

Collaboration is how we'll find population...

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Collaboration is how we'll

TODAY, Commonwealth, state and territory treasurers are meeting in Canberra to discuss the issue of population.

It follows a Council of Australian Governments leaders meeting last December, at which it was agreed governments would co-operate more closely on the shared responsibility for managing population change.

With an annual growth of about 1.7 per cent, Australia's population is growing at the fifth fastest rate in the OECD and at a rate that is higher than it was in the 1980s and 1990s.

Back in 2002, the Intergenerational Report was predicting a population for Australia of 25 million by 2040, whereas we reached that milestone last year. We are now expected to



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reach 30 million by 2031 and 40 million by 2059.

While the population dynamic in each state and territory may be different, we have seen two thirds of the population growth over the past decade occur in Melbourne, Sydney and Southeast Queensland.

The growth in Victoria has been exceptionally strong, 17 times higher in 2016 than it was in 1993 and over the past year, at 2.2 per

cent, significantly faster than New South Wales at 1.5 per cent and Queensland at 1.7 per cent.

In fact, Melbourne is projected to become Australia's biggest city, with population potentially doubling in the decades ahead. This growth is putting significant pressure on infrastructure and services, be it roads and public transport or education, health and housing. The congestion pressures are real. A 30km commute in Melbourne today requires substantially more time than it did a decade ago. Average speeds are down by up to 25 per cent over the past 10 years in Melbourne's inner region freeways.

As the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia has commented, Australia has been "slow to increase investment in infrastructure to meet the needs of



find population solutions

our rapidly growing population”, but “investment in this area has now picked up, particularly in transport”.

Indeed, the Coalition government is leading this new investment approach, having committed more than \$20 billion to fund transport infrastructure in Victoria, with major projects prioritised, including the Airport Rail Link, the North East Link, the Monash Rail, the duplication of the Princes Highway east from Traralgon to Sale, upgrades on the Geelong rail line and a Victorian congestion package — to name but a few.

But despite the challenges posed by a growing population, we should never forget how important migration is to the story of Australia.

Nearly a third of the population

was born overseas. Our rich cultural diversity is a strength and the contribution of migrants has helped our nation to be what it is today. Indeed, in 2015-16, 84 per cent of migrants were under 40 years of age, compared with 54 per cent of the resident population. The message is that migrants are helping to slow the ageing of our population. That is good news for the economy and for jobs.

So too with international students. About 600,000 in number, they added more than \$30 billion to our economy in 2017-18, making education our third biggest export.

These international students form a big part of the temporary migrant numbers; 10 per cent of Australia’s population growth since 2010 has come from temporary migrants, with 50 per cent from

permanent migrants and 40 per cent from a natural increase.

Today’s meeting of Treasurers will present an important opportunity to improve the planning and management of Australia’s population growth. Enhanced data sharing, better identification of skills needs and infrastructure plans, population projections and internal migration flows within and between states will be critical as we respond to the population challenge.

Working together, Commonwealth, state and territory governments can and must put in place the right solutions to deliver the right outcomes for all Australians as our population grows.

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