

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Charles Smith; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Michael Mischin;
Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Tjorn Sibma

POPULATION GROWTH

Motion

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [10.10 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house recognise the threat of rapid population growth in the state and the costs to be borne by incumbent residents.

Population growth is a big subject, and that is the reason I have moved this motion today in non-government business. Since 1798, scholars around the world have been warning us about the dangers of unsustainable population growth. It is not about humanitarianism or refugees; it is about sustainable planning for the future and how we are going to pay for that. Population growth is not a simple issue. We do not believe that this issue is being handled appropriately and adequately at the moment. Growth in our cities is not simply an issue of housing and jobs. It touches every part of our society and of people's lives—society is people. One of the reasons we have moved this motion is that we want this chamber to debate this issue and hear the solutions. This is an incredibly important issue for the state of Western Australia. Although population growth in this state has slowed, there is no doubt that population growth will continue in the future. A lot of people think that our population growth is going backwards, but it is not. In 2012, when more than 73 000 people came to this state, the population peaked. As recently as last year, 21 000 people came to this state. That includes immigrants, refugees, movement from the eastern states, births and deaths—the whole lot.

Hon Colin Holt: Is that net movement?

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: That is gross movement. That figure of 21 000 includes everyone who came to this state and left this state, births and deaths, refugees, and immigrants. The perception has been that this state's population has been reducing in size. That is not the case. The population growth in this state, in round figures, was 73 000 in 2012; 66 000 in 2013; 30 000 in 2014; 21 000 in 2015; 14 000 in 2016; and 21 000 in 2017.

We believe this state will again experience rapid population growth. There is no doubt that there are some green shoots in the economy. That is particularly the case in the mining sector. We have read about that. That will change in the coming years. I want to make people aware of where we were a few years ago. In 2012, at the peak of the mining boom, 120 000 Western Australians were employed in the mining sector. That number is nowhere near as high today. However, we can expect that employment growth again, and the families and everything else that will come with that employment growth. This state is in no position to finance the infrastructure and resources to cater for population growth. All sorts of figures and dates have been quoted about how up to five million people will come to this state in the next 20 to 30 years. That is a fairly scary proposition. Government departments may have plans for the future. However, they have not planned for how we will pay for that population growth. That is what this debate is all about. How can we pay for this growth in population and for the water, hospitals and doctors and nurses, schools and teachers, police, and housing that will be required, and make sure that is done in a cohesive way?

I will start with water. This state has basically been relying on desalination. Desalination has worked. There was a big hue and cry when desalination was first touted, but the fact is that it has worked. The amount of rainfall in this state has been declining over the years. Will we rely just on desalination or will we plan for the future? Will we look at building new dams in specific areas of this state? Will we look at a long-term feasibility study for a fresh water pipeline, as Mr Barnett called for years ago? We need to put all the options on the table and they need to be debated and discussed. There are options apart from desalination. We need to work out the long-term best options for the state. There are salinity issues in farming communities. Will we look at increasing the number of water sources to cater for our future food needs as our population grows or will we rely just on importing all our food because we have not planned and we are not capable of feeding our own population? We need to implement long-term plans to handle the salinity issues that are affecting the productiveness of our farmland. A soil commission is currently looking at the problem of salinity. That is a good start.

However, the problem that remains is how we will pay for the projected population growth in this state. Where will the money come from? A lot of people have good ideas about what we need, but how will we pay for it? We believe that Western Australia should set up an infrastructure finance corporation. This state needs to be able to raise funds at a low interest rate to enable long-term investment in infrastructure. Royalties for regions is a very good program. It has been with us for eight or nine years. Although at times the management of that program has been questionable, the fact is that most sides of politics in both this house and the other place believe that royalties for regions should continue. The question is whether we should use those funds to provide vital infrastructure in regional areas or continue to use those funds as they have been used in the past. We need to provide infrastructure and create a good community environment in our secondary cities, such as Bunbury, to enable them to be viable options for people to live in. If we do not provide the infrastructure and resources, people will not want to live in those second cities but will come to the city to live. People want the infrastructure and the resources that are

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available in the city. They will want the hospitals, protection from police officers, good schools and good teachers, and as the population gets older, they will need the great health care available in the city. Decentralisation has been talked about a lot, but now the new wave of decentralisation is targeting certain areas where we need to put in proper infrastructure. We need to make sure that there are regional cities other than Perth that people have aspirations to move to. I believe water is going to be one of the main things. We are looking for private investors for a WA infrastructure finance corporation. We could make concessional loans become available, which would be for only infrastructure projects. That would help build an economic future for us.

I want to touch on security briefly. The Perth we lived in yesterday, the Perth that the honourable member for the northern suburbs, Hon Peter Collier, and me, who are of similar ages, were brought up in has changed. People like Hon Aaron Stonehouse will be living in a community of Perth well into the future, and where there were once 300 000, 400 000 or 500 000 people in the city, we are now talking about there being four million or five million people by the time Hon Aaron Stonehouse approaches my age or gets even more senior than that. That means that Perth will not be the same city it is today. We have escaped most of the bad parts of threats from radicals around the world, and because we have an incredibly great security system in Australia, even Melbourne and Sydney, to a degree, have been able to escape most of those incidents. Is that going to be the case in the future? We have heard calls from the media for sirens and all that sort of stuff. Will we need that in the future? Will we need bollards on every corner? Will we need to consider those? How are we going to pay all these extra costs for what will be needed because we are living in a city of three million, four million or five million people? That is consideration we need to look at. Later in this debate, Hon Charles Smith will discuss issues of housing and easing the squeeze, and I will leave that for when he speaks later on today.

I would like to move on to the next area, which is waste management. We heard just recently about issues with waste management. We have a population that is only one-quarter or one-half of what has been touted in the next few years. How are we going to deal with those issues? Our recycling program is obviously not the best in the world. Are we going to work out a program? Are we going to find answers to those issues? There is not enough landfill area available. As the population grows, it is going to be another major problem. If we keep ignoring the fact that Perth is growing rapidly and will grow rapidly in the future, and we think that the population has slowed now, that we are okay and we are past that, the minute the economy improves, we will be having those congested roads that we had four or five years ago and all the other issues that come with rapid population growth. We in One Nation are for population growth, we are for immigration; we just want better controls and we want to know how we are going to pay for it and whether we have the plans in place, at both the federal and state levels, to handle those issues as they come. There is no doubt that the need for schools, hospitals, police, fire stations, water, gas, electricity, telephone infrastructure and internet access are going to increase. We will need teachers, doctors, nurses, paramedics, firemen, policemen and many other people to support this rapid growth as we go into the future.

I turn to jobs. Do we have the jobs to accommodate these numbers? We have mining, but what else? We have agriculture. We know that tourism employs more people than any other sector in Western Australia. That is not travelling too well at the moment, and I am sure that the Minister for Tourism is working hard to turn that around. We have to look at all these issues.

We have seen some spending on projects that are nice to have and we are looking at this government—we cannot do much about the past government—to prioritise its spending and really look at infrastructure. I have looked at Metronet. I think in general terms the Labor Party has believed in Metronet for a long time and now it is in government, it will make that happen, but do we do it all at once or do we do it gradually? When we extend Metronet to other areas, do we do that as the needs arise? Will we need to change and alter it depending on growth and how it pans out? It is very hard to predict the future.

As I mentioned before, I will not touch on housing at this stage. I will leave that for another member.

We embrace change. We have mentioned that. We do embrace change; change is a part of every day and we need to be aware that change is going to come. I ask the members of this house to look at all the issues and to debate some of the answers and solutions. As I mentioned yesterday, yes, we come into this house and we debate issues, but are we prepared to find solutions? It really does not matter if we debate something and then in the end we do not find a solution. We really need to find solutions. That is what the public expects of us—to work together as much as possible in a united fashion to try to find solutions to some of these issues.

I would like to touch on a few other things. When One Nation was running in the state election, we talked about many of these things. We talked about an independent body to evaluate and prioritise major infrastructure projects; that was part of our policy as we ran in that election. We talked about a Western Australian infrastructure finance corporation. We talked about reducing the pressure on metropolitan infrastructure and encouraging the population to decentralise to places like Bunbury, but it cannot be just decentralisation; it has to be well planned and it has to be to areas that provide the same infrastructure as a metropolitan city. We also talked about relocating certain

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departments to help those things happen. It is a matter of private industry and government working together in these areas. One of our policies was a water and food program, which was a priority to receive more than \$100 million for development. How can we feed these people in the future? I am also happy and proud—I am not too scared—to mention a subject that has probably been taboo since Mr Barnett mentioned it. We need to see whether a feasibility study should be done for a new freshwater pipeline from somewhere. We can let the experts decide where that could and may happen, but let us not be too afraid to debate these issues. Let us be open and honest and put everything on the table. We also talked about \$50 million to provide long-term solutions for salinity issues and innovative new technologies. We discussed those things prior to the election. This is not new for us; this is one of our core platform policies. We want money to be made available for major infrastructure. I would like the house to join in that debate and discuss those issues to try to find solutions. Western Australia is an amazing state. Those of us who sit in this Parliament, including my three colleagues, are all very proud of the party, the state and the areas that we represent. I have got to know my crossbench members. I know that they are very proud of the areas that they look after and the people they represent. Let us make those decisions, let us find those answers and let us debate them openly.

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [10.30 am]: I would like to thank Hon Colin Tincknell for bringing this motion to the house. Population growth and sustainability have received a lot of commentary in recent times. There are issues for and against that, of course. We still have a relatively small population Australia-wide and in Western Australia. We will continue to see population growth. Unless we cut migration and have mandatory vasectomies, the population will continue to grow. A lot of that is driven by employment. During the mining boom, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that 2.45 million people were living in Western Australia in September 2012. In more recent times, in 2017, that figure had dropped to 2.1 million people. We have seen a decline in the state's population. During the mining boom, we were discussing issues in this house such as the stress on resources and essential services—police and hospitals—as up to 2 000 people a week were pouring into Western Australia to service the mining boom. A lot of people have now left. As the work has dried up, people have gone back interstate or overseas. That demonstrated that when population growth is fairly rapid, it puts a lot of pressure on resources and essential services. Water is a very important factor in Western Australia. We have a massive land mass—Western Australia is four times the size of Texas—yet only limited areas have an adequate water supply. We have a desalination plant at Myalup. There is talk of another desalination plant being built to try to meet our water needs. We have recently learnt that the hydraulic wastewater treatment system in the northern suburbs will be upgraded to try to produce more water for the state. As our population begins to grow, we will have to look at more technology to meet those needs.

It is estimated that by 2027, we will have 2.53 million people in Western Australia and by 2037, we will have 2.96 million people. That is still a fairly low population compared with, say, New South Wales or Victoria, which already have around eight million people in their states. We need some population growth. It is a matter of managing that growth and governments being aware of it. As I said, there has been quite a bit of commentary in recent times. Dick Smith has been quite vocal about population growth in Western Australia. He made some fairly good points in some commentary in *The Sydney Morning Herald* back in December 2015. He said —

In the 2016 election year we will hear a lot more about one of Australia's hitherto practically unsung federal-state imbalances.

The much sung one, of course, is the fact that the Federal Government raises the bulk of the taxes, but the states are the ones with the responsibility for spending them—schools, hospitals, police, most roads and so on. It goes by the rather ugly name of vertical fiscal imbalance.

The unsung one is that the Federal Government is responsible for Australia's high immigration rate but it is the poor states that have to provide the services and infrastructure for the extra people. It could be called vertical population policy imbalance. But it might be easier just to call it dumb policy.

Australians seem to have some idea about vertical fiscal imbalance because the Premiers and Chief Ministers are forever whingeing about being starved of funds by the Feds. It is a convenient excuse for long hospital waiting lists and the like.

So it goes on. Population growth is certainly something that Australia will continue to experience. It is about governments being able to manage and forecast the requirements for that extra population. I agree with Dick Smith that if the federal government is going to be in charge of the money and immigration, it needs to have some consideration for the states and their requirements.

I understand where Hon Colin Tincknell and One Nation are coming from on this issue. The reality, however, is that the population will continue to grow in Australia and Western Australia. Most of that growth in this state will be in metropolitan Perth. About two million people live in Perth metro and only about 400 000 or 500 000 people

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live in the rest of the state. A lot of planning will be required in Perth to ensure that we are able to service those people and provide essential things such as water. Obviously, genetically modified food, which we discussed yesterday, is one of those factors that helps produce food and income for the state. Improved agricultural technologies will assist and provide food for people, something that we have to focus on in this state.

HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan) [10.35 am]: I would like to touch on housing and the environment for a few brief moments. All Western Australians deserve access to safe, secure and affordable housing and to live in cohesive communities. Sadly, too many Western Australians, particularly younger Western Australians, find it difficult to put a roof over their head. Home ownership was the Australian dream but over recent years it has become the Australian nightmare. It is projected that another 800 000 new homes will be needed in Perth and Peel to accommodate big Australia and Third World population growth, engineered by the major parties.

Governments of both persuasions have also failed to crack down on illegal foreign purchases of existing homes and the flow of dirty foreign funds into Australian property for laundering processes. It is well documented that Australia has the weakest money laundering laws in the First World. Lots of dirty money flows into Australia, buying up residential property. One Nation supports a new foreign buyer tax. I am glad to see that WA Labor has stolen this policy. I understand that the foreign buyer tax will be increased to seven per cent in this year's budget. We would support a higher foreign buyer tax. In addition to curbing demand and reducing competition for housing, this tax will generate revenue to be spent on public services and infrastructure and used to expand social housing or even go back into Keystart schemes.

What else can we do about housing? We can reduce stamp duty costs for seniors who need to downsize and we can examine how Keystart shared ownership schemes can be improved and expanded. If our policymakers really want to fix the housing market, they should tackle the following demand and supply side distortions. We need to work with federal governments to normalise Western Australia's immigration program by returning the permanent intake back to the level it was before John Howard ramped it up in the early 2000s. That means permanent immigration below the 100 000 mark from where it currently is at 200 000-plus new people every three years or so. Perhaps we should look at undertaking tax reforms, unwinding negative gearing and the GST discount. We should also look statewide at extending anti-money laundering rules to the real estate gatekeepers.

I want to touch on the environment because it is not often debated how rapid immigration affects the environment. It is important to know that One Nation members are environmentalists. We put the "conserve" into conservatism.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: That's nice to know.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: I knew the minister would like that. The latest federal government's "Australia State of the Environment 2016" report released last year explicitly noted that Australia's natural environment is being placed under acute strain from rapid population growth and economic development. It noted that these are the main drivers of environmental problems such as land use change, habitat destruction, invasive species and climate change.

In the scientific journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, a team of scientists published a paper with their recommendations for slowing current rates of biodiversity loss that included limiting human population growth. I will summarise a few points from that report. Although key threats to biodiversity include habitat clearing for cattle, mining and urban sprawl, according to Deakin University researcher Euan Ritchie, these are all consequences of population pressure and high rates of resource consumption. I will quote a few of his key phrases from that report —

It's often a taboo topic to talk about human population size and family planning and how much we consume as individuals ...

But if we don't address these issues in the context of biodiversity conservation and sustainability then we're largely kidding ourselves ...

These are not the first environmental studies to draw a direct link between population growth and environmental degradation. In 2010, Flinders University released a report for the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship, which examined and was titled, "Long-term physical implications of net overseas migration: Australia in 2050". The report concluded that high levels of net overseas migration imposed greater adverse impacts on the quality of our natural and built environments and that the geographical concentration in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth substantially increased environmental impacts. The report also found that decreased urban water supply is a significant environmental constraint that is exacerbated by high levels of net overseas migration.

In 1994, when Australia's population was just under 18 million, the Australian Academy of Science convened a symposium on the future population of Australia. Its analysis extended to Australia's resources of water, minerals and arable land and the interactions between present lifestyle and environmental damage and between future expectations and the costs of an increasing population. The AAS cautioned —

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If our population reaches the high end of the feasible range (37 million), the quality of life of all Australians will be lowered by the degradation of water, soil, energy and biological resources.

It concluded that the quality of all aspects of our children's lives would be maximised if the population of Australia by the mid-twenty-first century was kept to the low and stable end of the achievable range of approximately 23 million. Just 24 years later, Australia's population stands at around 25 million and thus already exceeds what the AAS recommended as our maximum population.

I will refer to a quote from Sir Peter Scott, the founder of the World Wildlife Fund. The WWF nominated human population as the key risk factor for endangered species, noting that the current rate of extinction is 100 times what is considered normal without the impact of human activity—more of us means more of that. Sir Peter Scott said —

When we first set up the WWF, our objective was to save endangered species from extinction. But we have failed completely ...

If only we had put all that money into condoms, we might have done some good.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [10.43 am]: I thank Hon Colin Tincknell for bringing forward this very important debate. There has been a lack of preparedness at all levels of government to talk about population growth. We might come to different conclusions. I think it has been very wrong to always conflate the issues of population with some sort of notion of racism. Certainly, we heard nothing in the debate today that supports that conflation.

I want to comment first up on the position of Hon Charles Smith. Regardless of the position within Australia, we have to look at the risk that the accelerating world population is having on the sustainability of human civilisations on this planet. The planet will survive, but whether we will survive as a civilisation with climate change and the destruction of biodiversity is another question. Frankly, I would prefer that we put our efforts into dealing with that problem. The member raised very importantly the question of birth control, which has become a seemingly unfashionable issue over the last decade, but I think that is an important process.

I am glad to see that those members who seem to be on the conservative side of politics obviously will not be joining the likes of Cory Bernardi and some others who do not want Australia to fund as part of its foreign aid package—I think Mr Trump is of the same view—women's health care and family planning options. That is extremely short-sighted. I want to frame it in that way. I think it is an important debate. We have to talk about the size of population that is optimum and what we on this dry continent can do to try manage it while at the same time recognising that much of our energy and dynamism comes from immigration. Those parts of Australia that have not had the benefit of migration tend to lack the creativity and energy that drives our economy forward. The wide range of people from different cultures who come to Australia with different ways of seeing the world and who bring different connections and different skills create the dynamism that drives our economy.

Obviously, it would be chaotic if we went from three million people to five million overnight, but, generally speaking, we have gone through continuous growth in Australia. Our cities have become bigger and we have invested more to deal that growth. I do not think that we should be too alarmist in our concerns about how we are going to do this, particularly if we have good structures in place. The member mentioned Metronet. It is a very critical point that one of the problems under the last government was that it fundamentally walked away from expanding the rail network, which was an absolutely critical part of the work done by Labor in the 1980s and early 1990s to electrify the system, expand, reinstate the Fremantle line and build the northern suburbs line and the work we did in the early 2000s to expand the northern suburbs line again, develop at Thornlie and do the Mandurah rail line, all of which was really necessary for us to keep up with growth. We then had a period under the Liberal government, which did not really like rail, when nothing happened and, at the same time, we had a massive growth in population. We simply have not been investing sensibly. I am glad that under Minister Saffioti we are back on track with a forward-looking plan for the next eight years that will deal with that. I think we have the apparatus in government, as long as we are not driven by an ideological obsession against one form of public transport, or, indeed, against the whole notion of public transport, which is what Tony Abbott has. He single-handedly took the cause back some years with his views and his refusal to fund urban rail. I am very pleased that if nothing else has been achieved by Mr Turnbull, he is overcoming that absurd ideological position and allowing the federal government to invest in urban rail projects.

I come now to the question of desalination. There is no doubt that in the southern half of the state our climate is drying rapidly, so the difficulty comes as our population grows. What do we need to do to deal with this? I urge members please not to waste more time on this idea of a pipeline from the north. When we were last in government, we rigorously assessed this concept. We put in an independent, expert team and we gave it a broad charter to tell us what would work: "Will this work? What are the capabilities? What is the cost of delivering water from the Kimberley down to the southern half of the state?"

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Hon Robin Scott: May I ask when was this requested?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: This was done around 2003–04.

Hon Robin Scott: So it happened 15 years ago?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: It was in 2003, so possibly about 15 years ago. If anything, I would suggest to the member that the economics have gone in the other direction. At that time it was found to be cheaper to tow an iceberg from Antarctica into Fremantle port. It was found to be cheaper to put the water in a tanker and take it down to Perth, but the cheapest option of all was desalination. We committed to desalination as the fundamental—not the only—strategy for dealing with this problem. As time has gone on, desalination techniques have become more sophisticated—a bit like solar energy—and the benefit, if anything, has increased. We have answered questions in this Parliament and Hon Dave Kelly has talked about the need for us to now be planning our third desalination plant. We are also looking at cheaper forms of desalination for agricultural purposes. As the member said, one of the problems in our horticultural growing areas is the increasing salination of water. We are pleased that the federal government has finally come on board to support the Myalup–Wellington scheme, which is at its heart a major project to desalinate water and to increase and expand the water available for horticulture and agriculture in the Myalup–Wellington area. We have been looking at a number of technologies—more work can still be done—and what type of small-scale desal plant might be able to deal with this growing salination of particularly our horticultural waters in the south west. The pipeline is a very romantic concept, but I can tell members that if they thought getting a gas hub up in the Kimberley was a hard job, getting a dam on the Fitzroy River is not achievable. Even if it were a good idea financially, the environmental consequence of doing that on the Fitzroy would make it simply unachievable and would irretrievably compromise the area's conservation values. It would do the sorts of things that Hon Charles Smith was talking about and cause a massive reduction in biodiversity. I urge members not to waste too much of their very precious time looking at how we solve issues for what really is a pipe dream. Mr Barnett was Premier for eight and a half years and the greatest advocate of that project, but he did not advance it. I think he learnt that the romance of that project was not matched by its economics or its environmental sustainability.

In the short time I have left, I want to talk about this issue of Perth and the regions. We have a problem getting people to go out to the regions. As I say when I visit the regions, we have to be careful not to constantly focus on the negatives of regional life. We need to focus on the positives, and there are many. I always tell the story about Monty House, who was the National Party leader at the time, who stormed into the tearoom—I will make his words more parliamentary—absolutely railing against the farmers' federation of the time: "They constantly sell down our industry. They're constantly presenting that we're a group of busted arse"—sorry—"very poor people and we're not! Many of us want our kids to take over our farms, but they keep getting this negative story." There are lots of positives about living in the regions and in small communities, and about not having to drive forever and put up with the high crime rates and the anonymity of the big cities. Let us get out there and sell that. Government has a role to positively sell that message and to get people to start to think about the opportunities that come from living in the country. We have an enormous capacity to look towards the refugees who come into this country. Australia has a relatively small refugee intake compared with other countries. Nevertheless, it provides a great opportunity for the regions and there are some fabulous examples of work in that area. A regional refugee program was put in place for a very short time by a woman called Jackie Jarvis, who won a Rural Women's Award to do this work. She worked with particularly those refugees who had come from subsistence agricultural backgrounds and took them into the communities. One of the big success stories was a group of African refugees who took jobs on a dairy farm near the Scott River. We all know of the fantastic contribution made by the Karen refugees from the Thai–Burma border who have settled in Katanning. Many other Third World migrant groups like the Filipinos are turning towns around in the south west of Western Australia, Harvey being a case in point where they have reinvigorated the Catholic Church and the sporting clubs. We can also look at the role of the Indian people in Karratha. There is a lot to be positive about. There are big issues and we have to keep our eye on the ball and be prepared to have full and open debate, but we can deal with these problems.

HON MICHAEL MISCHIN (North Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.58 am]: I will not take up too much of the house's time. I was interested in the manner in which this motion was presented and I will repeat it with emphasis on some of the key points that caused me some confusion. One of them was the use of the word "threat". The motion reads —

That this house recognise the threat of rapid population growth in the state and the costs to be borne by incumbent residents.

What I suspect from hearing the debate presented to date, is that it should be a little more accurately worded like this: "That this house recognise the challenges presented by rapid population growth in the state and the costs to be borne by existing residents." Of course, what Hon Colin Tincknell refined it to be is really an expression of

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concern about various elements, questions and considerations that need to be taken into account with any population growth in this state. His particular focus is on trying to establish and maintain a sustainable population growth. Two aspects of population in this state come to mind: one is size and the other is distribution. Each present their own unique challenges. To focus simply on the quantum of people in this state is perhaps misleading and distracts our attention from some of the issues that are particularly important. Hon Colin Tincknell and from time to time other speakers, including Hon Alannah MacTiernan, have mentioned the question of population distribution in regional areas and the like.

Broadly speaking, population growth can arise in three ways. Firstly, there is natural growth through birthrate. We cannot do much about that. If anything, whatever the problems that are faced by other countries, our population is growing gradually and sometimes going in reverse. That does not seem to be the problem. We cannot do much about that anyway. If people suddenly decide to make a lot of babies and there is a rapid increase in population in Western Australia as a result, governments cannot do much about it. They need to adapt the available facilities to cope with that—likewise, migration from other states. Over the last two terms of our government, we were faced with the equivalent of the population of Tasmania coming into this state. Those people were attracted by the prosperity of this state and opportunities were presented to not only the incumbent residents, but also other members of the Australian population. Constitutionally and practically, there is no way that we can discourage people from coming over here and taking the opportunities that are presented to them. It should be a source of pride for Western Australia that it provided those opportunities at the time. They were never going to last; they come in cycles, as they always have. We saw the reaction to that when the opportunities disappeared because of a downturn in the economy—particularly the ones that have been the foundation of our economy over at least 100 years. We found that the population has gone the other way and exited the state. Again, not much can be done about that, unless we try to discourage people from moving here by not providing the opportunities.

Another factor is migration from overseas. It has to be remembered that wherever people migrate to—they may come directly to Western Australia as their first port of call and intend to stay here or they may go to one of the other states of Australia and hope to achieve opportunities there—nothing will stop them from drifting over to WA if they see the opportunities. The question is not really so much about the threat of population growth. That is always going to be latent if we consider rapid population growth a threat. The issue is really how the state government and the people of Western Australia adapt to population growth and cope with the stressors that come from the attractiveness of this state to other people within the Australian commonwealth or from overseas. Over time this state has become better at dealing with those sorts of stressors.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan seemed to focus simply on expanding the rail network. She could not help herself; she criticised the previous government and claimed that it had an ideological mindset against rail. However, rail is not the only answer to dealing with the challenges of population growth. I remind Hon Alannah MacTiernan that our government prepared the 2030 transport plan, I think it was, and many of the elements that are now being put in place by the —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Anyone can prepare a plan. It is actually building something that is the issue.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I thank Hon Alannah MacTiernan. I did not interrupt the minister.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Order, members!

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I did not interrupt Hon Alannah MacTiernan. I let her babble on.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Hon Michael Mischin, I ask you to address your comments to the Chair.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I did not interrupt Hon Alannah MacTiernan. I allowed her to babble on.

The reality is that that plan was prepared and many of the things this government is giving a priority to do are in that plan, rather than simply drawing lines on a map. The previous government addressed other features of rapid population growth that do not seem to be an issue for this government, partly because of the change in the economy and the like. Water was one of them. That factor has been raised. But apart from that, electricity supplies were uninterrupted over the past eight years of government, unlike under the preceding term of government. We addressed roads and other forms of transport, because not everyone catches the train. Going around some of the suburbs, we see the need for good freeway networks and the like. Yes, rail is important, but remember that the population we were dealing with six or seven years ago has now largely disappeared. We have seen a diminution in the demand for public transport. It is still important for the future. I do not deny that at all and that is why a plan had been prepared.

Education facilities were demanded by people coming into this state. We spent a vast amount of money under the stewardship of Hon Peter Collier on expanding and rebuilding education facilities in this state. Medical facilities, hospitals and the like, are equally important to residents of this state and we spent a vast amount on them. We

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spent money on rebuilding our court and police infrastructure. It is all very well to say that there are attractions out in the regional areas because of low crime rates. Members should talk to people in Kununurra. They do not seem to have the view that there is a low crime rate there. These challenges need to be faced, and our government attempted to do that. There is always more work to be done. Our regional communications strategy expanded the opportunities for existing towns and allowed for growth there. The regional city programs created a greater amenity for those who choose to live in the country and encourage decentralisation from Perth. We had smaller projects such as moving government offices down to Bunbury. The office building with a capacity for 800 public servants, which was started under our government, is being created in Joondalup. That should shortly open and allow for certain government departments to distribute their public servants across the metropolitan area.

The real challenge is providing the services. Simply providing the infrastructure is not the answer. We need public servants to deliver those services in the right places at the right times. The community resource centres, which have been a source of great debate, the residential colleges out in the country and all those sorts of things not only provide services for the incumbent population, but also accommodate any increases in population down the track. Of course, in the wisdom of hindsight, we can always say that some things could have been done better or differently, and mistakes were made, but those, with respect to Hon Colin Tincknell, are the real challenges. It is not so much a threat. We are always going to have the problem of potential increases in population, whether gradual or otherwise. The real challenge—I am glad he has raised the issue—is that governments and states and populations have to adapt to the changing circumstances, and we are conscious of that. I thank him for having raised the subject. I have been interested in the contributions to date, and I thank members for that.

HON AARON STONEHOUSE (South Metropolitan) [11.08 am]: I thank Hon Michael Mischin because he has given us a lot of clarity on what the real issue is and what really needs to be discussed, which are the challenges for government in providing essential services to a growing population. As I was listening to the debate earlier, I thought that it was reminiscent of Thomas Malthus, who was proven wrong over 200 years ago. With respect to my Pauline Hanson's One Nation parliamentary colleagues, this is the kind of nonsense we hear from Dick Smith, who is—if it is not unparliamentary to say—a socialist nut job. If anyone has had the absolute misfortune to read his manifesto, they will see that it is rambling nonsense. He has more in common with the Greens in economic policy, not immigration policy, than anyone else who might be considered right of centre.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Honourable member, I am going to rule that it is not unparliamentary to use the word “socialist”!

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Thank you. I would like to quote a little bit about Malthus. For those who are not familiar with Malthusian thought, I quote from an article in *The Economist* on 15 May 2008, titled “Malthus, the false prophet” —

Malthus first set out his ideas in 1798 in “An Essay on the Principle of Population”. This expounded a tragic twin trajectory for the growth of human populations and the increase of food supply. Whereas the natural tendency was for populations to grow without end, food supply would run up against the limit of finite land. As a result, the “positive checks” of higher mortality caused by famine, disease and war were necessary to bring the number of people back in line with the capacity to feed them.

That is pretty dark stuff. When Hon Alannah MacTiernan addressed population growth, she made the distinction that we can talk about the challenges of population growth without necessarily being racist. I think that is true but I would warn that if we look at history and at anyone who ever attempted to control the growth of population, that power has always been wielded by one class, one ethnic group and one group of people against another, downtrodden, less fortunate group of people. More often than not throughout the twentieth century, the history of eugenics was intertwined with racism and we cannot ignore that. China's one-child policy showed the social cost of human life and suffering in attempts at population control. It resulted in daughters or disabled children being abandoned on the street because parents had one shot at a child, and they would have rather had a male, healthy child to carry on their legacy. Yes, we can talk about population growth without necessarily being racist but if we look at attempts in history to control population, they have always resulted in human tragedy, normally along the lines of race or class.

A few issues were raised by members who made contributions before me and I will try to address a couple of them. A concern was raised about what would happen if we imported all of our food in Australia. I suppose it would probably be much like Britain. If I am not mistaken, Britain is a net food importer. Trade deficits and surpluses do not matter. There are countries in Africa that have massive trade surpluses but they are in abject poverty and there are wealthy countries in Europe and the Western Hemisphere that have trade deficits but they are incredibly wealthy. Trade deficits and surpluses have no bearing on the affluence of the population of those countries. I will read from the www.agriculture.gov.au website, under the heading “Food”, which states —

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The food industry is integral to Australia's economic and social prosperity. It consistently accounts for around 20 per cent of domestic manufacturing sales and service income.

...

We are able to export more than half of our agricultural produce, while more than 90 per cent of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, milk and eggs sold in supermarkets are domestically produced.

The concern that we are suddenly going to become a net food importer and rely on other countries to provide our food is rather unfounded. Hon Charles Smith mentioned a report that stated the population of Australia should not exceed 23 million people. Obviously, we are well above that now, so we would think that the sky would be falling in and that it would be horrible because there would be too many people and we would all be starving and jobless because of the high immigration intake.

I will quote some figures from the OECD Better Life Index for Australia. The website states —

In Australia, the average household net-adjusted disposable income per capita is USD 33 417 a year, more than the OECD average of USD 30 563 a year ...

In terms of employment, around 72% of people aged 15 to 64 in Australia have a paid job, above the OECD employment average of 67%.

Hon Charles Smith interjected.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I do not have that in front of me but the website does not make a distinction between people who are in the job market and people who are not. It refers only to people who are aged between 15 and 64 years old, so presumably, it includes all people who are able-bodied within that age bracket. It continues —

Good education and skills are important ... In Australia, 80% of adults aged 25–64 have completed upper secondary education, higher than the OECD average of 75%.

... the average student scored 502 in reading literacy, maths and science in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This score is higher than the OECD average of 486.

... life expectancy at birth in Australia is around 83 years, three years higher than the OECD average of 80 years.

Pollution levels are also down and water quality is above OECD averages. Some people are concerned about culture, which is a little less tangible than economic affluence. As we import large groups of different cultures and diverse groups of people, they may set up enclaves and fracture society somewhat, which would break down social cohesion. It is very intangible stuff. According to the same website, I quote —

Concerning the public sphere, there is a strong sense of community and high levels of civic participation in Australia, where 94% of people believe that they know someone they could rely on in time of need, more than the OECD average of 89%.

That is interesting. Again, it is very intangible stuff, but it is at least one figure to take to heart. Our population has continued to grow at a pretty steady rate, well above 24 million people. I have a graph that shows it has been on a steady incline for quite some time.

It is certainly not true that immigrants and people who come across state borders steal jobs. I have an interesting study here titled, "Are Immigrants a Shot in the Arm for the Local Economy?" by Gihoon Hong and John McLaren from the University of Virginia, if I am not mistaken. I will quote from the conclusions of the paper —

... emphasizing the effect of immigration on local labor *demand* as opposed to merely labor *supply*. We have first studied a stylized model of a local labor market that shows how the arrival of immigrants increases local aggregate income and thus the labor demand by the non-traded services sector. This effect, which we have labelled the 'shot-in-the-arm' effect, dampens the downward pressure the extra labor supply places on local wages, and also increases the variety of non-traded services available, which confers a benefit on all local consumers, native-born and immigrant.

That is interesting. It continues —

Consequently, even in a model in which immigration always lowers local wages in terms of tradeables, it *raises* real wages in terms of non-tradables, and depending on how strong the shot-in-the-arm effect is, it may raise real wages in terms of the overall consumer price index, raising utility for all local workers.

I said that really fast, so I encourage members to go back and read *Hansard*. Basically, immigrants create jobs. They raise real wages because they increase the supply of labour. In fact, they put a new demand on labour at the same time. Generally, each immigrant creates about 1.2 new jobs.

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In closing, Malthus was wrong. It has been 200 years, so we know that. Malthusian thought should be relegated to that same part of history where Nostradamus resides. I will not support the motion.

HON PIERRE YANG (South Metropolitan) [11.17 am]: I rise to make a small contribution to this issue. First and foremost, I thank Hon Colin Tincknell for bringing this motion before the house to debate.

Population policy is very important. It has significant ramifications for the people and their wellbeing, as well as the future of the country and the state in which we live. There is no doubt that Western Australia has experienced strong population growth over the past decade or two. According to census data from 2011 and 2016, Western Australia's population has grown at 10 per cent—10.5 per cent, to be specific—over the past five years. However, population growth has significantly slowed down over the past two years. It is estimated that population growth was 0.77 per cent in 2016 and 1.15 per cent in 2017. There is an interesting correlation between the economy and population growth, as previous speakers have touched on. Naturally, when the economy is doing well, it attracts a lot of people from overseas and interstate. When we are in a more difficult financial situation, such as we are in now, the growth rate is much slower. During the mining construction boom, we attracted a lot of immigrants from the eastern states and other countries but, since then, we have been losing a lot of our own people to other states.

I believe in sustainable population growth. Sustainable population growth, coupled with well-managed and well-planned mechanisms, will be beneficial for our community and for employment. The most important question is: how do we define “sustainable”? Some people would say sustainable means two or three per cent population growth. Some people would say sustainable means zero population growth. Some people would say it means somewhere in between. Different people have different answers to that question.

I am not a supporter of net zero population growth. In my view, that is dangerous to a country, its people, its communities and its economy. It will threaten a nation's security into the future. A good example is Russia. During the 1990s and 2000s, the population of Russia was in decline. Russia experienced a significant loss of population. In 2005, the United Nations warned Russia that at its current rate of population growth, by 2050 it would lose one-third of its population. I cannot imagine what that would do to an economy and the wellbeing of its population. A 2015 report said that Russia has a very low fertility rate of 1.7 births per woman. That is much greater than the previous rate of 1.2 births per woman. However, it is lower than the population replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman. According to research, since the 1970s, the birth rate in Western Australia has been below the population replacement rate. The rate is currently 1.83 births per woman. I have done my part, although I have not achieved the rate of 2.1 births. I do not know how I can achieve that!

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Keep trying!

Hon PIERRE YANG: Thanks very much! Probably I would not!

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Order, members!

Hon PIERRE YANG: I am acutely aware of the time and I would like to give other speakers a chance to speak in this debate, and also Hon Colin Tincknell a chance to reply to this motion.

People's life expectancy is continuing to grow. People look forward to retiring and enjoying the remaining years of their life. Therefore, we need more people to work and continue to pay tax. It is difficult to achieve that if our rate of population growth is stagnant or shrinking. We cannot be complacent and allow the fertility rate to go down even further. However, because we have such a low fertility rate, it is important that we maintain a robust, effective, efficient, non-discriminatory and merit-based immigration program that will ensure our continued growth as a nation, with sustainable population growth.

The critical issue in Western Australia is not population growth; it is how we can curtail the rate of loss of good people from this state to the eastern states. I appreciate the concerns raised by previous speakers and by the mover of the motion. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to put my views and observations on the record.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [11.24 am]: I intend to curtail my remarks in order to provide Hon Colin Tincknell with the opportunity to reply to this debate. Earlier this morning, I was detained on urgent parliamentary business, so I caught only the last three or four contributions. The only observation I would make is that if we are to have informed debate in this chamber, we need to commence with the premise that we need to agree on the details. I am not aware of any valid, peer-reviewed study that states that Western Australia is under threat of rapid population growth. I do not see that forecast. I think we have gone through that hump and are now at the other end. Western Australia saw rapid population growth consequential with the boom in the resource, exploration and production sectors. We will never see that growth again. Frankly, a large part of the reason the budget is in the shape it is in is that the former government needed to provide infrastructure and services to accommodate that rapid population growth. I am not necessarily sure that my friends opposite would have handled

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that situation to a significantly different degree. However, I do think that would be a worthy discussion if the topic was not so much around the threat of population growth but around preserving and improving the quality of life of our population.

I want to make one remark in the context of the budget that is about to be tabled. The threat we face is that people's quality of life is being diminished. Income growth is relatively flat. Confidence in the retail market is pretty low. The property market is stagnant. We are also looking at rapid increases in fees and charges for water, power and the like. This is the issue. I am more than prepared to speak on another occasion about the quality of life that Western Australians face. However, I do not necessarily think the threat comes from population growth; the threat comes from the policy settings adopted by the group opposite.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [11.27 am] — in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to this debate. It has been very interesting. The reason we put this motion on the table is because Infrastructure Australia released a report in February that forecast that Perth's population will reach 4.4 million by 2046. I know what the near future looks like. This debate is about the long-term future. This state will incur enormous infrastructure costs to build our society to cater for that increase in population. The best time to plan for that is in the lull that this state is in now. I mentioned during the debate that I am looking for solutions and answers to certain problems. We need to know how that infrastructure and services that this state will need to provide will be paid for, as rightly mentioned by other members.

The Infrastructure Australia report suggested that in order to effectively capitalise on these opportunities, the structure and operation of cities will need to change. The agency directly challenged Perth to amalgamate councils into one major central council to assist in planning. That did not go too well, did it? Further suggestions in the report include public transport development; tax incentives for private enterprise to move jobs to strategic urban centres, with public transport used to link people with jobs; and road tolls or congestion charges on trucks and passenger vehicles. According to Infrastructure Australia, congestion reduces access to jobs and skilled labour and could potentially cost Australia \$53 billion by 2031. It also reduces access to education, health and social services. If we are talking about quality of life, that is right; it is an important issue.

Before I wrap up, I want to ask: how are we going to pay for this? We have suggested structuring a WA infrastructure and finance corporation. We need to build for the future and we need to do it now.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.