

Populate or the state will perish

THE Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates South Australia's population will peak at 1.6 million in 2027 and then slowly decline.

By 2050, there could be fewer people in South Australia than there are today.

South Australia's share of the national population will fall from 9.2 per cent in 1961, 7.7 per cent in 2003 to 5.6 per cent in 2050.

Some people, including respected conservationists, argue that this may be desirable in a world threatened by global warming, water and food shortages, increasing demand on health services and rising fuel and power costs.

But a policy of declining population prompts core questions about changing lifestyles, the availability of jobs, the amount of guaranteed taxation, the standard of health care and the relationship between the ageing and the young, employed and unemployed.



**Mike Rann:
Population
policy requires
lateral thinking.**

A declining and ageing population leads to a contracting and less competitive business base and a weaker, less flexible and resilient economy.

Business, academic and cultural creativity shrinks and increasingly decisions affecting the community's day-to-day living are made interstate or overseas.

As a regional economy, South Australia would become marginalised and living standards would fall. We would become isolated and irrelevant.

The alternative is for a population increase with a commensurate reduction in the average age and a rise in the workforce, productivity and economic certainty. But reversing what has become an entrenched trend of decline will not be easy.

For example, South Australia's share of Australia's overseas migration has fallen from 10 per cent in the 1960s to only 4 per cent in the past decade.

It is more than a coincidence that South Australia has a median age of 37.9 compared with the national average of 35.9, with 14.7 per cent of the population over 65 years compared with a national figure of 12.7 per cent. If current trends continue, by 2050, 31 per cent of South Australia's population will be 65 or older.

So realistically, what can be done?