

Too many people

I FIND it hard to join in the national self-congratulation that accompanied the announcement that the population had passed 21 million. Leaving aside the conjecture over which birth brought about the milestone, is a population boom something to celebrate?

We've been here before. The baby boom of the 1950s left us with an ageing population, a legacy that the Treasurer worries so much about. This boom, as with the last one, will be followed by a bust that will create an ageing population for future generations to deal with.

The only study aimed at determining an optimum population was done in the 1970s. It predicted that we would be able to sustain 25 million if we are to continue exporting food. The Government has no idea of what population it is seeking. It only mentions that we would pass 30 million by 2043.

The population boom gave us the housing boom, yet statistics show that the building of new dwellings has fallen behind the rate of population increase. The lack of housing affordability has driven household debt to alarming levels. As suburbia runs out of places to sprawl to, and country towns become unviable because of drought, house prices will increase exponentially.

Worldwide, the population explosion that began after World War II has been sustained by the abundance of oil. With peak oil now passed, has anyone given any thought as to how those populations are to be sustained in the next few decades?

Peter Costello's dreams of leapfrogging population figures are reckless indeed.

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AUSTRALIA'S population hitting the 21 million mark is nothing to celebrate. Our environment is coming under increasing strain and overpopulation is the main cause. The cities are running out of water, and the high rate of population growth makes it increasingly difficult to reduce greenhouse gases. Rising house prices have put home ownership beyond the reach of many. If Peter Costello cared about the environment or housing affordability he would scrap the baby bonus and stop using immigration as a solution to skills shortages.

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