in most Australian cities. In some cities, increasing air and coastal pollution is also a concern (Young 1989:4). There is evidence that as cities increase in size, inequality increases (King 1984).

Given the present rate of population growth, the 10 million people who will be added to Australia's population over the next 40 years will necessitate the construction of urban areas equivalent to another Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Darwin and Canberra (Betts 1990b:21). This will increase environmental pressures on the habitable coastal strips. While urban consolidation remains the government's preferred option for urban development and this may absorb some of the growth, it cannot provide for the urban needs of all the extra people. To the extent that urban consolidation is successful, it will cause more crowding in cities and will probably lower the quality of life. Despite the efforts of governments to encourage medium density housing, many Australians continue to value their gardens

and back-yards for recreational activities (Betts 1988:23).

Sustainable Economic Development?

There are some question marks over the claims of population growth supporters that rapid population growth has been wholly for Australia's economic benefit (See Chapter 2). With a slower rate of population growth and an eventually stable population, some capital could be forced to shift from the land, building and retail sectors to areas more geared to export markets.¹¹ Increased exports would help Australia's current trade imbalance with the rest of the world. Whether this economic development would be sustainable would depend on the types of products exported and the technologies used to produce them. Alternatively, speculative capital in land and building, could perhaps, be channelled into more socially desirable activities (solar power, recycling and other appropriate technologies).

Concluding Discussion

In terms of the criteria for an ecologically sustainable population, Australia is failing to adequately protect its forests, its native plants and wildlife. Australia is not using its nominally renewable resources, such as soil, in a sustainable way. While not all of our environmental problems can be attributed to population, it is one factor. While it is difficult to assess which of the factors - consumption, technology or population - has been the main cause of environmental

11. According to the Department of Finance, economies of scale would be more easily achieved through exports than through attempts to increase the size of the domestic market. (Unpublished submission to the Fitzgerald Inquiry.)

deterioration in Australia over the past 200 years, recent work indicates that world-wide population growth accounted for almost two thirds of the increase in carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere between 1950 and 1985 and population growth was responsible for about two thirds of all deforestation in developing countries between 1971 and 1986 (Harrison 1990).

Even with improved technologies and lower consumption, it is doubtful that Australian can continue its present rate of population growth without incurring additional environmental costs. The joint submission to the government of the ACF, Greenpeace (Australia), the Wilderness Society and the World Wide Fund for Nature (Australia) on ecologically sustainable development acknowledged

Even with moves to reduce per capita resource consumption and to put in place a comprehensive array of environmentally friendly practices or technologies, it is almost inevitable that a reduction in population increases will be required.

(Hare (ed.) 1990:27)

Australia could tackle its consumption levels, develop better technologies and practices and opt for the lower population range of 20-22 million rather than the more risky 25 million and above. 20 million could be achieved with a maximum net immigration of 24,000 persons a year (Young 1989:5). This would be politically difficult and perhaps undesirable for humanitarian reasons. A stable population of about 22 million could be achieved over the next century with a gross migrant intake of 70,000 a year, about half the current intake.¹² This

12. A gross intake of 70,000 migrants a year would give a net intake of

intake would allow Australia's current refugee and close family reunion programmes to continue. These two categories accounted for some 55,000 places in the 1989/90 programme (Eccleston 1990b) (See Appendix 3).

A population of some 22 million is perhaps more likely to approximate an ecologically sustainable population in this country than is the higher population option. The 22 million option is favoured by Young, on demographic and environmental grounds, as the least disruptive path to eventual population equilibrium (Young 1989:11).

CHAPTER 2

Over-view of Post War
Population Issues in Australia

The Green movement was drawn into a debate on immigration in the late 1980's through the debate over ecologically sustainable development conducted largely among the government, industry and the environmentalists. Population size and growth could not be ignored if ecological sustainability were to mean anything. For the many Greens who had previously taken little interest in the long immigration debate in Australia, this was new territory. To understand and analyze the dilemma in which the Greens found themselves over immigration, it is necessary to outline the major themes of the post war immigration debate. These themes provided the context in which the Greens found themselves as they entered the immigration arena.

Population Growth Since World War II

Since 1945, population growth has been encouraged in Australia largely to satisfy the perceived needs of economic growth and defence imperatives. In 1947, Australia's population was approximately seven and a half million. By 1990 it had passed 17 million (ABS 1986: ABS 1990). Over half of this population increase was due to immigration (Betts 1984:53).

Immigration and the Imperatives of Defence

Since colonial days, many Australians have felt isolated from the 'mother country', England. This sense of isolation often expressed itself in fear of invasion by a foreign power (Betts 1984:59). Australia is geographically close to South-east Asia and some of these countries have large populations and relatively little land. Australia, by contrast, has a

relatively small population and a large land area. Fear of the seemingly hungry teeming Asian masses to its north has been a strong theme in Australian political life (McQueen 1970). The Japanese threat in War War II exacerbated Australia's concern about invasion. While the Japanese did consider invading Australia in 1942, they abandoned the idea as beyond their ability (Australia, Parliament, Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence 1981, Annex C:62). Nevertheless, early Ministers for Immigration after World War II persuaded Australians to accept any costs of the post war immigration programme as the price to be paid for greater national security. 'Populate or perish' was the message.

By the 1980's, the defence justification for continued immigration had been over-turned. Defence specialists now argue that few countries are capable of invading Australia. Between 1976 and 1981, three government reports¹ did not foresee any shortage of person-power for the armed forces and thought that, given the technological basis of modern warfare, Australia's population was sufficient for military needs. There was agreement that Australia's geographically isolated position did not increase its vulnerability but comprised a barrier which made the country a natural fortress. Only the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. were considered to have the capacity to invade Australia (Betts 1988:21).

Despite this agreement among the experts, polls showed that less educated people in Australia continued to worry

1. Australian Defence 1976, a White Paper; Threats to Australia's Security: Their Nature and Probability 1981; and Immigration Policies and Australia's Population 1977, a Green Paper.

about defence more than did intellectuals. The governing elite also continued to worry about defence (Betts 1988:97). In the late 1970's increased immigration was justified through linking defence anxieties with demographic trends. In 1979, Michael MacKellar, the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, expressed concern about the low fertility of the 1970's in terms of defence.

In the last century, the Prussians came to the conclusion that their higher birth rate meant they won a battle against France every year. How many battles are we losing?

(Cited in Betts 1988:88)

The theme of 'populate or perish' refused to die.

Post War Immigration and Economic Needs

The main economic aim behind the high rate of migrant intake from the late 1940's was the desire to provide labour and markets for Australian industry (Maude 1989:12). Population growth spurred economic growth and economies of scale in some industries. There were few dissenting voices. One was H. Arndt who suggested in 1964 that "The economic case for large-scale immigration is ... in no small measure an act of faith" (Arndt 1968:20). In 1965, the report of a Committee of Economic Enquiry (the Vernon Report) considered that while ~~that~~ immigration had made a substantial contribution to Australia's economic development, there were costs arising from rapid population growth. These costs included the divergence of capital from productive investment into infrastructure and increased demand which

placed pressure on the balance of payments. The report also pointed out that the demand for capital caused by immigration strained domestic savings, thereby increasing Australia's dependence on foreign ownership (Committee of Economic Enquiry 1965:66-68).

From the late 1970's, importing skilled workers was seen as one way of aiding economic growth after the serious recession of 1975 (Betts 1988:121). Increasingly in the 1980's, immigration was seen as aiding restructuring of the Australian economy away from its traditional exports of unprocessed primary products to high value-added manufactured goods. In the mid-1980's several Labor ministers including Chris Hurford (Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs), John Dawkins (Minister for Trade) and Bill Hayden (Minister for Foreign Affairs) believed that high immigration would assist restructuring of the economy. Under Labor's Minister for Industry and Commerce, Senator John Button, government policy stressed that the Australian economy should move towards producing high value-added manufactured goods for export. In this view, Australia's best prospects lay with specialized products and markets (Cited in Birrell and Birrell 1987:292). There were few critics to point out that strong population growth might be at odds with efforts to restructure the Australian economy. Sophisticated manufacturing processes were unlikely to employ much labour (Mitchell 1988:91). By contrast, much of the post war migrant intake had been employed in relatively labour intensive manufacturing industries which had grown up behind tariff walls (Joske 1989). Dawkins believed that a larger Australian market

could promote economies of scale and technological innovation (Betts 1988:179). Migration-induced economic expansion, while at odds in some ways with the drive for sophisticated exports, may make structural re-adjustment easier for governments to achieve as new industries can be developed without the need to rationalize less efficient ones, thus avoiding problems with trade unions, state and local governments affected by industry closures (Birrell 1988:96).

The fuelling of post war economic growth in Australia by rapid population growth benefited sectors of the economy geared to the domestic market, including the retail, finance and protected manufacturing industries. Others to benefit were the housing industry, including land speculators, developers and real estate agents. These beneficiaries became a growth lobby by the 1970's (Betts 1984:56).

Immigration and Environmental Concerns

By the late 1960's, some Australian intellectuals were expressing concern about issues raised in the Vernon Report including the demands placed on public infrastructure services by rapid population growth. The provision of water, sewerage and other public services had lagged behind the rate of population growth (National Urban and Regional Development Authority 1973). In addition, there was rising concern about a range of social and environmental costs of the large immigration programme. These included suburban sprawl, pollution and conservation (Downes 1970).

Environmental concerns encouraged the rise of a Zero Population Growth movement in Australia in the early 1970's.

This was part of an international movement in the developed countries.

The Whitlam government was elected in 1972 on a platform which included providing sewerage and public services and improving cities. This government maintained a low migrant intake, partly in response to environmental concerns and partly to assist its plans to make Australian industry more internationally competitive. Internationally competitive industries were likely to be capital intensive and less in need of labour. The Whitlam Government cut the migrant intake in 1975 when recession struck.

The Borrie Report and Population Growth

According to the first report of the National Population Inquiry 1975, Population and Australia (The Borrie Report), Australia had a likely minimum carrying capacity of about 42 million with a maximum several times greater, depending on technological change, markets and availability of resources. This conclusion was based on a submission by the CSIRO which considered only food and water constraints on population growth in Australia. The CSIRO submission argued that if the area under crops could be doubled and if all the produce were consumed locally, Australia could support 60-70 million (Borrie 1975). While the Borrie Report drew on the CSIRO work, it ignored the assumptions which underlay the CSIRO report and took no account of land use conflicts, quality of life issues and environmental trade offs.²

2. For a critique of the Borrie Report, see ACF 1975. For a critique of the CSIRO submission, see French 1984:149.

The Role of an Aging Population in the Immigration Debate

The high fertility rate which characterized the 1960's fell in the 1970's when restrictions on birth control measures were relaxed (Betts 1984:52). This drop in the birth rate brought about a fall in the rate of natural increase and an increased medium age of the population.³ By the late 1970's, it was argued that aging of the population necessitated a vigorous immigration programme to provide the young workers to support the increased proportion of elderly dependants in the coming decades. Declining fertility, it was also claimed, meant that the population would, without immigration, decline.

These arguments were unchallenged until the late 1980's when demographic analysis showed that while it was true that Australia's net reproduction rate had fallen to 0.9, that is, to below replacement level, Australia's population would continue to grow for several decades without any immigration. This continued growth was due to the large numbers of post war 'baby boom' women who were still in their reproductive years. Young (1989:8) has shown that, without immigration, Australia's population would grow for several decades and then decline gradually, not falling below its current size until ^{almost} another century had passed.

3. Before industrialization, societies were characterized by high fertility, high mortality and young populations. With industrialization, mortality declined, resulting in growing numbers. Due to high fertility, populations were still young. In recent decades, fertility has declined in industrialized nations. (But numbers do not necessarily stabilize if populations are still young.) Fertility decline results in a population with higher average ages. The move from high fertility and high mortality to low fertility and low mortality is called the 'demographic transition'. It is hoped that all societies will reach this stage eventually as growth in human numbers cannot continue indefinitely (Betts 1988:29).

Demographic analysis has also showed that immigration at current levels would have very little effect on slowing aging of the population. Young has calculated that by the middle of the next century, given static fertility rates, the proportion of elderly people in the population will stabilize at 20 to 22 per cent, regardless of whether there has been a constant level of immigration of 50,000 or 150,000 a year. A very small retardation of aging could be achieved by a high level of immigration, but the costs of catering for the needs of several extra million inhabitants might not be worth the effort (Young 1989:9).

Refugees from Asia

The victory of the North Vietnamese over the United States of America and its allies, including Australia, in 1975 marked the start of an outflow of refugees from Vietnam. When some of these refugees began arriving in Australia, the strongest voices of sympathy for the refugees came from intellectuals of the centre and to the right of the political spectrum and from the Catholic Church, according to Betts (1988:143). Intellectuals of the politically extreme right, including those associated with racist organizations such as the National Front of Australia and the Australian National Alliance, were hostile to the refugees. The Indo-Chinese, as refugees from a communist regime, may have been acceptable to right-wing intellectuals, but they represented a dilemma for right-wing parochials. While left-wing intellectuals too were, at first, unsure how to receive these refugees from communism, they soon felt pity for the obvious suffering of

the refugees (Betts 1988:132, 144-5). It was in Australia's interests to accept the refugees, Phillip Adams argued,

If Australians can't accept these people gracefully, let them do so out of self-interest ... The secret is simple and painful: Australia is a deeply racist nation, in a state of latent panic about its right and legitimacy and tenure ... the talented, hungry and resentful races in our vicinity are shaping up to take their rightful place in the sun. They will not overlook an under-developed and fabulously rich continent held in ransom by a marooned and lazy rearguard of an extinct European empire.

(‘Towards Apart-hate’, The Age,
7 December 1977. Cited in
Betts 1988:146)

The assumption of the threat from the north persisted. Concern for the plight of refugees provided humanitarian justification for a return to higher rates of immigration under the Fraser government. Humanitarianism found adherents among church and welfare groups and some academics. Humanitarianism became the chief goal of immigration policy for some people from the late 1970's and immigration came to be seen as a form of international aid (Betts 1988:34).

Ethnic Lobbies and Family Reunion

The Whitlam government removed the last vestiges of the preference for migrants of Anglo-Saxon and then European origin (the White Australia Policy). It adopted a policy of multiculturalism which encouraged non-English speaking migrant communities to retain elements of their traditional cultures. Multiculturalism valued cultural diversity. Multiculturalism was seen as providing a solution to the problems of non-English speaking migrants whom

Australian intellectuals often regarded as oppressed and discriminated against. Multiculturalism gave ethnic communities an increasing political voice.

The Whitlam government was able to pursue a commitment to internationalist ideals, to a non-rationally selective immigration policy and to multiculturalism while at the same time reducing immigration. But by the early 1980's, people who questioned immigration were perceived to be questioning the value of existing migrants (Betts 1988:113).

When the Fraser government began increasing immigration from 1976, the Labor opposition was under pressure to support the family reunion category for immigration.⁴ Southern European lobby groups were pressing for an increased emphasis on extended family reunion.⁵ These demands were legitimated in terms of cultural rights and humanitarian obligations (Betts 1988:83).

Despite the ALP's support for an increase in family reunion, Dr. Moss Cass, opposition spokesman on immigration, did initially criticize rising immigration. Tom Uren, the Shadow Minister for Urban and Regional Affairs, also criticized rising immigration at a time when unemployment was high, there were urban problems and no decentralization policy (CPD:HR 5 October 1976:1499-500, cited in Betts 1988:125).⁶ But to oppose or even question immigration was taken as

4. Despite differing titles over the years, there are basically three categories to the immigration programme: refugees, family reunion and independents.

5. By 1975, southern Europeans were voting mainly for the ALP. So their lobby groups had some power in the ALP (Betts 1988:141).

6. The Whitlam government had tried, unsuccessfully, to promote decentralization as one way to ease the urban pressures of population growth.

implied hostility to the welfare and interests of existing migrants (Betts 1988:125-6). For example, Uren's criticism of the government's proposed increase in intake was described as:

an insult to the migrant community ... an attack upon migrants ... an attack upon the relatives of people in Australia, it is an attack upon our refugee policies and it is an attack upon migrant children.

(CPD:HR, 5 October 1976, Shipton: 1503-4. Cited in Betts 1988:26).⁷

To question immigration was to risk being seen as intolerant and inhumane. Ironically, some southern European community leaders initially opposed the Fraser government's decision to increase immigration, on the grounds that it was occurring at the same time as cuts in welfare services, but their arguments soon died away. According to Betts, the foreign language press wanted a continuing flow of native speakers and the ethnic community leaders wanted a continuing flow of migrants from their native lands to provide these leaders with status within the migrant communities (Betts 1988:148-9).

The passing of the White Australian Policy saw a significant widening of source countries for migrant intake in the 1980's, with 37 per cent of permanent arrivals coming from Asia, a new source of migrants, by 1987 (Betts 1988:184). Indo-Chinese refugees qualified for family

7. Moss Cass was also attacked. Il Globo called him "this strange shadow Minister of non-immigration" who fully endorses "the oldest populist theory of the 19th century according to which migrants take the bread away from the mouths of Australians" From the Ethnic Press 10 March 1978. Cited in Betts 1988:149.

reunion entitlements and this allowed them to sponsor relatives into Australia, laying the basis for increasing Asian immigration. The increase in the sources of migrants placed pressure on intake numbers through the family reunion programme. For example, by 1987, more than 53 per cent of settler arrivals were coming in directly under a family reunion category (Betts 1990a) (See Appendix 3). For the southern European ethnic groups which lobbied hard for extended family reunion, the issue was largely a symbolic one as 77 adult siblings were being sponsored for every one thousand Australian residents born in the Philippines compared with 0.9 for every thousand residents born in Greece and 0.2 for every thousand residents born in Italy by the latter 1980's (Betts 1990a:23).

The lobbying activities of the ethnic groups has had a significant influence on the immigration programme. For example, in 1986, ^{according to Betts,} one of the advisers to the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs gave two reasons why the migrant intake was growing in size. Firstly, there was a 'blow-out' in Category C of family reunion applicants (adult brothers and sisters and non-dependent children). While the numbers could have been kept down, said the adviser, this would have created problems with the ethnic lobbies. So it was allowed to grow. Secondly, some business groups were pressing for a larger immigration programme to increase the size of the domestic market (Betts 1990c).

The lobbying activities of the ethnic groups have had a major influence on the immigration portfolio. Under the Hawke government, there has been a rapid succession of Ministers for Immigration which, according to Hardcastle and

Parkin (1990), has been largely due to the office's sensitivity to political pressure.⁸ The 1988 report of the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies (the Fitzgerald Report) found that the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs represented migrant lobbies rather than providing independent advice to the government.

The portfolio ... is not meant to act only for immigrants. But until very recently, the Department appears to have been locked largely into immigrant networks ... This orientation cannot but affect the scope of the advice going to Ministers.

(CAAIP 1988:13)

Betts has argued that publicly funded multiculturalism has invested a handful of leaders of organized ethnic groups with the appearance of electoral importance. This, she has argued, has allowed them to influence political decisions in favour of increasing immigration. Furthermore, Betts has challenged how representative these ethnic leaders are of migrant interests in Australia (Betts 1990a).

The Role of Intellectuals in the Immigration Debate

Betts has described how, by the 1970's, intellectuals in Australia had developed a liberal cosmopolitan outlook which served to distinguish them from less educated people or 'parochials'. Key issues for contemporary liberals were equality, tolerance and the elimination of racism and Third World poverty. These were ends which were admirable in themselves, but very hard to achieve. They had "a moral

8. Successive ministers have been, Stewart West 1983-84, Chris Hurford 1984-7, Mick Young 1987-8, Clyde Holding 1988, Senator Robert Ray 1990 and Gerry Hand from 1990.

appeal to Western intellectuals who have been taught to question the basis of their own material comfort" (Betts 1988:46). Furthermore, Betts observed that

The new intellectuals wanted to define their own cultural style in order to demonstrate their achievement and their difference, and they found the elements for this in the world overseas first in Europe and then in Asia.

(Betts 1988:119)

Certain elements intensified this, according to Betts, including opposition to the White Australia Policy, opposition to the Vietnam War and concern for the plight of southern European migrants who were regarded as oppressed in the 1970's (Betts 1988:119).⁹ The new intellectuals or cosmopolitan liberals tended to favour immigration and multiculturalism (Betts 1988:99).¹⁰ Both multiculturalism and immigration were seen by many intellectuals in the 1970's as making Australia cosmopolitan, more like Europe, less provincial, isolated and dull. In 1980, Phillip Adams wrote

It's important to remember Australia before the most recent wave of migration. It was dull, self-satisfied and joylessly conformist ... Not merely mindless, but lobotomized.

(The Age 12 July 1980.

Cited in Betts 1988:117).

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9. Southern European migrants were often concentrated in manual jobs in the 1960's and the 1970's due to their lack of English and seemed to fare badly in the health and welfare areas, again partly due to their language problems. By the 1980's there was evidence of an exceptional degree of upward mobility in southern European migrants (King 1984:236-7).
 10. Right-wing intellectuals, however, tended to be suspicious of multiculturalism.

Cosmopolitan liberals espoused an international humanitarian outlook. Internationalism distinguished the cosmopolitans from the more nationalistic parochials who were less in favour of immigration from the 1970's. Polls showed that whereas most Australians strongly supported immigration in 1961, this support fell during the 1970's until by 1988, over two thirds opposed the size of the migrant intake.¹¹ Only two groups diverged from this pattern, non-U.K. immigrants and the tertiary educated, particularly the university educated (Betts 1988:70, 77).

When immigration numbers rose from the late 1970's, cosmopolitan liberal intellectuals did not criticize population growth as many intellectuals did in the late 1960's. From the late 1970's, intellectual critics of the immigration programme were seen as illiberal outsiders who need not be taken seriously. Critics were increasingly seen as parochial, ethnocentric, racist, anti-migrant, anti-family and inhumane (Betts 1988).

The Blainey Debate on Immigration

In 1983, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bill Hayden, claimed that a Eurasian Australia of some 50 million people was desirable and inevitable (CPD:HR 9 September 1981:1068-9). By the early 1980's, the significant intake of Vietnamese refugees and Asian migrants were noticeable on the streets of cities. The issue of the racial origin of immigrants flared up in 1984 when Professor Geoffrey

11. The Fitzgerald Report noted with concern that the level of support for stopping immigration altogether was at a post war high by 1987 (CAAIP 1988:25).

Blainey, a leading Australian historian, delivered a speech to the Warrnambool Rotarians. He claimed that contrary to perceptions, Australia had nearly always been a multicultural society and while Australia was a tolerant society, if a nation were to be effective, its people had to have values in common. At the end of the speech he said it was possible that the massive increase in Asian immigration was occurring at a rate well ahead of public opinion. He claimed that Asian residents in Australia were being given favourable treatment in the allocation of migration places. This last claim was untrue. Asian migrants were just using the family reunion programme more than were other ethnic groups (Betts 1988:159). Blainey also argued, shortly after his Warrnambool speech, that Australia could not support a much larger population due to its aridity and poor soils (The Age 20 March 1984). But the public debate which raged around him focussed on race.

Blainey made an enormous public impact (Hardcastle and Parkin 1990). Many intellectuals attacked him. He was seen as supporting the deep-seated racism of parochial Australians.¹² Betts has attributed the hostility which Blainey aroused in some intellectuals as due to his breaking the taboo on questioning non-European immigration (Betts 1988:41). The furore around Blainey influenced the course of the environmental debate on immigration in the late 1980's.

12. Polls and surveys show that race and attitudes to racism are subjects on which intellectuals and non-intellectuals are divided (Betts 1988:106). Post war intellectuals have written Australia's history from a view point which stresses the racism inherent in Australian society. For example, see McQueen 1970.

The Fitzgerald Report on Immigration in Australia

The 1988 Fitzgerald Report supported substantial immigration and recommended the intake be increased from about 132,000 to 150,000 per annum (CAAIP 1988:73, 122). Under the influence of its economic adviser, Professor Helen Hughes, the Committee considered immigration levels from 100,000 to 220,000 a year (CAAIP 1988:77).¹³ At no stage did the Committee ever appear seriously to consider lowering the migrant intake to, say 70,000 or 50,000.

Immigration, said the Report, supported economic growth.

... our international competitiveness and dynamism as a society are linked to economic growth and there is a growing belief that this is supported by immigration.

(CAAIP 1988:75)

The Committee was cautious, however, about accepting the economies of scale argument for population growth (CAAIP 1988:42). It conceded that only a fraction of economic growth could be attributed to immigration.

This Report claimed that while the 1940's-50's ideology of 'populate or perish' was unacceptable today, there was justification in continuing immigration

... in terms of how we are perceived by others and how others might wish to act if we ourselves do not take steps to maintain and increase the size of our population. (CAAIP 1988:18)

13. See Betts (1990c) for the role played by Hughes.

This argument echoed the time-honoured 'populate or perish' thesis.

In a report of 127 pages, the committee devoted about 200 words to environmental concerns about population growth. It claimed that while some of the most pressing areas of environmental damage such as air pollution and the salination of irrigated land would be increased with population growth,¹⁴ the cost per taxpayer and as a share of Gross Domestic Product of 'cleaning up' such pollution or salination would be likely to fall with a higher population (CAAIP 1988:42-3). The environmental argument presented by the Fitzgerald Report is worth commenting on, at this stage, as it was an influential Report. The argument poses problems as it ignores:-

- (1) possible diseconomies of scale. For example, given Australia's relatively scarce water resources, population growth around water catchment areas can cause problems. The cost per capita of overcoming these problems can rise if less accessible water resources are exploited. Similarly, pressure to expand agricultural exports to sustain the living standards of a growing population can lead to damage to the environment. The cost per capita of trying to overcome this damage could rise if more marginal land is cultivated (Joske 1989:16).
- (2) possible threshold effects. Population growth can cause disproportionate increases in environmental damage. For example, below a certain limit, trees survive smog. A small increase in smog was sufficient to kill all Norfolk Island pines on the Sydney metropolitan shore by 1971.

14. Population growth can cause a loss of valuable arable land through residential development near cities. Agriculture or horticulture may then be forced into areas more reliant on irrigation (Mosley 1982:21). This has happened in Adelaide where the loss of market garden areas close to the city to urban development has forced horticulture into the northern Adelaide Plains. Here over-exploitation of ground water resources has caused saline intrusions (Environmental Protection Council of South Australia 1988:40).

The suspected cause was detergent in the air which blew in from sewer outlets in the Pacific Ocean (Birch 1972:7).¹⁵

- (3) possible synergistic effects. For example, a toxic pollutant disposed of at point A may travel to point B miles away. In the process, it may mix with other pollution and the damage from the combined effect may be greater than the sum of the damages from the individual effects (Pearce et al 1989:10).
- (4) the possibility that much environmental damage may be irreversible (Pearce et al 1989: 8-9, 36). Examples include soil erosion, loss of native forests and native species.

... ecological irreversibility is not unusual - natural species are lost every year, unique ecosystems are destroyed and environmental functions are irreparably damaged.

(Pearce et al 1989:43)

The Fitzgerald Report pointed out that with an increased population, the provision of some government services such as public transport can become cheaper and more efficient. It acknowledged in passing diseconomies of scale in the provision of government services, citing urban sprawl as costly for public utilities to service.

Overall, the report failed both to question the desirability of large-scale immigration and to address the issue of a desirable stable population for Australia.

The Garnaut Report and Immigration

A report to the government in 1989 by Professor Ross Garnaut recommended greater integration of Australia into

15. Technology is, of course, an issue here as well as population growth.

Asian markets which were projected to grow strongly in the coming decades. This report argued that Australia cannot expect to expand trade with Asia, the most economically dynamic region in the world, if Australia does not accept migrants from Asia. The Garnaut Report recommended a large intake of Asian entrepreneurs and professionals.

To date, there is little evidence that increasing immigration from Asia increases trade with Asia (Joske 1989:26-27). Nevertheless, a generous refugee policy and an effort to avoid ethnic and racial discrimination may enhance international relations (Betts 1988:22). In the 1980's the Labor government was keen to point to Australia's non-racially selective immigration policy to improve relations with its ASEAN neighbours.¹⁶

Political Parties and the Immigration Debate

In the 1980's, immigration policy was largely bipartisan between the two major political parties. The ALP had developed strong ties with both ethnic lobbies and many left of centre cosmopolitan intellectuals (Betts 1988:153-4). The Liberal-National Party coalition had traditional links with the growth lobby (Betts 1990c:5). The 1980's was characterized by a remarkable lack of debate on a desirable long term population for Australia. While it had an immigration policy, it lacked a population policy. It had a de facto population policy of 'populate or perish', some would argue.

16. At a recent meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations and their dialogue partners, Australia, the U.S., Japan, the European Community and New Zealand, Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs, told ASEAN ministers that they should not continue to see Australia as tainted with racism because the single largest group of migrants in Australia now were Asians (Sheridan 1990c).

The racial origins of migrants continued to flare up as a political issue, not only in 1984 with the Blainey debate, but also in 1988 when the leader of the Opposition, John Howard, announced a policy of 'one Australia' (The Age 30 July 1988). By this he meant that there must be an "over-riding commitment ... to the institutions of Australia, her values, her traditions" (The Age 8 August 1988).¹⁷ Howard promised that a future Coalition government would reduce Asian immigration in the interests of a "socially cohesive, harmonious and tolerant society" (The Australian 2 August 1988). As in 1984, media commentators were hostile to the 'anti-Asian' position and Liberal parliamentarians were divided (Hardcastle and Parkin 1990). This helped dispose of Howard (Barnett 1990b). The term 'racist' had become a powerful tool in Australian politics. In 1989, Andrew Peacock replaced Howard as leader of the opposition and affirmed a non-discriminatory and bipartisan immigration policy. In the 1990 federal election campaign, Peacock made a last minute attack on the proposed Multi Function Polis.¹⁸ This incited Prime Minister Hawke to imply that this criticism was 'racist' (Austin et al 1990). The Treasurer, Paul Keating, said Mr. Peacock had insulted the Japanese (Abbott 1990). This helped discredit Peacock.

In 1989, the Minister for Immigration Senator Ray suggested that 25 million may be a suitable figure for a stable population for Australia (ABC 1989). In 1990 while on a visit

17. The 1988 Fitzgerald Report had criticized multiculturalism and recommended migrants demonstrate a commitment to Australia and its institutions by becoming citizens.

18. A high tech city producing high tech exports. This is to be funded largely by foreign investment, including significant Japanese investment.

to Adelaide, the Environment Minister Senator Richardson hinted that 25 million would be a sustainable population for Australia (P. Tighe personal communication). This figure seemed to be based on recent CSIRO studies (Nix 1988), but these remarks were only made in passing, there was no open debate on the issue and no effort was made to synchronize this target with current immigration levels.

The Joske Paper and its Influence on the Immigration Debate

While the changing racial origins of migrants received sporadic political attention in the 1980's, immigration numbers were largely ignored. This situation began to change in the late 1980's when an economic debate on the wisdom of large-scale immigration surfaced. In 1989, Westpac Bank suggested that immigration cost Australia some \$9 billion a year in foreign debt for infrastructure and housing investment (Wallace 1989:39). In the same year, a paper was published which questioned many of the benefits claimed for immigration. This paper, by S. Joske, both criticized and drew on two previous studies of the economics of immigration.¹⁹ The Director of the Economic Planning and Advisory Committee (EPAC), Brian Parmenter, was also criticizing these studies as 'fatally flawed' late in 1989 (Wallace 1989:34).

The Joske paper did not attempt to deny that there were positive economic benefits from the immigration programme, but pointed out that the evidence for these was not as clear-cut as had often been claimed. In addition, Joske pointed out possible negative effects of high immigration. Joske argued

19. Norman and Meikle 1985 and Centre for International Economics 1988.

that whereas migrants themselves clearly benefit from immigration into Australia, the pre-existing population, especially low income citizens, may suffer costs. Low income citizens were likely to be disadvantaged in job training, job availability and housing. While immigration could supplement the supply of skilled workers, it also created a disincentive for employers to train existing workers. This would most severely disadvantage low income earners who generally have more potential to be trained (Joske 1989:26). While immigration did not seem to raise unemployment, pre-existing workers in low income labour markets may be disadvantaged. In the housing market, low income earners would be worse off as increased demand from migrants pushed up house prices and rents. While supply could expand to meet demand, housing was likely to be in worse locations with higher transport costs (Joske 1989:26).

This report argued that large numbers of migrants necessitated relatively unproductive forms of capital investment in housing and urban infrastructures. This investment in housing, roads, schools, water and sewerage expanded the capital base to accommodate a larger population ('capital broadening') rather than enhancing productivity by developing more capital intensive production methods ('capital deepening'). While other developed countries had been deepening their capital bases, Australia had been broadening its base. Consequently productivity growth in Australia has been low (Joske 1989:24).

The Joske report also argued that large numbers of migrants pushed up demand for imports without necessarily generating extra exports, thereby increasing Australia's

balance of trade problems and hence its foreign debt.²⁰ Furthermore, it argued, by providing a continuing source of low-paid low-skilled labour (the family and humanitarian categories accounting for most of the intake) immigration had oriented Australia's manufacturing towards low technology production and provided a disincentive to it to move into more sophisticated production methods which would have made more internationally competitive industries (Joske 1989:24). Furthermore, the paper argued, Australia's high rate of immigration may have added up to \$8 billion to Australia's foreign debt in 1987-88 (Joske 1989:21).²¹ Support for Joske's arguments was provided by the Department of Finance's unpublished submission to the Fitzgerald Inquiry (O'Reilly 1990a).

When the Joske report was published, Joske was personally vilified by some immigration advisers to the government (Preface by Argall to Joske 1990). The Bureau of Immigration Research, which had been set up, on the recommendation of the Fitzgerald Report, as an independent research body within the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, was concerned to refute Joske's claims. Joske (1990) has criticized the Bureau as being biased in favour of population growth. Its director, J.

20. Although there is debate about just how important Australia's foreign debt is (given that over half is private debt) according to Brian Parmenter, Deputy Director of Melbourne's Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, most people now agree that Australia's main macro economic problems are essentially medium term problems to do with the balance of payments and foreign debt (ABC 1990b). Concern over balance of payments deficits has spurred the Hawke government to run a high interest rate policy over the last 18 months in an effort to reduce demand. This has hurt many struggling home-buyers.

21. This was over two thirds of Australia's total demand for foreign capital (i.e. the current account deficit) in 1987-88.

Nieuwenhuysen, previously worked for the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia, a business lobby group. All of the Bureau's staff have a pro-immigration background (AAFI literature).

Some members of the Hawke government were nevertheless impressed with Joske's arguments (D. McCormack, personal communication). There were increasing signs of dissension within the Labor Party over the immigration programme in 1990. But these only surfaced publicly after the March federal election, a reflection of the sensitivity of the immigration issue.

In April 1990, the recently retired Minister for Finance, Senator Peter Walsh, attacked the government's immigration programme. Walsh claimed that the annual intake of 140,000 was economically damaging and the product of political pressure from ethnic leaders (Walsh 1990a). Although the current Minister for Immigration, Gerry Hand, rejected Walsh's claims, they were partly supported by former Immigration Minister Stewart West who denied the 140,000 annual intake was due to pressure from ethnic leaders but said the figure should be cut.

You have to ask yourself, does it make sense to bring 140-150,000 people a year in, now that we are sliding into recession and given that we are going to squeeze the hell out of the States on infrastructure funding.

(Cited in Eccleston 1990a)

In the same month, the Labor Leader of the Opposition in New South Wales, Bob Carr, claimed that the Sydney Basin was full and that immigration should be examined (ABC 1990c). In

May, the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, John Kerin, claimed that Australia's immigration programme was putting pressure on the land and making Australia's soil degradation problems worse (Ferguson 1990). By this, Kerin was probably referring to growing urban development around water catchments and on good agricultural land which forces agriculture on to more marginal land with poorer water supplies which in turn necessitates increased irrigation (Mosley 1982:21) and perhaps increasing use of fertilizers with resulting land degradation problems. The Federal Opposition too was having second thoughts on immigration and the new leader of the Liberal Party, John Hewson, called for a debate on the economics of immigration. Immigration, was, he said, a 'sacred cow' (ABC News 20 May 1990). Renewed debate on immigration, however, seemed linked to a looming economic slow-down by mid 1990 as the government's high interest rate policy began to bite. Environmental concerns rarely entered the debate.

In the middle of 1990, the new Minister for Immigration, Gerry Hand, announced that he had commissioned research on the impact of population growth on the environment (O'Reilly 1990:35). Ironically, perhaps, the La Trobe University group investigating this was to be headed by an agricultural economist (Letter, J. Nieuwenhuysen, The Age 16 February 1990). Also in 1990, the Bureau of Immigration Research, apparently in response to the public debate, announced it was organizing a conference on immigration in Melbourne for November. Papers by academic and ethnic groups will be presented, but a lack of representation of government departments which directly

advise government on policy has been criticized, as has been the absence of organizations like the CSIRO with their knowledge of intensive farming practices and land degradation (Barnett 1990b:39-40).

Concluding Discussion

The immigration debate has revolved largely around economic goals and defence fears. The main political parties have generally continued to support population growth to achieve these economic and defence aims. From the 1970's, the immigration debate was marked by confusion and ignorance about demographic trends. Cosmopolitan liberals were concerned to defend the humanitarian aspects of the immigration programme and marginalized critics of the programme. Furthermore, by the 1980's immigration policy was being driven by other interests, including the lobby groups representing business and ethnic interests. The newly formed Bureau of Immigration Research, set up to provide independent advice to the government, appeared to have its own bureaucratic interests to defend and these were likely to be furthered by strong immigration.

The issue of the racial origin of migrants largely dominated public debate in the 1980's and detracted attention away from the crucial issue of the overall size of the migrant intake.

Environmental concerns only received serious attention in the early 1970's and, to a lesser extent, by 1990. An optimistic assessment of Australia's capacity to support a large population, such as Borrie's estimate of a minimum of 42 million, underlay the general neglect of possible physical

limits or environmental costs to continued population growth. While this optimism was tempered by reality by the late 1980's, as Labor ministers hinted that 25 million was a desirable population for Australia, politicians seemed unaware that, at current growth rates, Australia was headed within 40 years for a population of 27 million, with strong growth likely to continue even after that. The attainment of a desirable stable population size required long term planning and coordinated action. Governments seemed both uninterested and incapable of looking beyond the next few years or the next election.

Some two thirds of the population were opposed to immigration by the late 1980's. But there were few intellectuals willing to voice the discontent of the parochials. It was into this immigration context, as part of the debate on ecological sustainability, that the Greens found themselves drawn as 1990 unfolded. The dilemma for the Greens was whether to side with their traditional cosmopolitan intellectual supporters or to risk political alienation and the tag of 'racist' by opposing the level of immigration on ecological grounds. This conflict is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Australia's Population and the
Australian Conservation Foundation

Australia's population, and hence immigration, became an increasingly divisive issue within the Australian Conservation Foundation in the 1980's. A clear division within the Foundation's policy-making body emerged over the issue. The members of the Foundation also appeared to have widely divergent views on the issue.¹ The membership of the Foundation would seem to be largely drawn from the middle class and many of these members would probably hold views compatible with cosmopolitan liberals and would be likely to be sympathetic to immigration.²

The policy-makers of the Foundation were split by 1990 on three fronts among those who thought immigration should be considerably reduced on environmental grounds, those who were unsure, and those who would want no cuts in the federal government's immigration programme. Most notably, the President, Peter Garrett, and the Executive Director, Phillip Toyne, supported the 'no cuts' position. By June, this position was supported by a majority on the Foundation's policy-making body. There were a variety of reasons for this. These will be examined after a brief survey of the Foundation's history and its policy changes on population in recent years.

History of the Australian Conservation Foundation

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) was established as an organization dedicated to conservation in 1965. From its early years, the Foundation showed an

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1. An examination of letters to the national journal of the Foundation from 1967-1990 indicates this.
 2. According to Walsh (1990b), albeit a hostile source, the ACF has recently stated that most of its members are from the eastern suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. This would indicate that most ACF members are middle class.

interest in both human-made and natural environments. In practical terms, however, most of its energies were devoted to protecting natural environments.

The formal structure of the ACF has evolved over the years. Councillors from the different States and Territories are officially responsible for deciding policy. There are five councillors from each State, three from the Northern Territory and two from the Australian Capital Territory. Policy formulation is also steered by a President (an honorary position) and salaried staff including an Executive Director, Deputy Director and Policy Director. There are campaign officers in the States and Territories.

In the 1970's, the ACF moved from being a polite conservative society to a more politically active one (Jones 1981). In the 1980's the Foundation continued its movement into the political arena. It shifted from being an idealistic organization to one concerned with getting results (G. Mosley, personal communication). Results were achieved through lobbying government. There has been a rapid increase in ACF staff as it went into gear as a high-powered lobby group.³ In 1989, the Foundation adopted a forward planning process which sets out what issues the organization will deal with and what it will try to achieve in the next three years.

In the 1980's, the Foundation adopted a more radical critique of modern society. Its criticism of the consumer

3. Most of the staff, especially the office staff, are female. The top positions are largely taken by men. See Supplement to Conservation News, November 1989 and McCann 1990:7.

society and of industry made its agenda more attractive to those on the political left.⁴

ACF Policy Changes on Population 1970-1990

The Foundation was involved in the population issue within four to five years of its founding (G. Mosley, personal communication). Some of its members had links with the Zero Population Growth movement of the early 1970's. In the early 1970's, the ACF wanted the government to plan for an optimum population for Australia (ACF 1973).⁵ In 1978 the Council adopted a policy of population stabilization for Australia (ACF Newsletter 1978a:5).

The Foundation was active from the mid-1970's in challenging the way annual immigration targets were set (G. Mosley, personal communication). In 1978 when the Fraser government was increasing immigration into Australia at a time of high unemployment, the ACF Council supported condemnation of this action by Labor Party spokesman on immigration, Dr. Moss Cass (ACF Newsletter 1978a:5). In the same year, without success, the Foundation asked the Minister for Environment, Housing and Community Development to examine the environmental impact of the government's migration programme through a public inquiry under the Environmental Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974 (ACF Newsletter 1978b:8). It met with a similar response in 1981,

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4. See Birrell (1987:38) for the Foundation's recent linking of conservation with anti-capitalist and anti-nuclear issues traditionally associated with the left.
 5. The August 1975 issue of Habitat Australia, entitled 'Populate and Perish' mapped out the Foundation's preference for minimizing population growth in Australia.

when the Foundation again requested the Minister to do this (Mosley 1982:22).

The early 1980's marked a gradual shift in the ACF's position on population. This shift was associated with the rise of a new faction within the Council.⁶ A new President, Hal Wootten, elected early in 1984 seems to have been associated with this faction. At its March 1984 meeting, Council decided to withdraw the existing policy on population stabilization and to draw up a new one.

The Foundation had planned to hold a conference on population in August 1984. The now famous Professor G. Blainey was scheduled as a speaker at the conference. At the Council meeting of 30 June - 1 July 1984, a minority group won over a few undecided councillors so that a decision was taken to postpone the conference. The Council considered it "inappropriate to hold this conference at a time when public debate is focussed on racial aspects of immigration and not the broader issue of population policy" (ACF Newsletter 1984:3).

Blainey's post-Warrnambool notoriety caused the Council to back away from the conference. This was due to fear that the Foundation would be associated with the Blainey phenomenon.⁷ For the same reason, a faction within the ACF lobbied unsuccessfully to withhold Foundation sponsorship from the book Populate and Perish? published late in 1984

6. For evidence of factions in the ACF, see J. Wootten, 'Control of ACF' in ACF Newsletter 1986:7 and The Age 7 April 1986:2.

7. The conference was sponsored two years later under the auspices of the Australian National University. (See Day and Rowland 1988.)

(Betts 1988:168).⁸ The decision to review the existing population policy coupled with the decision to postpone the conference signalled the first clear break in the ACF's strong position on population and immigration.

In the 1985 Council election, the previous minority faction became a majority group (G. Mosley, personal communication; The Age 7 April 1986:2). The new Council strongly down-played the issue of immigration. A new policy on population was adopted at the Council meeting of 24 November 1985. The new policy was framed in the language of ecological sustainability. It stressed the necessity to stabilize both resource use and human population. On net immigration, it said

Immigration limits should be set consistent with the achievement of a sustainable society except in the case of intake for specific humanitarian reasons...

Humanitarianism, it seemed, was now more important than sustainability.

In 1986, a new Executive Director, Mr Phillip Toyne was appointed in place of Dr. Geoff Mosley. The departure of both Mosley and the Assistant Director, Doug Hill, partly reflected Council antagonism towards their strong views on a stable population policy (Birrell 1987:38). Toyne was formerly a barrister in the Northern Territory where he specialized in Aboriginal public interest advocacy work.

In 1987 the Foundation was uninterested in making a submission to the Fitzgerald inquiry despite the inquiry's terms of reference including examination of "the overall

8. This book was concerned with the environmental effects of population growth in Australia.

capacity of Australia to receive significant immigration intakes" (CAAIP 1988:ix). However when councillors Coulter and Teltscher pressed for participation, a submission was formulated by these two councillors. Both men have had a long-term interest in population. Their submission, forwarded to the inquiry as the official ACF submission, concluded that even the present population was rapidly degrading the environment and was therefore not sustainable in the long run.

The current Three Year Forward Plan of the Foundation was passed in October 1989. The Forward Plan recognises that

reduction and stabilisation of human population numbers and resource usage, both globally and nationally are fundamental to ecological sustainability (ACF 1989a:6).

According to the Three Year Strategy Plan

ACF acknowledges concerns about the growing levels of population in Australia and the need to move towards a sustainable population level (ACF 1989b:31).

There were, then, several references to Australia's population in these forward planning documents, largely due to the efforts of councillors Coulter, Teltscher and Mosley. But no action was proposed.

At the December 1989 Annual General Meeting of the Foundation, eight members submitted a notice of motion to amend the recently adopted Forward Plan. This notice of motion read

Noting the following points:

1. That the ACF Master Plan recognises that 'reduction and stabilisation of

human population numbers and resource usage both globally and nationally are fundamental to ecological stability';

2. That the ACF Policy Statement on Resource Use and Population (Clause 4) states that 'immigration limits should be set consistent with the achievement of a sustainable society except in the case of intake for specific humanitarian reasons';
3. that Australia's annual rate of population growth is the highest of any industrialised country and that the current net annual immigration rate of over 140,000 is responsible for about half of this growth;
4. that such high rates of growth:
 - (a) make it more difficult to achieve ecological sustainability by placing more pressure on already degraded resources;
 - (b) increase the size of the cities reducing the amount of land available for food production;
 - (c) reduce the surplus of food available for export to needy third world countries;

That this meeting amend the recently adopted Forward Plan by adding an extra objective:

"stabilize Australia's population by reducing immigration rates below the current level" and an extra aim: "ensure that there is broad community understanding of and support for, the arguments for reducing current immigration rates, while noting that immigrants should not be discriminated against on the grounds

of race, sex, lack of particular skills,
political beliefs or religion".

Councillor Mosley moved an amended motion that a postal ballot of Foundation members be held on the proposed extra objective. The amended motion was lost by a vote of 45 to 48. This close vote seemed to indicate how deeply divisive the immigration issue had become.

In the late 1980's other groups with firm population policies sprang up to fill the void created by the Foundation's retreat on population. Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population was established in Canberra with an ex-ACF councillor as its President.⁹ Australians against Further Immigration (AAFI) sprung up in Melbourne in May 1988. This organization has branches in Melbourne and Perth. A Canberra based group, Writers for an Ecologically Sustainable Population, supported by literary figures Judith Wright, A.D. Hope and Mark O'Connor was formed in 1989 (Betts 1988:112).

At the June 1990 Council meeting, the ACF's population policy was discussed. The Executive Director, Toyne, argued that no cuts in immigration were called for. Literature was circulated to Councillors which indicated that an anti-immigration group, probably AAFI, was using Foundation material (see Appendix 4). Concern was expressed by Toyne that the Foundation might be seen as racist should it support a reduction in immigration (H. Aslin personal communication). The Executive Director's argument prevailed. A resolution was passed dissociating the Council from the Coulter-Teltscher 1987 submission to the Fitzgerald inquiry on the grounds that 'its

9. Dr. Chris Watson of the CSIRO.

emphasis on immigration presented a very restricted view'. Extraordinarily, the same motion restricted the right of anyone, apart from the top executives, from making public statements on population. The reason was given that the Council was "currently developing a comprehensive policy on global and national population as part of a broad program of policy formulation on ecological sustainability." A resolution was passed adopting a recent newspaper article by Toyne as an 'interim reference document'. This interim document on population argued that

... the question of immigration levels can only be determined from an ecological perspective once we have worked out what our desirable stable population size is to be and at what level of per capita resource consumption we wish to sustain this population.

(Toyne 1990a)

The document also urged Australia to do all it could to help reduce population growth in the world's poorest ^{countries} ~~communities~~. But, for Australia, the article argued, more calculations were needed before limits could be imposed on migrant numbers. First we needed to work ^{out} our desirable stable population size, our level of per capita resource consumption, the environmental impact of numbers of people and then we could calculate our migrant intake. This seemed an exceedingly difficult task. It ignored the important fact that any decision on an ecologically sustainable population would involve value judgments.

Concluding Discussion

The Foundation was clearly divided on the immigration issue by 1990. Fear of giving support to anti-immigration racists, together with concern for the humanitarian component of the immigration programme, made most of the ACF's policy-makers reluctant to criticize the immigration programme. But the issue of ecological sustainability had to be faced up to. If the immigrant intake were not to be criticized, how to reconcile continued population growth with sustainability was the dilemma.

CHAPTER 4

The Dilemma for Australian Greens:
The Case of the ACF

The divisiveness of the immigration issue within the ACF was exacerbated in the 1980's by shifts of power within the organization and its movement into political activism. Increasingly, the Foundation adopted an internationalist humanitarian stance which was proud of its anti-racism and concern for social justice issues. To support lowering immigration into Australia for the sake of ecological sustainability seemed, to some, to fly in the face of many of these ideals. To debate immigration meant opening Pandora's box¹ because arguments to reduce immigration into Australia have been, and are still being, depicted by some intellectuals in Australia as racist, selfish, inhumane and nationalistic or isolationist. In addition, some in the Foundation believed that environmental problems were not caused by population growth, but by bad planning and excessive resource use. These arguments were influential in shaping the Foundation's policy on population. Political pressures too added another layer of complexity to the Foundation's dilemma. These are now examined.

Racism

Betts (1988) has traced the processes by which critics of Australia's immigration programme were marginalized from the late 1970's. The charge of racism was used in this process of ridicule. It was used by both left-wing and right-wing cosmopolitan intellectuals

The use of arguments based upon ecology conservation and environmental protection to support exclusion in

1. 'Opening Pandora's Box' is part of the title used by Toyne 1990b.

immigration policy must be regarded, I regret to say, as 'racism' in disguise.

Zubrzycki, G. 'The boat people'
Quadrant, Vol. 23, 1979:44.
 (cited in Betts 1988: 207)

Some intellectuals argued that immigration policy should not be discussed publicly on the grounds that it could arouse the ever-latent racism of Australian parochials.

It may well be that ill-considered and polarized controversy about the desirable size of our immigration policy may do more harm to the community than would be done by an over-generous immigration-policy itself. In particular, the consequences of a strongly anti-immigration argument are of concern.

There is a very real reason to fear the widespread controversy about immigration levels will tap and legitimize deep-seated and explicit racist feelings ... which doubtless continue to exist in the Australian community.

(Batziias and Liffman 1979:32)

The message was that ordinary Australians should not be encouraged to consider the immigration issue even though they would be called on to bear the costs of continuing population growth. This was the climate of opinion in the 1980's on immigration as the ACF tried to dodge and duck the issue.

The debate on Asian immigration which erupted around Blainey in 1984 seems to have been a turning point for the Foundation on the immigration issue (R. Birrell, personal communication). The public ostracizing of Blainey was not likely to encourage others to enter the immigration debate (Betts 1988:168). The polarization of views which Blainey

incited over Asian immigration was not conducive to a rational debate on immigration numbers.

Increasingly in the 1980's there was conflict within the Foundation over the issue of racism in the immigration debate. This conflict became public in mid-1990 (Seccombe 1990a). According to Dr. Mosley, former Director of the Foundation from 1973 to 1986 and now a Victorian councillor, there are no racists within the ACF (personal communication). But according to an article in the Sydney Morning Herald, the present Executive Director claimed in mid-1990 that racists had infiltrated the Foundation (Seccombe 1990a). In the ACF's newsletter, Conservation News, the Executive Director, said

Let me express dismay that ecological justification has been picked up by some to argue against immigration when it seems the core of their objection is the ethnic origins of those entering Australia. We must never allow our deliberations and processes to be hijacked by those with that agenda.

(Toyne 1990b)²

Who were the alleged racists who had infiltrated the Foundation? One, it seems, was D. McCormack, a member of both the Foundation and Australians Against Further Immigration (ABC 1990e). The dominant faction in the ACF was hostile to AAFI and saw AAFI members as infiltrating the Foundation and trying, illegitimately, to change the Foundation's population policy. ACF leaders were particularly

2. Ironically, the issue of racism in the immigration debate boiled up in the ACF just after it died away in the federal sphere (Anonymous, ABC 1990e).

incensed that AAFI appeared to use ACF's environmental information in virulently anti-population growth literature, apparently printed by AAFI (see Appendix 4).

In the June 1990 Council meeting, the Foundation's immigration policy was debated. The Executive Director argued that the Foundation could be seen as racist if it supported lowering immigration. So, there were three claims being made about racism and the ACF. (1) The suspect AAFI had used ACF material to support its racist opposition to immigration (2) racists had infiltrated the ACF and (3) the ACF could appear to be racist if it argued for lower immigration. These arguments appeared to win over most Councillors to the case that more research on population was needed before the case for lowering immigration could be supported.

If, as it was suggested, AAFI were a bunch of racists, then the ACF leaders and their councillors need not take their arguments seriously.

... once an idea has been cast as ideology its intrinsic merits tend to be ignored.

(Betts 1988:10)

However there is no evidence that AAFI is a racist organization. The anti-immigration literature which aroused the ire of the ACF executive was not produced by AAFI (D. McCormack, personal communication). AAFI does, nevertheless, espouse a nationalist philosophy. It opposes immigration into Australia on economic, ecological and cultural grounds. AAFI is hostile to multiculturalism which it regards as institutionalized State-funded propaganda foisted

on to a reluctant Australian public. AAFI's nationalist ideals and its opposition to multiculturalism seem to have laid it open to charges of racism from cosmopolitan liberals with internationalist ideals.

Was Foundation support for a lower rate of immigration and hence a slowing of population growth in Australia in mid-1990 likely to have caused it to be seen either as racist or as supporting racist opposition to immigration? Although some intellectuals and perhaps some ethnic lobby groups may have responded with this charge, it is unlikely, given the renewal of the immigration debate in 1990, that the ACF would have been widely regarded as racist if it had called for lower immigration. As to whether the Foundation would generally have been seen as supporting racists, it is true that there are anti-Asian racists within the Australian community. It is also true that many of them are likely to be attracted to arguments supporting a lower rate of immigration, as this would mean, probably, less immigration to Australia from Asian countries. However, arguments are not necessarily wrong because they attract support from some people with socially undesirable attitudes (J. Coulter, personal communication). Betts has noted

We cannot say that an idea is false simply because we have discovered some other ends that it may promote. But discourse often proceeds as if this were the case.

(Betts 1988:19)

For the Foundation in 1990, discourse did proceed in this way. The case for lower immigration was made by a few councillors within the ACF and supported with reasonable

environmental arguments, but since they were seen to be supported by suspected racists, then the arguments were likely to be rejected.

At least some Foundation councillors appeared to be in a dilemma on the issue of racism in the immigration debate. It probably seemed a no-win situation. Supporting lower immigration meant risking the Foundation being seen as racist and perhaps alienating the media, politicians and some of the membership. Refraining from criticizing the level of immigration, while it might displease some councillors and members, was the safer option.

Selfishness

To advocate a reduction of the rate of immigration into Australia on environmental grounds is often depicted as selfish.

Social justice on an individual and international basis is the key principle underlying all our policies. We would betray that principle if we closed our borders in the selfish desire to secure a high quality of life for ourselves and to disregard the needs of others. Before we do that we must make every effort to increase our capacity to meet our global obligations to share.

(Sid Spindler, Australian Democrat
Senator for Victoria, in Australian
Democrats National Journal. July
1990:4.)

The message here is that Australians currently enjoy a high quality of life and should accept a lower quality of life so that more people can take their place in the sun. Just how many more people is not spelt out. Presumably the numbers are limitless. And just now much lowering of the quality of life is

not spelt out. Neither is the issue of who will mostly bear the brunt of this. Betts has pointed out how local resistance to immigration can appear as a selfish reluctance to share, a reluctance to forfeit grossly indulgent levels of material comfort. The theme of anti-materialism highlights the clash between intellectuals and non-intellectuals (Betts 1988:48-9). Similarly environmental arguments for lower immigration can appear as motivated by a 'selfish' desire to retain Australia's 'high quality' environment.

Betts has also pointed out that some people support immigration not because they believe it is in their own interests nor because they believe it is in Australia's interests, but because they wish to further the interests of the would-be migrant. This is an altruistic position. It is adopted more by the educated than the less educated. Altruists may believe that "no sacrifices are involved and that the gift of opportunity in Australia is a free gift and that it is theirs to offer" (Betts 1988:78). Those who argue for lower immigration have to challenge the altruists' assumption that no costs are involved in Australia's continuing to accept large numbers of migrants.

Greens who want to reduce immigration on environmental grounds can be depicted not merely as selfish, but as fanatics whose dedication to a cause makes them inhumane.

... we must retain our compassion and humanity. ACF's Forward Plan ... speaks of striving for a society which promotes 'equity and social justice for all'. We cannot embrace all people who may wish to relocate here. But nor can we turn our backs on recommended numbers of refugees or those seeking to be reunited with relatives already here.

To do so would justifiably have us branded as inhumane zealots.

(Toyne 1990b)

Refugees and family reunion are powerful emotional issues. They are invariably linked to demonstrate the moral bankruptcy and cold-heartedness of those who would challenge them (Betts 1990a:22).

There is a further tension in the charge of 'selfishness' raised against environmental arguments for lower immigration. Not only are their proponents depicted as zealots but the implication is that these are self-indulgent people who prefer trees to people (Betts 1988:20).

Australia is part of the world and we have obligations to the world ... We must now argue our humanitarian policies ... or be branded as more interested in trees than we are in people.

(Michael Macklin, Australian Democrat Senator for Queensland, in Australian Democrats National Journal July 1990:5.)

Perhaps the arguments can even be seen in terms of putting some other species (perhaps endangered ones) ahead of some people (potential migrants). Perhaps the proponents of lower immigration are inhumane ecocentrics, rather than humane anthropocentrics. This was the 'selfishness' aspect of the dilemma which seemed to confront the ACF.

The claim that Australians enjoy a high standard of living and it is selfish to want to reduce immigration because Australians should share more of what they have with others may be superficially appealing. However it ignores the reality

of life in an increasingly inegalitarian society such as Australia where the people who are most likely to bear the cost of a high rate of immigration are not the rich or the middle class, but the poor (King 1984). It is the Australian poor (including the poor among the present generations of newly arrived migrants) who have to struggle hardest for the jobs, the increasingly expensive housing and government services (Joske 1989). It is the poor who have to cope with the worst aspects of sprawling cities, including long travelling times to work, urban congestion and pollution. There is evidence that the larger cities grow, the more inegalitarian they become (King 1984). Most of Australia's cities may already be larger than optimal in terms of quality of life. The claim that Australians should open their doors to more migrants and lower their quality of life is an argument for increasing inequity in Australia. It is also an argument that Australia should have an immigration policy which serves the interests of would-be migrants and not the interests of Australians (Betts 1988). Current immigration levels are opposed by some 65 per cent of the population (Betts 1988:70). As immigration has generally been a bipartisan issue in Australia, the electorate has been given no choice. Rarely has the issue even been subjected to a genuine debate.

Those who must bear the costs of growth and pay the price of policies oriented to the interests of others should give their informed consent.

(Betts 1988:13)

At the moment, this is not happening.

The assumption that Australia can help to solve the problem of a rapidly increasing world population by accepting

more migrants underlies many of the internationalist claims. World population is increasing so rapidly, can we in Australia really hope to isolate ourselves from this? Demographic study shows that Australia's immigration policy does not, and cannot, help the world's population problem (Day 1984). With a world population increasing by some 90 million a year, it is obvious, even to the casual observer, that Australia would scarcely be capable of absorbing one Third World mega-city of, say, 14 million people, without unacceptable environmental strains (Stevens 1988).

Is it callous and inhumane to argue for a reduction in immigration numbers into Australia? It need not be. Australia's immigration policy, while it helps individuals and families, does not help other countries. Australia often selects people on the basis of their wealth, skills or relationship to someone living in Australia. These are all discriminatory measures (Day 1984:309). Indeed Australia may well be taking skilled and wealthy people away from poorer countries. Australia rarely accepts the poorest of the world's poor as migrants. Once new migrants are in Australia, much capital is spent fitting them out to be Australian consumers (Routley 1984:345). So they consume and pollute as we do, which is their democratic right.

In one sense, acceptance of an immigrant into this country from a country with lower rates of consumption increases that individual's impact on the environment. In this sense, Australia is doing a disservice to itself and the rest of the world by accepting immigrants, because the individuals screened and accepted increase the rate of environmental degradation.

(Bennett and Sylvan 1988:159)

It would, perhaps, be more equitable and effective to share Australia's resources by helping poor people in their own countries rather than allowing a favoured few into Australia (K. Betts and C. Young on ABC 1990e; Routley 1984:345; AAFI). Any reduction of immigration into Australia could be accompanied by an increase in foreign aid targetted to the world's poor. For example, some of the estimated \$8 Billion Australia spends on infrastructure for new migrants each year could be diverted to overseas aid.

Are environmental arguments for reducing immigration made by self-indulgent Greens who value trees more than people? Is the dividing line in the environmental immigration debate between the ecocentrics and the anthropocentrics? While arguments can be framed in terms of protecting the interests of other species (especially those under threat), all of the arguments for slowing the rate of population growth and aiming for a lower rather than a higher population size in Australia can be framed in terms of human-centred values. Continued rapid population growth in Australia may not be in the best interests either of present or future generations of Australian people. The larger and faster the Australian population grows, the less options we and future generations may have. The larger the population grows, the more pressures are placed on both cities and the natural environment, including the habitable coastal strips and the more arid hinterlands. Future generations may wish to live differently from those of today. For example, they may be less enamoured with economic growth and congested cities

than we are. Our actions today in encouraging population growth can close off options for future generations.

If the 20 per cent of Australian species which are bound for extinction early in the next century do indeed die out, then the environment of both the present and future human generations will be impoverished.³ Nevertheless, at a deeper level of analysis, other species do have interests. Human beings, as the dominant species on the planet, have a custodial obligation to care for other species. To aim for a lower rather than a higher human population in Australia is in the interests of people, trees and the other native species of this country.

Slowing the rate of population growth in Australia to aim for a lower, rather than a higher, population does not imply that no migrants should be allowed in. For example, political refugees are one category of intake which most participants in the immigration debate support. Australia currently takes about 14,000 refugees a year. With an estimated 15 million refugees world-wide, mostly women and children, Australia can only have a small impact on this number. Nevertheless, even AAFI supports an annual intake of some 20,000 refugees and their close family members (AAFI Manifesto).⁴

Family reunion is also a contentious issue in the immigration debate. While close family reunion is generally supported by those calling for reduced immigration, extended family reunion is not. Migrants in Australia can at present

3. The figure of 20 per cent for species at risk in Australia is provided in Saunders et al 1990.

4. Some 20,000 people leave Australia permanently each year so an intake solely of 20,000 would mean no net contribution to population growth from this intake.

sponsor their extended family for migration. This includes their adult brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces. People now choose to migrate to Australia and they choose to break up their extended families. Once they are in Australia, it is often claimed that Australia has a responsibility to reunite families. It is not clear why this should be so. At present, people migrate to Australia on the understanding they they will be able to sponsor relations into Australia. If Australia decided to reduce immigration numbers, potential migrants would need to understand that they would not automatically be able to sponsor relatives from their extended family into Australia. Allowing migrants into Australia on the grounds that they have a relation already in Australia amounts to discrimination on the grounds of family ties. These grounds are open to the charge of racist and favouritist (Day 1984:311). Interestingly, the older Greek and Italian communities in Australia are not using the family reunion system very much. It is being used mostly by the more recent Asian migrants and it seems that many of these are migrating more for economic reasons than for reasons of family attachment (Birrell 1984:44).

In all probability, the membership of the Foundation was likely to be divided by the apparent conflict between selfishness and humanitarianism in the immigration debate. The ACF leaders too were divided by this issue and they were caught floundering over the issue in 1990 partly because they had taken little interest in the immigration debate from about the mid-1980s and lacked familiarity with its arguments.

Nationalism and Global Environmentalism

To advocate reducing immigration into Australia on environmental grounds can be depicted not only as racist and selfish, but also as nationalist.⁵ This was recently argued by Jock Collins of the University of Technology in Sydney (ABC 1990e). The ACF is, as are other environmental organizations in Australia, controlled by bright, young university-trained internationalists (Woodley 1990a:21). Internationalism stresses the global nature of environmental problems and is most at home with concepts of 'one world' and 'planet Earth'. In recent years, global environmental problems such as ozone layer depletion and the Green-house effect have received much publicity and served to increase this consciousness. 'One world' songs are now sung by rock musicians to raise both the consciousness of Western youth and funds for the hungry in famine-stricken countries. It is, perhaps, significant that Peter Garrett, the current President of the ACF, is a rock singer and has distanced himself from the immigration issue in Australia (McCormack 1990).

Internationalism, arising as it has out of left-wing political views, stresses the injustice of the subjugation of poor countries to rich countries. In this view, Third World poverty is commonly attributed to the actions of Western banks (resulting in the debt trap), Western multinational firms and unjust terms of trade in the world market. Australia, as part of the exploitative First World, is rich while others are poor. Perhaps Australia is rich because others are

5. Post-war historians have often linked Australian nationalism with racism. For example, Humphrey McQueen has argued that racism is the most important element in Australian nationalism and that this is created by the threat from the north (McQueen 1970:42).

poor. This view reinforces middle-class guilt. Not only is Australia seen as rich, it is also often assumed to be vast, empty, under-populated and under-developed. This view is common not only to left-wing intellectuals but also to Christian humanists (Betts 1988:112). In this view, Australia should share with others. In 1982, Sir Frank Little, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, argued:

This is a country of great emptiness. We should promote the opening of our shores to people in need, particularly refugees. Australians are only stewards of this vast tract of land, not the ultimate owners.

(The Age 27 March 1982,
cited in Betts 1988:112)

Proponents of lower immigration have sometimes been depicted as people who want to 'close the door' and as people with a 'fortress Australia' mentality (Jock Collins on ABC 1990e). A letter from an ACF member in the national journal argued:

If the human population of the planet is a problem we in Australia are not going to solve anything by collectively 'sticking our head in the sand' and closing our doors to other peoples. Any immigration debate will be stormy and emotional and perhaps best left to the 'Bruce Ruxtons' of the country to make fools of themselves over. But if the ACF wants to enter the issue, as a member I sincerely hope we have both our social and environmental assessments in order. The planet's social and environmental responsibilities must not be divided. If they are, the conservation movement will incur enormous costs in wasted time, energy and support.

(Alistair Phillips, North Carlton,
Victoria in Conservation News,

Vol. 22 No. 1, Feb. 1990:14)

It is assumed here that Australia can help the world population problem by accepting migrants. It is also assumed that immigration is not really a fit topic for the ACF to debate and should be left to the parochials (Bruce Ruxtons).⁶

Internationalism and the Implied Threat

One ACF member, concerned to combat nationalist isolationism in the current immigration debate, wrote in a letter to the national journal:

I believe that an argument of this kind is dangerously narrow-minded in that it is based on the out-dated view that Australia is an island far removed from the rest of the world; that we can make decisions here oblivious to the conditions prevailing in the rest of the world.

Overpopulation is a world problem, not just an Australian one. Stemming the flow of immigrants into the country will not solve the problems of enormous numbers of people degrading the world ecology. Do readers believe that when we have managed to preserve our wilderness and are enjoying our vast open spaces that the millions of starving people in the rest of the world will merely sit idly by as we refuse them access to our natural resources?

(R. Preslmaier,
Conservation News
Vol. 21, No. 5 June, 1989:14)

Again the assumptions here are the ones which underlie many of the internationalist claims that reducing immigration into

6. Bruce Ruxton, of the Returned Services League, has criticized immigration in terms of numbers and racial composition. He is seen as the archetypal red-necked parochial and is not taken seriously by intellectuals.

Australia is 'selfish'. The assumptions are that Australia is vast, rich in natural resources and under-developed. In addition, there is the further assumption here that the starving millions of the world will not tolerate Australia keeping its resources from them. By implication, Australia will meet its international humanitarian obligations if we share what we have, develop our vast open spaces and fill them with people and, presumably, degrade our remaining wilderness. A sort of international levelling out process is to occur. The effects on Australia's flora and fauna and the quality of life of its people, are not spelt out. The implication in the suggestion that the world's poor will not tolerate Australia's hoarding its natural resources is that if we do not let them in as migrants, they will forcibly take Australia anyway. This is the old threat schema which has bedevilled the European settlers of Australia for 200 years. Betts (1988) has analyzed the extent to which the post-war intelligentsia scoffed at the 'populate or perish' notions of the previous generation, linked as that concept often was with the racist idea of the Asiatic 'yellow peril'. Nevertheless, although the concept was rejected by many intellectuals, it was rarely rationally debated and its assumptions were never laid to rest. Many intellectuals in Australia today talk as though Australia were inherently indefensible and the best way to placate the hungry over-populated countries to its north is not to arm ourselves to the teeth but to be good neighbours, to practise a non-discriminatory immigration policy (thereby accepting Asians as migrants) and to increase Australia's population (Betts 1988:98). This is the 'populate or perish' theory in new garb. There is evidence that this sentiment is

still alive and well in Australia. It is subscribed to in the Fitzgerald Report (CAAIP 1988:18). The secretary of the federal Caucus Committee on Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Bob Catley recently answered a question on how closer integration of Australia into the Pacific Rim created pressure on Australia to increase its population by saying

There is in the long term, I believe, a demonstration effect that you will find that people ask why 100 million people have to live at something above, but not very far above, subsistence level on the very very small island of Java, while one fifth that number live on an island many many times the size of Java at a much higher standard of living and don't wish to cultivate all the available land and maximize food output...

(B. Catley, personal communication)

C. Teese, a former Deputy Secretary of the Department of Trade was more forthright than most when he told a recent Canberra conference that Australia's population policy "rests upon the 1940's slogan 'populate or perish', though politicians today would prefer to dress up the notion" (Teese 1989:2). The 'populate or perish' thesis continues to rest on the premises of Australia as a vast rich under-populated under-developed nation in the midst of Asia's starving teeming masses. International humanists, in urging Australia to accept more migrants on social justice grounds have often used an implied threat (Betts 1988:111). For example, in 1979, David Scott, the Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence and Chairman of Community Aid Abroad, argued

The 'populate or perish' notion that fuelled the post war immigration drive does not carry much

weight today, but as is now often pointed out, in the eyes of our neighbours, we need to be making good use of our spaces and/or resources. More people may be needed to legitimise our occupation of a sizable and well-resourced land mass. Failure to be seen to be responsible can be used to exert political pressure to influence Australian policies or regional attitudes towards Australia...

(Cited in Batzias and Liffman 1979:75)

There is, undoubtedly, international pressure on Australia to accept migrants (Maude 1989:12). But if, as Betts has pointed out, so many vocal Australian intellectuals think that Australia is vast, empty, under-developed and capable of supporting a much larger human population, then it is not surprising that people in other countries also share this view (Betts 1988:108) Also if 17 million Australians cannot justify their possession of Australia to their near Asian neighbours, why should 30 million be able to do so? It may well be that no amount of immigration will ever convince the poor countries of South-east Asia that Australians, of predominantly European stock, deserve Australia. Making good use of our spaces and resources, in the eyes of our neighbours, may well mean considerably greater pressure on Australia's unique native species.

The claims of international humanists that if Australia does not increase its population and share its resources with the world's poor then it will be invaded is unsubstantiated and contradicts all defence analysis in Australia over the past 15 years. Certainly Australia should help poorer countries. But to suggest that Australia can take significantly large numbers of people from poor countries without increasing damage to its own fragile arid environment is pure fantasy.

If Australia reduced its rate of immigration in order to slow its rate of population growth, then, would this be an isolationist nationalist action? Would it be saying, in effect, that 'we're all right Jack, and the rest of the planet can go to hell'? Not necessarily. Australia may well be acting in the interests of all the people and all the species of the planet if it chooses to slow its rate of human population growth.

While reducing immigration into Australia will not be in the interests of potential migrants who would probably have enjoyed a higher standard of consumption and quality of life in this country, on a world-wide scale, their numbers are comparatively few. In terms of the poor of Third World countries, the vast majority of whom have no chance of ever coming to Australia, it may well be in their interests, and the world's interests, if Australia can

- (a) preserve more^{of} its unique biodiversity both for its intrinsic value and for the use and enjoyment of future generations of human beings on a world-wide scale (through medicines, possible food sources, aesthetic appreciation of etc.),⁷
- (b) reverse its land degradation, and
- (c) maintain its agricultural exports to poor countries which need food imports instead of consuming an increasing proportion internally (Mosley 1982:18).

All of these achievements will be assisted, by Australia's achieving a smaller population of around 22 million, rather than a larger population of 25 million and above. In addition, to help the poor of the Third World, Australia could develop

7. According to Possingham, seven countries in the world possess over half of all biological species and Australia is one of them. Australia therefore has a big responsibility to the rest of the world to protect its biodiversity (H. Possingham on ABC 1990g).

appropriate technologies which are less environmentally damaging than those currently used and help poorer countries both with appropriate technologies and increased and better foreign aid targetted to the very poor, especially women. In addition, Australia can help poor Third World people by supporting reform of the international trading system and the abolition of some Third World debt. None of these last measures depend on Australia's having a larger population.

Nevertheless, in the late 1980's the ACF was enmeshed in the competing claims of the immigration debate as the internationalist humanitarians sought to defend the government's immigration programme from the attacks of the apparently selfish, and possibly racist, nationalists who wanted immigration reduced. In addition the Foundation was divided over whether population numbers per se were a key cause of environmental degradation or whether bad planning was a more important cause.

The Role of Planning in Environmental Impact

By the late 1980's, some ACF councillors believed that the impact of Australia's population on the environment was a consequence not of population growth but of bad planning which could be rectified by reform of the capitalist system (Birrell 1987:38). In this view, urban sprawl can be reduced by urban consolidation, traffic jams by better public transport, pollution by better controls on industry, species loss by more reserves and so forth. While there is some truth in this view, it ignores the basic facts that people need clothes, food, water, transport, jobs, education and recreation which in turn necessitates ~~food~~, wood, bricks, paper, cars, buses,

photocopiers, parks, beaches and so forth. 30 million caring environmentally-conscious Australians will still cause more environmental damage than 10 million caring environmentally-conscious Australians (C. Young, personal communication). The view that we can have open-ended population growth and environmental protection if only governments would act ignores the fact that there are limits to government power, especially within a predominantly free market system such as ours. For example, the Whitlam government's attempt to establish decentralised cities failed for a range of reasons, not least because industry and people were reluctant to leave the coastal cities. Planning does not occur in a social vacuum. Furthermore, planners often get things wrong. The past record of planning in Australia gives little ground for optimism that we can have continued rapid population growth and better environmental protection.

Resource Consumption and Ecological Sustainability

The Foundation's political evolution in the 1980's caused it to question seemingly simplistic population-linked accounts of environmental damage. In developing a critique of modern society, the Foundation increasingly adopted an ethos which questioned the affluent-effluent Western lifestyle. In his article 'Opening Pandora's Box: Seeking a Balance between Population Growth and Ecological Sustainability' in the national journal, the Foundation's Executive Director referred to 'exploding materialism' in a world where 20 per cent of the population uses some 80 per cent of the world's resources (Toyne 1990b). Consumption and technology determine per capita resource use and resource use was increasingly

portrayed by the ACF as the chief cause of environmental damage.⁸ By the late 1980's, for many Foundation members, the contentious issue of Australia's population could be ignored if the dragon of excessive resource use could be slain.

The implication in much of the debate on resource use is that all Westerners, including Australians, are grossly indulgent consumers who should lower their consumption. There is no doubt that if environmental impact is influenced primarily by the types of technology in use, the per capita resource consumption and population size, then there is a good case to be made for reducing consumption levels and changing to less environmentally damaging and sustainable technologies. However, it is not at all clear that this means that population, as one factor, can be ignored.

The ACF interim reference document on population claims that while no action can be taken on population growth to minimize environmental damage over the next 20 years in Australia, action can be taken on reducing consumption.

It must be acknowledged that in the short run, over the next 20 years or so, environmental decline in Australia can only be addressed through changing our lifestyles, consumption patterns and improving our waste disposal and minimization technologies.

(Toyne 1990a)

8. The Foundation endorsed The Green Consumer Guide, supported the 'greenspot' environmental labelling scheme and published a book by one of its office staff, B. Lord's The Green Cleaner 1990. It also showered advertisements for environmentally 'friendly' products on its members. Of course this was also part of a marketing drive to raise funds.

This argument, following Harrison 1990, that reducing population growth is a long-term issue whereas reducing resource consumption is a short term one, appears flawed in three respects. Firstly, Harrison seemed to be discussing population growth due to natural increase, not to immigration. Reducing population growth through natural increase will obviously be a longer process than lowering population growth through reducing immigration in a country where there is significant immigration (as in Australia).⁹ Secondly, Harrison did not claim that population should be ignored for 20 years as the interim ACF reference document seems to imply. Harrison said:

Population growth increases many types of damage to the environment. Slowing that growth reduces the damage. But it may be 20 years before there is any noticeable effect.

(Harrison 1990:11)

Australia's continued high migrant intake will have a significant impact on its population size in 20 years time.

| <u>Net Migrant Intake</u> | <u>Population in 2011¹⁰</u> (Million) |
|---------------------------|---|
| Zero | 18.2 |
| 50,000 | 19.7 |
| 100,000 | 21.2 |

(C. Young, personal communication)

9. Over half of Australia's annual population growth is now due to immigration. See Appendix 1.

10. These figures assume this level of net migration from 1986.

So, reducing the level of net migration from 150,000 each year to 50,000 would make a difference of 2.5 million people in 2011.

Harrison himself did not argue for stalling action on population but concluded the very opposite of the Foundation reference document.

... in the medium to long term, reducing population growth can have a very significant impact -- ~~and~~ and precisely because it takes so long, action must start ^{right} now.

(Harrison 1990:11)

Thirdly, while there is obviously a strong case for moving to more appropriate technologies and reducing consumption levels in Australia, achieving capital shifts into better technologies may take time when government and industry are reluctant to change. In addition, changing people's lifestyles and consumption patterns cannot usually be achieved quickly, at least in democratic societies. For example it appears that it will take decades to reduce emissions of Greenhouse gases in the developed countries (J. Coulter, personal communication) Following the Toronto target for Greenhouse gas reductions, Australian industry ministers were recently told that Australia would have to reduce Greenhouse gas emissions by almost twice the level of Western European countries on a per capita basis to meet the target proposed by the Minister for the Environment, Ms. R. Kelly. This was largely due to the fact that Australia's population is growing faster than Western European nations (Garron 1990). Lowe has shown that growth in energy ^{use} in Australia is now tied closely to population growth, as energy

use per head has been roughly constant for a decade (Lowe 1988:36,46) Reducing Greenhouse gas emissions in Australia is obviously going to be much harder to achieve with a rapidly growing population.

Apart from the short-term versus long-term aspect of the consumption-technology-population debate, there is the basic fact that there is a limit to how much consumption can be reduced. For example, recycling is not a panacea for resource consumption for it consumes energy. Similarly, even solar and wind power would require prodigious amounts of construction materials. This underlines the fact that no technology is without some costs (Suzuki 1990:72, Pearce et al 1989:22)

Although it is important to take advantage of low-impacting technologies to reduce damage, environmental costs cannot be avoided by technomagic. Because of the sheer daily throughput of human beings, only so much reduction is possible, especially in social arrangements like those entrenched in Australia.

(Bennett and Sylvan 1988:158)

The Foundation however had set its heart on challenging that 'sheer daily throughput' of people in Australia.

Land practices and technology seemed to be the Executive Director's target in this passage in the current reference document:

... I believe we must act ~~from~~ from a sound factual basis if we seek to argue a particular figure for immigrant intake. To arbitrarily set a number and justify it by pointing to increasing environmental problems is too simplistic and open to ridicule. Much inappropriate land use, degradation and

pollution was put in train when Australia's population was much smaller.

(Toyne 1990a)

There was obviously some truth in the claim that much land degradation had commenced when Australia's population was smaller. For example, land clearance was carried out with gusto from early colonial days. Nevertheless, intensive farming techniques with their associated use of pesticides and fertilizers have certainly exacerbated Australia's land degradation problems. These farming techniques have been used increasingly as rapid population growth created pressure to expand exports of agricultural products and as urban population growth clustered around water catchments and continued to remove good agricultural land from production, sometimes forcing agriculture on to more marginal land thereby necessitating more intensive farming techniques.

Pollution, too, the above passage claimed began when Australia's population was smaller. This is trivially true, but again population growth has exacerbated many pollution problems. For example, in coastal urban areas, the marine environment might cope with the sewage effluent of 10,000 town-dwellers, but that of two million city-dwellers has a more detrimental impact. Urban air pollution too has obviously been exacerbated by population growth.

In addition to the ethical and ideological differences within the ACF over the immigration debate, there were influences and political pressures which discouraged the expression of criticism of the Hawke government's immigration programme.

Influence of the Ethnic Lobbies

The predominantly young leftish cosmopolitan liberals who guide Foundation policy have grown up with multiculturalism. Generally favourably disposed to multiculturalism and immigration, they are probably sensitive to the claims of ethnic lobby groups. This was suggested by the recently retired Finance Minister, Senator Peter Walsh.

... it is astounding that the Australian Conservation Foundation recently watered down or jettisoned its previous opposition to immigration... . Could it be that the ACF leaders have realized that opposition to immigration - the logically inescapable conclusion from their professed beliefs - would draw flak from the ethnic lobby and bring into the open the innate contradictions between the two groups' objectives? Is this reinforced by knowledge that the multicultural lobby includes many of the same bourgeois lefties who make up the ACF's own membership?

(Walsh 1990c)

The attacks of the ethnic lobby on public figures who criticize immigration would not have gone unnoticed by the Foundation's leaders or its members.

To question the level of immigration is now often seen as attacking existing migrants.¹¹ Extreme racist groups are indeed hostile to newly-arrived migrants in Australia, primarily to those of Asian origin. But apart from these groups, few appear to 'blame' existing migrants in Australia

11. This trend is often exacerbated by the media. For example, several newspaper articles on immigration numbers in 1990 were accompanied by photographs of migrants of distinctly different racial or ethnic origins.

for pursuing their own interests by coming to this country. For example, D. McCormack of AAFI has stated:

Our problems are the creation of our own politicians and no attempt should be made to place blame on the migrants themselves. Opposing immigration is not opposing migrants.

(McCormack 1990)

Nevertheless, in the current political climate, some Foundation members, both on the Council and in the general membership, may have felt that criticizing immigration was attacking existing migrants. As well, to stand up to the pressure which the ethnic lobby could muster if they saw the Foundation urging a lowering of immigration, the ACF would have to be sure of its ground. And by 1990, the Foundation was too divided on the issue.

Influence of the Australian Labor Party (ALP)

In its move in recent years into the political arena, the ACF has become more allied with the ALP than with the conservative Liberal-National Party coalition. The Foundation's Director, Dr. Mosley, recommended a vote for Labor and the Australian Democrats in 1983 and for the Democrats in the Senate in the 1984 elections. In 1987, the ACF recommended a vote for Labor. It gave qualified support to the ALP in the 1990 election, advocating second preference to Labor after Greens or Democrats (ACF 1990b). In addition, the Foundation's shift in the 1980's from a society for conservation ideas to a powerful lobby, often working closely with government, led to what some saw as a degree of co-

option of the ACF by the Labor government (G. Mosley, personal communication).

When thrown a scrap of Kakadu, Jervis Bay, bat cave and so on, that is, a finite easily perceived win, the ACF is expected to support the ruling ALP on broad long-term controversial policies, such as immigration and urban consolidation.

(D. McCormack,
personal communication)

Liberal Member of Parliament for the seat of Sydney, David Connolly, recently pointed out that the Labor Party has made an art of net-working, i.e. infiltrating "big bloc special interest groups, so that, at the top, they have people sympathetic to their political position". Connolly went on to point to the Conservation Foundation which was run "not so long ago" by former Menzies minister and conservative High Court justice Garfield Barwick¹² (O'Reilly 1990b:81). While the leaders of the Foundation were undoubtedly sympathetic to the Labor Party, recently the leadership has been wary of tying the Foundation's fortune too closely to those of any one political party (ACF 1988).. Perhaps part of the Foundation's predicament over the immigration debate in 1990 was simply that having achieved much in the late 1980's by working closely with the Hawke Labor government, the Foundation's leaders had developed a good relationship both with the government and the ALP and they did not wish to endanger that relationship by opposing the government's immigration policy (K. Betts, personal communication).

12. Garfield Barwick was President of the ACF from 1965 to 1971.

The Hawke government has recently appointed ACF Executive Director, Phillip Toyne, to the National Population Council, a small group of mostly pro-immigration people. The chairman of this group, Professor G. Withers, recently claimed in a paper circulated by Phil Ruddock, shadow spokesperson for immigration, that regarding the recent debate on the economic costs and benefits of immigration "belief and faith, informed or otherwise, must still dominate in such matters". This struck critics of the immigration programme as an astounding claim from a person on such an advisory body (Betts 1990c:6).

Dr. G. Mosley, the previous Director of the ACF, was also on a national population advisory body. In 1982, Mosley described what was then the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs as "a carefully hand-picked group of people ... not likely to present the Government with any disagreeable views on alternatives" (Mosley 1982:15). Being on the Council did not appear to change Mosley's long-term opposition to high immigration, but a person would need strong views to be able to resist the combined weight of opinion of such a select body. Undoubtedly it is a wise move of the government to appoint the Executive Director of Australia's most powerful environmental lobby to the Population Council. Such a move reduces the possibility of the Foundation openly criticizing Government immigration policy. Many Foundation members will feel that the ACF's (or at least its Executive Director's) views are being heard in one of the highest advisory bodies on population in the land.

Part of the Foundation's dilemma on the immigration debate then seems to have entailed staying on good terms

with the government while dealing with dissension from within on the issue.

Concluding Discussion

The immigration debate in the ACF opened Pandora's box and racism, selfishness and nationalism flew out. These issues, while important in themselves, complicated the debate often unnecessarily, through presenting a series of false choices. There was also conflict between those who wanted population growth reduced and those who believed that it was resource consumption levels, not population size, which were the main deterrents to an ecologically sustainable society. Related to this latter argument was the view that better planning, rather than reducing population growth, would improve the environmental problems which afflicted Australia.

The ACF policy-makers had chosen to concentrate on reducing resource use rather than oppose population increase via immigration. Sympathy for the views of the ethnic lobby groups and the Labor Party probably contributed to the reluctance of the ACF leaders to criticize the immigration programme.

Nevertheless the issue of Australia's population refused to fade away. This was due to several factors. Firstly Greens were deeply involved in the ongoing debate on ecological sustainability and population was one aspect of this debate. The activities of those ACF councillors and members who were strongly opposed to the Foundation's recent neglect of population also kept the issue alive. In addition, as shown in Chapter 2, the economic impact of large immigration numbers

were being debated publicly in a political climate where public opposition to immigration levels remained high. Furthermore, the lead-up to the immigration conference sponsored by the Bureau of Immigration Research in Melbourne in November served to maintain interest in the economic and environmental debates on immigration throughout the latter half of 1990.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to examine the orientation of the Green movement to the concept of an ecologically sustainable population for Australia through an analysis of the debate on immigration-induced population growth within the Australian Conservation Foundation. This analysis has supported the hypothesis that immigration presents a dilemma for the Green movement. This dilemma arises because although continued population growth is not conducive to the attainment of long term ecological sustainability in any society, the Green movement is committed to social justice concerns. While Australia's rate of immigration remains high, on any international comparison, criticizing immigration levels is, for many Greens, tantamount to repudiating social justice. The themes of racism versus anti-racism, selfishness versus humanitarianism and nationalism versus internationalism permeate the immigration debate. Those ethical concerns are important in themselves and in part reflect long-standing themes in Australia's immigration debate. Nevertheless these concerns have often confused the immigration debate within the Green movement by presenting false choices. This thesis has sought to identify these false choices where they occur.

The Green dilemma has undoubtedly been exacerbated by political pressures which have served to marginalize critics of the immigration programme in recent years in Australia. In addition, the general community ignorance of and disagreement about environmental limits to population growth in Australia have deepened the Green movement's confusion and division over the issue.

The debate on an ecologically sustainable population is a valuable one and should not be allowed to fade. There is a need to conduct a wide ranging debate. During such a debate people need to be made aware that there will be environmental costs to continued population growth. Of course, these costs will be less with better planning and lower resource use. But there will still be costs. At the same time we need to be clear about what our international obligations are. These include accepting some refugees and close family reunion for smaller numbers of migrants. But at the same time, our international obligations include preserving our unique biodiversity for its intrinsic value and for future generations of all people in the world, increasing our foreign aid to help the poorest of the world, turning around our own land degradation and maintaining an agricultural surplus for export to countries still undergoing very rapid growth in their populations. A public debate would at least make these options plain and hopefully inform public policy on this issue.

To reduce environmental impact in order to move towards an ecologically sustainable society, Australians should be reducing consumption and pollution by using better practice and technologies. To some extent, this will require a change in values. At the same time, continued rapid population growth should be questioned. A stable population of about 22 million, rather than any higher figure will assist, rather than handicap us in approaching sustainability. Here is a sustainable option and a feasible target figure to work with for informing policy decisions. It is also an option which pays consideration to social justice concerns.

Population in Australia will remain a contentious

political issue for many Greens. Nevertheless, being straddled on the horns of a dilemma is not a comfortable situation for the environmental movement to be in. If Greens remain unable to tackle the issue of an ecologically sustainable population for this country, then no-one else will.

APPENDIX 1Components of Population Increase, 1970-1989

| Year Ended 31 December | Natural Increase | Net Recorded Migration | Increase(a) (‘000) | % | Population at end of period (‘000) |
|---------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|------|---|
| 1970 | 144,468 | 122,874 | 250.8 | 2.02 | 12,639.0 |
| 1971 | 165,712 | 84,605 | 244.7 | 1.93 | 13,198.4 |
| 1972 | 155,209 | 56,320 | 210.9 | 1.60 | 13,409.3 |
| 1973 | 136,848 | 67,494 | 205.1 | 1.53 | 13,614.3 |
| 1974 | 129,344 | 87,248 | 217.6 | 1.60 | 13,832.0 |
| 1975 | 123,991 | 13,513 | 136.9 | 0.99 | 13,968.9 |
| 1976 | 115,148 | 34,030 | 141.0 | 1.01 | 14,109.9 |
| 1977 | 117,501 | 68,027 | 170.9 | 1.21 | 14,280.8 |
| 1978 | 115,756 | 47,397 | 148.5 | 1.04 | 14,429.4 |
| 1979 | 116,561 | 68,611 | 170.6 | 1.18 | 14,599.9 |
| 1980 | 116,832 | 104,125 | 206.4 | 1.41 | 14,806.3 |
| 1981 | 126,839 | 121,785 | 242.1 | 1.63 | 15,049.5 |
| 1982 | 125,100* | 102,200 | 227.4 | 1.51 | 15,276.8 |
| 1983 | 132,700 | 54,800 | 187.4 | 1.23 | 15,464.2 |
| 1984 | 126,700 | 59,000 | 185.8 | 1.20 | 15,650.0 |
| 1985 | 126,100 | 89,300 | 223.3 | 1.42 | 15,900.6 |
| 1986 | 128,400 | 107,500 | 238.5 | 1.50 | 16,139.0 |
| 1987 | 126,600 | 133,300 | 259.9 | 1.61 | 16,398.9 |
| 1988 | 126,300 | 171,700 | 298.1 | 1.82 | 16,697.0 |
| 1989p | 126,600 | 133,500 | 260.1 | 1.56 | 16,957.1 |

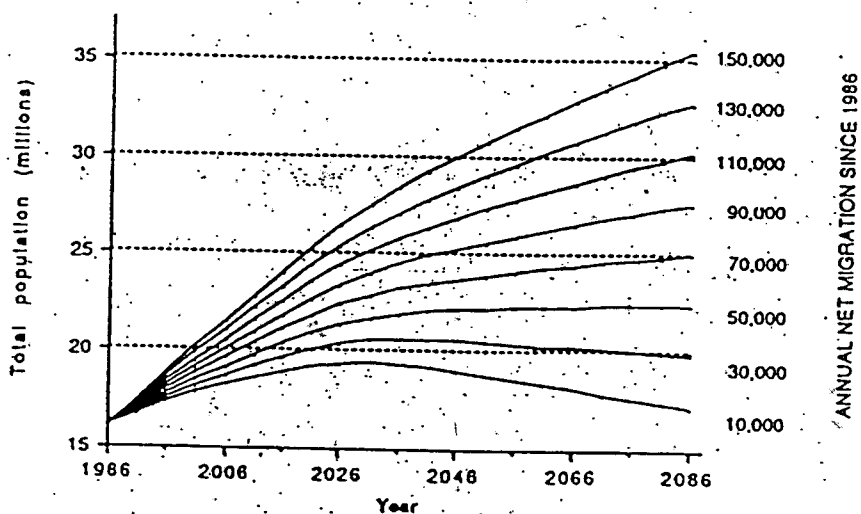
(a) For dates prior to 1986, differences between the total increase shown and the sum of natural increase and net overseas migration are due to the distribution of intercensal discrepancy.

* Figures rounded to nearest 100 from 1982 for natural increase and net recorded migration.

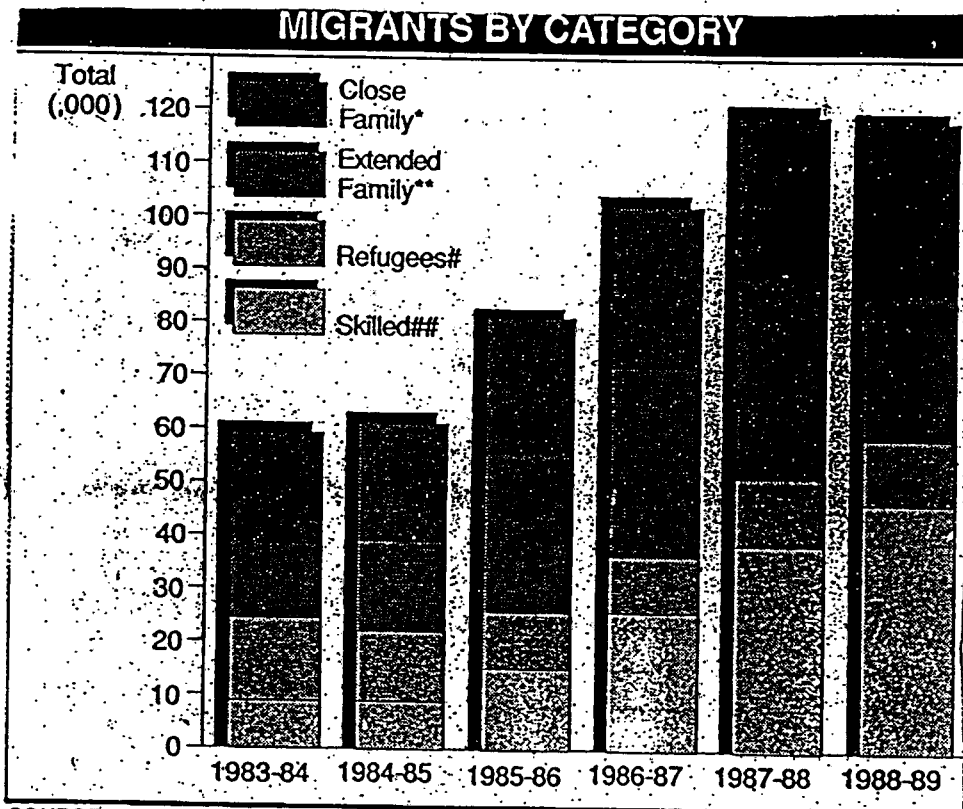
Source: ABS Catalogue No. 3101.0 Australian Demographic Statistics Quarterly June 1979, Catalogue No. 3101.0 June Quarter 1988, Catalogue No. 3101.0 September Quarter 1990.

APPENDIX 2

PROJECTIONS OF THE TOTAL POPULATION WITH
DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ANNUAL NET MIGRATION SINCE 1986
(Assuming a continuation of the current level of fertility)



(Source: Young 1990:13)



SOURCE: R. Birrell, *The Chains That Bind*, Bureau of Immigration Research, 1990, page 3.

*Spouses, fiances, dependent children, aged parents.

**Adult brothers and sisters, non-dependent children, working-age parents, nephews and nieces.

#Includes the Special Humanitarian Program.

##Includes business migrants, people sponsored by employers, and independents.

GREEN EVENTS

1990 POSTER cost 50c

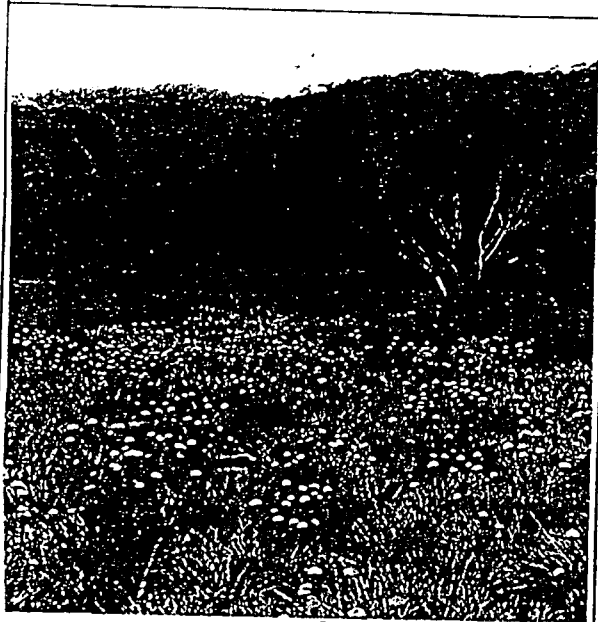


Photo: Courtesy of A

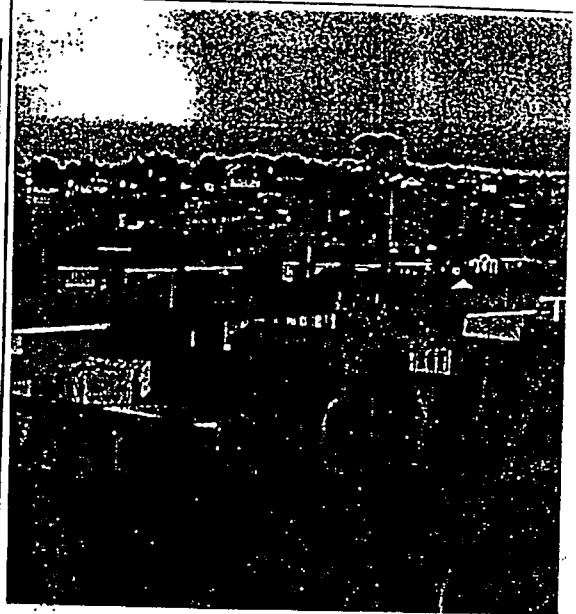


Photo: By Jon Madin, Courtesy ACF

POPULATION POX

In 200 years of European Settlement, more than two thirds of our eucalypt forests, and three quarters of our rainforests have been destroyed.

Melbourne's urban sprawl, extinction of native wildlife, pollution, forest devastation, shortage of housing, unemployment, inflation and deterioration of our quality of life are all symptoms of the same problem.

Australians have one of the highest quality of life in the world, yet we are feeling the sting of population increase, because we know that days gone by were better. We must preserve our animals, trees, and a clean environment not only for ourselves, but also for our descendants. We have an obligation like keepers of the last bastions of the wild world, to save these forests, and wildlife for the world's future. The world will not thank us for converting the Dandenong Ranges into suburbia. The world will not thank us for allowing oil to kill their penguins. The world will not thank us for converting agricultural land into concrete, and suburbia. The world will not thank us for allowing people's presence in the forests to kill off Lyrebirds. The world will not thank us for allowing millions of migrants to increase these, our crime-ridden, over-crowded islands. Over 90 million people are born every year. That is 6 times the population of Australia.

The those of us who are not satisfied by the extinction of animals, and forests, and the loss of agricultural land to suburbia with a population of 16 million, must imagine the consequences of importing 1 million a year. At the present time Australians are producing enough children to replace themselves. We are importing 3,400 migrants a week.

On our present record of environmental destruction, we are importing 3,000 migrants a week too many (Unless they are life-threatened political refugees). We must give free contraception, and abortion on demand, to reverse our population growth, so that we can save Australia's wildlife and unique habitat for a future world of small populations.

If the world's population were 10 or 15 million we could pollute as much as we like. The sea would cheerfully absorb the lead, mercury, and associated filth we poured into it" (p. 21 *Doomsday Book* by Rayray Jaylan, Thames and Hudson 1970.)

In his book *THE POPULATION BOMB* Paul Ehrlich states that if the world's population were to continue reproducing at it's present rate, in 900 years the population would be Sixty Million Billion. This is about 100 persons for every square yard of the Earth's surface including land and sea.

What will happen on the way to this disaster? It is already happening. Millions are dying from over-population which causes starvation and disease. As usual religion is at the heart of everything, whether it be war, apathy (God will take care of it), and can presently be blamed for discouraging contraception and abortion.

To stop population growth, we must stop immigration, financially penalize families who have more than one child, and give financial rewards to migrants to leave Australia.

We must also make contraception and abortion a law reduction, and make it illegal for any organisation or figure of prominent opinion to advocate non-contraceptive policies.

WORLD'S POPULATION

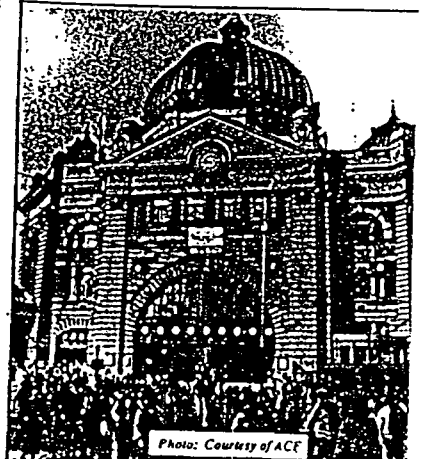
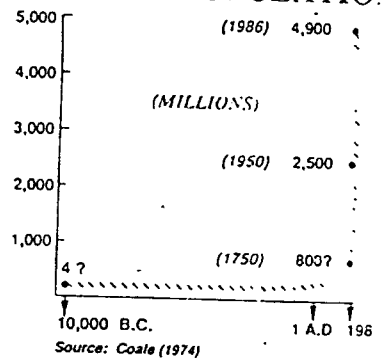


Photo: Courtesy of ACF

NOTE: The opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the Green Events Committee, but are those of the author. Thank you.

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