

## **Let's broaden the population debate**

As Tim Watts, Hugh Martin and Steve Vizard have noted (Opinion, 7/4/03), the delegates of last year's population summit have produced a proposal for a shift in the way population policies are set. Not surprisingly, Phillip Ruddock refuses to sign the proposal. What is surprising, however, is that so few of the so-called 'leaders' at the population summit were women, aboriginal people, migrants and refugees.

From my perspective as a member of the audience, the population summit was just another 'talk fest' by an in-group of 'key stakeholders'. With audience participation kept to a minimum, there appeared to be a lot of talk, but not much dialogue.

Nevertheless, the organisers should be congratulated for bringing the issues of a population policy to our attention. But now that the position statements, political posturing and media grabs have finished, the real work of developing a responsible population policy begins. And women, aboriginal people, migrants and refugees have a substantial contribution to make to Australian's future policy on population. It is time for a more inclusive conversation to begin.

**Letter to Age, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2003**