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Introduction to the special section on Australia's population policy

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Editorial



Introduction to the special section on Australia's population policy

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This issue of *Australian Population Studies* includes a special commentary section on Australia's population policy. Population issues and population policy debates periodically find themselves in the political and media spotlight, and recent months have seen a resurgence of interest in these topics. In part this attention was the result of Australia's population officially passing the 25 million milestone in early August (ABS 2018), though population issues had been gaining momentum from earlier on in the year. A number of politicians and well-known figures have advocated for lower immigration and lower population growth, with relatively few voices supporting current or higher growth rates. While much attention has, as usual, focused on annual net overseas migration totals and the overall growth rate of the population, on this occasion many commentators have also expressed concern about the growth rates of Melbourne and Sydney, and argued for a greater proportion of immigrants to be directed away from those centres. Sensing the increased political sensitivity of the issue, the Australian Government created a new Minister for Cities, Urban Infrastructure and Population in addition to the established portfolio of Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs as part of the cabinet reshuffle accompanying the change in Prime Minister in August (Parliament of Australia 2018). Many will be watching for population-related policy announcements from these Ministers with interest, particularly in the lead-up to the next federal election.

In the special commentary section of this issue three Australian demographers present their responses to the question 'What sort of population policy should Australia adopt?' (if any). The purpose is to add some academic perspectives to the wide-ranging population policy debate. All contributions underwent the same double-blind reviewing process applied to regular journal papers. Peter McDonald argues that Australia already has a comprehensive de facto population policy and that the country should retain it until at least 2026, especially in light of the labour supply crunch coming in the next decade. Nick Parr sets out the case for Australia to adopt an official population policy and focuses particularly on the Skilled stream of the Migration Program. Importantly, he also calls for more research on demographic issues to build up a more comprehensive evidence base for Australia's population policy. Liz Allen also argues for an official population policy which eschews

demographic targets and instead emphasises the wellbeing of individuals and communities, and long-term sustainability.

References

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