

“IMMIGRATION - A tribute to our past, A commitment to our future”

Introduction

On 27th November, 1997 the Minister for Immigration, Hon Phil Ruddock launched the Housing and Urban Development Council's much awaited review of immigration in Australia. The review, undertaken by a team of highly qualified researchers, explored a number of important aspects of immigration including:

- Does immigration add to unemployment?
- Does immigration affect the health of Australia's population?
- Are immigrants a drain on the public purse?
- Does immigration undermine social cohesion and national identity?
- Are descendants of immigrants upwardly mobile?
- Does immigration compliment Australia's environment?

These and a number of other questions were carefully studied by the researchers. A message from the Premier of Victoria, Mr Jeff Kennett on the results of this research is included in this booklet?

Bob Day, one of Australia's leading home builders was one of the guest speakers at the launch. Herewith is an edited version of his address.

Minister Ruddock, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Whenever the housing industry advocates increased immigration, there is a tendency for our various critics to observe - "they would say that, wouldn't they." This perception of industry self-interest subverts powerful argument and good public policy and it needs to be addressed directly. I would like to cite just three of those arguments this morning.

But before I do, it goes without saying of course that Australia as a whole has benefited mightily from immigration in the past and as the HUD report makes clear, there's every reason to suppose that properly targeted immigration will continue to make an even greater contribution to national prosperity.

The reason why we can say this with confidence is that first and foremost **immigration creates jobs**. It's understandable that the unemployed might find it hard to believe because of the fear of increased competition for available jobs but it's true nevertheless. The overwhelming consensus of economists who've investigated this issue is that immigration hasn't added to Australia's unemployment rate but, if anything, has reduced it. Immigration has actually enhanced the employment prospects of non-immigrants.

Historically, immigration to Australia is now at a low ebb - relative both to the size of the total population and to intake levels in comparable countries like New Zealand and Canada. We need to decide whether we will opt for growth, as they have done, or for stagnation. If we have to correct popular misconceptions and allay misplaced anxieties in the process, let us begin the task of persuasion - that's the task of leadership.

Second, as well as creating jobs, immigration **raises the skills base in the workforce**. The evidence is that immigrants bring a higher level of skills to Australia than the average level in the non-immigrant sector. The late Victor Chang was a dramatic example of the transformation of a field of expertise by an outstanding individual who enhanced a lot of other people's lives. We could of course, name many others.

Third, another dimension beyond the realm of individual skills in which immigration enriches us is by **building technology links**. Without the human base, the linkages which gave the economy of my home state of South Australia its partnership with the US Computer giant EDS and with British Aerospace would have been inconceivable.

There is a further, too little understood advantage which is not lost on underpopulated states like South Australia and those which have the highest population growth rates, Western Australia and Queensland. Immigration helps to alleviate and delay the ageing of the population and to broaden the band of taxpayers needed to support it.

These are just some of the reasons why the housing sector wants to see our historically high levels of immigration maintained. It's in our national interest - not just so we can build more houses. I think this report attests to that fact and I commend it to your thinking.

Thank you.