



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

**Address to the  
Public Policy Forum**

**‘Australian immigration: responding to a changing global environment’**

**Mr Andrew Metcalfe  
Secretary  
Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

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Ladies and gentlemen.

It's a great pleasure to be here in Ottawa and have this opportunity to speak about recent developments in our approaches to immigration and citizenship matters in Australia.

Australians enjoy similar democratic freedoms to Canadians, and we have ongoing public debates about whether, as a people, we are too complacent about these. I know from my own work how valued these rights and freedoms are by the people we assist who have arrived from countries where human rights and democracy are not always respected.

The existence of the Public Policy Forum and other similar independent organisations in Canada is a demonstration of these rights and freedoms in action and so it's a pleasure to contribute to these debates today.

Canada and Australia also share important characteristics including our systems of democracy and parliamentary governance, the rule of law, and we both enjoy resource rich and extensive lands and seas, to name just a few examples.

Even our populations have broadly similar characteristics, although this country has about one and a half times the population of Australia. As in Canada, our Indigenous peoples are increasing as a percentage of our population. The latest major expression of recognition for Australia's Indigenous people was the historic apology delivered by our Prime Minister the Hon Kevin Rudd, just over a year ago in the Australian Parliament.

Australia has around 45 per cent of the population having been born overseas or having a parent born overseas, which compares fairly closely to Canada with a little under 40 per cent in your first and second generation groupings.

Our populations also share similar life expectancy and demographic characteristics, which is relevant to a point I shall make later.

When we look at migration patterns the similarities are also striking.

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6 Chan Street Belconnen ACT 2617

PO Box 25 BELCONNEN ACT 2616 • Telephone (02) 6264 1111 • Facsimile (02) 6225 6970 • Website: [www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)

Over the past decade or so, Canada has averaged around 220 000 new migrant arrivals each year whereas Australia has averaged 110 000 over the same period, although this had increased over time to nearly 150 000 in 2007-08. So relative to our population size, we have broadly comparable migration programs at present.

Canada and Australia also welcome significant numbers of refugee and humanitarian arrivals each year. Our planning target for 2009-10 will increase to 13 750 people. This includes people who have been identified by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for resettlement, including our Woman at Risk Program, our Special Humanitarian Program where people are accepted having a proposer or some other link to Australia, as well as those people seeking protection in Australia.

We are very proud of our refugee and humanitarian programs in Australia, but I do take the point of your Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the Honourable Jason Kenney, who noted in a recent speech on cultural diversity that:

‘...we cannot take our success for granted.  
We Canadians are kind of modest people on the one hand.  
On the other, I think we sometimes throw our shoulders out of joint patting ourselves on the back.’<sup>1</sup>

He is absolutely right. We cannot take our success for granted in any sphere of government activity and we must continually work to improve all our programs across the spectrum of humanitarian migration and settlement, skilled and family migration, cultural diversity and citizenship and not least border security.

In mentioning border security, I note the extraordinary circumstance Australia enjoys of having a complete sea border. This dominates our approach to border protection and at the same time tragically results in loss of life as people smugglers send off overcrowded and unseaworthy boats from the archipelago to our north.

In Australia, we consider one of the key elements of an effective and well-run migration administration is border control, and it is my view that this is an essential foundation for maintaining public support for our immigration program.

Here in Canada, of course you also have an extensive sea border and the novel—to Australians—land border with the United States, which has its own implications.

I read the other day that the United States Government has only just tightened controls at this border, requiring Americans to show government-approved identification, such as a passport.

While I understand why this needs to change, I am very impressed at the stability and goodwill shown by both countries across this significant border.

Overall, I see Canada and Australia as having broadly similar approaches and requirements in our migration policies and programs, and this means the bilateral and multilateral discussions which I have been taking part in here have been particularly fruitful and useful.

Today, I would like to give a brief but fairly wide ranging view of current approaches and programs in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship which I lead and reflect at various points on how we respond to a changing global environment. I won't have time to cover every aspect of our work so if there's a topic you wish to pursue please ask me about it afterwards.

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking notes for the Honourable Jason Kenney, P.C., M.P. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism “Good Citizenship: The Duty to Integrate” at Huron University College’s Canadian Leaders Speakers’ Series University of Western Ontario, 18 March 2009

Australia has had planned migration and citizenship programs in place for more than sixty years—indeed 2009 encompasses the sixtieth anniversary of the first modern Australian citizenship ceremony. We recently interviewed a participant in the first ceremony in 1949 who was born in Spain and came to Australia as a teenager. Now with five children, 11 grand children and six great-grand children, Angelo Muguira is a testament to the benefits we can reap over many decades and beyond from a single migrant visa.

Overall, around seven million people have migrated to Australia since the mid 1940s from around 200 countries. This, in a population of just 21 million or so, means that we have the very high proportion of overseas born residents and citizens I mentioned and hence a vibrant cultural diversity.

Indeed, all Australians other than full-blood Indigenous people have at least one ancestor who has arrived from an overseas country in the past 221 years, ever since the First Fleet hove to with its cargo of convict settlers from Portsmouth in England at what was to become Sydney Harbour.

Many and various waves of migration have occurred since then, usually with a strong push or pull factor such as a gold rush, or in the case of our humanitarian entrants, some overwhelming event such as the exodus of Hungarian and Czech refugees in 1956 and 1968, or people coming by boat from Indochina after the end of the Vietnam war in 1975 and so on.

In the past 60 years, Australia has consistently sought skilled workers such as for the construction of the Snowy Mountains scheme which still provides low cost water and electricity to some of our main population centres.

In recent times, we have sought to address quite specific gaps in our labour market for positions which we cannot fill domestically.

One of the key ways the Australian Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, is responding to the global economic downturn is by very careful and responsive finetuning of the eligibility categories for permanent and temporary skilled visas.

This is a relatively straightforward exercise using our points system where people applying for the various categories of permanent economic or skilled visas have to amass a certain number of points to be granted a visa. They 'earn' points through English language ability, educational qualifications, work experience, whether a position is on the Skilled Occupation List and so on. This system has served us very well in being able to respond quickly to balance changes in both our domestic labour market and the global labour market.

Bearing in mind Minister Kenney's remarks, I felt a certain amount of pride a couple of years ago when the United Kingdom adopted a similar points based system after seeing ours in operation. (And of course, you know and I know that Australia's points system—dating back to the late 1970s—was in turn modelled on yours!)

Since the 1960s, Australia's migration policies have been non-discriminatory in terms of the source countries we draw people from.

And as we now accept migrants from some 200 countries, we have a much greater pool of people from which to choose in terms of skills and potential benefit. In 2007-08 the top seven source countries for permanent additions to Australia's population were in rank order: the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Peoples Republic of China, India, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Malaysia, Korea and Sri Lanka. Here in Canada, in 2007, the top three countries were China, India and the Philippines, the same as Australia once we remove our traditional migrant source countries of the UK and New Zealand.

One of the great success stories since the states of Australia federated in 1901, and especially following the Second World War is how— with our great cultural diversity—we have forged a peaceful and cohesive nation.

For example, we have invited around 700 000 refugee and humanitarian entrants to live in Australia since the mid 1940s. I mentioned we consult with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees so that our intake for next year of nearly 14 000 people will include refugee and humanitarian entrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

When we started to accept people from new source countries such as Africa and the Middle East, we also realised that we had to improve the responsiveness of our settlement programs. We offer intensive assistance to our offshore humanitarian arrivals, starting while they are still in the refugee camps with a five-day Australian Cultural Orientation Course and then medical and other support to ensure they are healthy when they arrive.

After arrival, we provide the full gamut of accommodation, income support, English language tuition, translating services and so on, delivered by contracted service providers, other government agencies and the wonderful volunteers who—especially if they are of the same culture—form a vital bridge between the old life and the new.

We also fund a significant Settlement Grants Program, which provides grants to community organisations and service providers to help people to become self-reliant and participate equitably in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival.

This can be used for everything from information sessions and casework for newly arrived settlers, to sporting activities to foster links to mainstream sporting organisations, and projects with a highly practical focus such as driver education and homework clubs.

A few years ago, we refined the selection criteria for the projects and the funding so we can respond quickly to emerging needs right across Australia. This was partly in recognition that the support requirements for refugee and humanitarian entrants could change rapidly, such as through a change in the source countries for the program.

We also monitor all our settlement programs very closely now to ensure they are highly responsive to emerging needs. For instance, we developed a DVD in several African languages to help people from Africa to access services and receive information in the first vital weeks after their arrival, when they are still building connections in the community.

I was very pleased by the comments made by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres earlier this year that ‘Australia has one of the best refugee resettlement programs in the world’.

In the same way as for our direct settlement programs, we have recently changed our flagship cultural diversity program to ensure it is responsive to emerging needs. The Diverse Australia Program, with the catchphrase ‘Everyone Belongs’, is a means of celebrating our rich diversity and importantly, addressing any potential or emerging issues that may threaten community harmony.

One of our great successes in this area is an annual event called Harmony Day which has grown in size over the past decade until this year we had more than 4500 registered events nationwide. As the name suggests, this day is about celebrating our harmony, social cohesion and inclusiveness. What’s especially valuable is that hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren participate in these events and so they are being exposed to these concepts of belonging, tolerance and diversity at an early age.

Finally, I should like to expand a little on how we are responding to the global economic downturn.

We run an extensive temporary skilled visa program, where workers are sponsored by employers to work in Australia for up to four years. It's an excellent barometer for global financial conditions, as a year or so ago, the program was bumping up against capacity constraints. Now with the global economic crisis, the number of temporary skilled migration visas granted in April was 64 per cent lower than in September last year, when the crisis hit, and indeed, the lowest rate in four years.

I should mention part of the fall was due to some necessary changes implemented by the Australian Government to protect local jobs and improve the integrity of the scheme.

Nevertheless, the demand for overseas labour is not as great and in recognition of the impacts of the crisis on the domestic labour market, the minister has also decided to cut the permanent skilled migration program in this financial year and next.

Overall, the migration program will total 168 700 for 2009-10, including 60 300 family places and 108 100 skilled places.

These reductions will also have an impact on the department of 7000 or so staff that I lead, as our funding is partly based on activity levels. We are currently managing a process of reducing our salary expenditure, which includes options to redeploy some staff with other government agencies which will be growing in the near future.

Our migration planning target for next financial year might have been lower given the negative economic outlook, except that Australia faces significant demographic change over the next decade, as does Canada. We have the same issue as you do of the baby boomers reaching retirement, in common with many other countries.

According to a recent report from our federal Treasury department, skilled migration is expected to be the only source of net labour force growth in Australia from about 2010.

This factor alone is likely to drive a substantial skilled migration program in the longer term.

A well-managed and appropriately sized migration program will help to attenuate the effects of population ageing as baby boomers leave the workforce. It will also boost living standards as our migrants tend to be younger and better educated than the population at large.

We also need to be ready to use our migration programs to meet skill needs and balance the ageing of the population so that the impacts of the global economic crisis are minimised.

I see a further key role for my department to assist in the economic recovery when it comes. Our current projections are for significant economic growth when the recovery commences and so skilled migration will be a critical element in meeting demand in the expanding Australian economy.

Ladies and gentlemen

May I thank you for your invitation and the typical and cordial Canadian hospitality shown to me today and throughout my visit. It has been a pleasure to speak to you about how we adjust our approaches to immigration in Australia to respond to the changing global economic and immigration environment.

If you have any questions, I would be very pleased to answer them for you now.

Thank you.