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SUBMISSION TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION
Concerning The Draft Report:
Implementation Of Ecologically Sustainable Development By Government Departments
And Agencies

This submission draws to attention that the Draft Report does not offer a suitable framework to adequately address ESD in relation to the impacts of population growth. This submission offers suggestions to overcome the deficiency.

The Draft Report at page 152 states (in part) in relation to the Commission's questionnaire: *"The Commission is seeking information about Commonwealth departments and agencies programs that:... could impact significantly on ESD even though they may not have ESD as their primary focus....Examples of that type of program include those that seek to encourage economic development where that development may have (often unintended) ESD or environmental implications."*

The Department of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) is an example of the above type of program. It is not certain if DIMA responded to the Commission's Questionnaire. However, it is noted that the DIMA submission (sub 39) acknowledges that:

*"... Previous population inquiries highlighted the impact of population on the economy and the environment and long term sustainability as **critical issues**".*

The Commission's Draft Report (p. 11) quotes from the DIMA submission as follows:

*"It should be noted, however, that achievement of ESD will depend on many other **pivotal considerations** such as, population distribution and mobility, consumption patterns, productivity, technology, public sector pricing policies, waste management and disposal, lifestyle choices and land management practices."*

By drawing attention to pivotal considerations that are **direct or downstream effects of population growth**, the Commission's Draft Report underscores that the initial responsibility for a very large proportion of the environmental impacts of population growth (i.e. those resulting from immigration) rests directly with Cabinet. Population growth from natural causes is another matter.

It is therefore Government – Cabinet – that has to acknowledge the **critical issues** of the impact of population (immigration) on environment and long term sustainability. That should be included in the findings and recommendations of the Commission's Inquiry.

Department heads of DIMA should be advising their Minister of the **critical ESD issues** of population growth **before** Cabinet immigration decisions. Unfortunately DIMA lacks an adequate mission statement or appropriate guidance from Government. DIMA department heads are ill-equipped to advise on issues of ESD.

DIMA (sub 39) states: “*The primary objective of **the GOVERNMENT’S immigration policy** is to ensure that immigration is unequivocally in Australia’s national interest by achieving a **proper balance** between the economic, social, environmental and humanitarian objectives*”

Unfortunately the statement is without value as a guide to DIMA or anyone else because:

- Australia’s ‘national interest’ is undefined
- ‘Proper balance’ is undefined.
- ‘Economic objectives’ are undefined.
- ‘Social objectives’ are undefined.
- ‘Environmental objectives’ are only obliquely referenced**
- ‘Humanitarian objectives’ are ill-defined
- The weighting of each objective is undefined..

**The May 1992 Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment, requires all policies at all levels of Government to be “informed” by principles of ESD.

If the primary objective of the GOVERNMENT'S immigration policy is to ensure that immigration is unequivocally in Australia's national interest by achieving a PROPER BALANCE between the economic, social, environmental and humanitarian objectives, then what is the "proper balance"? Who in GOVERNMENT will determine the weighting that will be given to ESD? Cabinet should be advised on immigration by the Department of Environment, **NOT** the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

State of Environment Reports cannot be denied. One impact of Sydney’s four million people on air quality is that the deaths of 400 people annually are linked to air pollution (NSW SoE Report). Motor vehicles are the major source of air pollution. Motor vehicles are the tools of humans. More humans equate to more pollution. Is more proof required of environmental consequences of population growth? Note that 40% of all migrants settle in Sydney. Note also that 1.7 million Australians can’t find work (ABS). Dubious economic advantage should not be sought at the expense of an environment and society that is already stressed.

It is pointless to expect Government departments and agencies to implement ESD when the Government itself is failing to address the **critical issue** of environmental degradation from population growth. Government – Cabinet – can do little about population growth from natural causes however, it must acknowledge and address the environmental consequences of population growth where it can. Immigration is such an opportunity.

To improve long term ESD outcomes throughout Australia it is suggested that the Government implement the recommendations of the “Jones Report” giving immediate priority to recommendations Nos. 1, 2 & 3 as follows:

1. The Government should determine that population policy and immigration policy are quite distinct, with differing goals, although the long term consequences are inextricably linked. The political and administrative responsibility for population and immigration must be separated.

2. The Australian Government should adopt a population policy which explicitly sets out options for long term change, in preference to the existing situation where a *de facto* population policy emerges as a consequence of year by year decisions on immigration intake taken in *ad hoc* fashion, such decisions being largely determined by the state of the economy in the particular year and with little consideration of the long term effects. ***Population policy is central to establishing national goals# and must involve the Prime Minister directly.*** (My emphasis).
3. The Government should establish a Cabinet Committee on Population, chaired by the Prime Minister, to take specific responsibility for *population* policy in distinction to *immigration* policy, to create a publicly assessable data base on population issues and publish material intended to improve the quality of public understanding and political debate on the subject.

ESD is a national goal.

A recent article by Social Scientist Katherine Betts in *People & Place* Vol 6 No 4 calling for a population policy is as relevant to ESD as it is to age structure. Katherine Betts states;

“If Australia were to have an explicit population policy, the question of population growth and the effects of different inputs on Australia’s age structure would be analysed rigorously. Without such a policy, ignorance, emotion and special pleading will have more scope”.

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