



Tim Smith MP
Member for Kew

774 ABC with Sally Warharft

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Transcript:

Sally: Tim Smith, the Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Population Policy, Member for Kew, and well known 'Wrapper' on this program, has been put in charge of a Victorian Population Taskforce, and it will today, well, announce what its aims are. And we have Tim Smith on the line to talk about it. Hello Tim.

Tim: Sally, how are you?

Sally: I'm fine thank you. Tell us about what the Victorian Population Taskforce, why, why it exists.

Tim: So, last year Matthew Guy appointed me the nation's first Parliamentary Secretary for Population Policy, and what we are going to be looking at in the lead-up to the next election is a multi-faceted and whole-of-government approach to what is one of the biggest issues facing state governments in Victoria, which is population growth: 100,000 people a year, of which 92 per cent of it move to Melbourne, Greater Melbourne. Now we simply want to have a look at a whole host of different options about how we plan for that population growth, and indeed, how we potentially take more pressure off Greater Melbourne and spread that growth around Greater Victoria.

Sally: A multi-faceted whole-of-government approach sounds just so broad as to be almost meaningless. Can you give us a bit more, a bit more detail about what your aims are?

Tim: So, for example: we know that through the planning system, and indeed through the state tax system, there are a whole host of different incentives that we can devise to look at how we can encourage people, not just to settle in Greater Melbourne, but to settle in regional centres like Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong.

So, we know that of the 100,000 that move to Victoria every year, 60 per cent of them are overseas migrants. I met with Peter Dutton last week to discuss these issues on how both the state and the Commonwealth can work together to ensure that migrants don't just settle in Melbourne, but in regional centres, as long as state government is prepared to fund infrastructure and support jobs growth in those regional centres to take the pressure off Melbourne.

Sally: I mean that's the key isn't it, if you -

Tim: Exactly right.

Sally: - if you're talking about relocating people? Is that something that conditions would be put on people migrating, or is it all about incentive?

Tim: Well, to be frank, from the state level it's all about incentives. We don't have, obviously, the immigration powers of the Commonwealth - it's not a power that we possess - but we certainly possess powers through the planning system, and indeed the state tax system, to incentivise people to move to regional Victoria; that's absolutely what we're going to be looking at.

And this will be a slow burn: this will be in the lead up to the next election. So I've got quite a period of time to devise this strategy, and I know people are looking for answers immediately, because this is a problem that affects all of us, particularly through car congestion, over-packed train carriages, trams that are completely full, and all the visible signs of population growth that are related to transport congestion in particular. But I am absolutely committed to drawing up a strategy that will help deal with this problem in the lead up to the next election. People can criticise politicians for not thinking in the long-term, but that is what this is all about: thinking for Victoria's long-term future.

Sally: Victoria's population grows by about 100,000 people a year -

Tim: That's correct.

Sally: - is that, is that about right?

Tim: That's correct.

Sally: Is it about right, though? Do you think that we need more population growth or less?

Tim: Oh is that fact right? Look, we take in an enormous percentage of net overseas migration into this country; Melbourne is the multicultural heart of the nation -

Sally: Yeah, we're talking about numbers, though, Tim Smith, like we're talking about whether or not the Coalition thinks population growth is good, and how much there should be.

Tim: So, you're wanting me to put a figure on it, and I can't do that. But the key point is this: growth is good, but unplanned growth is bad.

Sally: I would have thought, as the Chair of the Victorian Population Taskforce, having a goal of the right number of people to live in Victoria would be the very first question you'd need to be able to answer.

Tim: Well it's certainly something that we're going to look at. But the key point is, as I said to you earlier: given that the immigration power is something that's controlled by the Federal Government, and we have obviously freedom of movement in this country - there's, to an extent, not that much that a state government can do about how many people are moving to our country - but we can certainly help incentivise those who move to Victoria, and through various powers at our disposal, ensure that Melbourne itself remains as liveable as it has been in the past.

Sally: I'm sure though that you and the Victorian Liberal-National Coalition have a view on population growth broadly, is it something you're, you're for?

Tim: Look my opinion is that population growth, if well-planned-for, is a good thing, and all the economic data shows that. But unplanned growth brings into question the nature of population growth to our State, and that's a bad thing. We want people to be confident that governments are planning for population growth and, quite frankly, this government is not - current Labor government in Victoria - is not planning for population growth. For example, in tearing up a new road project and spending a billion dollars for the privilege, you would say probably that is not planning for population growth. Equally, not having South Yarra connected to the Metro Rail tunnel, despite the enormous jobs and population growth in that part of our city: that again is another short-sighted decision by a government that ought to be planning for the future.

Sally: - What's your first order of business in this Tim Smith?

Tim: So the first order of business is going to be, obviously, to convene the panel - I'm working through those issues at the moment with Matthew. We will have our initial meeting in the coming weeks and months, and to devise the terms of reference, and to go from there basically, and to get cracking. So, in the lead up to the next election there is a significant piece of work that can be

presented to the Victorian people. And Sally, I'm absolutely committed to this. This is going to be a really good piece of work that's going to go into quite a level of detail that - you know, people often will claim that politicians don't go and do the nitty gritty themselves - well, this is going to be a sleeves-rolled-up exercise, and we're going to get to the heart of what people are concerned about.

Sally: Alright, look I, we will wait with great interest, and I'm looking forward to hearing people's calls on this.