

If you were asked to design a relevant and achievable population policy for South Australia, what would be the most important elements of the policy? Justify and explain your answer in terms of recent population trends and issues in South Australia and in terms of the capacity of government to influence population trends in a country such as Australia.

Introduction

At various times since European settlement, Australian governments have expressed concern over decline in the birth rate, often indicating that continual growth of the population is essential to the wellbeing of the country. Toward the end of the 20th century Australia was one of many developed countries to experience steady fertility decline, falling below the replacement level in 1976. There is much uncertainty and discrepancy regarding the future economic, social and importantly the environmental issues that will result from these recent population trends along with the proposed actions to control these trends.

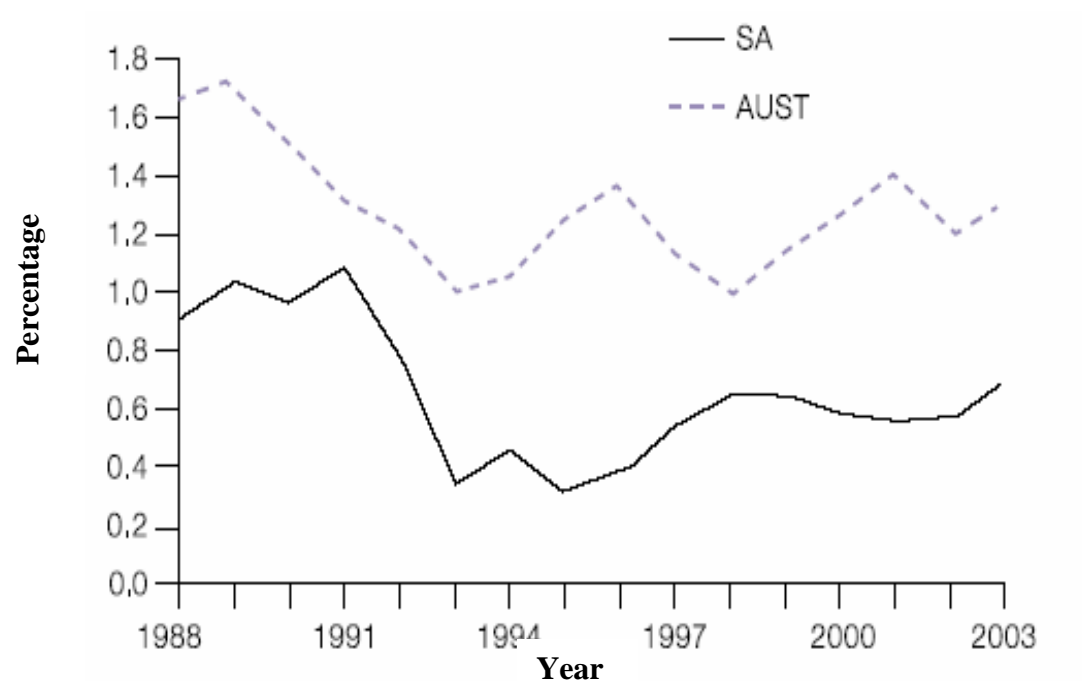
This essay considers South Australia's unique demographic history and recent population trends. In line with Australia, the State government and business sectors have issues concerning slow population growth, low and declining birth rates, and a rapidly ageing population. In accordance with the recent demographic trends of South Australia three main elements of a population policy are outlined, along with varying individual opinions regarding South Australia's demographic future and the need for a policy. The Governments influence at Federal and State levels and the implications faced are also discussed.

South Australia's Population Growth

The South Australian population at 30 June 2004 was 1,534,000, less than eight percent of the total Australian population (ABS 2004). The State's share of the Australian population has been declining gradually over the last forty years, 9.2% in 1961, 8.1% in 1996 and 7.6% in 2004 (ABS 2004). Hugo (2002a, p.2) explains that with the recent fertility trends the outlook for South Australia is for the total population to begin to decline around 2030. This in turn, will result in the state moving towards what McDonald and Kippen (1999) describe as a 'coffin' shaped age structure. Hugo adds that this scenario does not sit well for the future prosperity and wellbeing of the State.

For the past 15 years South Australia has averaged 0.5% annual population growth (Figure 1) less than half that experienced by Australia (1.2%) as a whole (Government of South Australia [GSA] 2004, p.5).

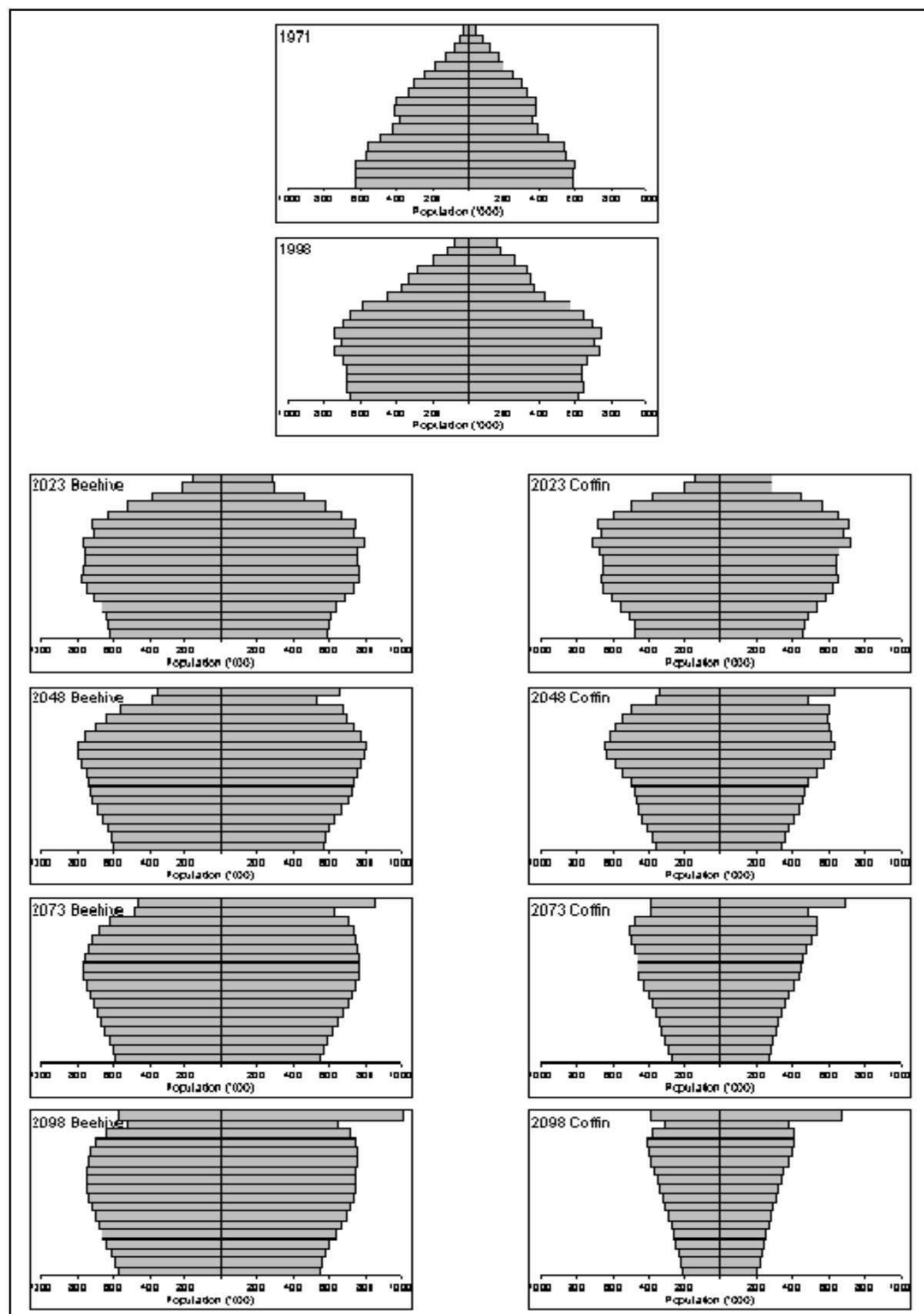
Figure 1: Population Growth: Australia and South Australia 1988-2003



Source: GSA 2004, p.2.

McDonald and Kippen (1999) explain that the shift from a pyramid-shaped age structure to a beehive or coffin shaped structure is likely to occur only once in Australia's history. A return to the pyramid shape seems extremely unlikely and would require a return to the fertility of the 1960s; twice as high as the present level of fertility. From a population policy perspective, the demographic direction for South Australia along with Australia is now between the beehive and the coffin-shaped age structures, with the beehive shape clearly being the superior option. The two alternative age structure scenarios for Australia and as predicted by McDonald and Kippen can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Selected Pyramid, Beehive and Coffin shaped age structures, Australia 1971-2098



Source: McDonald and Kippen, 1999, p.1

Important elements of a population policy

Hugo (2002a, p.1) defines a population policy as;

a coherent set of objectives with relation to future population size, distribution and structure, together with a series of initiatives designed to achieve those objectives. It partly involves governments seeking to anticipate and respond to population trends but also includes attempts to alter demographic trends deemed to have negative consequences.

Hugo (2002a) also adds that a population policy should not be developed separately from the wider economic, social and political policies and should strive to move toward such goals as improved prosperity, increased equity, greater productivity, ecological sustainability and social cohesion.

Taking into account the definition outlined above, in my view the following three points are the backbone and the most important elements to take into account when designing an attainable population policy;

- demographic goal;
- methods proposed in achieving the goal;
- implementation and continual monitoring of methods and goals.

The above points were derived from an essay by McIntosh (1998, p. 2) and link in with Hugo's definition.

Demographic goal

The problem the Government faces when considering a policy is determining the demographic goal. As Cocks (1996, pp. 23-24) explains, there is much debate and prediction relating to Australia's population capacity. Therefore, he has divided individual opinions into the following three groups:

- Populationists, believe we need a substantially higher population than at present;
- Stablists, want to see the population stabilised as soon as possible at population levels similar to the present;
- Reductionists, a small group, would like to see the population become smaller than at present.

Cocks (1996, p 24) states that Reductionists are relatively small in number but other authors including Dr. Paul Norton, Griffiths University (2002) suggest that this group have force and often voice their opinion on environmental grounds. They deem that Australia's population is already as large or larger, than the optimum and that the continent should aim for rapid population stabilisation or even reduction from Australia's present population (Norton 2002). Dr. Tim Flannery, Senior Research Scientist agrees and explains the limitations of Australia's ecology and suggests a sustainable population for Australia would be between six and twelve million (Kelly 1995, p.1).

A view that may be preferred from a Stablist's perspective is the forecast by McDonald and Kippen (1999, p1). They predict that if the fertility rate falls to 1.65 per woman, average annual immigration of eighty thousand per year and an increase of five years in life expectancy is achieved that the population in Australia will stabilise at 24-25 million by 2050. Norton (2002) implies that this situation is acceptable and states that:

we are on course for a demographic "soft landing" at a national population of 25 million, which can be made sustainable if we are prepared to make the necessary changes in our society and economy.

From the Populationist's perspective there are concerns that a declining population creates a declining economy. The current South Australian government share these concerns and consequently feel it is necessary to take steps to increase the population, aiming to achieve a State population of 2 million by 2050 (GSA 2004, p.1).

Methods in achieving goals

There are many examples world wide of population policies that have been designed to influence either an increase or decrease in population. McIntosh (1998, p.1) refers to the

Swedish efforts to increase fertility, which introduced a parental insurance program in the early 1970s. This program produced a positive relationship between women's labour-force participation and fertility. McIntosh (1998, p.9) explains that the results were an increase from a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 1.6 in 1978 to above the replacement level (2.13) in 1990. A severe economic depression in the 1990s resulted in unemployment and funds being cut throughout the entire social welfare system. By 1996 the TFR had return to 1.6. McIntosh points out that these events support the theory that high labour force participation among women in supportive conditions and sustainable fertility levels can have a positive correlation.

A recent incentive to raise Australia's fertility rate was a program in 2001 known as the 'baby bonus' scheme. The Federal Government advertised this as a scheme that offered financial assistance to families. According to the Australian Democrats and as pointed out by Senator Andrew Murray (2002) there are many problems with the scheme. Murray states that the benefits are highly skewed, favouring those women who are high wage earners. Furthermore, the scheme will cost \$510 million by 2005-06. Murray adds that this amount could go a long way towards providing a much better, less complex scheme, such as paid maternity leave.

McIntosh (1998, p.14) explains that many incentives and offsets offered in developing countries to increase population appear to have had little effect and that a fertility policy needs to focus on two objectives; First, the establishment of conditions in which women could achieve genuine equality with men in the labour force and men could participate more fully in parenting. Second; the restoration and a greater balance between public and social expenditures on the support of children and the elderly.

In contrast to increasing population, Flannery (Kelly 1995, p.1) suggests that the key to reducing population in Australia is through immigration control.

Implementation and continual monitoring of methods and goals

Australia's Federal Government has avoided the adoption of a population policy even though there have been calls by government initiated inquiries to do so. According to Hugo (2002a, p.1), State and Territory Premiers support the proposal but in Australia the

Federal government has greater control over most of the levers available to influence population processes. Nevertheless, there is increasing recognition at the State/Territory level of the significance of population trends for social, economic and environmental change. Hugo (2002a, p1) questions whether in fact there is scope for States to have effective individual population policies.

The Government of South Australia (2004, p.10) states that key demographic drivers and influences must be constantly monitored, and policies, targets and programs related to growth should be continually reviewed and adjusted. Such monitoring will also provide valuable information to help with planning in other areas of government policy.

As previously mentioned the proposed population policy for South Australia strongly suggests population growth is necessary (GSA 2004, p.1). Growth can be accomplished in three ways;

- fertility
- international migration
- internal migration

Hugo (2002a, p2) notes that international migration is an area of population policy completely within the hands of the Federal Government, although in the past South Australia has been active in attracting immigrants by offering package incentives. In contrast there is more scope for internal migration and fertility to be encouraged by State Governments.

Fertility in South Australia

South Australia has experienced a consistent pattern of low fertility in Australia since the late 1960s, well below the rate of 2.1 required for population replacement. As shown in Table 1, the TFR has been reasonably stable in South Australia since 1970, although constantly below the national average (Hugo 2002b, p.29). This trend is also illustrated from 1992 to 2003 in Figure 3.

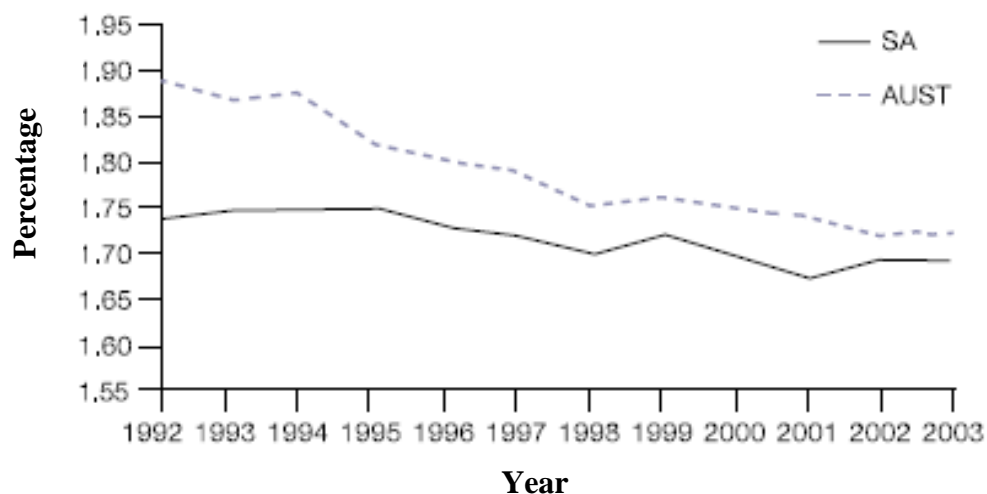
Table 1: Comparison of fertility rate – Australia and South Australia, selected years between 1976 and 1999.

Year	Australia	South Australia
1976	2.05	1.86
1986	1.87	1.76
1996	1.80	1.75
1999	1.74	1.72

Source: Figures derived from Hugo 2002b, p. 29

Table 1 reveals that during the 1990s the State's fertility fell only marginally, in comparison with Australia's TFR, which has fallen more than three times as quickly (GSA 2004, p.4).

Figure 3: Comparison of fertility rate – Australia and South Australia, 1992–2003



Source: GSA 2004, p.4

To introduce a policy which will increase the fertility rate in South Australia the State Government propose to introduce flexible working arrangements to provide a better work/life balance. They state that their role is to identify and support womens' preferences. In addition, the government also state that a more widespread and fundamental cultural shift is required by men, workplaces, and the larger community (GSA 2004, p.8). A shift in attitude is also pointed out by McDonald (2000, p.14) who believes that clear recognition needs to be given to the fact that children are valuable to the whole of society, not just to their parents.

Ageing Population in South Australia

In the 1950s and 1960s South Australia's population was younger overall than that of the nation (GSA 2004, p6). However, as a result of past immigration policies, lower fertility, lower than national mortality, disproportionately low current migration gain and selective net loss to interstate, South Australia now has the oldest population of all the States and Territories (Table 2). The proportion of South Australia's population aged 65 years or over stands at 14.8% compared with 12.7% nationally. This ageing of the population is projected to continue and is often viewed as being a demographic setback, which will lower living standards. By 2050, 31% of the State's population is forecast to be 65 years or over, more than twice the current figure (14.7%). In the same time the over 85 populations will increase four fold (GSA 2004, p.5).

Others argue that an ageing population is not a threat to society but an adaptable demographic change. McDonald (2004) has been researching the implications of an ageing population for the future performance of the Australian economy and states that the ageing population is not a threat to living standards. Furthermore, McDonald concludes that his research indicates that many people in the future will be considerably richer than they are today.

Table 2: Proportion of resident population over 65 years (%)

State/Territory	2002	2021	2051
New South Wales	13.2	19.0	26.9
Victoria	13.1	19.1	27.3
Queensland	11.8	18.5	26.8
<i>South Australia</i>	<i>14.8</i>	<i>22.2</i>	<i>31.1</i>
Western Australia	11.2	18.4	26.9
Tasmania	14.0	23.4	33.8
Northern Territory	3.9	8.1	12.1
Australian Capital Territory	8.8	16.4	23.5

Source: Australian Local Government Association 2005.

Mortality

A distinctive feature of population in South Australia is the level of life expectancy of the residents, which has consistently been below the national average since European settlement (Hugo 2002b, p.28). In 2002, the life expectancy for men was 77.3 and 82.6 years for women (GSA 2004, p.7).

In line with the rest of Australia there has been a major improvement in mortality in South Australia over the post-war period. Throughout the continent one of the main features of the mortality decline of the last thirty years has been an improvement in life expectancy among the older population.

In South Australia this trend has proved particularly significant as the aged are a larger proportion of the population than the other States. Hugo (2002b, p.29) states aged care service providers not only have to deal with a large number of older people surviving longer, but the survivors are 'sicker' than in the past. Hugo adds that new developments in medicine often prevent people from dying but in the older generation they may not recover to full health.

Migration

The Government of South Australia (GSA 2004, p.10) proposes that as the world becomes more globalised, many decisions affecting the daily lives of South Australians will be made in national government and non-government forums. It is suggested that a declining population and economy could diminish the State's ability to influence those decisions. As a result, a smaller and less affluent population would support a narrower variety of creative activities and attract less interest and talent from overseas and interstate.

South Australia's share of the national overseas migrant intake has steadily fallen from about 10% in the late 1960s to approximately 4% for each of the past eight years. The State's decline has been in all categories (Table 3), except in the Humanitarian Program.

Table 3: South Australian Settler Arrivals by Category 2002-2003

Category	New Arrivals in SA	Share of Total Australian Arrivals (%)
Family	1,243	4.4
Skilled	1,239	3.9
Business	93	1.7
Humanitarian	686	7.2
All Categories	3,261	4.2

Source: GSA 2004

As previously mentioned international migration is controlled by the Federal Government. Hugo (2002a, p. 3) explains the South Australian Government has made a substantial investment in attempts to attract international immigrants. The problem that South Australia faces is that there are two major factors shaping settlement decisions:

- The presence of family, friends and compatriots who provide a support network during initial settlement;
- The ready availability of work.

In fact, according to Hugo (2002a, p. 4) South Australia is not able to provide either of these things with the small numbers of recently arrived immigrants and high levels of unemployment. Therefore, there may be little chance of South Australia attracting a substantial number of immigrants in the near future.

Encouraging internal migration may be more effective than attracting people from overseas. A recent proposal that has been discussed by Hugo (2002a, p. 5-6) is the 'Bringing Them Back Home' scheme. Hugo lists a number of factors that could be used to attract workers from outside the State, including targeting people with particular interests, who would fit into the South Australian lifestyle.

Conclusion

The initial element required in designing a population policy is to have a precise definition and intention to reach an achievable demographic goal. The current South Australian Government believes that it is necessary to have a population policy for the State and to aim for a population of 2 million by mid-century by increasing fertility and immigration. However, not everyone supports this proposed growth and many feel that Australia cannot sustain the current numbers, let alone increase the population.

The second element is to have methods to achieve the demographic goal. The policy proposed for South Australia to increase fertility, significantly suggests that the methods will be based around supporting families and providing a better work/life balance. Schemes to encourage internal migration are included in the proposed government policy and appear to be attainable. International migration is also high on the South Australian Government's agenda but there are many challenges to overcome to be able to satisfy the Federal Government's employment and support network prerequisites.

The final element of any policy is the implementation and continual monitoring of methods and goals. South Australia's proposed demographic needs have been outlined by the South Australian Government and clearly emphasizes the economic and social issues that South Australia's population could face in the future. The proposed policy pays less attention to Australia's fragile environment and does not clearly explain how a larger population can be sustainable. A population policy is important for Australia and South Australia but the demographic goal must be based on the population capacity that Australia's unique environment can truly sustain.

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