

SPEECH

Office of Multicultural Interests – Strategic Planning Session for Business & Industry

The role of migration in a bright future for Perth

16 October 2013

Today I have been asked to provide a short address on the on the importance of the economic contributions of migrants to the business and industrial sector and ultimately to the Western Australian community.

As a think tank focused on the future of metropolitan Perth, this is a topic that the Committee for Perth has been actively engaged in since our inception in 2006.

The reason for this is primarily that Perth's success has strongly hinged on the ability of the region to attract skilled and talented migrants to meet skill shortages during recent boom periods.

And it has become evident that Perth's ability to attract the best people will be dependent on its ability to compete with other cities around the world.

In Perth's case we are particularly competing with other Australian capitals, with other resource and energy cities, and with other second tier cities in the developed world for the very best people from around the globe.

Making Perth a more liveable and competitive city now and in the future has driven much of the Committee's advocacy work, including a project we completed in 2012 – Perth @ 3.5 Million.

This project involved broad consultation with our members, stakeholders and the wider public and was successful in identifying a Bright Future scenario for Perth.

This is a scenario in which Perth is:

- People: A safe & welcoming city.
- Prosper: An economic powerhouse & recognised engine of knowledge, innovation & entrepreneurialism.
- Place: A distinctive region high quality public transport, vibrant centres & housing, lifestyle & recreation choices.
- Green: An environmentally friendly region that maintains its natural beauty & active, outdoor lifestyles.
- Learn & Create: A dynamic, intelligent region focused on knowledge & innovation.

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Our work is fully funded by our members and foundation partners. We acknowledge:



A complete list of current members is available at www.committeeforperth.com.au

- Decide: A region whose government, business & community sectors work together to achieve a positive future.

And our research and consultation found that migration has a central role to play in reaching the majority of these goals.

For example migrants fill gaps in skills and talents and contribute to cultural and recreational vibrancy and diversity. There is also evidence that diverse societies are more likely to be both tolerant and welcoming.

Recent Committee for Perth research tells us that:

- Perth is already has a diverse population – with more than 35 countries represented.
- Skilled migration has been one of the most important means of managing the labour market in recent years.
- WA's intake of temporary skilled migrants has significantly benefitted the mining, construction & manufacturing sectors over the past decade.
- Diversity or low barriers of entry for talent increases a regions ability to attract talented individuals over time and propels a regions ability to generate and attract high tech industry.

Experience tells us that:

- Immigrants add a cultural richness to a society, bringing with them unique customs and traditions that become part of the multilayered fabric of the nation

In addition to the economic benefits already outlined, we also know that migrants are innovative and entrepreneurial, they make a positive contribution to the economy and help counter the effects of trends such as population ageing.

For example:

- Research by the Productivity Commission in 2006 has confirmed that migrants have an overall positive impact on the economy.
- It also confirms that migrants will play a significant role in managing the effects of the aging population.
- Research from the OECD also tells us that migrants groups tend to be highly entrepreneurial and the Office of Multicultural Interests has confirmed that this is very much the case in 2010 when 40% of WA's small businesses were owned by migrants.

Migrants could also play a role in making our cities more sustainable, by increasingly favouring inner city lifestyles and locations that are accessible to employment and public transportation.

Recent Committee for Perth research tells us that migrants of working age are increasingly attracted to Perth's inner and middle suburban areas and are choosing to live in inner Perth, Stirling, Victoria Park, South Perth, Canning and Mosman Park and in decreasing numbers in places like Rockingham, Kwinana and Armadale. This may be an indication of the shift from the 'Anglosphere' on which we have traditionally pulled migrants and with that their desire to be part of the great Australian dream of single homeownership to attracting people from Asian and Indian regions who have a preference is for more communal and urban living.

High levels of educational attainment or human capital is also central to competitive and successful cities – by enabling the development of innovative and creative industries. And migrants have a role to play in increasing a region's human capital, because successful cities attract educated and skilled people.

Committee for Perth research tells us that:

- Educational attainment among migrants in Perth compares favourably with that of the existing population (49.2% have a bachelors degree compared to 50.2% of Australian born residents)
- There is potential for migration to increase human capital (educational attainment) by attracting talented people

It is clear from all of these benefits that Perth's ability to attract and retain skilled and talented migrants is core to achieving a bright future for Perth.

But, research also tells us that the most skilled and talented people from around the globe are most attracted to cities that exhibit a host of positive economic, social and environmental characteristics.

Characteristics like:

- Economic & employment opportunities
- Rich cultural amenities, recreational opportunities & the buzz of the local arts & music scene
- The attractiveness of the local environment & built form
- Quality of schools
- Housing affordability
- Transportation access
- Urban diversity
- Open minded employers
- A welcoming community

All of which are reflected in our bright future scenario for Perth.

However, delivering this bright future will not happen without dedicated action and change.

A sobering finding of our work has been identifying an overwhelming majority view among our members and stakeholders that if Perth continues on its current or 'business as usual' trajectory, it is highly likely to become a region that is:

- An unsafe, unfriendly & divided city that is increasingly unaffordable & struggles to attract & retain talented people.
- A region too heavily reliant on the resource & energy sectors which lacks economic diversity, innovation & resilience.
- A sprawling, highly car dependent region that is criticised for being dull and boring.
- A polluted, fossil fuel dependent region suffering from a depleted natural landscape & environment.
- A region with an inadequate education system, low levels of human capital & which fails to foster new thinking.
- A region that is stuck in the past, lacks shared vision & fails to collaborate

It is therefore clear that we must all work together – as government, businesses, individuals and NGOs to make Perth a city that we all want to live in – and this includes taking action to ensure that Perth is not only attractive to migrants, but that migrants are welcomed and supported in our community, that they are offered the lifestyle and recreation choices that they desire, and that Perth's cultural diversity is recognised and celebrated. Because our economy and community will reap the rewards.