

Abbott's Immigration Policy: Open for business

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During the two years of his prime ministership, Tony Abbott's immigration rhetoric had a constant refrain of 'stop the boats'. From his public utterances it is not clear that Mr Abbott has any firm and unchanging views on economic immigration provided that the immigrants arrive by plane. For his two-year incumbency, this paper reviews the areas of immigration numbers; 457 and other temporary visas; refugees and asylum seekers; and trends in the views of the Australian public on immigration. It also examines some of the claimed economic impacts of immigration and the role of free trade agreements in deregulating in-flows as well as the immigration reports of the Productivity Commission. Finally, it scrutinises Abbott's changing views on multiculturalism contrasting them with those of his successor Malcolm Turnbull.

If we want to remain a prosperous, high wage, generous social welfare safety net, first world economy then, in this rapidly converging global economy, we have to be more efficient, more imaginative, more innovative, more technologically sophisticated ... Our greatest natural assets are not below the ground but walking around on top of it and every sinew of national policy must be dedicated to the vision of ensuring that our human capital becomes the smartest and nimblest (Turnbull 2015).

Introduction

Tony Abbott is an immigrant from England. He was born in Lambeth south of the Thames and was not registered as an Australian citizen until 1981 when, aged 23, he wanted to take up a Rhodes scholarship which was exclusively available to Australian citizens. Abbott was Prime Minister just for the two years from September 2013 to September 2015. In so far as he acted on immigration issues during those 24 months, he appeared obsessed by border protection and gave very little attention to regular immigration. This was typified by his immediately changing from the Rudd preferred title of Department of Immigration, Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship to his own creation of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. His first Immigration Minister was Scott Morrison who stayed for 15 months, being replaced by Peter Dutton, a former policeman, whose background well suited the new paramilitary border protection image.

Most of Abbott's significant statements on immigration and the question of a 'big Australia' were made when he was in opposition, before he became a prime-ministerial captive of three word-slogans. Individually, Abbott was aware of the strains imposed by population growth and of popular resistance to competition from immigrants, but he also accepted the business lobbies' claims of a need for immigrants from particular groups. That this made

him appear inconsistent did not seem to worry him. Thus before losing the 2010 election, Abbott declared that population and immigration would be big issues, that capital cities were 'choking' and population growth was putting the environment under pressure. Population, he said was 'growing in an out-of-control and unsustainable way'. Immigration spokesman Scott Morrison backed him up by promising that the Coalition would erect 'guard rails on growth'. They promised that in government the Coalition would turn the Productivity Commission into the Productivity and Sustainability Commission within three months and ask it to 'establish a new benchmark of community attitudes on where to go from here on future population growth' (Grattan and Dowling 2010). Results from public opinion surveys before the successive elections show that in 2010, refugees and asylum seekers ranked seventh with 6% of respondents naming this issue as most important, but by 2013 it ranked second with 13% naming the issue as primary. Thus in 2013 more voters were concerned with asylum seekers than with health and hospitals (10%) or climate change (9%) or education (9%) (Reece 2015: Tables 1 and 2). Unfortunately, the surveys did not ask just why these concerns were so strong so it is not possible to judge the impact of prior political campaigns.

When he eventually came to power, Abbott was able to leave the immigration program largely on autopilot because of the bipartisan support for a constant inflow of new Australians. Broadly speaking, all Australian federal governments, whatever their party affiliations, have been pro-immigration. Occasionally they have opposed particular groups of immigrants: Chinese in the 1900s and 2000s, Jews in the 1930s, Communists after the war, but broadly they have favoured continued growth through importing ever more people.

Certainly there was the post-World War II slogan: 'The Best Immigrant is a Baby'. Also there was Peter Costello, the Treasurer who wanted Australian families to have a child for mum, a child for dad, and a child for the country. But these very slogans were evidence in support of a 'Big Australia'. Given this position, very close to unanimity, Australia's immigration debate focuses almost exclusively on 'Australia's disproportionate reaction to the small number of people who arrive here, [as refugees] which amounts to one per cent of all applicants for asylum worldwide' (Menadue et al. 2011). Some would see this as targeted persecution (New Matilda 2014). In 1994-95 just 5.2% of the migration program entrants were refugees. This proportion peaked at 6.3% in 2012-13 after years of hovering in the region of 4 to 5%. It was due to sink to 3.2%, the lowest rate for more than 20 years, reflecting Abbott's personal views, before the announcement that Australia would take 12,000 Syrian Refugees [now quietly expanded to include Iraqis] (Parliament of Australia 2015a; Savva 2016: 275). Attacking asylum seekers is a tactic that yields multiple rewards: fomenting paranoid security concerns; stoking xenophobia; keeping right wingers happy and taking attention from the real impacts of a quarter of a million authorised immigrants arriving by plane each year. Johnson (2016) argues that politicians evoke fear and anxiety to garner support for tougher border security measures, but it is equally plausible to argue for a different causal path with morally corrupt politicians provoking fear simply so as to garner votes.

As Prime Minister, John Howard, stung by the success of the One Nation Party, determined on a pact to cater for the baser instincts of voters. Asylum seekers were to be demonised which would simultaneously pander to the anti-immigrant right wing, and keep attention away from the elephant in the room, the continuing influx of more than a hundred thousand skilled migrants each year. Thus,

... for its 11-and-a-half years, the Howard government tried to use xenophobia for its political advantage while at the same time running a relatively high immigration policy. It was a tricky act, but John Howard was a skilful politician and ... he managed it very well (Richardson 2015).

With less skill, Abbott kept up this policy of turning back the boats and demonising asylum seekers whilst welcoming plane loads to join the Australian job market each week (Ghezelbash and Crock 2013). Commentators watched to see how Abbott would balance xenophobia with welcoming economic migrants. In opposition in April 2012, Abbott gave a key-note speech in which he was totally explicit about riding the two horses at once. Beginning with stopping the boats, he then went on to stress 'the coalition has always been pro-immigration and pro-immigrant' and claimed that 'John Howard rebuilt a consensus in favour of immigration' (*The Age* 2012). This

support for immigration was inconsistent with Abbott's earlier concerns about population growth but reflected his acceptance in government of the business lobbies' pro-immigration stance.

Currently, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection website explains that 'the purpose of migration is to build the economy, shape society [sic], support the labour market and reunite families' (2016). There is no mention of asylum seekers or refugees.

Temporary Visas

Most Australians are probably unaware just how many people are here in Australia on temporary visas. In 2000-01, temporary migrants outnumbered permanent migrants for the first time. Unlike the permanent migration program, the level of temporary migration to Australia is not subject to quotas or caps, but is left to be demand driven. In 2013-14 the total number of temporary entrants was just under three quarters of a million (736,124) as compared with 190,000 permanent migrants and 13,750 refugees. Of the temporary entrants 40% were students, 33% working holiday makers and 13% were on 457 temporary skilled worker visas (DIBP 2016). The 457 visa holders are supposed to be paid a minimum of \$53,900 plus superannuation per year and can stay for up to four years. It is estimated that more than 70% of 457 visa holders and 30% of student visa holders go on to become permanent residents (Productivity Commission 2015b: 75).

The 457 visas were introduced by Prime Minister Howard in 1996 to de-regulate temporary labour migration. This was then partially re-regulated by the ALP Government between 2007-13 (Campbell and Tham 2013). The political debate over 457 visas centres on three issues: whether visa holders take Australian jobs, whether they lead to reduced pay and working conditions for Australian workers and whether visa holders themselves are exploited (Howe 2015). Answers to these questions depend upon detailed research into individual industries in local areas. In May 2014, Change.org hosted a petition with over 30,000 signatures protesting against 457 visa holders excluding Australian-trained nurses from employment, because the in-comers had greater experience to offer, and were perceived as being more compliant with employers' demands.

In 2012, in opposition, Tony Abbott argued that the 457 visa program was one of the Howard Government's 'most significant innovations'.

These are the best possible immigrants to Australia. They make a contribution from day one. From day one, they are immersed in the Australian way of life. They also help Australian businesses to make the most of their economic opportunities to build a prosperity which every Australian participates in (Flitton 2012).

Debate continues about low level skill requirements and the genuineness of the shortages of local workers to fill them. As Campbell and Tham (2013) pointed out, their survey showed that very few employers were willing to pay more to attract Australian workers to the positions taken by 457 entrants, which argues that the problem is often one of low wages offered, not the lack of skilled Australians. Visa holders can also bring in eligible family members who have unrestricted work and study rights in Australia. December 2015 Departmental statistics showed 85,900 primary 457 visa holders in Australia (DIBP 2016: 1). The June 2014 Audit by the Fair Work Ombudsman showed that 40% of the 457 visa holders were being paid below the statutory minimum wage or had been let go. Yet in October 2014 the Abbott Government announced that it would make it easier for businesses to use 457s by relaxing the rules for English language competency to 'broaden the pool of potential workers from overseas' (Giakoumelos 2014).

As bilateral free trade agreements come into force, some categories of employers have the freedom to bring in as many employees as they choose without skills or language tests. There is certainly no cap on numbers. So much for the 2001 Howard slogan: 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.' Now it is the Chinese who decide. Abbott signed up to the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) with China which allows Chinese companies, often government owned, to bring in unlimited numbers of Chinese workers for projects worth \$150 million or more. Very little thought appears to have been given to the likely social and economic impacts of these enclaves of non-English speaking Chinese workers. Will they bring their own hospitals? In September 2015, the Turnbull Government introduced the enabling legislation for ChAFTA which had been drafted for the previous Abbott Government. This provides that labour market testing, to see whether suitable Australian workers are available before bringing in Chinese employees, will not apply to certain categories of Chinese workers as set out in Annex 10-A to ChAFTA. Also, mandatory skills assessment is not needed for categories such as electricians, carpenters or motor mechanics.

Very occasionally opinion polls ask specifically about 457 visa holders (unless otherwise indicated, public opinion data cited in this paper are from Monash University 2016). The Lowy Institute Survey of February 2014 asked the 37% of respondents who said that the migrant intake was too high whether they agreed that 'we should train our own skilled people, not take them from other countries' – 88% agreed alongside the 87% who felt 'having more people could make unemployment worse'. In March 2013, the ANU's Essential Report found that 58% of respondents felt that there were too many foreigners coming in with (Short Term) 457 visas (Monash University 2016). Writing for *The Age*, Mark Kenny commented that Julia Gillard's

claim that foreigners were pushing Australians to the back of the jobs queue was for the benefit of a particular group of potential Labor voters (Monash University 2016). However, the Fairfax Nielson Poll of 19 March 2013, which asked about 'too many workers from overseas coming to work in Australia', showed that Abbott had a better reading of the support base since it found 41% of Coalition supporters and 39% of Labor supporters (but only 15% of Greens) agreeing (Monash University 2016).

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

In considering Australian approaches to immigration, it appears that the level of political attention is inversely related to actual numbers arriving, so that 99% of the attention is devoted to the less than 3% of arrivals who are refugees and asylum seekers. In the past, in just three years, from 1948 to 1951, Australia resettled 160,000 refugees when our total population was only 8 million. Since World War II, some 800,000 refugees and displaced persons have settled in Australia. However, in the twenty-first century, as the Australian population reached twenty million, the usual allocation of visas for refugees and others with humanitarian needs has been just 13,750 places a year, most of which go to refugees in camps. Owing to a deliberate decision by the Howard Government to set one group of refugees against another, the more places within this 13,750 which are given to asylum seekers who are found to be refugees on shore in Australia (most of whom arrived by plane, not boat), the fewer places are available to refugees in camps. Indeed 2012-13 was the only year in which boat arrivals exceeded arrivals by plane (Parliament of Australia 2015c).

Australian politicians make great play of the fact that on a *per capita* basis Australia 'settles' more refugees than any other country except Canada. The critical qualifier is 'settles'. Many developing countries host far more refugees *per capita* but they do not formally settle them. More than two thirds of the world's refugees live in poor developing countries. Thus Jordan with 2.8 million, Lebanon (1.6 million or a quarter of the population), Turkey (1.6 million), Iran (0.9 million), Pakistan (1.5 million), and Kenya (0.5 million) all host numbers of refugees unimaginable to Australians (World Bank 2014). Compared with Western countries, Australia's refugee numbers were in a different league as compared with France's 250,000 or Germany's 217,000 (World Bank 2014). Yet these figures were before 1,321,560 new arrivals claimed asylum in Europe in 2015, 476,000 of them in Germany. On a *per capita* basis there were 260 asylum claimants per 100,000 citizens across Europe, which would equate to many more claimants for Australia. One might query whether it is a consequence of being an island country or the Anglo-Saxon heritage that makes Australia and the United Kingdom both respond with such outrage to some of the smallest proportions of asylum seekers. Owing to the Australian policy of exporting our

asylum seekers to far poorer countries, one person in 20 in Nauru is now an asylum seeker, while Australia spent \$55 million on settling just five asylum seekers in Cambodia, who did not stay.

For the past 15 years, approximately 13,700 places have been granted under Australia's Humanitarian Visa Programme annually. Yet back in 1980-81, under the leadership of Prime Minister Fraser, our resettlement program peaked at 22,000 places per year, which would be equivalent to 34,000 on a *per capita* basis today. In 2012-13, the Gillard Government decided to raise the intake from 13,750 to 20,000 but this was immediately returned to 13,750 by Prime Minister Abbott, who cited 'stopping the boats' as one of his government's most significant achievements. Abbott had continued Howard's tradition of using the asylum seeker issue to deflect attention from overall immigration levels and to provide an aspect of security concerns that the Australian public can worry over without antagonising our Asian neighbours (McLean 2016: 14-15). Ever since the 2002 establishment of the Bali Process, jointly chaired by Australia and Indonesia to deal with people smuggling, Australia's commitment has been supposed to be part of a regional plan to deal with refugees. This has never eventuated because Australia has not been able to persuade its neighbours to act in ways that serve Australia's interests rather than their own.

In September 2015, days before being deposed in favour of Malcolm Turnbull, Prime Minister Abbott announced that Australia would permanently resettle 12,000 refugees from Syria as well as begin air strikes on Islamic State targets inside Syria within the week. Australian bombing raids have continued, but of the 12,000 refugees, as of May 2016, less than two hundred have actually arrived in Australia. It would appear that Abbott's generosity, however limited, was a reaction to community agitation and pressure from NSW Premier Mike Baird and National's Barnaby Joyce. Labor had pressed for a 10,000 intake. Allegedly Abbott, or Credlin, had to be persuaded that letting in Syrians would not dilute the electoral success of his 'stop the boats' message (Walker 2015). Abbott was also apparently affected by the *New York Times* editorial of 4 September 2015 calling his asylum seeker policies 'inhumane, of dubious legality and strikingly at odds with the country's tradition of welcoming people fleeing persecution and war'. The delays in actually welcoming the Syrians to Australia can be blamed on the lack of staff and professionalism within ASIO, which is responsible for security clearances; on a government spooked by the Muslim inspired violence in Paris and, as a consequence, a decision that at least 80% of the Syrians/Iraqis accepted should be people with relatives or other sponsors already living in Australia. This is also cheaper, since the Government provides far fewer benefits for sponsored refugees. The sponsorship requirement is

also likely to bias the intake in favour of Christians and Mandaeans. Hopefully, the Yazidis who are regarded as far worse than pagans by Muslims will also benefit.

Australian Views on Immigration

The ANU Poll on National Identity taken in March 2015 showed that, when asked an open ended question about 'the most important problem facing Australia today', immigration ranked third at 10% of responses, as compared to July 2011 when 20% were most worried about immigration (Monash University 2016). Asked about views on the current immigration intake (whether they knew the actual numbers or not) in March 2015, 42% felt that it should stay the same, 27% favoured an increase and 13% wanted to reduce 'a little' and 15% to reduce 'a lot'. It is not clear what respondents who wanted a little reduction were thinking about, possibly road congestion or Sydney house prices. Overall views were very positive and 86% agreed that 'immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures', and 83% that immigrants 'are generally good for Australia's economy' (Monash University 2016).

The Essential Survey in September 2014 asked: 'When a family applies to migrate to Australia, should it be possible for them to be rejected purely on the basis of their religion?'. Fully 63% disagreed, which suggests that Australians are generally quite tolerant. Some 27% of Liberal/National supporters favoured religious discrimination as against 16% of Labor and 9% of Greens (Monash University 2016). The Greens stand out as having a distinctive policy maintaining that: 'seeking asylum is a humanitarian issue rather than an issue of border security or defence, and people seeking asylum must be treated with compassion and dignity'. They also want to prioritise family migration over the importation of skilled workers which must not 'substitute for training or undermine wages and conditions in Australia' (Greens 2016).

In opposition, Abbott did not hesitate to use mass immigration as a political tool. In August 2010 an Essential Survey informed respondents that: 'Tony Abbott has proposed to cut immigration from around 300,000 a year to 170,000. Do you approve or disapprove of this cut to immigration?'. Fully 64% approved, 22% disapproved and 14% did not know. Remarkably, 91% of Liberal/National voters agreed as opposed to 51% of Labor and 38% of Greens. When asked 'Which leader and party do you trust most to handle immigration issues?' some 35% chose Tony Abbott (as compared to 64% approving his proposal), 23% went with Julia Gillard, but as many as 31% said that there was no difference and 10% said they did not know (Monash University, 2016).

Opinion polls vary (Markus 2014; Monash University 2016; Bilodeau and Fadol 2011; Bloemraad and Wright 2014). A survey for the Australian Parliamentary Library, and thus for Members of Parliament, found that the average result of 25 surveys conducted in Australia from 1999 to 2010 was near to an even split as 52% supported the existing level of immigration or an increase whilst 43% wanted a reduction and 5% were uncertain (Groot and Watson 2011). In terms of strong opposition to multiculturalism this characterised about 10% of the population.

Abbott and Multiculturalism

Prime Minister Howard had a real problem with multiculturalism, even with just saying the word (Ang and Stratton 1998; Henry and Kurzak 2013). Abbott's commitment was so dependent upon the political context that, on ABC Lateline in 2006, when he was Minister for Health, Tony Jones accused him of 'playing both good cop and bad cop simultaneously on the issue of multiculturalism' (Jones 2006). The context was alleged ethnic branch stacking in the Victorian Labour Party when, referring to Greek, Spanish, Vietnamese and Cambodian branches, Abbott asked: 'Are there any Australians left in the Australian Labor Party?' The clear implication was that not even Greek and Spanish, much less Vietnamese or Cambodian voters were to count as Australian should they choose to vote Labor. Abbott went on to explain: 'When people come to this country, we expect them to join the team, as it were, in their own way and at their own pace. We don't put all sorts of Australian-ness tests on them'. Abbott was given to talking about 'Team Australia', preferably when backed by multiple national flags, but this usage created a 'them and us' mentality and an expectation that Australian immigrants would abandon their own culture and become cricket fans. As Abbott stressed: 'The purpose of multiculturalism is to ease the path for migrants into our society'. He pointed to 'British-born Australians who, 30 or 40 years after coming here, still find it hard to barrack for the right team at the cricket or the football' (Jones 2006). There was no reference to Asian women with no interest in team sports. As his reference to British-born Australians suggests, Abbott tends to work from a core ethnic view of nationalism as reflecting common descent and a common culture, only to find that in the contemporary world, what is required is civic nationalism, which encompasses all citizens who accept the national laws and values (Kymlicka 1999). As the Howard and Abbott Governments found in drawing up citizenship tests, in Australia it has proved to be remarkably difficult to define Australia's distinctive values (Chisari 2014).

In his manifesto *Battlelines*, published in 2009, Tony Abbott wrote:

As a journalist in the 1980s, I had attacked multiculturalism for eroding Australia's distinctive identity. In fact, along with other contemporary critics, I had made the mistake of underestimating the gravitational pull of the Australian way of life. I was too defensive about western values, which have turned out to have near-universal appeal (Abbott 2009: 162).

In 2010 as Opposition Leader, Abbott was asked why he did not have an opposition spokesperson on multicultural affairs. He replied:

I think that it is important that we recognise the diversity of Australian society but these days on both sides of politics we tend to talk more in terms of citizenship and I'm happy to keep doing that, I think that it's important that we acknowledge the diversity of Australia but I think it's also important to focus on the unity of Australia (Koleth 2010: footnote 108).

The impact of 9/11 was to tarnish the validity of claims of the 'near-universal appeal' of western values. Even within Australia, debate about allowing burqas in Parliament revealed the limits to the acceptance of multiculturalism, and showed Prime Minister Abbott changing his mind twice (Bourke and Massola 2014). In 2016, Prime Minister Turnbull is again arguing for the virtues of multiculturalism: 'barely a day goes past when I don't celebrate that we are the most successful and harmonious multicultural nation in the world' (Turnbull 2016).

The Economics of Immigration

Ged Kearney ACTU President stated 'Unions are not opposed to overseas workers, we are opposed to their exploitation and the subsequent undermining of local jobs, wages and conditions' (Toscano 2015).

There is a highly specialised literature relating to economics of immigration (Fichen and Pellizzari 2014; Fitzgerald, Leblanc and Teets 2014; Hatton 2014). There are two core and related questions: the impact of immigration on wages and the impact of immigration upon unemployment. In both areas, since we can never know what the levels of wages or unemployment would have been in the absence of mass immigration, a great deal depends upon the assumptions which are made in modelling. For example, some studies compare wages in areas of high immigration with wages in areas of no or little immigrant presence, but this requires an assumption that immigrants do not choose their destinations on the basis of local job availability and/or wages. Other studies focus on the impact of immigration at different

skill levels. Such studies are particularly interesting for Australia, where immigration has moved from the illiterate or primary educated southern Europeans of the 1970s to the graduate and post-graduate qualified Chinese and Indians of the 2010s. What these studies tend to show is that those most disadvantaged by having to compete with the incoming skilled migrants are the less skilled natives and the earlier arrived immigrants (which explains why immigrants themselves are often so hostile to immigration). However, again these findings depend on the assumptions as to the substitutability of the immigrants. How far do employers prefer the natives because of their greater knowledge of English and the local work culture? Or how far do they prefer imported workers because they are cheaper, more experienced and more compliant? (Campbell and Tham 2013).

The fact is that before they can come and 'take Australian workers' jobs', skilled or unskilled immigrants have to have government supplied visas which makes the economics of immigration particularly politically sensitive. Take the case of university employment. Lecturers down to entry level A are on the list of skilled occupations where employers can nominate to import workers if there is no Australian available to do the work. The websites of many Australian universities explain the procedure to potential applicants. Evidently, the availability of qualified Australian lecturers depends entirely on exactly in how much detail the requirements of the position are defined. In 2014-15 Australia imported 620 university lecturers on 457 visas (DIBP 2016).

However, besides wages 'there are a number of other dimensions by which immigration may affect the host country economy, such as the price of goods, the housing market, the availability of public services and the fiscal system' (Dustmann, Glitz and Frattini 2008: 15). This is an area where there appears to be a clear difference between Prime Ministers Abbott and Turnbull. As Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull has already demonstrated a willingness to see the Federal Government help to pay for the upgrading of public transport. One of the biggest complaints against immigrants is that they make our already over-crowded cities and transport systems even more clogged up (Krockenburger 2015: 19; Markus 2014).

The Productivity Commission Inquiry

On 20 March 2015, then Treasurer Joe Hockey referred the migrant intake into Australia to the Productivity Commission. The scope of the inquiry was to cover both the benefits and costs that the intake of permanent entrants can generate with respect to the budgets and balance sheets of Australian governments and the income, wealth and living standards of Australian citizens.

A novel requirement was to examine the scope to determine intakes solely through significant payments for entry visas and the impact such a scheme might have *inter alia* on 'opportunities for Australian citizens to be altruistic towards foreigners including refugees' (Snow 2015). This payment option was originally proposed by economist Gary Becker in 2011. Apparently he was pursuing a hypothetical argument, since he acknowledged that: 'No country has ever adopted such a policy' (Becker 2011: 27). The Australian body was tasked to examine this idea as part of the deal under which Senator David Leyonhjelm agreed to vote for the reintroduction of temporary protection visas. The Senator argued:

Once upon a time we had 'ten pound poms', but in future we could have 10,000 pound poms. This is a revolutionary idea that requires a change in the way we see migrants – not as charity cases, but as contributors to Australia (Creighton 2015).

One reason why the government viewed the Senator's proposal with considerable scepticism was the prospect of wealthy refugees being able to buy their way into Australia. The Productivity Commission's (2015a) Issues Paper already demonstrates a very limited interest in the proposal, suggesting that one unanticipated consequence of such a policy could be a rush to emigrate to New Zealand as a back door way into Australia. Another option to be examined was a US style lottery for immigration places.

Temporary migration was also under scrutiny due to recognition that 'temporary migration is an established pathway to permanent migration'. The Commission's Issues Paper provides an excellent summary of Australia's current policy setting and regulations and experiences with immigration (Productivity Commission 2015a). The public were expressly asked 'What should be the objectives of Australia's immigration policy' and whether 'the current immigration policy in Australia (is) broadly aligned with the objective of improving the wellbeing of the Australian community?'

The Commission issued a draft report for comment in November 2015. There were very few submissions from an uninterested public. Overall, the Commissioners' conclusion is that:

... although it is possible to assess the impacts of immigration, there is no comprehensive empirical basis for setting a level of immigration or population over time that would improve the wellbeing of the Australian community. It is up to the political process to deliver an informed decision about the change in the size of the population that is

in the best interests of Australians (Productivity Commission 2015b).

So the ball is back with the government of the day.

Prime Minister Turnbull

In early 2016, the ABC's Lateline (5 February 2016) revealed that it had seen a leaked government document proposing sweeping changes to Australia's humanitarian resettlement program. Recommended changes allegedly included 'An enforceable integration framework to assess aspiring migrants' suitability for life in Australia', 'a revamped citizenship test and citizenship pledge' and more surveillance of applicants from pre-visa to post-citizenship conferral. Prime Minister Turnbull denied that either he or Immigration Minister Dutton had seen the draft document. Dutton said that he would not apologise for the debate around screening refugees 'this is a very serious time for our country, for Western democracies ... people will pretend to be refugees when they are not'. Actually, the document was more complex, explaining the concern was not that people fleeing Syria are not refugees, but that 'it is expected that some refugees from this conflict will bring issues, beliefs or associations that lead them to advocate or engage in politically motivated or communal violence' (ABC News 5 February 2016). Overall, the content reflects Dutton's view, as a former policeman, of citizenship. These views are in common with the Howard citizenship proposals, as well as the recent most controversial legislation stripping dual nationals of their Australian citizenship, which Turnbull had opposed when Abbott was prime minister (Savva 2016: 183, 209). There is still the risk of creating two classes of citizenship; one for those born here and the other for immigrants.

Conclusion

The only consistency in Abbott's public views on immigration, whether in opposition or government, lay in their inconsistency. Since attracting blue-collar votes at the same time as support from the business community was the objective, it simply did not matter if the messages to different audiences conflicted (Savva 2016: 213). Workers were to be reassured that our sovereign borders remain unviolated by small boat-loads of asylum seekers, whilst businesses could fly in as many jumbo loads of temporary immigrants on 457 visas as they pleased (Howe 2015). Concerns over urban congestion and rising house prices were to be waved away by Productivity Commission reassurances that business-induced immigration only serves to grow the national skills base and the national wealth. Finally, Australia's one off increased quota for Syrian Christian refugees was in stark contrast to the fate of Syrian Muslims being bombed from the air by the Royal Australian Air Force.

In 2016, federal electioneering still demonstrates governmental attacks on refugees, with Minister Dutton saying that refugees 'won't be numerate or literate in their own language, let alone English' yet 'these people would be taking Australian jobs'— two statements which appear again to be contradictory and fail to explain why Australian employers would prefer non-English speaking illiterates to locals. Prime Minister Turnbull backed Dutton in a sadly familiar replay of using the small number of refugees as a political football whilst conveniently ignoring the far greater number of 457 and other temporary visa holders (Bongiorno 2016).

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Author

Dr Ware is a professor of Peace Studies in the School of Humanities at the University of New England. She started her academic career in Australia in the Demography department of the ANU where she studied Italian and Greek immigrants, funded by the Italian community. Back then, immigrants were largely unskilled labourers, factory fodder and female sweat-shop workers. Today, Professor Ware assists the 457 temporary visa holders who, despite their required skills, are still misdirected and exploited.

I lost my words

I lost my words
 one night
 they fell in letters
 over my body
 a litter
 of scar tissue
 etched
 as a constant
 reminder
 turning to shards
 of glass
 at a touch
 as if, I could forget

ZALEHAH TURNER,
 SYDNEY, NSW