

Australia's Population Debate – Who are the true “fascists”?

Michael Lardelli

To many Australians it is obvious that our environmental footprint/impact is not only a matter of how big are the feet but how many feet there are. But engaging in the debate over foot numbers/population has never been so fraught.

Australia is a dry, mostly desert continent of ancient/infertile soils. In the state of South Australia where I live, the citizens will proudly tell you that theirs is, “The driest state in the driest continent on Earth”. The fragility and the sometimes extreme nature of the Australian environment (fires/floods/droughts) has given its inhabitants an above-average awareness of their dependence on the natural world. After all, the [world's first “green” political party](#) was established in Australia during the early 1970s. However, just because Australia has rather strong environmental credentials does not mean extremes of opinion on population issues do not exist. In fact, over the years many former members of the Australian Greens have [left that party](#) in frustration at its refusal to take a more public stance on the vital issue of population growth.

In what may well be another example of Australia leading the world environmentally, this nation now has two political parties formed around population issues. The [Stable Population Party](#) (SPP) is registered for federal elections while the [Stop Population Growth Now Party](#) (SPGN) is registered in the state of South Australia. Both parties formed independently in around 2010 as debate raged on the prospect of a “[Big Australia](#)”. Also notable is a prominent lobby group, [Sustainable Population Australia](#) (SPA), that is politically non-aligned and draws its membership and leadership from all political persuasions. (One of its [patrons](#) was, until recently, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs.)

Australia today is a nation of [23 million people](#) increasing by more than one million people every three years. We have twice as many births as deaths and, on top of that, we receive 27 immigrants every hour. In fact, immigration makes up about 60% of our population growth. But this is a relatively recent phenomenon. In 1994 [projections of Australia's population](#) size saw it stabilising between 20 and 30 millions which was just as well since, at that time, the Australian Academy of Science [stated](#),

“In our view, the quality of all aspects of our children's lives will be maximised if the population of Australia by the mid 21st Century is kept to the low, stable end of the achievable range, i.e. to approximately 23 million.”

However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s business interests began [lobbying](#) the Howard Liberal government of that time to increase the rate of immigration and while Howard postured to Australians with his “tough on refugees” stance and declarations that “... we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come” he quietly opened the door to much greater inflows of authorised immigrants. This year Australia sprinted past the 23 million level with a rate of population growth rate of 1.8% (over three times the OECD average) that will double our population size by mid-century.

Over a decade after the opening of the immigration floodgates the difficulties of coping with rapid population growth are becoming apparent. Traffic congestion is endemic in all our major capitals, hospital beds are insufficient, schools are overcrowded and housing is largely unaffordable to all but wealthy investors. The “Australian dream” of a house and garden is largely forgotten for younger workers. For the luckier ones, future prospects are most likely that of paying off a huge mortgage (with the help of their partner) on a townhouse or apartment in a crowded

inner city. The rapid population growth (equivalent to an additional city larger than Canberra every year) is now having political consequences. State governments have fallen into [debt and unpopularity](#) in vain attempts to keep up with the enormous requirements for new infrastructure on top of maintaining existing stock. (They have been unable to afford the [hundreds of thousands of dollars in infrastructure](#) each additional person requires and have been forced to [privatise public assets](#) to cover the consequent debts.) Urban Australians are increasingly aware that their quality of life is deteriorating and are frustrated at their inability to stop inappropriate development ruining the amenity of the suburbs in which they live. A good illustration is the massive vote against the Liberal Party in the NSW seat of Miranda at the recent federal election when the rest of the nation swung to the Liberal Party to govern. Opinion [polling](#) indicated this was caused by anger at “overdevelopment” and cuts to health services.

Now that voices are being raised against continuing Australia’s rapid population growth the property industry and others who benefit from it feel threatened. A publicity offensive is needed to counter this threat to the easy profits that come from a continuously expanding market. Fortunately (for them) they have found an advocate in public relations consultant [Malcolm King](#). Since 2009 Malcolm has developed a reputation for vigorous but inaccurate attacks on those whom he describes as “[anti-populationists](#)”. However, the 2013 federal election saw Malcolm’s writing shift into high gear as he placed articles in many major national newspapers. Unfortunately, the editors of these newspapers have neglected their duty to ensure accuracy in the articles they carry. For example, one of Malcolm’s most common faux pas is incorrect naming. This is unexpected for someone who claims to run a, “professional writing business - [www.republicresumes.com.au](#) - specialising in use of high order persuasion and propaganda techniques”. (Is it dyslexia or something else? Does he believe it might protect him from prosecution for libel or slander?). In a 2009 article titled, “[The eco-fascist face of population control](#)” he falsely stated that, “*The SPNG (sic) is supported by the (sic) Sustainable Population Australia (SPA)*” in an apparent attempt to entangle the activities and motives of the two separate organizations. Further, he claimed that, “*The SPNG (sic) ask us to envision humans as vermin ravaging mother earth, much as the Nazis depicted Jews as rats*”.

Malcolm recently continued his Nazi-baiting of population organizations with an [extended attack](#) on the opening day of an “*anti-population conference*” (sic) funded by the Australian Academy of Science and organised by SPA. As an SPA member, I responded to King’s rather incoherent article in The Canberra Times with a [letter](#) to the editor,

“I was very disappointed to see The Canberra Times devote two-thirds of a page to the misleading writing of Malcolm King (“Population alarmists disregard human feelings”, Times2, October 11, p5).

“King has a serial history of attempting to create the impression that Australian organisations concerned with issues surrounding population growth are inspired by the Nazis or are somehow responsible for family planning policies adopted in India or China. One of his favourite tactics is to misname these organisations.

“In his recent article he described a “Fenner anti-population conference” that does not exist. He appears to have been referring to the recent and very successful Fenner Conference on Population, Resources & Climate Change: Implications for Australia's Near Future.

“This conference included former governor-general Major-General Michael Jeffery speaking in his official role as Advocate for Soil Health and federal member for Wills Kelvin Thomson commenting on how Australia's very high rate of immigration (far and away the highest for any developed nation) is congesting our roads, clogging our health systems and excluding our youth from taking their first steps onto the employment ladder.

“Ian Dunlop, former CEO at the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and numerous leading Australian academics described the desperate need for Australia to drastically reduce carbon emissions and end habitat destruction - something impossible to do while population is increasing.

“The conference was funded by the Australian Academy of Sciences and had nothing whatsoever to do with invoking "the concept of lebensraum" or "creating a form of totalitarianism based on nature worship over individual rights". In his previous diatribes, PR consultant King has stated that "the 'fallacy of generalisation' so beloved of media commentators ... is the enemy of truth" and yet that is exactly what he has engaged in. To balance King's latest misleading contribution, The Canberra Times should devote at least two-thirds of a page to comments on the Fenner conference from people who, like myself, actually attended it.”

Before the federal election, King's PR propaganda was directed at SPP. But with the new federal government now in place the next election relevant to the population movement is the coming South Australian state election in March. SPGN has already started campaigning on Facebook (and it took the opportunity to display advertising corflutes [signs] stating, “Population Growth Is Making U Poorer” during the recent federal election). So King (now rebranding himself as a “corporate demographer” whatever that is) has renewed his focus on SPGN. Once again he appears to be attempting to entangle SPA with SPGN's political campaign. He [writes](#),

“Hardline anti-population forces have infiltrated some of Adelaide's community groups ... The arrival of the Stop Population Growth Now party (SPGN) and their allies, Sustainable Population Australia (SPA), has introduced a new idea to state politics – people are the problem”

Interestingly, because there is such widespread concern and criticism at the current government's policy on urban development, King tries to drive a wedge between population groups and other community/environmental activists,

“...The SPA (sic) has latched on to community groups – such as the Community Alliance – like a limpet mine....

“The brand damage these ‘no-growthers’ do to community groups is lethal.

“No government will hold discussions with sectional interests while they represent hostile fifth columnists, committed to ZPG and whose policies would destroy the state's \$1 billion international student industry.

“The anti-population growth movement has done nothing to constrain extractive industries or hold polluters accountable, as other environmental groups have done.”

However, his writing is not without humour (intentional or otherwise). King attempts to dismiss the troublesome aspects of population growth as mere selfish whining,

“ So if your train is packed full of people, it's the fault of over-population – not that there are too few trains running. If you don't get that important job, it

must be because a migrant took it. If it takes you an hour to get to work, it's because there are too many people – not because every single person is driving a car.”

I doubt many readers will appreciate being told, in effect, to “learn to love the crowding and wage-depressing competition of population growth”! In South Australia, public concern over poor planning decisions and the intention to build highrise apartments in suburban areas has recently boiled over into anger. In February 2010 the government released its “30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide” that envisioned higher density and highrise apartments along transport corridors in Adelaide. (This property industry-inspired plan has previously been described in an [essay](#) at SPGN’s website.) Since then Labor Ministers for Planning and Urban Development have [rammed through decisions](#) against the wishes of local councils and the advice of their own planning departments. We have seen a company [appointed to investigate land in SA for future housing](#) turn around and become developers of the very areas they have assessed (and had options on developing - and then seek to avoid scrutiny by getting the state government to override the local council). And now the state government, concerned at growing public resistance to the trashing of their suburbs, is [taking back development approval powers from local councils](#) so that it can push through approvals for property developers. So three years of public struggle against the lifestyle-destroying 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide appears to have achieved exactly – zero!

To Adelaide’s citizens it is apparently that they no longer have any influence over the decisions being made by (what used to be) their government in favour of property development corporations. This reminds me of the definition of fascism given by Benito Mussolini, “*Fascism should more appropriately be called Corporatism because it is a merger of state and corporate power*”. The notion that people should have democratic control of the areas in which they live has been overridden by a government acting for corporate interests in a large-scale form of social engineering (and without any environmental impact assessment of the consequences of massive population growth). The engineering in this case is being guided by ideological slogans such as “densification” and “transport oriented development”. The 30 year plan for an expanded and densified Adelaide – that was roundly criticised for not considering transport infrastructure – has now been complemented with a 30 year, [\\$36 billion transport "vision"](#) all without community input (and without the money to pay for it).

So my question to Malcolm King is, who are the true fascists here? Is it the sustainable population crowd who want to try to preserve our quality of life for our children by living within our state’s, nation’s and planet’s finite limits? Or is it a government beholden to corporations engaged in a social engineering experiment with an inevitable and inequitable outcome of degraded lifestyles, degraded environment and food insecurity? Who are the extremists when SA’s Planning Minister (who is also the Attorney General) states on stabilising SA’s population that,

“It would mean that everyone of productive age is going to be sterilised in Adelaide and the borders of SA will have to be bolted down and no one can enter the state from interstate, other than on holiday for a very limited visa period and nobody will be allowed to migrate into this country from overseas and come to South Australia”

(Interestingly, the online newspaper that originally published the article containing this quote now appears to have deleted it since internet searches find only a copy at [SPGN's Facebook Page!](#))

Who is it that is guilty of discrimination when planning bureaucrats can make [dismissive comments](#) due to the age of concerned residents:

“At a later public meeting in Norwood Town Hall a brave planning bureaucrat took to the lectern and commented on the advanced age of the audience.”

The only reason Adelaide is now roundly recognized as more “livable” than the other major Australian capitals is that it has not yet been trashed by massive population growth, crowding and overdevelopment. SPGN recognizes that we have something very special in Adelaide but also something that, once lost, cannot be reclaimed.

SPGN's opponents are the operational fascists who put corporate greed before democracy. Malcolm King should look behind him and study the true nature of the people whose interests he promotes. The fascists are not those he accuses!

Michael Lardelli is on the national committee of SPA and is a member of the management committee of SPGN.