



Sustainable Population Australia Inc.

Patrons: Hon. Bob Carr, Dr Paul Collins, Prof Tim Flannery, Em Prof Ian Lowe, Dr Mary E White

Youth Ambassador: Ms Bindi Irwin

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26th December, 2017

Kirstin McLiesh
Head, Audience and Consumer Affairs
ABC
GPO Box 9994
Sydney 2001

Ms Michelle Guthrie
Chair ABC Board

Dear Ms McLiesh and Ms Guthrie,

This is a hard copy of letter e-mailed to the ABC a fortnight ago. As I am unaware of any acknowledgement of receipt of that e-mailed version **I request that an acknowledgment of receipt of this letter be e-mailed to me at vp@population.org.au**

We write in response to your letter (KM, 26/8/2016) which was itself a response to a letter from us (copy included) pointing to bias in the ABC as regards understanding and coverage of the important issues of population and economic growth. **You asked for examples which illustrate our complaint.** We began collecting these shortly after your letter arrived. There were then several gaps in collecting these examples and finally we come up to the present time when, in our opinion the situation has not changed and the ABC continues to promote a set of values which are not only demonstrably wrong but pose serious dangers to the future of Australia and the world. We also note that asking for specific examples rather indicates that our complaint was not understood. We were and are complaining, not about specific programs but a pervasive view pervading almost all ABC programs

Attributing the ABC's persistent omissions of a population perspective to bias is about as difficult as attributing any particular storm to climate change. But the pattern is increasingly convincing. The following are only a sample.

12th November 2016

What keeps me awake at night. This program on water began with the statement that water was a limited resource but that demand was increasing. It identified the limits on water supply as underpinning several of the areas in turmoil in the Middle East, especially Syria. It touched on the appalling conditions in Yemen, specifically dealing with declining water per capita but again failed to mention the very high fertility rate in Yemen or any of the other middle east countries which appear on the nightly ABC TV news showing very large numbers of children but with never a comment on the size of the population or the fact that the high population growth has exacerbated the water shortage per capita. It is not a water shortage but a longage of people. This is the point that the ABC repeatedly misses. The standard analysis by ABC

journalists as to what ails many of the middle-east countries is presented in political and religious conflict terms; never does it point to the underlying drivers: too many people trying to derive resources, including water and food, from a finite environment.

4th March 2017

Saturday Extra featured a long interview regarding the plight of refugees in Sudan but failed to even mention population growth as a driver of this and similar distressing situations across much of the world, especially the middle east and throughout Africa. Population growth is clearly going to make the present look like a picnic compared with the inevitable future. By not dealing with population and implying that the real need is for short-term aid rather than family planning, contraception availability, education and a rise in the standard of living and equality of women, such programs will make the future worse than it needs to be. In short, such programs will increase the totality of human suffering.

See the 2 minute video from the UN on the plight across the Sahel:

<http://oasisinitiative.berkeley.edu/news/>

This item on *Saturday Extra* was not isolated. A week earlier on a different program a similar account from another refugee camp in Africa failed to mention population growth as a factor.

24th March 2017

Stan Grant interviewed Dick Smith in a setting of a Sydney market on the evening *Link* program on ABC TV. This part of the program was said to be about population and Australia's immigration intake. However the context set by Stan Grant was that the size of a sustainable population can be determined by public opinion and Stan kept asking leading questions of those in the market suggesting that any reduction in immigration would be detrimental to their business. Stan could not be more wrong in his assumption. Finding a sustainable population size for Australia is no more a matter of public opinion than using public opinion to find the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that can be allowed without invoking climate change, or the number of sheep that can be kept permanently in a paddock without overgrazing. These are all matters in which there is good and essential science underpinning consideration of these matters but Stan consistently talked over Dick and did not allow him to advance any of them.

28th March 2017

On *Lateline* Jeremy Fernandez interviewed HRH Haya Bint al Hussein of Jordan who is in Australia in her role as assisting international refugees and speaking with Australia's Foreign Minister. Princess Haya made the remarkable claim that the world produces three times as much food as needed. This went unchallenged. She was not asked a single question about the very high fertility rates in middle eastern countries and how this was impacting (what is usually called the shortage of food and water but is really) the longage of people. Note that almost every news item that covers the Middle Eastern refugee situation speaks of families of 4, 6 and 8 children and every video clip shows a preponderance of children. There is no shortage of evidence. She was not asked a single question on family planning or use of contraception.

28th March 2017

On the same day on *Radio National* Fran Kelly also interviewed the princess and again there was a complete absence of any questions about the very high fertility rates in Middle East countries, what her charities might be doing about this, about Trump's change to foreign aid specifically with respect to family planning clinics providing abortion advice or services and

whether she would be asking the Australian Foreign Minister for additional foreign aid to counter this deficit. Women's standing in Jordan was touched on but only with respect to the number of women in significant positions in government and society.

28th March 2017

ABC RN Drive with Patricia Karvelas. Interview with three interviewees on housing affordability. First comment by first interviewee was that it was a matter of both supply and demand and there was a gap. Karvelas did not pick up on the demand side throughout the interview. She identified 'the elephant in the room' as negative gearing but failed to identify that 60% of demand is being fed by high immigration and that many (including prominent economists like Judith Sloan) have identified this as a very significant factor in housing affordability. The first interviewer mentioned immigration in his closing remarks but no one picked up on this remark.

31st March 2017

The Drum. A segment on population that contained an entirely one-sided panel with no mention of environmental sustainability in relation to population growth. Thus, claims that we need population growth, that it was inevitable, that growth was wonderful, that it benefitted the economy, that government could do nothing to limit population growth, that Japan was shrinking and we don't want to go down that path were all left to stand as truths whereas every single one of these claims can be refuted with well-documented evidence. The selection of such a panel without an alternative voice shows bias.

6th, 7th, 10th April 2017

Three sessions on *RN* on almost successive days dealt with aspects of housing affordability but none mentioned population growth or immigration.

6th April 2017

Interview on with respect to the role of transport development as a way of alleviating the problem of housing affordability (Marion Tell). This was based around a talk by Phillip Lowe, Reserve Bank Governor. Lowe had mentioned population as a driver of housing unaffordability but this was not taken up by Fran Kelly. Together with the other programs not mentioning population growth and immigration this seems a quite deliberate omission.

7th April 2017

Interview with MP, Sarah Henderson who claimed that improving rail links to regional centres would improve housing affordability. No questions asked about population growth or immigration intake.

10th April 2017

Interview with Saul Eslake about use of superannuation as a way of boosting housing supply but again no mention of population growth or the size of the immigration intake.

17th April 2017

Patricia Karvelas interviewing Matt Canavan. Long interview on a number of matters but touching on housing affordability. Canavan mentions population increase and how it is causing problems in Sydney and Melbourne but then provides a 'solution' in opening up more regional centres especially in north Queensland. Patricia does not suggest that perhaps the problem might be the increase in population caused largely by high immigration over which the Federal Government has control.

4 May 2017

RN's PM featured what seemed to be an advertorial seeking interstate migration into the Northern Territory. It opened with the claim, "For the eighth consecutive year, the Northern Territory has recorded negative population growth." This is a blatant falsehood, which could have been easily checked. The statistic it probably referred to was "net interstate migration", which has indeed been negative and is a sure sign that jobs are difficult to find – the exact opposite of the claim made in the piece. The assumption that a declining population is of itself a problem that needs remedying, regardless of job availability, also showed bias.

8th September 2017

Shooting the Past: All hands on deck. This piece began as an interesting story about how the White Australia Policy was actually out of step with Australian culture and attitudes around the turn of the 20th Century. Contrary to the way the ABC usually depicts it, as "White Australia" being a bigoted and xenophobic society, this discussion demonstrated that we were always racially and culturally tolerant, relative to many countries, and the political "white Australia policy" was out of step, just as current federal settings delivering ultra-high population growth are out of step with public views. However, the program quickly turned into a propaganda piece championing unlimited immigration, as if it's all about race and character, and as if the existence of one respected non-European doctor is an argument for unlimited immigration, completely blind to the issue of population growth rate and its impacts. George Megalogenis was trotted out as an 'expert' and his assertions unchallenged, despite being totally baseless and tendentious. There is no substance to his claims that Australia's economy was stifled due to restricted immigration (indeed none globally that ethnic diversity correlates with economic performance), nor that the children of immigrants are particularly high contributors in the national interest. Indeed, it is a peculiar form of racism to suggest that this is so. An ABC search shows over 300 references to George Megalogenis yet no mention of the recent TAPRI Survey into current attitudes to population size and growth in Australia and which showed a majority of people in favour of a smaller immigration intake. Not all of GM's references are to immigration but a large number are.

23 November 2017

Blackmail — the business plan for cheaper wages ABC news article by David Chau covered the ACTU's exposé of underpayment of 457 visa workers, including quotes acknowledging that the majority of migrant workers were affected, that the availability of this cheap labour undermined job opportunities and wages for locals, and that this stifled the whole economy by reducing spending. But instead of questioning the scale of worker importation, the ABC implied that the exploitation could be avoided by reducing visa restrictions – so that migrants would be more free to compete as they will with Australian job seekers, or indeed to remain unemployed. No connection was made with the Wage Theft report from UNSW and UTS, released the same week, documenting exploitation of student, backpacker and guest worker visa holders. No spark of recognition was given that the extent of this exploitation destroys the entire rationale for the enlarged skilled migration program, its claims to improve productivity and generate job opportunities for locals, supposedly justifying its impacts on infrastructure and housing affordability.

3 December 2017

Sunday Roundtable, Why aren't wages going up? This panel failed to make any mention of the huge oversupply of labour and rising numbers of applicants for each available job. No mention was made of any of the recent reports exposing systemic underpayment and abuse of foreign workers, mentioned above. The impression was given that workers were simply not

bargaining with employers as hard as in the past. That elevated immigration levels have destroyed their bargaining ability was not mentioned.

4 December 2017

RN Breakfast – Fran Kelly interviewed Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala on the work of Gavi Vaccine Alliance, and speculated that better health services like vaccination would reduce the incentive for people to migrate from sub-Saharan Africa. Can she really be so naïve about population pressure? Gavi claimed that vaccination programs saved \$16 for each dollar spent. The figure for family planning programs is over \$100 per dollar spent.

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Finally a search across the ABC from September 2016 to 19th April, 2017 failed to find a single ABC reference to the impact of population increase/ immigration on housing affordability. Indeed there is not a single reference to any impact on any aspect of infrastructure failure and the increase in population being driven by very high immigration.

Bringing this right up to the present, it is still the case that a search of the ABC website shows no references linking population/immigration (size) with unaffordable housing or the range of inadequate infrastructure services caused in part by high population growth dependent on very high levels of immigration intake — and this entirely within the federal government’s ability to determine.

On the international front the ABC continues to ignore the key role of population growth in the plight of millions, especially children. Daily we are shown and told about the plight of those in Yemen but no mention of the fact that the fertility rate in Yemen is over 4 children per woman and the population growth rate is 2.5%. At this rate the population will double in 28 years. (How many will be starving and dying of thirst then?) This is not to deny that other factors also impact the plight of the Yemenis. But by failing to recognise the role of population growth the ABC is denying its importance and making it more difficult to urge the Australian and other governments to increase foreign aid for family planning, contraception, women’s health and education. Similar criticism applies to much of the coverage by the ABC to many African countries.

Within recent weeks an article has been published in a refereed science journal, *Bioscience*, titled ‘World Scientists’ Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice’. It was authored by nine principal scientists and endorsed by 15,364 scientist signatories from 184 countries. It followed an initial warning published in 1992. Inter alia this document paints a grim warning for humanity if we stay on our present growth oriented course.

*‘We are jeopardising our future by not reining in our intense but geographically and demographically uneven material consumption and by not perceiving continued rapid population growth as a primary driver behind many ecological and even societal threats. By failing to adequately limit population growth, reassess the role of an economy rooted in growth, reduce greenhouse gases, incentivise renewable energy, protect habitat, restore ecosystems, curb pollution, halt defaunation, and constrain invasive alien species, humanity is not taking the urgent steps needed to safeguard our imperilled biosphere.....We must recognise, in our day-to-day lives **and in our governing institutions**, that Earth with all its life is our only home.’ (Emphasis added)*

It seems the ABC gave no coverage to the publication of this important warning. However, if mention was made but missed by us, our criticism is not weakened but rather strengthened. A search of the ABC Website under an exhaustive range of key words including the principal author shows no mention of this article. Even more damning, in our view, is that neither this nor many other similar warnings have made one jot of difference to the underlying and

fundamental paradigm that informs all the ABC's principal journalists, namely that growth is good, necessary, inevitable, desirable, and can continue for ever.

Thus at this critical time in the evolution of human civilisation when a major change of direction is necessary, the ABC has become part of the problem rather than, as we believe it should be, an important part of the solution.

In the light of all the evidence we have presented in this letter, we repeat our request for a meeting with the Board or with the ABC Chair.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra M Kanck". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and a distinct 'M'.

Hon. Sandra Kanck
Vice-President

Enc.