



Hon Tony Abbott MHR
Leader of the Opposition
Federal Member for Warringah

Mr Dick Smith
PO Box 418
TERREY HILLS NSW 2084

Dear Mr Smith

Thank you for your recent letter.

Mr Rudd's position on a population target of 35 million is unclear. It is clear, however, that he has not satisfactorily answered the community's questions about the impact of population growth on water, infrastructure, housing, environmental sustainability, living standards and other issues.

It is important that Australians are able to participate in a sensible debate on these issues and that they have the opportunity to discuss the Australia they would like to live in, now and in the future. To foster such debate, I have appointed Senator Cory Bernardi to the newly created position of Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Population Policy.

You may be aware that the leader of The Greens, Senator Bob Brown, is currently pushing for a population inquiry to be conducted by the government. This has been publicly supported by the Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Mr Scott Morrison.

I have provided your comments to Senator Bernardi and Mr Morrison and thank you once again for your letter.

Yours sincerely

TONY ABBOTT

*I'm also happy to
reply to your mail
together on these subjects*

cc. *Mr Scott Morrison MP, Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship*
Senator Cory Bernardi, Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Population Policy



**LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MHR
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR WARRINGAH**

****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY – UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL DELIVERY****

22 January 2010

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MHR
ADDRESS TO THE AUSTRALIA DAY COUNCIL (VICTORIA)
AUSTRALIA DAY DINNER, MELBOURNE.**

E&OE.....

Australia Day has many meanings. To some, it's just a holiday. To others, it's a celebration of the good things about our country. To some Aboriginal people, although perhaps a dwindling number, it's more properly considered invasion day. Strictly speaking, though, it commemorates the formal establishment of modern Australia. It marks the first arrival of the ways of life, the habits of mind and the processes of government that have defined this country.

Our unreflecting assumption is that the people who founded modern Australia were Australians. In fact, the people who raised the flag and toasted the Crown on January 26 1788 were Australia's first modern migrants. The loyal toasts soon descended into a riotous party, a very Australian thing it might be thought. That does not alter the essential fact that our nation is as much the product of the people who've come here as of the people who've been here.

Except for the half million or so who identify as Aboriginal, every other Australian is an immigrant or the descendant of immigrants since 1788. Unlike any other, we are a nation of relatively recent immigrants. New Zealand has a proportionately larger indigenous population and North America has been settled for almost two centuries longer. This means, of course, that the immigrant who feels like a stranger in our midst is really at the heart of the Australian story.

To the extent that it is a celebration of our nation, Australia Day is necessarily a salute to an immigrant culture. In stating the obvious, I intend no disrespect to the Aboriginal people, whose sense of community and connectedness to land and whose laconic and stoic approach to life has become part of the Australian character. What's curious, then, is the ambivalence that many Australians feel about immigration even though it's so central to our national experience.

Within a generation, Australia's settlers felt somewhat different from their connections in Britain. To this day, a strong sense of kith and kin with other English-speaking peoples has co-existed with an equally powerful sense that we are unique. The populist view that everything about Australia is beyond reproach, especially from outsiders, exists in tension with a restless striving to be better and a sense that we're not yet our best selves. It's "the moral middle class" versus the instinct to give "three cheers for Australia". We do indeed have a history to be proud of, not just because it's ours, but because it's been a record of exceptional achievement.

Many conscientious people continue to be dismayed by what they see as the harsh treatment of boat people. Of course, Australia has an obligation to people in fear for their lives or to those who have been found to be refugees but this has to be balanced against our obligation not to become a soft touch for everyone seeking a better life. Unfortunately, there are no easy ways to deter people who want to force themselves on Australia. The alternative to mandatory detention is the risk that people might disappear into the community. The alternative to "locking up women and children" is separating family members. The alternative to strict border protection is tacit encouragement for people to risk their lives at sea. There is an important distinction between boat arrivals on the one hand and, on the other, people who arrive without putting themselves in peril, on a valid visa, and only subsequently become unauthorised over-stayers.

It's far from obvious how to strike a judicious balance here. Giving boat people what they want is not self-evidently morally preferable to strict deterrence if it encourages more of them to take great risks on the open sea. The critics of border protection policy under both the current government as well as its predecessor need to ask themselves at what point would the size of any unauthorised influx become a concern. They further need to explain why it's better to wait for the problem to become worse before tackling it. Still, a country that's alive to the shades of grey inherent in aspects of government policy is more likely to find an acceptable balance between competing moral claims.

For their part, the supporters of border protection need to understand that it's no reflection on boat people that they want to come to Australia. Why wouldn't people who might otherwise wait in camps for years try to short-circuit the process especially if they're plausibly told that getting to Australia means the beginning of a new life? At worst, boat people are guilty of choosing hope over fear. Although the main villains, of course, are the people smugglers, a government which allowed desperate people to think that getting on a boat might be a shortcut to permanent residency in Australia would hardly be blameless.

A strong border protection policy is perfectly consistent with a large and inclusive immigration policy. In fact, it's probably essential if the public is to be convinced that Australia's immigration policy is run by the Government rather than by people smugglers. It's not surprising that the 67 per cent of Australians who thought that the immigration intake was too high in 1993 had dropped to just 34 per cent by 2004 even though the intake had increased.

Under the Howard Government, there was little public questioning of a large immigration programme because people were persuaded that it was being run firmly in Australia's national interest. As well as strict border protection, the former Government doubled to four years the period of residency required for citizenship, reduced new migrants' access to welfare and gave more weight to the ability to speak English in the immigration points system. The Labor Party may not have liked these changes but it did not oppose them. The critics need to be careful lest their concerns end up undermining Australia's traditional openness to immigrants.

The last thing that any Australian should want is to make recent immigrants feel unwelcome in their new country. After all, they have voted with their feet for Australia in a way that the rest of us have not. That's why we should be especially concerned at the possibility that ethnic Indians have become the victims of racially motive crime. This would be worse than a law enforcement problem. It would be an affront to our self-perception as society where people are judged on their merits rather than on their skin colour. Conversely, the rise of ethnic gangs and perceptions of ethnic street crime threaten the understanding that migration should be overwhelmingly a net benefit to Australia.

The former Mufti of Australia Sheik Hilaly's highly publicized attacks on women and Jews have struck many people as un-Australian and prompted much anxiety about importing social problems. Ninety years ago, so did the attacks of Archbishop Mannix on the conduct of the First World War and there were calls for him to be deported. There has hardly been a time when there were not some reservations about the loyalty of particular ethnic or religious groups. Thus far at least, all of them have eventually become as Australian as everyone else.

to meet the challenges of the mid century. It would be even better if he would actually make some prior to the next election. That would give Australians more confidence that the national government had not succumbed to the cycle of spin over substance which afflicts so many of our state governments.

Australia's population is a function of the death rate, the birth rate and the immigration rate. Obviously, the death rate should be as low as possible. The birth rate should be determined by the choices that Australian families make. The immigration rate should depend upon the strength of Australia's economy, the confidence of our society and the readiness of potential migrants to make a commitment to their new country. The right population for Australia is the one that these choices determine. With the best technologies, including the harvesting of urban rainwater otherwise wasted, there's no reason to think that Australia has a fixed carrying capacity, the population equivalent of the Goyder line. My instinct is to extend to as many people as possible the freedom and benefits of life in Australia. A larger population will bring that about provided that it's also a more productive one.

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