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***“Doing far more to build our nation”
Reasons to be optimistic about Australia’s immigration future***

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Check against delivery

At the opening of the Citizenship Convention in 1958, Prime Minister Robert Menzies got to his feet to speak about the post war migration program.

“We’re doing far more,” Sir Robert remarked, “Than receiving people from other countries. We’re doing far more than finding them employment or finding them accommodation or introducing them into the habits of our own society. We are in this way - and never let us forget it - building a nation. That is the great work of migration.”ⁱ

Australia has a well-earned reputation as arguably the most successful and cohesive multiethnic society in the world today. There are many reasons why we can be confident that this will continue into the future, but we cannot take it for granted.

I am optimistic about our future as an immigration nation.

I am optimistic because immigration has been our past and has forged our present. That optimism is rooted in the reality we have built together as a nation.

This has always been a place of the fair go for those who have a go.

We are an immigration nation but that experience does not simply date back sixty years.

We are all of us migrants, whether our ancestors came to these shores in 1788 or 2008. Whether you are a first generation Australian or a tenth generation Australian, we all share equally in the legacy.

Whether we became Australians by birth or by pledge, we are proud Australians.

Australia's general take-up rate of citizenship amongst those eligible to apply is the second highest of the OECD nationsⁱⁱ.

In 2012-13 we saw the highest number of people in six years apply for citizenshipⁱⁱⁱ and seek to take the oath of their unwavering loyalty to our great country as they became Australian citizens.

Our migration program remains to this day a significant contributor to our national success, helping create a strong economy and sustaining our strong, cohesive society and a way of life we can all enjoy.

Protecting the integrity of our immigration programme is essential to our continued success.

For decades we have also worked hard to establish a national consensus about the merits of cultural and ethnic diversity. Having achieved this goal, it is now time to focus more on what we have in common as Australians and how we can work to better integrate our society through shared national values and aspirations.

Our migration program has delivered social and economic strength, prosperity and unity.

We have worked to overcome the barriers of diverse ethnicities and nationalities to create a single nation. A harmonious and unified nation with a clear sense and profound pride in our national identity.

We have achieved the success represented in the extraordinary level of social cohesion that exists, in comparison to other societies around the world, in proportion to the broad diversity of ethnic, national, religious, racial and language origins of our citizen and resident population.

We should not forget that this success has been hard won – nor can it be taken for granted.

“To build a nation”, Robert Menzies said, “requires the acceptance of difficulties and their overcoming.”

The Coalition has long believed Australia's migration programme is fundamentally a nation building initiative. We don't have an immigration programme because we're lonely, and neither is it a welfare programme.

Menzies called it the “greatest exercise in nation building for Australia that this century has seen.”

The Liberal Party has been at the vanguard of these efforts over the last century.

It was the Liberal Menzies Government who signed the Refugee Convention in 1954 and embraced an ambitious programme of post war immigration.

In 1960, it was the Liberal Party who abolished 'White Australia' from its Party Platform^{iv} – five whole years before the ALP made a similar change^v and it was the Holt Government that removed the White Australia policy from our national laws.

Australia's success as an immigration nation is based fundamentally on our commitment to the economic participation of migrants at all levels. We have always valued the involvement of migrants in our economy.

Until this year, our skilled migration program enjoyed bipartisan support.

Labor's attack on skilled migration through the measures introduced to choke the 457 skilled migrant program with union red tape is at odds with this approach.

But it's not just the measures that Labor forced through the Parliament, it was their rhetoric.

Labor's rhetoric on the 457 changes was blunt, unsophisticated and anti-migrant; crudely blaming migrants for taking away Aussie jobs.

The Liberal Party has not and will not subscribe to this view.

It is false. It is insulting. It is unacceptable and it is against our national interest.

Yet this was the first piece of legislation that Prime Minister Rudd chose to put through the parliament on the one day he had to do so, when he took over the job - picking up where Julia Gillard left off, endorsing this anti migrant legislation and the rhetoric the Labor Party used to sell it.

Australia's migrant communities should be under no illusion about what the Labor party thinks about legitimate economic migration. They want to stop people coming the right way, who wish to make a contribution to our economy and society from day one, while doing nothing to stop those coming the wrong way as part of a migration program being run by criminal syndicate people smugglers.

No Government that truly believes in the value of immigration and the contribution of migrants, would allow the program to be so significantly undermined and its integrity so seriously compromised by being as weak on our borders as this Government has.

If you want to know how much a Government values immigration, look at their border protection policies, because stronger border protection polices create the platform for strong and successful immigration programs.

You cannot pretend to control your immigration program if you are not in control of your borders.

You also must deliver a program that places economic participation of legitimate migrants at the top of the list of objectives of any immigration program.

The participation of migrants has been the key to the success of our migration program. Participation in our economy, participation in our society, and participation in our communities.

We must be vigilant to preserve the ongoing success of our program by guarding against threats to that participation and engagement.

Policies to drive this participation and engagement must be practical rather than token, as is too often the case.

It must address the practical challenges, it must be driven from the ground; through relationship and community interdependence – where the goal is to build a self-reliant community. Comprising self-reliant individuals rather than a welfare class.

There are threats to participation – difficulties as Menzies alluded to them – and we must be ever-conscious of those threats, in order to overcome them.

- linguistic barriers through language skills that prevent engagement

- social dislocation, crime, disadvantage, educational challenges

- a dependency on the government and creeping intergenerational welfare

- workforce regulation that can exclude migrants from participating in our economy

As I said earlier, disorderly immigration through illegal arrivals which violates the integrity of Australia's migration program and damages community support and confidence in that program.

The story of Australia's migrants over more than 200 years has been historically one of self-sacrifice – of giving everything, expecting nothing and we are all the beneficiaries.

Australia's migrant communities have done the heavy lifting in our economy for generations and a Liberal Government wants this opportunity to continue – so the rewards can follow.

The Coalition believes that a properly targeted and well-managed skilled migration program, where the government is prepared to enforce the rules that apply is necessary to protect Australian jobs, but also to protect the integrity of the immigration program that is critical to our nation's future.

During the Howard years skills based migration increased from less than 30% of the permanent program under Paul Keating^{vi} to almost 70% by the time they left office^{vii}. The Howard Government also introduced the temporary skilled visa, the 457.

Research by Monash University showed that during the Howard years the percentage of Australians who were concerned about immigration levels being too high almost halved, from more than two thirds to just over one third^{viii}. Over the same period our permanent immigration intake doubled.

Those who came had the skills to find employment. Over the ten years to 2005/2006 unemployment for skilled migrants fell from 9% to just 3%, better than the national average^{ix}. Labour force participation rates were also higher.

Even from the family stream unemployment levels dropped from 19% to 6% and their participation rate increased from 55% to 70%^x.

Today, in stark contrast to many countries, migrant unemployment in Australia is low. Not only is it low, it is strikingly on par with unemployment of native-born Australians.

In 2011-12, Australia's migrants had an unemployment rate of 5.2 per cent – the same rate of unemployment as those born in Australia^{xi}.

In fact, Australia's migrants have the second lowest rate of unemployment amongst the OECD member nations in 2011, with the exception of Israel.

That puts us ahead of New Zealand, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and most of Europe.

The key reason for Australia's success that continues to set us apart has been our merit-based skilled migration program.

The Centre for Independent Studies recently argued that Australia's selective migration system has been the driving cause for our success as one of the world's most culturally diverse nations^{xii}. The centre argued that 'Australia predominantly received migrants who were qualified and capable of easily integrating into society' and that Australia has been 'cherry picking' the best qualified migrants, most likely to make a positive contribution.

They argue that Germany and the United Kingdom did not follow our planned migration path and have paid the price in social dislocation.

The CIS authors concluded by saying 'if Australia wants to continue the process of attracting migrants into the future, it should not deviate from its policy of selecting migrants by their suitability. Migrants can only add value to recipient countries if they fit in and make an effort to integrate. Immigration nations ignore this basic insight at their peril'.

The Coalition will ensure that two-thirds of our permanent migration programme will be for skills. The best thing we can do for our migrant communities and to build social cohesion is not to run festivals, but to enable migrants to get a job.

Language is also a key challenge. English is a key skill to help migrants get a job and participate, rather than withdraw and segregate from the Australian community.

English language skills are a primary source of connection and empowerment for migrants.

This is not to suggest we should be a mono lingual society – far from it – but the common denominator for our language must always be first and foremost English.

More than any other skillset, English language allows migrants to rise above the other barriers of social or cultural disconnect to enable them to plug in to our communities; to connect; to find their feet and their way in the workplace, to build relationships and to make a contribution.

Migrants who were born in an English speaking country or speak the language well have a participation rate that is 30 percentage points higher than those with little knowledge of English^{xiii}.

They also have one-third of the rate of unemployment.

Migrants who can speak English well are four to five times more likely to earn \$800 or more per week – and one and a half times more likely to be employed in a professional, skilled management or technical field.

According to the Department of Immigration’s Continuous Survey of Australia’s Migrants, at the six-month stage of the survey, skilled primary applicants had an unemployment rate of 5% – compared to Australia’s unemployment rate of 5.2% across the same time frame^{xiv}.

The participation rate at the six month mark was 96% for skilled migrants; well above the national rate of 65%.

The next six months of settlement recorded improvements in the proportion in skilled work, in earnings and a decrease in unemployment.

English language proficiency is critical to ensuring employment outcomes.

I have said before there is a need to revisit the English language test requirements Australia currently hold, to ensure these are fit for purpose, rather than a one size fits all.

In order to apply for a visa within the skilled stream or access the student visa program for example, applicants need to demonstrate a working knowledge of English.

Currently the English language test requires an applicant to score at least a 4.5 in all four categories of the International English Language Testing System.

IELTS is a quality program – used by more than 6,000 organisations across 135 countries, including immigration departments and authorities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK. IELTS conduct around 1.9 million tests per year.

But we must be wary of creating a closed shop on English language testing or having English language testing used as a non-tariff barrier by trade unions trying to crash the skilled migration programme as an industrial tactic.

We should be moving towards a more competitive framework.

Australia needs to have the capacity to have progressive levels of English language capability. We also need greater flexibility; the notion of having an English language test that is fit for purpose, instead of a one size fits all.

There can be no argument that English skills are important. They are critical not only for personal safety but also for participation and social cohesion.

English language skills are important to ensure awareness of compliance with occupational health and safety rules. They are also important in allowing a visa holder to communicate and connect with their employer, their colleagues and their community.

Temporary migrants, whether they are students or workers, can be highly vulnerable to abuse. An understanding of English helps them access services and understand the protections available to them, whether they are trying to rent a flat, understand the terms and conditions of their employment, open a bank account or take out a loan.

The United Kingdom accepts over 30 language assessment systems in addition to the IELTS.

One of those providers is the renowned Cambridge English Language Assessment – formerly the ESOL – with 4 million candidates sitting the tests in 130 countries.

The rationale behind Cambridge is that “tests need to be fit for purpose, offering users a range of solutions that meet diverse needs”.

The level of language skills required of someone applying to come to Australia should also take into account how long they intend to stay.

We also need more than a one-off time freeze snapshot. If a person has been living, working and actively engaging in Australia over a number of years, it is in their interests as well as that of the community that as their active engagement grows, their level of proficiency does not stay static; ideally it would develop and improve over this time.

A progressive model of English language testing would assist in tracking longer term applicants as they progressively develop and consolidate their English skills through real life on the job experience and additional support along the track where needed.

For our refugee and humanitarian entrants, it would measure the success of the Adult Migrant English Testing program in equipping new residents with the tools they need to successfully build their new life in Australia; to find a job, to buy a house, to become a contributing member of their local church, their mosque, their place of worship, their community organisation and to access to support their need.

The other great challenge we face is that of religious tolerance, understanding and acceptance.

Section 116 of our Constitution provides for one of our greatest liberties – freedom of religion. Note that it says ‘of’ not ‘from’.

That same Constitution also recognizes Australia’s Christian heritage in its preamble. These points are not contradictory, as one of the tenets of Christianity which has provided the basis for liberal democracies like Australia the world over, is that of choice and free will when it comes to matters of personal belief and faith.

Faith and values are as important to our nation and society as they are to the individuals who make up that society. It is because faith matters to the individual, that faith is important to our society.

We have successfully embraced Australia as a multi-ethnic society, but we still have a distance to travel to being a multi-religious society. But it is not a new challenge.

In the 19th century Irish Catholics were accused of being terrorists, enemies of the state, undermining our national character, lacking loyalty to our King and were the subject of routine discrimination and indeed miscarriage of justice as a result of religious bigotry and rampant sectarianism. It has a familiar ring to it, doesn’t it.

The good news is that Australia largely got over the damaging religious sectarianism that existed between Catholics and protestant Australians for more than a hundred years, as white Anglo Saxon migrants struggled to get over the conflicts of their past and their old countries.

Those of us of British and Irish descent should keep this in mind when criticism is made of more recent arrivals to Australia for carrying on their old world conflicts in their new land. It took us more than a century to get over our baggage, and for some it still rings true.

But such prejudices can be overcome, including by those who held them.

Our Father of Federation Sir Henry Parkes, who enthusiastically engaged in the sectarian debate, was also able to say at the same time

What we are doing by this great Federal movement is not for us, but for them, for the untold millions that will follow us; until this land of Australia shall gather within its bosom all the fruits of the culture of the world; and until the flag of freedom shall be planted here so firmly and guarded with such a fervent patriotism, that all the powers on earth shall never assault it.

The hope expressed by Sir Henry Parkes then we can share today as we confront the challenges of making our nation and our society stronger.

On the issue of new citizens Menzies said *“from now on they are Australians. Sharing with us our joys and our sorrows, our privileges and our duties”*.

We have learnt to appreciate our differences. We must now learn to value more what we have in common - the importance of community, our economy, family and faith.

We must disconnect ethnicity from citizenship.

We must come back to the important point of connection between all of us; which is not where we have come from, but where we are going together.

Ethnicity, religion and cultural backgrounds must never prevent a barrier to this process.

To the extent it does, that is where such influences depart from our national interest.

As Australians, it must be our goal to become, over generations, what the Maori call Tangata Whenua – people of the land.

As the generations before carved this country out of the bush, they sowed and they reaped.

As Australians, we are people of this land – not our old land. What we cultivate we must cultivate together, not sowing old prejudices afresh.

When we arrive in this country, we become part of it – and it becomes a part of us – it becomes what Parkes described as ‘the land of our adoption’.

It changes us – and in doing so it provides the basis for our connection with one another.

Australia has always been a land of beginnings. A land of stories and a land of dreams. Our stories as Australians must become each other’s stories. This includes connecting with indigenous Australians.

Whether our ancestors came across a land bridge or an air bridge, in this land we share a stewardship that creates a kinship.

For me, I look beyond Cook and Philip to Pemulwuy and Bennelong – as an adopted Australian – nine generations down the line, this also becomes my heritage, they become my adopted ancestors.

The apology to indigenous Australians for me was not to a different people or to a different nation but to my own adopted brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties – it was about bringing together our broken family – not out of guilt or judgment – but out of love and desire to be one people.

We must choose to go beyond the sphere of our own ethnic experiences in how we identify as Australians.

We must all embrace the Aboriginal ancients, the settlers, the Federationists, the Anzacs, the post war migrants, the Indochinese refugee; all who have come since and all who came before.

Because in their strength, in their experience, in their sacrifice, we understand what it means to be an Australian. Their trajectory will guide our future, just as their experience and sacrifice has created the Australia we have inherited from them today.

Menzies described his immigration program as the “greatest exercise in nation building for Australia that this century has seen”.

I am optimistic about our immigration future because I am confident that together, we can continue to build a society where Australians of all backgrounds can share in the hope, reward and opportunity that comes with living in the greatest country on earth.

ⁱ Menzies, R. 1958 *Sir Robert Menzies speaks at the opening the Citizenship Convention in Canberra on 22 January 1958*, National Library of Australia recording <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.oh-vn2849456>>

ⁱⁱ Evidence by DIAC Acting First Assistant Secretary, Citizenship, Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Division Ms Frances Finney, Hansard Senate Estimates 28 May 2013, pg 124

ⁱⁱⁱ Evidence by DIAC Secretary, Mr Martin Bowles PSM, Hansard Senate Estimates 27 May 2013, pg 18

^{iv} Hancock, I. 2001 ‘The Holt Government 1966-67’ in Nethercote, J.R. (ed) 2001 *Liberalism and the Australian Federation*, The Federation Press 2001, pages 202-203

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^v Dunstan, D. 1993 *Transcript; the end of White Australia*, Multicultural Research library, last accessed on 16 November 2011 <<http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Audio/id/386.The-end-of-White-Australia>>

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^{vi} Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007 'Migration: Permanent Additions to Australia's Population' in *Australian Social Trends 2007*, published 7 August 2007
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^{vii} Department of Immigration and Citizenship *2011 Migration Program Statistics*,
<<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/statistical-info/visa-grants/migrant.htm>>

^{viii} Markus, A. 2010 Transcript – Mapping Social Cohesion 2009 Scanlon Foundation Report, Grattan Institute, p.7

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^{ix} Department of Immigration and Citizenship The Labour Market; Summary of findings for Third Longitudinal Study of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA 3),
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<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/_pdf/csam-additional-results.pdf>

^x Department of Immigration and Citizenship The Labour Market; Summary of findings for Third Longitudinal Study of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA 3)
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^{xi} DIAC 2013 'Chapter 10: Labour market – Outcomes for migrants and their children' in *Australia's Migration Trends 2011-12* pg 144

^{xii} Hartwich, O.M. 2011 Policy Monographs Population and Growth Series 4: Selection, Migration and Integration: Why Multiculturalism Works in Australia (and fails in Europe), The Centre for Independent Studies pg vi

^{xiii} DIAC 2013 'Chapter 10: Labour market – Outcomes for migrants and their children' in *Australia's Migration Trends 2011-12* pg 146

^{xiv} DIAC 2013 'Chapter 10: Labour market – Outcomes for migrants and their children' in *Australia's Migration Trends 2011-12*, pg 150