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News release

Contact Clive Hamilton (02) 6249 6221 (bh) or 0413 993 223 (mob.)
Bob Birrell (03) 9905 2967
Stuart Gardiner (02) 9959 3509

High Population Policy Will Double Greenhouse Gas Growth

A policy of high population growth based on high levels of immigration will see Australian greenhouse gas emissions increase twice as fast compared with a policy of zero net immigration, The Australia Institute warned today.

Faster growth in Australia's greenhouse gas emissions – already per capita the highest in the industrialised world – will require additional costly measures if Australia is to meet its commitments under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

The study is published in the current issue of *People and Place*, the journal of the Centre for Population and Urban Research, Monash University, and simultaneously as an Australia Institute research paper entitled *Population policy and environmental degradation: Sources and trends in greenhouse gas emissions*.

The authors, economists Dr Clive Hamilton and Hal Turton, have calculated emissions under six scenarios ranging from low fertility with zero net immigration to high fertility with high net immigration (see chart).

Under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, Australia is committed to limiting emissions to 108 per cent of 1990 levels by 2008-12 or an estimated 120 per cent after declining emissions from land clearance are factored in. Australia's energy emissions already exceed 120 per cent of 1990 levels.

Dr Clive Hamilton, who is the Executive Director of The Australia Institute, said: "Environmental issues can no longer be ignored in the population debate in Australia, and this is the first comprehensive study of the effect of population growth on a big environmental issue.

"Some sections of business are now publicly calling for a population policy of 50 million by the year 2050. This would require immigration to be set at 450,000 each year, an absurd proposition.

"They have clearly not considered the impact that a high population policy would have on greenhouse gas emissions and on our international commitments. It is

inconsistent for business to call for high population growth and to complain about the costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.”

The study observes that over the last 15 years Australia has experienced the highest population growth of the industrial countries and the second largest increase in energy-related carbon dioxide emissions. While the efficiency of electricity generation has improved, Australia lags behind other countries in the proportion of energy obtained from natural gas.

The new research shows that immigration to Australia more than doubles the greenhouse gas emissions of the immigrants with the average energy-related emissions from the countries of origin standing at 6.6 tonnes per person compared to Australia’s 15.8 tonnes per person.

The paper calculates that each additional 70,000 immigrants (the annual intake under a ‘medium’ immigration policy) will lead to additional emissions of 20 million tonnes of greenhouse gases by the end of the Kyoto target period (2012) and 30 million tonnes by 2020.

These figures overshadow an expected reduction in greenhouse emissions of 6 to 10 million tonnes from the Federal Government’s recently announced 2 per cent renewables policy in the electricity sector.

“In broad terms, therefore, a decision to adopt a policy of high net immigration of 140,000 per year would require two or three 2 per cent renewables policies to offset the increase in emissions.”

The paper concludes: “The Federal Government will need to introduce further policies to restrict emissions from the energy sector in order to meet Australia’s international obligations, especially in the second and subsequent Kyoto commitment periods.

“Clearly population policy could be an important tool for meeting Australia’s target.

“The Government could reduce energy-related emissions during the commitment period by up to 6 per cent of 1990 levels by restricting the immigration intake from now until 2012. Conversely, any increase in the current immigration intake will require more severe restrictions on the economy to control emission-producing activities.

“This analysis highlights the importance of incorporating environmental considerations into population policy decisions”, said Dr Hamilton.

“Any attempts to increase rapidly Australia’s population will produce a sharp increase in greenhouse gas emissions. Even small increases will make it more costly for Australia to achieve future emission reduction targets.”

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