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INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF AID EFFECTIVENESS

SUBMISSION by

SUSTAINABLE POPULATION AUSTRALIA

1. Introduction

Sustainable Population Australia (SPA) welcomes this opportunity for “anyone who has views on Australia’s aid program to have their say”. In particular, we are pleased, as both members of the public and members of a civil society group, to have been invited by Sandy Hollway, AO, Chair of the Independent Review, to offer our views on how Australia’s aid program can be strengthened in the years ahead.

SPA, originally known as Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population (AESP) was formed more than 22 years ago by a group of six Canberrans concerned about the potentially disastrous consequences for mankind and all other living creatures of continued rapid population growth in Australia and globally. The organisation has grown from this small beginning into a national body with branches in all States and a membership of more than 1200.

Early SPA members and supporters included historian Manning Clark, poet A.D. Hope and scientist Sir MacFarlane Burnett. Our first patron was poet and environmentalist Judith Wright. Our organisation has continued to be supported by many distinguished Australians, notably Professor Frank Fenner, who passed away in November 2010 at the age of 95. Professor Fenner was a senior member of the World Health Organisation team that eradicated the smallpox virus, saving hundreds of millions of lives (some estimate as many as 500 million) during the 20th century.

SPA Patrons today, as listed at the top of this submission, include The Hon Bob Carr, former Premier of New South Wales, Professor Ian Lowe, President of the Australian Conservation Foundation, Professor Tim Flannery, palaeontologist and environmentalist, Dr Mary White, palaeobotanist and author, and Dr Paul Collins, historian, broadcaster and writer.

We are encouraged by the support of these distinguished Australians to continue to advocate policies that will slow the pace of human population growth, both in Australia and globally. Our aims and objectives are:

1. To contribute to public awareness of the limits of Australian population growth from ecological, social and economic viewpoints.
2. To promote awareness that the survival of an ecologically sustainable population depends on its renewable resource base.
3. To help promote policies that will lead to stabilisation, then reduction, of Australia's population by encouraging near replacement fertility rates and low immigration rates.
4. To promote urban and rural lifestyles and practices that are in harmony with the realities of the Australian environment, its resource base and its biodiversity.
5. To advocate low immigration rates while rejecting any selection based on race.
6. To help promote policies that will lead to the stabilisation, then reduction of global population.

It is in the context of the last of these objectives – “to help promote policies that will lead to the stabilisation, then reduction of global population” – that we are making this submission to the Independent Review.

Since its foundation SPA has advocated an increase in Australia's spending on international aid, and in particular an increase in aid devoted to population-related programs such as family planning, education of women, primary health care, gender equity, maternal and child health and reduction of violence against women, as essential steps towards peace and prosperity in a context of low or no population growth — or indeed in the longer term of a return of world population to lower levels such as the 2.5 billion it was in 1950, less than one lifetime ago.

SPA is strongly supportive of a non-coercive, human rights-based approach to family planning and advocates meeting unmet demand as a high priority, so that people have a real choice as to the number and timing of the children in their families.

SPA believes the stabilisation, then reduction, of human numbers is essential to the long-term survival of human kind. And we believe it is essential for government policies, particularly in the area of population growth, to focus on the long term, not just on the next three, five or even ten years.

We envisage a world in which the human race will learn to mitigate the consequences of its own “death control” – measures such as the eradication of the smallpox virus which have had the consequence that hundreds of millions of people survive today who would have been carried off by disease in the past.

It should be noted here that smallpox hero and SPA Patron Professor Fenner was not the only distinguished Australian medical scientist to have been concerned about the removal of a natural “control” on population growth. The Australian inventor of penicillin, Sir Howard Florey, Nobel Laureate and foundation Chancellor of the

Australian National University, was equally concerned. He told the National Press Club 1966:

“Of all the changes brought about by scientific and technological advances, none is more important than the effects that hygiene and medicine have had in bringing about rapid increases in population, not only in Asia but in places like Great Britain and the United States. The problems posed by this rapid increase are second to none in the modern world”.

Oddly, although many are prepared to acknowledge the greatness of Australians such as Florey and Fenner, few have been prepared to take their views on population growth seriously – perhaps because of the time frames involved – scientists see the world from a long-term perspective, politicians and policy makers from a short-term perspective. This is a fatally flawed approach, because any public policy that does not have regard for the long-term consequences of its recommendations is ultimately worthless.

Why does any nation bother giving international development aid? Australia’s aid aims to achieve outcomes whereby the welfare of people in less wealthy nations in our region will improve, with consequent positive outcomes for Australians as well as for those overseas people. But most of these measures – for example, improved education – are not likely to have their full effect until many years into the future. This argues that one of the distinguishing features of overseas aid is that it is forward looking – it has the aim of creating a better world for future generations.

How far into the future? Ten years? A human lifetime? Two lifetimes? A hundred years? 200 years? 500 years? As the Egyptian crisis has illustrated, it is difficult to see into the future even a few days, but surely our public policies should be being framed with a view to a long-term future for mankind, lasting at least some hundreds of years into the future – not planning for such a future seems futile.

This is the perspective that informs the following submission – that Australia’s international aid policies should be predicated on the welfare of humans and their natural support systems for *hundreds of years* into the future, and that growing populations combined with growing consumption of resources per capita are incompatible with such an outcome. We submit that unless the populations of Australia and her neighbours, and indeed all nations in the world, begin to stabilise there will be inevitable cataclysmic consequences involving war, famine and disease. A halt in population growth will not necessarily avoid such a gloomy prognosis, but it will at least make it less likely.

Having said this, we acknowledge the initiative announced by the Australian Government in September 2010 to spend \$1.6 billion over the next five years as part of its support for the UN’s new Alliance for Reproductive, Maternal and Newborn Health.

Recommendations

1. SPA notes that Australia’s official development assistance (ODA) budget of \$4.3 billion in the 2010/2011 Budget was a real increase of 9 per cent over the previous year, bringing the ODA program to 0.33% of Gross National Income. At this rate the Government is progressing slowly towards reaching its target of 0.5 per cent

of GNI (around \$8-9 billion) by 2015. However an increase of 0.02 per cent is sluggish progress towards this goal, and an average increase of more than double that – 0.0425 per cent – will be necessary over the next four financial years to reach 0.5 per cent.

Further, SPA notes that at 0.33% of GNI Australia still lags behind many OECD countries who contribute significantly more aid – in fact, Australia is currently in 16th position out of 23 OECD donor countries.

SPA believes the effectiveness of Australia’s aid budget can be boosted by increasing the quantum of it, in such a way that the many important initiatives within the program can continue to be developed while the all-important population-related matters are developed to a much greater degree than at present.

SPA **recommends** that the Government to accelerate the present growth trajectory to reach 0.6 per cent of GNI by 2015 and to continue growing at 0.05 per cent over the ensuing four years to reach the UN-recommended level of 0.7 per cent of GNI by 2017. Thereafter, SPA **recommends** Australia should consider joining countries such as Finland, which with a population of only 5 million still manages to contribute 1 per cent of its GNI to overseas aid.

2. Within the Aid Budget, health funding increased from \$475 million in 2009/2010 to \$555 million in 2010/2011. However only around \$28 million of this aid has been designated specifically to reproductive health.

SPA **recommends** spending on reproductive health be doubled to \$56 million in 2011/12, increased to \$100 million in 2012/13, to \$150 million in 2013/14 and to \$200 million in 2014/15, and be kept growing at a rate of at least 10 per cent per annum in subsequent years. We **recommend** that such increases not come at the expense of other sub-sectors in health priorities section of the Aid Budget.

3. SPA **recommends** that AusAID pay very close attention to the very considerable successes that has been achieved by the US-based Population Media Centre in using entertainment-education strategies, like radio or TV “soap operas”, to improve the health and well-being of people around the world. SPA **recommends** that as a matter of urgency AusAID devote very significant amounts of funding to the careful development of similar serialized dramas in countries throughout Australia’s aid region. Adopting a similar approach to that taken by the PMC would be an enormous step forward in increasing the effectiveness of Australia’s aid program, because PMC approach has been proven by careful quantitative and qualitative studies to have been highly effective in changing attitudes and behaviours. In Australia’s aid region, PMC is currently working in Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Vietnam and AusAID should give expanded assistance to this kind of work and ensure it is replicated in all other recipient nations, with careful measurement of its success and overall contribution to national well-being.
4. SPA **recommends** that population issues be much more openly discussed. In the aid community population appears to have taken on a “taboo” status similar to talking about sex in the repressed Australia of the pre-Pill days of the 1940s. This is enormously damaging, because unless a subject can be discussed in open daylight it becomes warped, misunderstood and feared. Slavery would never have

been abolished if it had been frowned upon to mention the “S” word in the way it is now frowned on to mention the “P” word in the aid community.

SPA **recommends** that AusAID take a lead in returning to an era where it is not only tolerated, but actively encouraged, to talk about population growth. SPA **recommends** AusAID mount a highly proactive education campaign both within Australia and in recipient nations to encourage discussion, debate and consideration of population issues and to highlight just how beneficial attention to slowing population growth can be in helping to achieve all MDGs. For example, much could be made of the example of the Indian State of Kerala, which has the highest female literacy rate in the world and is mercifully free of many of the problems of poverty and overcrowding that beset most other parts of India.

SPA **recommends** that AusAID identify and sponsor eloquent and highly respected spokespersons for limiting population growth, such as Jane Goodall and Sir David Attenborough, to voice their opinions and support population programs world-wide.

5. SPA **recommends** that AusAID significantly increase its funding support for international agencies such as UNFPA and WHO, and for population-related NGOs. Further, that AusAID carefully analyse NGO reproductive health programs including family planning, education of women, primary health care, gender equity, maternal and child health and reduction of violence against women, and ensure they are widely publicised, honoured, and emulated as best practice by other practitioners. A generously-funded international competition to encourage excellence in this field is also **recommended**.
6. SPA **recommends** that AusAID initiate its own thorough study of the extent of unmet demand for family planning and contraception in all nations in Australia’s aid region. World estimates for unmet demand vary between 200-350 million women/couples. SPA **recommends** that Australia verify with as great a degree of accuracy as possible through careful survey techniques what the real figure is in the Australian aid region. Subsequently, SPA **recommends** that the results of such a study be promulgated widely and that AusAID work to reduce unmet demand to zero. This will involve letting people have what they want, in terms of correct information, choice of contraceptive, and realistically affordable and accessible contraceptives.
7. SPA **recommends** AusAID declare its support for Millennium Development Goal 5, as revised in 2005, with its twin targets of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters between 1990 and 2015, and achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Further, SPA **recommends** AusAID declare its absolute determination to achieve MDG5 within Australia’s aid region – starting with Oceania – and devise and widely promulgate a strategy and timetable for achieving it, with monitoring checks and safeguards to ensure that the objectives are achieved. SPA believes Australia is not honoured by continuing to tolerate high maternal death rates and lack of access to reproductive health care within its region.

8. **SPA recommends** AusAID initiate an exhaustive study of the links between family planning and economic and social progress, for instance the contrast between Thailand and the Philippines. Thailand today receives one of the smallest allocations of Australian aid, whereas the Philippines still requires large amounts of aid. Why? What is the role of family planning in this, and what other examples are there in our region? Further, given the unreliability of much international data, **SPA recommends** AusAID initiate its own exhaustive study of population growth rates in all countries in the aid program. Further, SPA recommends that such a study examine existing strategies and develop possible new strategies whereby all countries in Australia's aid program can be assisted to stabilise their populations.

3. Conclusion

The role of population growth in exacerbating social, economic and environmental problems in Asia and Oceania – and the importance of restricting population growth in order to facilitate achievement of the Millennium Development Goals – has been acknowledged frankly by many key players such as Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and former Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda. Indonesia is embarking on a renewal of its family planning program with the aim of reducing population growth from 1.5 per cent to below one per cent – as a key part of its strategy to reduce poverty.

Population growth has also recently emerged as a key issue in Australia, with opinion polls consistently revealing 70 per cent opposition to continued high population growth (currently 1.7 per cent) and the Government acknowledging the strength of public feeling on the issue by appointing the nation's first Minister for Population, subsequently re-titled the Minister for Sustainable Population.

Australia's aid program can be significantly more effective if it acknowledges these developments, and gives a much higher priority to joining world-wide efforts to slow population growth and achieve population stability as soon as possible.

It might be apposite to finish with the words of Greens Leader Senator Bob Brown, who in September 2009 stated:

"No world leader can ignore the planet's population burden. There were 3 billion people when Kevin Rudd was born. There are 6.8 billion now. There will be 9 billion by mid-century. This population boom is not economic wisdom, it is a recipe for planetary exhaustion and great human tragedy. We need the wisdom to have economic growth with a steady-state population at most - this is the new common sense."

Yours sincerely

Hon. Sandra Kanck
SPA National President