Discussant comments

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First of all, let me say to Oliver: welcome to Australia. I hope you get your permanent residence. I think we all feel we need you. Let me also say preliminarily that, while I am an economist, I am talking to you now not as an economist at all, but just as a person interested in immigration because — like our Prime Minister — I was a child immigrant here, except I've been in Australia, I think, longer than she has and that, I suppose, makes me more Australian than our Prime Minister.

First of all, I will come to Andrew's paper. I agree with everything he says. I have actually been a great admirer of his work for some years because, as he said, there have not been many people working in this field — that is, the sociology of immigration.

In 2003 I gave the Snape lecture on immigration for the Productivity Commission. It has been published in a little booklet that you can all pick up. I needed to do some research in preparation, and I found there was a considerable lack of information. I think Andrew has filled that gap more than any other individual. I particularly recommend to you a document called *Mapping Social Cohesion* by Professor Andrew Markus and published by the Scanlon Foundation and Monash University. This document has more detail than the paper that he has actually presented here. All I can say is, 'Keep at it, and I hope you get lots of money and have big programs and do a lot more quality research.'

Let me now come to substantive issues. Obviously, if we are going to have more population, we will need continued immigration, and we want that to happen in a comfortable way, without stress or strain. There are always going to be people who do not like immigrants, and I will say a little bit on the history of that in a minute. I just want to make two general points, one concerning the first generation and the other concerning the second generation. I am focusing now on those immigrants where there is a possible problem — that is to say, those who come from a non-English speaking background (like me) or a non-European background, such as Indians, Chinese, Vietnamese and Africans.

I begin with the first generation. The first generation is usually very grateful to be here, either for obvious reasons if they are refugees or because their standard of living and their job opportunities have improved. In many cases, one expects them not to speak English well. Sometimes the wives have great difficulty speaking the language. One should expect them to live in areas where other such people live. So you have Victoria Street in Melbourne full of Vietnamese, you have Italians in Lygon Street, as it was once, and so on. That seems to me quite inevitable, and we should expect it. In fact, it helps their integration into the country. We should not expect them to become very Australian. They must follow the laws and so on, but people in their forties and fifties or even their thirties cannot change that much and should not be expected to.

What really counts is the second generation (that is, those born in Australia), as well as the migrant children of the immigrants. The latter are the children up to (perhaps) the age of 16, a category to which, as I say, the Prime Minister and I both belong. It seems to me really important that this group — both the migrant children and the second generation that are born here — fit into the society. Here I think it is very important to do research. When I researched for the paper that I wrote eight years ago (the Snape lecture), I discovered some research that had been done on this. I think the principal researcher was a colleague of Peter McDonald at the Australian National University, Dr Khoo. It was very informative, and I will just mention some of the things I found.[1] I looked at three categories, in all cases children of migrants and second generation: Italians, Greeks and Vietnamese.

When I picked them, they were the largest groups of postwar non-Anglo immigrants that had been here for some time, so there was a significant second generation. If one takes the very recent immigrants, one does not have that opportunity. I found a number of things. First of all, I found that they had all attained an educational level higher than their parents, even though their parents in all three cases were primarily not skilled migrants of the type that Oliver has referred to, but came mostly from peasant or small-town backgrounds in Italy, Greece and, to some extent, Vietnam. So they improved on their parents. If you judge them by other criteria (specifically, what proportion went to school or university, compared with comparable age groups in the general Australian community), they all were well ahead of the

1 Since the Roundtable, I have learned that this work depended heavily on material from the Census, but the relevant question in the Census is regrettably no longer being asked. Hence, it would not be possible to do this research from more recent data. The Census needs to ask for the country of birth of each of the parents of the person. This was indeed asked up to the 1996 Census, but not at the later censuses. (I am indebted to Peter McDonald for this information.)

general Australian population — 'Australian' being the category of people whose parents were not born abroad but who were third-generation Australians, or more. So there was a major improvement in education for all those three categories, and that was not because the migrants were skilled.

But I feel I would like to see more studies of other categories, various others, including, say, Lebanese. I'd like to know what has happened to the second generation born here, particularly in education levels. I think someone here whom I met yesterday is actually doing some research on this. If we wanted to ask ourselves what kind of people do we want to bring into the country to join our happy family, above all we should be thinking about the second generation and perhaps not expect too much from the ones who actually come in (the adult migrants). But we do want the second generation to integrate and possibly even assimilate.

This raises another issue. Is it integration or assimilation that we want? Integration clearly involves accepting and understanding the democratic system, obeying the laws, and some other matters, but assimilation means more. Do we want them to become completely 'like us'. And who is the 'us' anyway? Must they follow AFL or Rugby, or is it all right to follow soccer? Perhaps in this and other respects some diversity is acceptable.

Let me just make one simple point: I understand that Muslims are not supposed to drink alcohol. They do not all follow the rules, but I think on average they tend to drink less than the average young Australian. I feel that there are certain respects in which we do not want immigrants to assimilate into Australia, and that is one of them. Perhaps, on average, young Australians should become a little more like Muslims in that respect. When it comes to hard work, I think perhaps the Chinese immigrants have something to teach the average Australian. So we want them to fit in (I will not say 'assimilate', but 'fit in') and maybe improve the society.

Let me come back to the issue raised by Oliver. What should be the focus of immigration selection?

This requires more research but I suppose if we go primarily for skilled immigrants, as we have been doing, the chances are that their children will also be more education-minded and probably the favourable outcome I have referred to will then result. But it is worth bearing in mind that the big numbers we historically had from Italy and Greece, who have been very successful both in assimilating (or integrating) and educationally, came to a great extent from peasant backgrounds. They were not necessarily skilled at all.

Incidentally, I read recently that in the immediate postwar period there were people who had skills and were deliberately told not to use them. They were asked to come

as workers in, say, the Snowy hydroelectric even though they might have been qualified doctors and so on, but their qualifications would not have got them into the country. Rather, they had to be physically fit. So that was a different story from what we have now, when we do, of course, select skilled people.

That is almost all I wanted to say, but I will mention just one other thing as one who has experienced being an immigrant. I had one personal experience, an impression in the early years when I came in, that was very similar to experiences noted by other immigrants to whom I've talked more recently. We found the following contrast: all the Aussies we met were very friendly. Indeed, Australians are a naturally friendly people — maybe they differ a little from the English, the French, the Germans and so on.

On the other hand, one would read in the newspapers hostile articles or letters to the editor by people one had never met. In those days (when I was young) there was a weekly paper called *Smith's Weekly*, and then there was a magazine called *The Bulletin* and there was an organisation, the RSL, that most of you will know. They all were very critical of immigrants. All sorts of terrible things were said that obviously were not true. This contrast between everybody whom we met, who were so nice, and yet one read about hostility — which I also think some current immigrants have noticed. This is a character thing. Australians cannot help being friendly, but we also cannot help having a minority of people who do not like or welcome immigrants.