

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE AUSTRALIAN PRINT MEDIA ADDRESS ENVIRONMENT WHEN COMMENTING ON POPULATION POLICY?

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Introduction

During the 20th century, the eminent US biologist E O Wilson notes, humanity has managed to decimate the natural environment and draw down the non-renewable resources of the planet "with cheerful abandon" (Wilson, 2002). Human population growth, along with increased per capita demands for energy and other resources, has been the cause of this environmental degradation. (Ehrlich 1968,1990,1991). In 1992, 1600 scientists, including 99 Nobel laureates, warned that population must soon be stabilised to avoid environmental destruction (Detjen, J. 1992).

More recently, on environmental web-sites, the effect of a growing population on the environment is reflected in headlines such as: "Growing Global Population Tramples the Planet", "Environment Losing Ground to Growing Population" and "Growing Populations Stamp Ecological Footprint" (ENS Nov 8, Jan 5, July 11, 2001.)

Yet in a random sample of 150 news stories in the United States about environmental problems such as urban sprawl, endangered species and water shortages, T Michael Maher found that only one story in ten framed population growth as a source of the problem (Maher 1997). Only one story in the entire sample posed population stability as a possible solution.

Clearly, journalists were not making the population-environment connection.

Background to this study

In his Australia Day address, Dr Tim Flannery, Director of the South Australian Museum and author of "The Future Eaters" and other books, called for a population policy for Australia. Flannery said the policy should be:

...based on the recognition of the environmental constraints on our land, our economic needs, and the social desires of its people. The only way that such a policy can be achieved is for the nation to engage in broad vigorous and truthful debate, accompanied by a Government inquiry that is charged with setting an optimum population target...we need to leave ill-informed opinion behind and embark on the hard work of determining, honestly and transparently, what population size will deliver the best future for our nation. (Flannery 2002)

While a Government inquiry has yet to see the light of day, nevertheless, some took hold of the idea of debate, broad, vigorous and truthful or not. Entrepreneur Steve Vizard and Victorian state Premier Steve Bracks duly convened a Population Summit for 500 Australians for 25 February at the Regents Theatre in Melbourne. Writers, business figures, economists and community leaders and former prime ministers, though very few environmentalists, were invited to debate three options - a slight decline in population, moderate growth or a dramatic increase (Gough, Feb 4, 2002). Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, who declined to attend the Summit, had consistently rejected the concept of a population target (Farouque 2002).

The Summit was backed by the Melbourne-based Apop, an organisation favouring high population growth. Amongst its membership it boasted businessman Richard Pratt, property developer Bert Dennis and former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. Vizard, in his opening address at the Summit, stuck to the original objective of informed community debate. Premier Bracks and Pratt, however, were blatant in their call for a rapid increase in population - to 50 million by mid-century. While the demographers and the few environmentalists demurred, most of the speakers, many with few claims to expertise on the issue, supported the call for significant population growth (Hewitt, 26 Feb 2002). Opposition leader Simon Crean endorsed the concept of a population target to avoid an "ageing and declining society" (Croswell, 26 Feb 2002).

The proposal of "50 million by 2050" had been ridiculed by New South Wales Premier Bob Carr before the Summit (Carr, Feb 17). He noted correctly that immigration would need to be increased from 90,000 to 463,000 annually. This would mean entry standards would drop and nobody would support such a policy. Carr went on to oppose any overly ambitious targets for population growth on "economic, environmental and planning grounds". He said there would never be large cities in inland Australia because the rivers would not support them.

Carr's words fell on deaf ears, however, and not long after the Summit, Australia's peak business group, The Business Council of Australia (BCA), called for a substantial increase in immigration, to avoid being "irrelevant in the world" (Kormendy 6 March 2002).

In May, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Philip Ruddock, announced a significant boost to immigration (up to 110,000 per annum) for the next four years which would, he proclaimed, mean Australia's population would be 27 million by mid-century.

Through the first half of 2002, the issue of Australia's ageing society received an almost panic reaction and dominated the arguments for those advocating higher population. Yet as former Federal Minister Michael Duffy pointed out:

The pro-growth argument ... cheerfully ignores the fact that many European countries have been doing much better than Australia for the past 20 years even though their populations are already as "aged" as ours won't become until 2020. Europe, strangely enough, faces an ageing future with equanimity - it's rarely an issue there, which makes you wonder why Australians get so upset about it (Duffy 2002.)

One response to the panic about ageing was the Human Rights Commission's Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward's call in April for paid maternity leave to encourage working women to have more babies and thus arrest Australia's "rapidly declining

birth rate" (Goward, 18 April 2002). Whether Australia's fertility decline from 1.777 in 1995-6 to 1.737 in 2000-1, of course, can be described as "rapid" is a matter of definition (ABS March 2002).

Another response was the "Intergenerational Report" introduced by the Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, at the time of the Budget on May 14. It noted that, overall the proportion of the population potentially to be supported by the working age population is expected to rise, though only slightly over 1970 levels. Expenditure for Government would be expected to increase, however, since the cost of children has been financed privately, while a larger proportion of supporting older people has been funded through government transfers, for example, pensions. (IGP 2002).

The IGR famously ignored the prospects for the Australian environment in 40 years' time, despite the warnings contained in two important publications focussing on Australia's environment that were released in the preceding weeks. The first was *Australia: State of Environment Report 2001* that was tabled in Federal Parliament on March 19 (Environment Australia 2002.) The second was *Measuring Australia's Progress (MAP)* by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2002).

The SoE Report was quite explicit in connecting environmental degradation with population growth. It said:

Pressure on the environment continues to grow...Degradation of lands and water remains of critical concern, especially on the land use zone upon which much of Australia's agricultural production depends. Population growth has particular effects on coastal Australia. Urban sprawl, high-energy consumption, stormwater pollution of estuaries and coastal waters, and the continued decline in biodiversity as a result of land-clearing all arise from population and economic pressures.

Even the Minister for Environment, David Kemp, not known for his environmental record, found the report sobering. "We are not yet managing Australia's environment on a sustainable basis," he said (Lowe, April 6).

The ABS publication *MAP* noted that throughout the 1990s, every economic and some social indicator had improved, but every environmental indicator had declined with the exception of air quality. Commenting on *MAP* in *New Scientist*, Ian Lowe noted that economic growth was produced by running down natural and social capital (Lowe, 20 April 2002.)

Commentary on population issues in the Australian media

This study looked at the commentary, namely editorials and Opinion articles on the op-ed pages, in three major metropolitan papers (*Sydney Morning Herald*, *Age* and *Canberra Times*) and two national papers (*Australian* and *Australian Financial Review*) over a three-month period from February 15 to May 15, 2002. There were 28 editorials and 45 Opinion articles that addressed population policy either directly or indirectly. The study considered whether environment or the broader dimensions of the debate had been addressed properly. I chose these papers purely on the basis that those were the ones available to me on a daily basis at the time. Had I lived in Brisbane, Perth or Adelaide, I may just as well have chosen the *Courier-Mail*, *Western Australian* or *Adelaide Advertiser*.

Editorials

The Australian

Just after the Population Summit (27 Feb), the editorial unequivocally called for a larger population because "we are rapidly ageing". It acknowledged environmental threats, but rejected the notion "that economic and population growth must necessarily damage the natural environment". Thus, the environment-population connection was made, but only to reject it.

A flurry of editorials in early April coincided with their own conference on *Towards Opportunity and Prosperity*. In announcing the conference (April 4) the editorial noted that Australia's economic reform agenda had run out of steam and it was necessary to discuss issues of equity and education, the environment and employment, welfare reform, population, work and family conflicts as well as the economy. The conference, it said, would be harnessed to the issues of the times, including "the environmental constraints to population and economic growth".

The next day (April 5) a long editorial focussed on the need to get rid of poverty, a precondition being "to sustain vigorous economic growth" There was, however, no mention of the environmental constraints mentioned the day before.

The editorial over the weekend (April 6-7) called on Australians to "challenge their tendency to look inward, scared of change and things different. This fear must be overcome if we are to accept that a population policy cognizant of the environmental effect of more people must also recognise that greater growth flows from allowing our domestic markets and skills base to grow, and that can only come from an increase in population."

By April 9, the editorial had decided that ageing was not all bad news as long as people work beyond retirement age to support themselves. It nevertheless called for an easing of the way for families to have more children and for a greater immigrant intake to provide more skills, though the environmental implications were not mentioned.

Following Pru Goward's call for a maternity allowance, the editorial on April 20-21 was back to panicking about a fertility rate of 1.75 and "becoming a society without a future generation". Endorsing a paid maternity leave scheme to encourage Australian working women to have more babies, it once again failed to mention the environmental implications.

Some weeks later (May 11-12), the editorial welcomed the recent boost to immigration and the Prime Minister's new comfort with a multicultural Australia. In an effort to have it both ways perhaps, it said: "But let's not...ignore the need for a sustainable population policy to maximise economic growth." (Many an ecologist would argue that this was a contradiction in terms.)

The Australian Financial Review

On the day of the Population Summit (Feb 25), the editorial was unequivocal in stressing the need to increase both immigration and the natural birth rate to stave off the effects of population ageing. Nevertheless, it acknowledged that the "damage done to our rivers, estuaries and top-soil by European farming techniques has strengthened the green case for

stabilising population". It went on to say, however, that we "should be optimistic that technology can ameliorate these problems".

On May 8 the editorial welcomed the Minister's announcement of a substantial increase in immigration while gleefully noting the \$7.2 billion added to consumption over five years. There was no mention of the environmental implications of rising consumption as a consequence of increased population growth.

The editorial (May 15) welcomed the Intergenerational Report but said that the \$40 billion funding gap in 40 years time because of ageing warranted more than simple cuts to the Pharmaceutical Benefits' Scheme. There is a strong case for more immigration and measures to boost fertility, it said, but no mention of environment.

Sydney Morning Herald

The editorial of February 26 called for positive policies to increase Australia's population steadily so as to maintain "the vigour and strength of the working population". Apart from referring to Ruddock's priorities that included "improved environmental practices and behaviour", it failed to mention the negative environmental implications of the growth it was advocating.

On March 20, the editorial warmly welcomed Australia's six millionth migrant and extolled the virtues of immigration for its crucial role in population growth. It bemoaned the "two Australias", with ethnically-diverse Sydney and Melbourne on one hand and "the rest". It noted Bob Carr's opposition to any increase in migrant numbers because of the pressures on Sydney which is "disproportionately burdened by the demand for services and infrastructure". It said, however, that these pressures should not be used to justify a reduction in numbers.

On March 23, the editorial welcomed Ruddock's announcement that he would take more migrants from the pool of overseas students, reiterating that Australia needed more migrants. It then addressed the moral questions of immigration, specifically the plight of children in detention centres. It failed, however, to address the moral question of running down the resource base through a bigger population.

On April 10, the editorial welcomed the Myer Foundation's grant to study ageing. It assumed it would be more wide-ranging than a narrow Government study. While it did not pre-empt the study by saying a solution was a bigger population, neither did it call for the environment to be included in the terms of reference.

Later in the month (April 24), the editorial gave qualified support to a paid maternity scheme, urging taxpayer support since it would make motherhood more affordable. It was thus in the national interest, it said, though its effect on population growth and in turn the environment was not addressed.

The editorial on May 6 noted that workers on the edges of the coastal conglomerate that is now greater Sydney sacrifice three to five hours a day travelling to and from the job. It also noted that there are "dire warnings of environmental damage for the Georges and Hawkesbury-Nepean river systems as a result of rapid urbanisation".

Yet only two days later (May 8) the editorial welcomed the "sensible" migration program for 2002-3 as announced by the Minister, one that will see a population of 27 million by mid-century and thus continuing pressure on Sydney and its environment.

A few days later, the editorial came out strongly against the current Business Migration Scheme because so few business migrants end up in regional Australia despite five years of allowing states and territories to sponsor settlers with business backgrounds and \$200,000. It welcomed the Government's efforts to end the rorts (May 11-12).

The Age

On February 27, the editorial reiterated the newspaper's long held stance for a bigger population in the interests of maintaining "a vibrant economy and international relevance". It gave grudging acknowledgement of environmental problems and said we "do need to change our environmental practices".

The editorial of March 23 also commented on the "two-nation Australia". It acknowledged the difficulties in getting migrants to settle in the country though suggested it may well happen in time. Brief acknowledgement was made of Sydney "outgrowing its infrastructure" though not of damage to its rivers and other natural resources.

After the Minister for Immigration announced a conference would be held on migration in Sydney in May, the editorial (April 10) welcomed the proposal. It said it would be broad in scope, with papers on skilled migrants, Australia's brain drain, ageing of the population and the economic and social effects of immigration. It did not mention whether the "broad scope" included the environmental consequences of population growth.

Later in the month, the editorial (20 April) endorsed the concept of paid maternity leave and said there should be some degree of public funding so female workers are not discriminated against. Without paid maternity leave, it said, there would be "consequences for national fertility". No consequences for the environment were mentioned.

Following the announcement to increase the immigration intake, the editorial (May 10) warmly congratulated the Government, saying Australia needed more workers to maintain its present momentum. It also welcomed the announcement that the levels would be maintained until 2007. It said, ideally, population planning requires an even longer-term strategy than four years "and the participation of business, the states and town planners". Such planning, apparently, did not require participation of ecologists.

After the Budget, the editorial (May 15) questioned the Intergenerational Report's prediction that spending may exceed revenue by 5 per cent in 2042, saying it was not taking into account increases in productivity. Nevertheless, it said the budget was right to register concern about the ageing population. Environment did not rate a mention.

The Canberra Times

The editorial (Feb 28) following the Population Summit stood alone amongst the five papers in giving the environment top priority. In the first paragraph it said: "Critically, there is the question of the environment. What population can this continent sustain?" Further on it noted that Australia is "dogged by a perception of underpopulation because of its huge area". It

went on to say that the desire to fill the empty spaces is foolish, though it countered this by saying that the idea that Australia as a "desperately fragile land that cannot handle more people is similarly misguided". Nevertheless, it urged caution about further population growth because it is easier to invite more people to come in and to encourage more women to give birth than it is to reduce the population.

The editorial (April 22) addressing paid maternity leave said that declining fertility and the trend for women to delay having children are major concerns. The latter related more to health complications of late pregnancies rather than its effect on the birth rate. It noted, as demographers have long pointed out, that: "there is a public interest in supporting greater fertility in place of higher immigration so that Australia can move to a sustainable, stable population". No specific mention of environment was made though its advocacy of a "sustainable, stable population" was consistent with its editorial of February 28 in its cautionary attitude to population growth.

The editorial (May 10) prior to the Budget poured cold water on the idea that Australia was facing an ageing "crisis", thereby taking the wind out of the sails of all who had used the ageing argument to justify a large population increase. It noted that: "quite respectable economists and demographers doubt that the ageing of the population will add anything to the public pension bill". It went on to say that a "terrible, but quite misleading, picture can be drawn which suggests all older people will be physically and financially dependent on the income being produced by a workforce declining in size, when the truth is that the overwhelming proportion of the aged will be perfectly mobile and able to look after themselves and that many will remain as active economic contributors." It saw the way to cope with an ageing population "is by promoting the health and social and economic well-being of all who are going to face it." The editorial warned, however, that there *would* be a crisis if the Government did not take account of future demand, "not least the prospect of a population, a generation hence, about 25 per cent greater."

In its editorial (May 11) commenting on proposed increases in immigration, it questioned the wisdom of the increase given "the state of things such as salinity, land-clearing, endangered species and the like". It added that the major burden of immigration is borne by Sydney "whose infrastructure is groaning under population growth". Importantly, it questioned the Government's projections about higher immigration leading to higher standards of living since they are purely monetary and "loss of environmental amenity is hardly considered".

Opinion articles

These Opinion articles were found on the "Op-Ed" pages of these newspapers and staff journalists wrote the majority. A number, however, were written by others, many of whom were speakers at the Population Summit or provided an alternative perspective (eg. McDonald, Guest, Krockenberger, McCracken, Curnow, Lowe). The non-staff writers included Ross Garnault (Professor of Economics at the Australian National University), Allan Fels (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission), Michael Cook (editor of a bioethics email newsletter), Ian McDonald and Ross Guest (academic economists), Bert Dennis (Australian Population Institute and property developer), Anne Summers (feminist author), Cathy Sherry (freelance writer and mother), Natasha Stott-Despoja (politician), Pru Goward (Sex Discrimination Commissioner), Michael Krockenberger (Australian Conservation Foundation), Richard Pratt (businessman), Kevin McCracken (lecturer in geography at Macquarie University), Christopher Pearson (editor of Adelaide Review), Jill

Curnow (Sustainable Population Australia, and Ian Lowe (emeritus professor of science, technology and science at Griffith University).

The Australian

The day after the Summit (Feb 26), the economics editor, Alan Wood, argued for a moderate increase in population. He noted that Australia does have serious environmental problems but argued that salinity and water quality have little to do with population size. Two weeks later (April 6-7), he dismissed the panic about ageing, saying that productivity would off-set its budgetary and economic effects, but made no mention of environment. On the other hand, the fecund Angela Shanahan (mother of nine children) saw a declining birth rate as a major problem and pushed for a boost to fertility (26 Feb, May 14). Mike Steketee (5 April) quelled panic about ageing by picking up on the McDonald/Guest paper from the *Towards Prosperity* Conference which claimed that living standards would actually rise with an ageing population. Rosemary Neill (12 April) also dispelled panic about ageing by picking up on the Australia Institute paper by Pamela Kinnear which found that collective ageing is a manageable "transition, not a crisis". By 10 May, however, Neill was supporting paid maternity leave because "we are in the midst of a baby drought" (10 May). Ross Garnaut (5 April) worried that a fear of racial diversity might impede immigration and Allan Fels said that while Australia's "small" population presented an acute dilemma for competition policy, nevertheless, competition law allows mergers and other anti-competitive behaviour in order to maintain productivity. With the exception of Wood, none of these commentators mentioned environment and Wood, of course, rejected any population/environment connection.

The Australian Financial Review

Economics editor Alan Mitchell (30 Feb) noted US studies that show the decline in wages since the 1980s of high school drop-outs can be attributed to the flow of low-skilled immigration. For Australia, he said, immigration favoured the professional and highly skilled but blue collar workers continue to feel threatened by immigration, with good reason. Deirdre Macken (2 March) also noted that the poorest are hit hardest from immigration because of increased housing prices and competition for jobs. Ian McDonald and Ross Guest got their opportunity (20 March) to publicise the results of their economic study that declining fertility will mean a higher standard of living. Alan Mitchell picked this up again (24 April) after the McDonald/Guest paper had gained status from being published in the *Australian Economic Review*. Nevertheless, property developer Bert Dennis, an organiser of the Population Summit, got space (8 May) to put his case that "more people create a better Australia". Tony Walker (8 May) seemed not to have read Mitchell, Macken or Macdonald and bemoaned the fact that the increase in immigration was not "robust" enough.

Interestingly, of all these commentators, the only one to mention environment was Bert Dennis who as a property developer is probably responsible for paving over more of Australia than the others. Nevertheless, he argued that he was creating new communities based on environmental sustainability with full treatment of drainage waters emanating from the developments.

Sydney Morning Herald

Anne Summers (25 Feb) bemoaned the fact that the Population Summit did not have a session devoted to women since the "extraordinary financial and social penalties imposed on mothers today" were responsible for women delaying having children and for the declining birth-rate. Her terminology - "precipitous decline in the birth rate" - was overstated. Cathy Sherry took up the same theme (26 Feb) and called for pressure to be taken off women. Neither Summers nor Sherry mentioned environment - the arguments were centred on feminism alone. On the same day, PP McGuinness (26 Feb) asked why we need more immigrants and acknowledged that environmentalists have a point when they argue the Earth is already populated. Jennifer Hewitt (28 Feb) claimed that Australia's pressing environmental problems have little to do with increased immigration. In fact, the lack of population "had reduced the economic and political impetus to find smarter solutions", she said. Democrat leader Natasha Stott-Despoja (7 March) joined the fray in support of paid maternity leave but, like Summers and Sherry, for purely feminist reasons. Ross Gittins (24 April), alone amongst commentators, picked up on ABS's *Measuring Australia's Progress* and noted that we're "healthier, wealthier and better educated, but it is coming at the expense of the environment". Pru Goward was able to put her case for paid maternity leave (26 April) claiming that without children, society would cease to exist, or "descends to a pre-revolutionary peasant rabble". Emotive words as though to wider debate of the issue. Jennifer Hewitt (April 27-28) then wondered what paid maternity leave would achieve. Twelve weeks paid leave does not stretch far given the years of financial commitment to child rearing. Like Goward, she ignored the environmental aspects of the debate. PP McGuinness (30 April) supported paid maternity leave but said it was time to decide how much a baby is worth. Does society as a whole want more children, he asked. There will be no way in which "the full cost of a pro-child policy will be accepted by childless taxpayers". This time there was no mention of environment though he had established his position clearly in his previous column on the subject (Feb 26).

The Age

Before the Population Summit, Michael Krockenberger (23 Feb) made a case for environmentalists, saying "increasing Australia's population under current circumstances will increase our environmental problems". Richard Pratt (25 Feb), on the other hand, ignored environment and held up Canada as an example of an innovative country that opens its doors to 225,000 immigrants a year. Australia's current level of immigration was "ultimately indefensible in the international community", he claimed, despite Australia only trailing Canada slightly on a per capita basis. Kevin McCracken (27 Feb) criticised Pratt for a "disturbing lack of demographic realities" - that to reach 50 million in 50 years would require 463,000 immigrants a year. The other striking omission of Pratt's, he said, was the absence of any significant reference to the environment. He challenged advocates of 50 million to spell out how it could be "achieved without disastrous environmental consequences". Ignoring environment altogether, Christopher Pearson (4 March) identified fertility rate rather than immigration as the crux of the issue and said abortion was the "silent tragedy of the population debate". Pru Goward appeared (8 March) to foreshadow her paid maternity leave proposal, arguing that it was necessary because "the birth rate won't rise by itself", assuming that a higher birth rate was intrinsically desirable and ignoring environmental evidence to the contrary. Cathy Sherry (7 April), contemplating her fourth child, said she would like to see us "lose our collective horror at the idea of four or more children". She had clearly not thought through the environmental implications of everyone having four. Louise Dodson (19 April)

appeared disturbingly free of facts in her article on ageing, claiming "Australia's fertility rate is one of the lowest in the world" and in her assumption that a population policy inevitably meant higher immigration and a lifting of fertility rates. Ross Gittins article about the MAP that appeared in the SMH on the same day, was splendidly titled here in the Age: 'Stuffing the ecology so we can afford to fix it' (24 April). Kenneth Davidson (29 April) then argued that the ageing of the population should be celebrated, citing the Guest/McDonald paper about living standards, and slammed those self-serving interests promoting the ageing crisis. Davidson confined his arguments to living standards and failed to mention environment explicitly, though it could be deemed to be a pro-environment stance he was taking.

Canberra Times

Simon Grose (2 March) said that because no future leader would want to offend the business and migrant lobby (advocating high migration) nor the environmental lobby (advocating low migration) a population target would end up somewhere in the middle where it is likely to end up anyway. Tom Connors (13 March) asked whether population growth was really environmentally sustainable and said if we want 50 million it will be at the cost of living standards. Jill Curnow (April 24) criticised the Government for focussing on the costs of the elderly when a small reduction in the proportion of children would release time and money for other purposes. The childless Simon Grose (May 1) opposed publicly funded paid maternity leave and said the childless were already footing the bill for children, including "the cost of environmental degradation caused by more Australians wanting food and drink". Pru Goward (May 7) countered by saying that paid maternity leave was a good bet for the childless because it means they enjoy the benefits of an ongoing community at minimal cost. While acknowledging that there has once been a debate that anticipated an "environmental apocalypse if we continue to breed up and destroy the earth's resources", the reader was left uncertain as to whether she supported the proposition or not. Simon Grose, having acknowledged the environmental costs of more Australians previously, suggested that if there were to be a shortfall of people in coming years, there will be plenty of people born into the rest of the world who would be happy to fill the gap. Ian Lowe (May 13), in defending himself against Grose's accusations of naivety and irrelevance at a recent conference on sustainability, said a society can hardly be sustainable if its population continues to grow since, ultimately, human population will be limited by the capacity of the earth's natural systems.

Conclusion

Determining whether editorial and Opinion page writers included environment when addressing population issues was difficult to quantify exactly because of the ageing issue. Many writers like Ann Summers saw it as purely a feminist issue though they did refer to the 'fertility crisis', or 'ageing crisis' suggesting they were afraid of imminent population decline.

As far as the editorials were concerned, 16 out of 28 failed to mention the environment. Of the 12 that did, only seven accepted that population growth might adversely affect the environment.

As for the 12 Opinion articles in the Australian, only one mentioned the environment but rejected the population/environment connection. Of the six in the AFR, only Bert Dennis mentioned the environment, but really only to plead his housing developments were environmentally friendly. Of the 10 in the SMH, four mentioned the population/environment

connection but one of those only did so to dismiss it. In the *Age*, four of the nine articles mentioned environment, two quite vociferously in favour, though one mentioned it but dismissed the importance. In the *Canberra Times*, all seven mentioned the environment though one left you with the impression it was not longer an issue.

Apart from the *Canberra Times*, coverage of the population issue was often too narrowly focussed with little attention given to the environment. Over the three-month period, however, there appeared to be an evolution in thinking though it advanced more quickly in some papers than others. The community debate that Tim Flannery had called for had indeed occurred, though perhaps not entirely to his satisfaction nor those of environmentalists deeply concerned by the deteriorating global and national environment. Nevertheless, the panic about an ageing society that so dominated discussion in February and at the Population Summit, had abated somewhat by May.

The *Australian* gave the issue of population a good deal of attention in its editorials though was unequivocal in its support for a higher population. Its ambivalence about the importance of environment was reflected in the Opinion articles where there was barely mention of it, despite some enlightenment on the issue of an ageing population.

The *Australian Financial Review* was also unequivocal in its support for higher immigration and fertility, and while noting environmental problems, felt they could be solved by the technological fix. Its Opinion writers were admirable in addressing the social downside to high immigration. There was also good coverage of the McDonald/Guest paper that was at odds with the high immigration push, though off-set by articles by Dennis and Walker.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* was perhaps more aware of Premier Bob Carr's misgivings about population, being of the same state, though it did not really mention environment until it had done its own survey on greater Sydney. It supported the increase in the immigration program despite the added load on Sydney that it would involve. Paddy McGuinness and Ross Gittins, however, provided antidotes to the pro-growth rhetoric. Of all the Opinion writers, they alone appreciated the costs to the environment.

The *Age* was also supportive of higher population growth, perhaps reflecting the sentiments of the loudest voices at the Population Summit held in the same city. Environment got short shrift in the editorials though in the Opinion pages Michael Krockenberger, Kevin McCracken and Ross Gittins all provided excellent environmental arguments and Ken Davidson demolished fears about ageing.

The *Canberra Times* won all prizes for enlightenment as far as making the connection between population and environment was concerned, both in its editorials and its Opinion articles. From an environmental point of view it was not perfect, but nevertheless all comment seemed grounded in reality.

Do Australian journalists make the population-environment connection? Clearly not enough but the few who do set an excellent example.

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