

Submission into the “Inquiry into Ecological Carrying Capacity of the ACT and Region”.

1. The terms of reference suggest that the purpose of this inquiry is to establish the “carrying capacity” of the ACT (in regard to its population) while minimising the ecological impact on the ACT. The issue that the inquiry is addressing is :”what is the maximum population that the ACT can handle before causing long or short term ecological problems?”
2. The reason for this submission is to recommend to the Standing Committee that the ACT Government not decide to plan for the ACT’s future population based solely on this current inquiry as there are at least two other major aspects that also need to be urgently considered, perhaps with another inquiry, or two.
3. The obvious first aspect that arises is how to plan (well in advance) to halt the population growth or decrease the population (if we have by chance already surpassed our ecological limit.).
4. I recommend, therefore that another inquiry be considered to establish how to plan and set the population around a “sustainable” level given that the borders of the ACT are open, there are religious and social factors and that Federal policies play a role (especially with immigration and tax incentives and possible tax disincentives). A plan needs to be put in place so that existing businesses continue to survive and perhaps flourish (exports?) in a static population environment.
5. There will be no benefit to the people of the ACT if an inquiry is held but then no action is possible because of the above factors– what a waste of money that would be!.
6. The other aspect that arises relates to the impact of population on various economic and social welfare issues.

7. There is a perception in the community that population growth leads to economic stimulus, more jobs, better infrastructure and a more diverse society culturally. This may all be correct and desirable.
8. However, while population growth can be an integral contributor to these benefits, we need to know when the law of diminishing returns will start to impact on the average wealth per head of population. The average wealth per head of population can determine the extent to which a significant proportion of the population can actually enjoy the facilities in the community and maintain a high standard of food, clothing, shelter and mobility (transport). In looking at the wealth in the community one must look not only at incomes but also taxes and Government charges (including income gathering fines).
9. There are some disturbing trends that should already be of concern in respect to the diminishing returns from an ever increasing population. One is the increasing number of people often described as the working poor. That is, people who have full time jobs but are unable to live at a standard above the unemployed. While the Government does have programs to help with “affordable housing” that does not resolve that underlying issue.
10. There are also currently budgetary problems for the Government in terms of providing adequate income support for the unemployed and unemployable, and financial constraints on the Government in keeping up with basic infrastructure such as hospitals, mental health, adequate parking in the main town centres etc.
11. Therefore, we need an inquiry to establish whether an increase or decrease in our population will further disadvantage a significant portion of our society and how a greater population will really impact on the Government’s budget - after taking into account that a larger population may well require more Government funds for infrastructure but there may not necessarily be sufficient funds to actually keep pace with the needs of an ever growing population.

12. To sum up, I see the inquiry as a good first step but further separate major inquiries are needed on how to actually put in place a particular population level and on how to ensure that the population level does not encroach on an increasing number of people within the ACT experiencing lower average per head wealth and lower general standards of living.

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