



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY  
AT THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB



Australian Government  
Department of Immigration  
and Citizenship

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***MANAGING MIGRATION, BUILDING A NATION: THE VIEW FROM AUSTRALIA***

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Transcript

Ladies and Gentleman, Australia and the UK, of course, share a wonderful history of democratic freedoms, including our common systems of parliamentary government, the rule of law, and of lively and open public debate. The Royal Commonwealth Society, which promotes discussion on a wide range of issues, is a prime example of how these rights and freedoms can be put into action to engage people on international issues and facilitate the exchange of ideas. It is therefore a great pleasure to contribute to discussions today, to assist in public information and debate.

The migration of people has long been an issue that has drawn significant attention in the public consciousness, here in the UK, in Australia, and indeed in most countries of the world. Questions about migration have been debated in parliaments, in courts, in the media, in academia, and, naturally, in the court of public opinion. Often, competing views and interests have to be weighed, which makes migration, at times, a controversial issue. However, this sustained debate and discourse is a reflection of national desires to work out who we are as a country, who we should be as a nation and a people, and who we want to be. This is a view that can be applied equally in both Australia and the UK. The history of migration is one of the great stories in the building of modern Australia. Australia, like the UK, has experienced a long history of migration, and has benefited enormously from the rich economic and cultural contributions of migrants. Migration keeps us open to the world, it continues to renew us with ideas, experiences and wisdom, and harnesses the efforts of people all around the world to build our society. Simply said, people migrate to succeed, not to fail.

In Australia, all aspects of our approach to the entry of non-citizens are integrated. Initial enquiries of wanting to visit Australia for tourism, through to our migrant and refugee programmes, to settlement programmes, to becoming an Australian citizen, and finally in reaping the benefits and supporting the development of a diverse and multicultural society. These functions are all managed in one integrated department, my department, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Like Australia, the UK has been a destination for migrants from all parts of the world. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries, thousands of French Protestants chose to settle in Britain; from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, tens of thousands of Jewish migrants arrived from Continental Europe, while later on, many migrants have arrived from the Subcontinent and from the Caribbean and Africa, all adding to the rich cultural heritage of this nation. The traditional movement of people too and from Britain and Australia, as well as the broader Commonwealth, has been an enduring feature of relations between the UK and Australia. Indeed, many Australians have come here- temporarily or for further periods- enriching this society. I was delighted to see Dame Professor Valerie Beral, an Australian that came here four decades ago, who is an epidemiologist at Oxford University, a fellow of the Royal Society, and the head of the Cancer Epidemiology Unit for Cancer Research UK, who was made a companion of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours, just last month.

The UK itself, of course, has been a significant source of migrants to Australia. As you will all know, this started between 1788 and 1868, when 160, 000 UK citizens, somewhat reluctantly (!), began arriving at Australia's shores. My wife's family- she can trace her ancestors back to a Royal Marine who was on the first fleet as well as a convict woman who was on the first fleet. Free settlers also began arriving in Australia in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and, since then, the UK has consistently been among Australia's top sources of migrants, as well as temporary visitors. Even today, UK citizens are the largest foreign-born group in Australia, making close to a quarter of all foreign-born people in Australia.

Our exchange of people is extraordinary, and worth reflecting on. Just to name a few, Australia has given you Valerie Beral, Dame Edna Everage, Sir Rolf Harris- who turned 80 this week- Clive James, Kylie Minogue, Patricia Hewitt, Geoffrey Robinson, Germaine Greer, and Elisabeth Murdoch. You in turn have given us the South Australian Premier Mike Rann, our Antarctic Explorer Sir Douglas Mawson, the 'Father of Federations' Sir Henry Parkes, Olivia Newton-John, the Bee Gees, Leo Sayer, Australian of the Year, Dr. Fiona Wood, Professor Ian Frazer, and three members of our current Federal Cabinet, including the Immigration Minister Chris Evans, and our new Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. I almost added Mick Jagger to that list, because I didn't realise until recently that Mick's Mum was born in Australia.

I had the chance to congratulate our new Prime Minister last Friday, when she met heads of departments for an hour or so, and some time ago, being a cautious public servant, I had done a little research, and managed to find an entire file, from the Australian High Commission, for the migration of the Gillard family, from Barry in Wales in 1965. I presented her with a copy, and I've just got a couple of extracts here. Our migration officer at the time, who interviewed her Mum and Dad, John and Moira, was pretty far-sighted; the office comments at the bottom of the application indicate 'A good family, well-presented, keen to migrate, quite realistic in outlook, should settle well'. And I was able to present our Prime Minister with a copy of the receipt of the twenty pounds her parents paid on the 'Ten Pound Pom' scheme. And I, somewhat obsequiously, made the comment that the kids were free, and that Australia had done pretty well out of the whole transaction. I think I've ensured the continuation of my department for at least another three or four years(!).

Ladies and Gentlemen, since the end of World War II, some 7 million people have come to Australia as new settlers. Some 750, 000 of those arrived as displaced persons or refugees. So, in our current population of around 22 million people, nearly a quarter of Australians were born overseas, and nearly half of us were born overseas or had a parent who was born overseas, making us perhaps the most diverse, Western, developed economy in the world. The contribution that these migrants and their children have made to Australian culture, society and prosperity has been a very important factor in shaping our modern nation.

The proportion of UK-born people in Australia has been declining in recent years, as countries like India have made an increasingly larger share of foreign-born nationals in Australia. In the 2008-9 financial year, for example, India was the largest single source of migrants in the general- skilled migration category, just ahead of the UK and China. It was also the largest source- country of students for Australia. Interestingly, Indian- born nationals are among the most common foreign-born residents living in the United Kingdom, again highlighting the close people links between Australia, the UK, and other parts of the Commonwealth.

The history of Australian migration has, of course, at times been controversial. The 'White Australia' policy describes the approach Australia took to immigration from federation in 1901, until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with the final vestiges being abolished in 1973. Implementation of this policy include the infamous 'Dictation Test' which was used to exclude certain applicants, by requiring them to pass a written English- language test, or indeed other languages, occasionally Gaelic, with which they were not necessarily familiar. As a result, the proportion of the population born outside Australia reached an incredible low, with just 2% of Australian residents in 1947 being born outside Australia, the British Isles and New Zealand. With the progressive abolition of the White Australia policy, finally being removed in 1973, around 45% of the Australian population has now been born overseas, or has had one parent born overseas.

Migrants come from virtually every country in the world. Central to Australia's migration programme in the post-war period has been the Migration Act of 1958. The Act provides the framework under which the Migration Minister and officers of the department have made decisions on visa applications, assessing thousands of potential migrants. In the early days of the immigration programme, these decisions were made purely as an individual prerogative. There was little independent or parliamentary scrutiny, leading often to criticisms of subjectiveness. At the end of the 1970s, however, Australia introduced a points-based system that gave weight to factors such as family ties, occupational and language skills. This points system brought greater objectivity to visa decision-making, and has endured as a policy tool, with frequent refinements, to this day. I feel a certain amount of pride in being involved, a few years ago, in assisting the UK with implementing a points-based system, after seeing ours in operation. Australia, of course, has modelled our points test on that of Canada, highlighting the value that we can all gain from sharing our ideas and expertise and knowledge of best practice.

The modern framework of Australia's settlement programme was also the result of groundbreaking work in the 1970s, and 1980s. In 1978, the Galbally Report reviewed existing settlement services in Australia, and outlined a detailed programme of action based on four principles. First, that all members of our society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential, and must have equal access to programmes and services. Second, that every person must be able to maintain his or her culture, without prejudice or disadvantage, and be able to embrace and understand other cultures. Third, that the needs of migrants must in general be met by programmes and services available to the whole community, but that special services and programmes were necessary at times, to ensure equality of access and provision of services. Fourth, that programmes and services should be designed in full consultation with clients, and self-help should be encouraged as much as possible, with a view to helping migrants to become self-reliant as quickly as possible. The adoption of the Galbally Report led to further developments in settlement services and multicultural services in Australia, and has set the framework for today's services.

In 1988, building on previous work, the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies was convened, chaired by academic and former diplomat, Professor Steven Fitzgerald. The committee considered the purpose and rationale of Australia's migration programme, and the extent to which it

could meet the demands of increased people-flow. The result of the committee's considerations, the Fitzgerald Report, was a significant moment for the evolution of Australia's migration programme, and shaped the system that we now have. The Report outlines 73 recommendations, on all aspects of the migration programme. It promoted the commitment to non-discrimination, and the philosophy of managing migration in the interest of all Australians, particularly to enhance Australia's social, economic and cultural development.

In my view, critical to creating the success of the modern migration programme has been the provision of specialised programmes for newly-arrived refugees, as well as pathways to Australian citizenship for new settlers, including skilled migrants. And key to understanding modern Australia is understanding that Australia is indeed multicultural, as uniquely summarised in 'The People of Australia', a statement on cultural diversity recently produced by the body that advises the government on social cohesion, the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, chaired by the Chief Executive of the Australian Football League, Andrew Demetriou. The Council said 'Multiculturalism in Australia is this Australia, this democracy, the country we know. Australia is multicultural, always has been and, we can say with certainty, always will be'.

Australia's skilled migration programmes have been closely managed for more than six decades, to fill skill shortages that support the nation's economic activity and growth. The Snowy Mountain Scheme, in which 100, 000 migrant workers helped construct Australia's largest ever infrastructure project- The Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric System- and, indeed, the broader post-Second World War immigration boom. Today, we're going through a similar generational change in the migration programme, brought about by various reforms being brought by our current government and Minister, Chris Evans. A priority of the government has been to inject greater agility into the migration programme. This means having and employing a flexible capability to achieve priorities quickly, which is vital for managing migration in an often turbulent economic climate. For example, only 2 years ago, in early 2008, Australia was in the midst of a widespread skills shortage, brought on by the extraordinary mining boom. Only a short time after that, of course, we all went through the global economic crisis, which led to a reduction in migrant intake. But Australia has, again, reached the point where we need particular skills as the economy resumes growth. The changes introduced by the government have sought to address pronounced gaps in our labour market for positions that we can't fill domestically or quickly, domestically.

Australia's permanent migration programme seeks to address larger labour issues, through three main categories. An employer-sponsored demand driven pathway, which allows employers to directly sponsor migrants; A business-skills component, which enables individuals to permanently migrate on the basis of running a new or existing business, and the general-skills migration pathway, an independent pathway, where migrants are selected via the points test, for their human capital attributes such as age, skills, qualifications, experience and language ability. The government is reforming the permanent skills migration programme, to ensure it's more responsive to the needs of industry and employers, and better addresses the nation's future skills needs. This includes the introduction of a new 'Skills Occupations List' which outlines the occupations in greatest demand in Australia, particularly those that require a long lead time of formal education and training, but are in demand right now.

A review of the points test is also being conducted. The review is being undertaken to ensure that the points test is selecting high-quality, high-calibre applicants with skills Australia needs for the future. While the points test has served us well over a number of years, it is important to understand whether sufficient numbers of points are awarded for work experience and excellence in English, and whether there should be points for qualifications obtained from overseas universities, amongst other

considerations. To further inform the way we go about developing skills needs, the Department has been developing a long-term planning framework for migration. The framework will provide policy guidelines to ensure that migration levels provide for the on-going good of Australia, through an optimal balance between Australia's population and our labour market and economic development. Also, to ensure sustainable urban and regional development outcomes over the medium and long-term. The framework will not become a target-setting mechanism, but rather a policy guiding tool for making decisions about visa-settings for our temporary and permanent migration schemes. The framework will ensure that future immigration levels are driven by the genuine economic needs of the country, and not visa-settings and the unilateral desire of prospective migrants to come to Australia. It will also improve our ability to forecast future immigration levels, and thus improve our planning and policies in relation to the natural environment, infrastructure, and social exclusion.

Population growth has become an increasingly important issue for Australians. The issue has been subject to extensive popular debate, and, as a contributing factor to population growth, net overseas migration has received its fair share of attention. The debate has arisen in the context of a number of demographic challenges. Australia, like many other developed countries, is facing a shrinking tax-base, brought on by an aging population. In the near future, more Australians will begin to retire, than join, the work-force. For example, the Australian Government Inter-Generational Report, released in February, has projected that the proportion of working people will fall, with only 2.7 people of working age to support each Australian aged 65 or older by 2050. This compares to 5 working-age people today and 7.5 in 1970. This aging of the population will have significant implications for economic growth and government finances, as older Australians move to retirement, and labour participation drops. The report has highlighted very significant increases in health and welfare expenditure we face over the next 40 years.

While a well-managed migration programme will not stem the flow of population-aging, it will help ameliorate its effects. It will also boost living standards, as our migrants tend to be younger and better-educated than the population at large. As part of the government's plan to challenge the problem of population growth, the Prime Minister recently announced the appointment of Tony Burke as Australia's first Minister for Sustainable Population. Minister Burke's first task will be to develop Australia's first comprehensive Population Strategy, which he'll do over the next 12 months. The Strategy will consider the social and economic infrastructure that Australia will need in order to support a growing population. It will take into account the need for specific infrastructure, such as roads, housing and service-delivery; as well as an assessment for the opportunities the growing population would create, such as Australia's economic growth. My department's long-term planning framework, which I mentioned earlier, will contribute to the Population Minister's Strategy.

The challenges facing migrant-receiving countries, including the array of issues in relation to population, regular and irregular migration and people-smuggling, require well-analysed, evidence-based responses. It is therefore vital to capture the insights and expectations of organisations in the third sector, to build up a knowledge base in best-practice of managing migration and border-control, amongst other important issues. As part of the efforts to build the knowledge-base, my department has worked closely with the Australian National University to develop, justify and fine-tune migration policies to meet the needs of our changing times. In December 2008, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship launched the Australian Migration Multicultural Advisory Council, which provides independent advice to the Australian government on strengthening Australia's identity as a diverse, multicultural country. We also continually look for ideas from overseas counterparts. As part of my visit here in London, I've taken part in the 5-Country Conference, joining counterparts from the UK, US, Canada and New Zealand, to share information and ideas about the challenges we all face in our very complex policy environments. I've

separately met colleagues from the UK Border Agency, and the UK Home Office. Given the broadly similar approaches and requirements of our migration policies and programmes, the discussions I've taken part in have been particularly useful.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I again thank you for the invitation, and very cordial hospitality. It's been a great pleasure to speak with you about the contribution that migration has made to Australian society, and the important role it plays in meeting the various challenges that we face in the years ahead. Australia values its place in the Commonwealth, and our enduring relationship with the UK, and I hope my presentation today has contributed to the broader debate on migration, and supports the ongoing role of the Royal Commonwealth Society, in discussing the key issues.