

10 May 2004

Australia's Demographic Challenges
Social Policy Division
The Treasury
Langton Crescent
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Public Consultations on Australia's Demographic Challenges

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

My thoughts are set out below. I encourage the Committee to evaluate these ideas / challenges and to further debate these wider implications. The issues are not listed in any priority order:-

1. Australia's 15% Tax on Super Contributions is negative and acts as a disincentive to prepare for Superannuation Investment. By comparison, I believe that the Republic of Singapore allows each citizen to earn \$20,000 Singapore Dollars Interest annually which is not taxed. Each Singaporean Citizen then literally aims to save 1/3rd for Savings; save 1/3rd for Essentials; save 1/3rd for Discretionary Expenditure.
2. Australia's natural population growth is negative. Supplementation of Australia's population therefore is necessary by Immigration / Refugee / Humanitarian programs. This therefore leads to the wider debate of the current 20 million population versus a possible 40 million etc in the future. Resource implications are also very important to discuss / debate. New immigrants would generally bring skills to the Australian workforce which would benefit investment and employment decisions.
3. The Triplication of government services within Australia costs an enormous amount of money. This is a waste of economic resources. Is there a continuing need for 3 levels of government; 6 States; and 2 Territories? Can Australia afford the luxury of 3 tiers of government, bureaucracy and political competition?
4. Information Technology (IT) has caused substantial job losses in the last decade. Do we wish to see this continue? As the Northern Territory interfaces with Asia could that Territory become the Australian IT capital? Can Australia achieve the status of the worlds most clever nation? Will governments continue to fund Research & Development and enable sufficient staff to be focused on IT issues.

5. Energy rationalisation has yet to be undertaken seriously within Australia by governments, businesses and consumers. Do we really utilise tidal power, solar, photovoltaic cells and wind driven energy carefully and thoughtfully? This impacts on job creation and retention possibilities. The work done to date is impressive but I believe we need to be less fossil fuel focused.
6. Does the Federal Government wish to investigate non-fuel power motoring means? This has direct implications for jobs creation within the research & manufacturing sectors.
7. Euthanasia must be a considered policy, side by side, with job creation & retention policies. Community attitudes on euthanasia are changing rapidly with a greater acceptance of this decision now than in the past.
8. With ever rising private health insurance premiums, how is it possible for older aged employees to meet expensive monthly health insurance premium costs of \$200 per month plus? In general, workers on the minimum wage cannot afford this luxury. If employers are considering staff, would they be expected to meet this cost and is that a fair imposition?
9. Cemetery / Crematorium Space Planning:- Increases in Australia's population and workforce will ultimately directly impact on the need for increased cemetery and crematorium space.
10. Immigration:- Can Australia sustain a 40 million population, of which 15 million plus could be workers? This requires wide community consultation including the business and government sectors.
11. Water resources:- Similarly, if Australia's immigration quota is lifted substantially, additional water resources will need to be developed to sustain the increase in the overall workforce population. Has anyone ever done a study on how much water is needed associated with an employee? Water is used in the workplace via air-conditioning, tap drinking water and water fountains, toilet and shower facilities, indoor plant consumption, repair and maintenance duties, display features etc.
12. Tax / Versus / Savings:- The Commonwealth Government must review taxation and offer incentives for employees to save and or invest in superannuation. At present, due to the 3 tiers of governments, Australian workers are repeatedly taxed on all goods and services on offer.
13. Physical Height Acceleration:- This is a current phenomenon. It will affect office seats, train seats, airline seats, shoe sizes, clothing sizes etc. Today's young people are growing bigger & taller than ever. Architects will need to plan accordingly when designing office and factory layouts.
14. Gay Marriage Implications:- This current movement of opinion could impact on workplace agreements & regulations.

15. Large Print for Seniors:- This trend is already underway in Australia and will continue to grow such that seniors can easily read forms, correspondence, news items etc. As the workforce ages, employees will presumably also request larger print facilities to accomplish their tasks..

16. Multiculturalism via immigration will continue to impact on workers rights issues; marriage, divorce, & inheritance laws & legislation; nation public holidays scheduling; the Republic of Australia debate; attitudes towards post Mortem examinations of deceased persons; private faith based and funded education facilities etc. Employers will need to be informed and aware of these attitudinal movements currently underway within the wider community.

17. An ageing population will seek smaller housing with easier low cost maintenance & fewer electrical appliances, suited for 1 or 2 persons only. This could also impact on future office and factory planning designs and workers needs.

18. Motor Vehicles may revert to 1 or 2 seater vehicles as a direct impact of smaller nuclear families; higher fossil fuel based operating costs; re-direction of leisure time. Also, Information Technology has reduced globally paperwork and courier delivery functions.

19. Organ donors will be in greater need to aid medical research & promise greater hope for a healthier future. As the workforce ages, transplant operations will be more common than in the past, with staff possibly aiming to return to work post-operation. Time-off for donors will presumable also increase.

20. All Australian workers will need to continue to be pro-active in reconciliation issues with Australian indigenous people. Education awareness programs will need to continue. A national Reconciliation Day could be created and observed.

21. A Commitment to Recycling: - Australian workers should continue to be aware and aim to reduce, reuse and recycle wherever possible.

Yours sincerely



David Combe