

## MEMBER PROFILE

# Michael Hickinbotham

*South Australia risks losing its competitive edge, warns Hickinbotham Group managing director Michael Hickinbotham. He says the State is also failing young homebuyers, who are being priced out of the housing market.*

As chairman of the Australian Population Institute (APop) in SA and a Member of UDIA's Executive, Mr Hickinbotham is fighting for South Australia's future by maintaining the pressure on State and Federal Governments on key issues.

Housing affordability tops his list, but it is inextricably linked with population growth, land supply and government policy.

Of great concern is housing affordability in Adelaide. "In Melbourne it takes 25.6 per cent of average earnings to service a mortgage, versus 24.3 per cent in Adelaide, up from 15 per cent only a decade ago," he said. "I think that is a terrible shame and it is an abrogation of our responsibility to the next generation."

Mr Hickinbotham blames a restrictive land supply policy and a frustrating planning system for the loss of this competitive edge, and is critical of the State Government's policy of competing with residential developers.

"It undermines investor confidence and crowds out the many private sector companies which are staking their own capital... and it is highly risky for the taxpayer," he said.

Mr Hickinbotham speaks proudly of APop's achievements since its population summit in 2003, including the establishment of a state population unit and a population target in the State Strategic Plan. The policy think-tank now leads the debate on sustainable population growth.

"I've always believed we should be doing everything possible to attract people to South Australia. I'm not saying we should prevent people from leaving – I'm just saying we should give them reasons to come back," he said.



Two years ago the Australian Bureau of Statistics predicted the State's population would go into decline by 2025. In the past year 3600 people left, many of them young, well-educated and looking for career opportunities. However, 8000 people moved to South Australia – the highest figure for at least 20 years. Mr Hickinbotham is heartened by this, but says more needs to be done to maintain the momentum.

He is also proud of Hickinbotham's tradition of challenging the status quo and pioneering innovations in construction and development techniques, water management systems and education.

He is less forthcoming on the personal front, but says his interests include horse riding in Kuitpo Forest and spending time with his wife Susan and three young children.

He grew up in and around the family business before legal practise took him to Melbourne in 1989. He returned to the company in 1994.

"Whilst I enjoyed practising law it was not for me; I was frustrated and wanted to be on the other side of the desk taking the risks and making the projects happen," he said.

Travel, reading, sport and an interest in wine round out his busy life, but nearly everything comes back to the fortunes of South Australia.

"I want my kids to live and work here and fulfil themselves here. I want to see the state light up," he said.