

I am making this submission on the basis of two quite distinct areas of qualification. One is as a demographer with decades of experience studying Australian immigration who is currently teaching a Unit on the history and actuality of Australia's treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. In this context, I am also currently writing a paper on just how little public discussion there has been over the years of Australia's immigration targets.

My other role is as President of Armidale Sanctuary, a NGO which helps humanitarian settlers in Australia through sponsorship and the operation of a rotating credit fund for paying airfares, as well as helping new arrivals as needed with everything from understanding how to choose and access a school for their children, to explaining the workings of a vacuum cleaner (potentially terrifying to someone fresh from an African refugee camp). However, the comments set out below represent my own personal views and do not necessarily represent the perspectives of my academic colleagues or other Sanctuary members. I would also note that this is a submission from a regional area – not a capital city.

Firstly, I would like to commend the Commission for a highly common sense and generally humane approach to a politically charged topic. It is absolutely true that the decision as to how much population growth, if any, Australia should aim for is a decision for Parliament and the people. However, the minor decisions which combine to make up that major decision certainly need to be better informed by a widespread debate backed up by the facts. Surveys over the decades have established that most Australians simply do not know, even approximately, how many immigrants come to Australia each year, much less how many residents leave. Perhaps Federal Parliament could set aside a day a year for informing and hosting public debates about issues related to immigration. For example, how 457 visas are actually used as well as how they are supposed to be used and the comparative financial and human costs of onshore and offshore processing of asylum seekers. There is a special need for an informed debate as to the immigration of people with medical qualifications as compared with the numbers trained locally in country. For the future, given the ageing of the population it would be most useful to know which immigrant groups will be most likely to contribute by providing carers for the elderly. Should there be specific visas for such carers who may have limited formal skills but a great deal to offer to the Australian community?

The draft report makes it quite clear that Commission does not favour a simple, one-size-fits-all, price based approach to the granting of immigration visas. However, as discussed, it is possible to combine a selective and a price based approach. For example, applicants aged 24-44 with x, y or z qualifications could be asked to pay a significant fixed sum for an entry/ permanent residence visa (similar to the proposal under option 1 in Box 1 of the Draft Report). I do not personally favour such an approach, but do feel that the Commission could have explored this path a little further than is the case in Chapter 13. There are enough qualified persons wishing to migrate to the West to make such an approach viable even if 'competitor' countries such as Canada did not follow suit. It would also be possible, if not necessarily altogether desirable, to set country of origin quotas. Should Australia debate the proportions of Chinese or Indians to be accepted amongst immigrants? Re Option 4 in Chapter 13 it should be noted

that whilst there are infrastructure and possibly settlement costs for immigrants, Australia has not had to pay for the education and training of adult immigrants – so the more educated and qualified, the better bargain Australia is likely to be getting. One factor that would need to be taken into account with any variant involving significant fees is the necessity of monitoring the sex ratio and marital status of visa applicants and of those obtaining visas. From many cultures one might expect to see an excess of single males and few single females, which would probably be undesirable.

Draft Box 13.7 discusses the Paid Permanent Visa option. Introducing this PPV as an experiment could yield very useful information. If the cost were to be in the region of \$30,000 or less it would be possible for refugee families to band together to bring out relatives. NGOs such as Sanctuary have considered whether we could operate rotating credit funds under such a system but when we discussed this with the then DIAC, the Departmental officers appeared to be opposed to the idea of associating additional humanitarian visas with repayment by the visa holder.

As to “improving the effectiveness of settlement services, especially for humanitarian immigrants”, I would like to stress that improving effectiveness does not necessarily mean providing more services but rather better and more targeted services. In short hand form, I would argue for a constant cost model: doubling the number of humanitarian entrants but halving the overall services provided. This would recognise that there is a vast gap between the needs of say a single man who is illiterate, even in his mother tongue, and a married woman with a string of professional qualifications. A constantly increasing wish list of services may well reflect beneficence on the part of social workers but not the best interests of disadvantaged migrants. The one area which is absolutely vital is English language, possibly 80% of the successful and contented settlement of humanitarian migrants depends upon their having or acquiring adequate English language skills. (Where we are going to take refugees from refugee camps why do we not have an aid project to teach English in these camps ? – If the visa then depended on passing a language test, this would provide the ultimate incentive and ensure a flying start on arrival).

I thank the Commission for the opportunity to make a submission, and strongly appreciate the fact that on this occasion issues related to the immigration programme are being laid open to well-informed public debate.