

Sleepwalking to Disaster
By Dick Smith

I've got bad news for people caught in this week's F3 traffic disaster – get used to it.

If Australia's population grows as fast as the Government wants, such failures are inevitable. Our hospitals, schools, roads and emergency services are already at breaking point, and massively increasing our population can only make things worse.

And an entire generation of young Australians can just about forget ever being able to afford a home of their own. Population growth puts intolerable pressure on house prices.

Our environment is stressed, our best farms are being lost to development, our older workers are being dumped, all in favour of an idea that the public is clearly concerned about. So the question has to be asked, why? Just who is pushing the idea of the 'Big Australia' our Prime Minister so eagerly welcomes?

I can tell you, because I have benefited from growth myself. If you are in business, a rapidly growing population is a free ride to profits.

And you don't even need to create a single job to make money when population is growing that fast. I've made more money out of the Sydney property market in recent years than I ever did out of retailing or publishing. For big business and property developers, population growth is easy - and addictive.

My concern is - will we have enough water and food to support a vast population? Will local communities have a say in how their neighbourhoods develop? These are questions Mr Rudd wants to put off answering. I hope his new Minister for Population is not really the Minister for Population *Growth*. Meanwhile Mr Abbot can't seem to make up his mind where he stands on the issue either.

Both the Government and the Opposition seem to be making it up as they go—and often their short-term solutions just create more problems. I have never known a time in Australia where so much policy is being made on the run.

We need to get this policy right, because the consequences of failure for our kids and grandkids are far too serious. We need a plan, and that means Governments and big business will have to start listening to people instead of giving into the growth addiction.

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