

Cut Through, August 6, 2026: **What does good migration policy look like in Australia?**
All timestamps are approximate

Crystal Andrews (00:00)

Hello and welcome to Cut Through, Crikey's spin-free analysis of Australian news, politics and power. I'm your host, Crystal Andrews, and I'm here again with politics editor Bernard Keane for that dedicated episode on immigration that we've all been promising you that we would tackle. Hi, BK, and welcome back to the pod again at a you know a pretty short interval.

Bernard Keane (00:19)

Yeah, no, it's good to be it's good to be here and may we may we continue to talk often.

Crystal Andrews (00:24)

Yes, absolutely. This this one has been highly requested. to lay a bit of the groundwork, first I think I should tell everybody that today's conversation is being guided by Bernard's new book, *Seize the Moment, Australia's Real Opportunities in an Unstable World*, which is all about how and where this nation can leverage its advantages to prosper over the next 25 years.

The book includes a chapter on immigration. There is an excerpt live on the Cracky website right now. And I've linked that in the episode description if anyone wants to read and get sort of a bit of a sample, a taster of what's in the book and what's in this chapter in particular. We're gonna discuss some of the points you've made in it. Not all of them. It is very I've read it, it's very comprehensive. We're gonna get to as much as we can. We'll we'll do our best. How does that sound, BK?

Bernard Keane (01:11)

Let's give it a whirl and and we'll see how we go.

Crystal Andrews (01:15)

I think we should start by just going over some numbers because there is, you know, a lot of confusion around this topic. People use all sorts of different numbers to talk about this topic. So we'll start there for everybody's context. These figures are all taken directly from the ABS. And if you're watching the video version of this episode, there'll be numbers on screen so you can follow along more easily. So for the most recent lot of data that we have, the 24-25 financial year.

Net overseas migration was 306,000 people. That is total migrant arrivals of 568,000 and total departures of 263,000. To compare to some years past, we had the most recent peak in the post-COVID era.

In the 22-23 financial year, where net overseas migration was around 538,000. And if we look back around 10 years prior to where we are today, the 1415 financial year, net overseas migration was 184,000. So a bit of a snapshot of what the overarching figures look like there.

When it comes to the different types of visas for migrant arrivals in this current financial or this most recent financial year, the split between

Permanent visas and temporary visas is very heavily skewed towards temporary visas, about 568,000, only 88,000 permanent. Breaking down into further different types, we have around 86,000 skilled visas, about 50-50 split almost of permanent versus temporary. Family migration visas of around 24,000 and student visas make up the sort of bulk here again, 156,000, all of those, of course, being

Temporary visas, apologies everybody for the for the big data dump. but BK, you know, when you were looking into this topic, of all of this data, which categories did you find the most relevant and the most productive, I guess, for people to kind of focus on in their discussions about immigration as a topic?

Bernard Keane (03:14)

Well, I think that those excuse me, those numbers tell us that our ideas about migration, particularly if you're, you know, over forty, need to be updated to kind of reflect the facts. I think a lot of us grew up with the idea of migration as always and fundamentally about permanent migration of people and families to Australia to become Australians, to become part of Australia.

And th that idea of migration I think is one that is really embedded in the heads of of people over forty. I mean that's their idea when I talk about migration, that's what they're thinking about when they talk about it. the idea of people coming to Australia permanently, becoming Australians, adopting Australia's values, or they people might complain not adopting Australian values, but becoming part of our community.

Now, I think that kind of non-economic way of thinking about migration is now thoroughly out of date. As those numbers that you went through just illustrated, temporary migration is a well the key part of our migration story.

Crystal Andrews (04:27)

Yeah.

Bernard Keane (04:27)

And there's a very strong relationship between temporary migration and what we think of as the broader migration context.

Partly because you know, if you're a temporary migrant, you're here as a foreign student, say, you still had the same impact as a permanent migrant does. You need somewhere to live, you you consume resources, you will look for work, you will contribute to the economy. and very likely you may well apply to become a permanent migrant as well. The bulk of our

Permanent migrants are actually people who are already here on some form of temporary visa, whether they're a foreign student or whether they're a, you know, they're here on a skilled visa.

But having a temporary visa is in many ways the pathway to permanent migration to Australia. So the whole kind of skewing of Australian migration is really becoming much more about the economy. Not merely is that sort of pathway to permanent migration now primarily through an economic channel.

But in terms of just sheer numbers, the impact of migration is one that is about the economy. It's not one that is, in the terms that older people might think about it, as a you know, a cultural one, you know, something about citizenship, about identity. And that kind of shift, I think, is one that is not fully appreciated by a lot of people who participate in this debate and maybe come to it.

not from an economic perspective, but more from a cultural and identity and a values perspective, whether they might be left wing or right wing. They might have very different values that they through which they examine migration, but nonetheless they're failing to grasp that migration is actually now primarily about the economy.

Crystal Andrews (06:12)

Hmm. Yeah, it is a really good point and I think underscores how difficult the discourse around this can be because, how you define who is a migrant varies widely depending on, I mean, the political ideology and the point that's being trying that that's, you know, trying to be made. I know that there is a cohort of people who will have this discussion.

And talk about the portion of people in Australia who are born overseas. Now, a portion of those people are Australian citizens, and do they necessarily factor into this discussion about quote-unquote immigration levels and you know who are migrants in Australia and how do they affect our economy? It is quite complex, but as much as we can shepherd this conversation around those numbers that we just went through, we'll we'll try to do as best we can.

I want to come to some of the stuff that you have written about in your book, particularly around the surge in anti-immigration sentiment that you know we're currently seeing is the topic of a lot of media coverage. But you point out that it's actually not that high when compared to decades past. So in 2025, the portion of voters who thought that immigration was too high was around 53%, according to a survey by a long-running survey actually by the Lowy Institute.

but that's about the same as it was in 2018. And you also write that that belief has been quite persistent as far back as the 70s and the 80s, and probably peaked in the early 1990s, with more than 60% of people expressing that view. but the key difference seems to be that previously that spike in anti-immigration sentiment was connected to periods of high unemployment.

And that's a little bit different to now where we're seeing maybe an uptick in that belief that there is too much immigration, but relatively low unemployment, currently sitting around four percent. what is going on there? What's what's the relationship between these two different data points and why it why are we seeing maybe a deviation of that pattern now?

Bernard Keane (08:08)

so the Lowy Institute's been doing a pretty comprehensive survey of of political and economic and and social attitudes for for some time now. So we can track how know things like what's the attitude toward migration, is it too high, is it too low? the book was written before we're using the 2025 data. The since then the 2026 data has come out and it shows basically the the same thing, which is that the attitude that migration is too high.

tends to be held by older people, it tends to be held by people in regional Australia, and it tends to be held by people with I you know lower levels of educational outcome. that kind of points you to what's driving this and the extent to which cultural rather than you know economic factors are driving this. that that's not to say that

younger cohorts of people or people in metropolitan areas don't also think that immigration is too high, but they consistently do so at levels significantly lower than older people and people in regional areas. And if you if you go further back as I've done in the book and look at other sources of information about attitudes toward immigration, it's one of those questions that polsters have actually regularly asked.

going back to the nineteen seventies. I mean Australia has been an immigration nation now for you know 50, 60, 70 years. And people have always been interested in what the public generally thought of it. And it does seem that there is a pretty strong relationship between levels of of unemployment and the view that migration is too high. And that's you know, that makes sense. I mean, you know, it's not merely the case that when times are tough, people tend to blame migrants for their economic woes.

You know, it also kind of makes intuitive sense that if you can't get a job, the idea that people are arriving in Australia looking for jobs is is gonna worry you and make you think, well, you know, why be letting these non-citizens in to, you know, to compete with us for jobs? Now lot of that is is really an economic fallacy. In fact, migrants in net terms tend tend to add to the demand for workers and tend to lead to higher wages and higher productivity. But putting that aside, you can kind of get why

people would look look a bit askance at high migration at times when there are you know economic difficulties and know there's a dearth of work. That's why I think you know the the we we saw some really big peaks in critical attitudes toward migration back during the last big recession that we had, which is in the early 1990s.

Crystal Andrews (10:32)

Mm-hmm.

Bernard Keane (10:33)

which was a pretty dramatic recession. I mean if you were around then the images that you had

of what was going on in the community, particularly in in states like South Australia and and Victoria, manufacturing states, you know, were really quite dramatic and they are seared into the memories of anyone of an age to actually remember that. But we haven't actually had a significant period of really high unemployment since then. We briefly had a peak during the pandemic, but you know, by and large unemployment has been substantially lower since then. And in the last few years it's been at historic lows. I mean it's been down

Crystal Andrews (11:04)
Mm.

Bernard Keane (11:04)
below four percent. You know, it's it's around

four to five percent at the moment. I think we've actually I think we can safely say we've entered in a an era of low unemployment. Famous last words I know, the AI apocalypse come along tomorrow and wipe out a third of all jobs, we'd be back to Great Depression levels of unemployment. But borrowing that scenario, and and I don't see evidence of that scenario emerging yet, you know, it doesn't look like we're going to have that kind of scarifying unemployment experience that we had back in the early nineteen nineties.

Crystal Andrews (11:32)
Mm-hmm.

Bernard Keane (11:32)
And that

I think is going to have a big influence on how people view migration. And I think you can see that in the numbers that show that younger people just simply don't share the same hostility to current levels of migration that older people do. And if you track the cohorts of people coming through, so if you if you track people who may have grown up in the late nineties and two thousands and who are now, you know, getting into their forties,

They haven't aged into hostility toward migration. they haven't become more like older people in their attitudes toward migration. They've generally stayed fairly sanguine about levels of migration. And that tells me that the lack of that kind of scarifying experience of high unemployment means that people tend not to be innately hostile to migration in the same way that older people.

you know, who can remember the, you know, the the massive cues of people applying for a you know a single job, you know, that sort of footage that made it onto the TV back in the early 1990s. the way that they tend to view the issue. And it's you know, quite possible that that kind of high level of hostility to migration, if we don't have a significant period of unemployment in the future, is kind of going to die off as the cohorts who hold it.

will die off. And the irony of all this is that it's younger people who actually, if you think about migration as some sort of you know problematic thing in terms of unemployment, which it isn't, but if you think about it in those terms, young people are the ones who've got the most to fear from high levels of migration. it can be argued that you know it's it's going to increase competition for the jobs that they want. It's gonna increase competition for the housing that they want. It's gonna put extra demand

on you know services in the community and on infrastructure. But you know, those people who are in in a sense most exposed to the negative consequences of migration, younger people in metropolitan areas, you know, are are much more relaxed about migration than older people who live in regional areas who are not exposed by and large to the consequences of migration, except in the sense that regional health services are extraordinarily dependent on high migration. You there's a rich irony in

you know, regional one nation

Crystal Andrews (13:41)
Yeah.

Bernard Keane (13:42)
supporters being viscerally against migration when you know migration is basically the only thing that is ensuring that they have decent health services in the areas in which they live. So this issue I think just illustrates the extent to which immigration is a kind of a, you know, it's an intersection of so many different issues. It's a, you know, it's an intersection of housing and it's an e you intersection of the labor market. It's an intersection of

of services and it's an you intersection of cultural values and and ideas about identity and that's you know that's I think one of the thing reasons why it makes it so difficult an area of policy for politicians.

Crystal Andrews (14:16)
we should say that that doesn't mean that there are no young people who think immigration levels are too high. Like it it absolutely exists, but you know, you're saying that they're not reaching the same sort of concentration in their, you know, thirties and forties as what you would have seen in in previous generations.

Bernard Keane (14:32)
if you look at the numbers and you conclude, well, younger people are generally more relaxed about immigration and older people aren't, the people who are in the transitional category, you know,

Crystal Andrews (14:42)
Mm-hmm.

Bernard Keane (14:42)

who are heading into middle age aren't transitioning into those kinds of views. And I suspect until we reach till we have a point when there's high unemployment again, like ten, eleven, twelve percent like we had back in the early nineteen nineties, we're probably gonna not gonna see that kind of impact.

Crystal Andrews (14:57)

I want to pick up on something that you did just mention and it's another key distinction that you make in the book between, you know, the Australia of the nineties and that period versus the Australia today, which is the makeup of the economy. if you'll indulge me, Bernard, I'd like to read just a little snippet from the book which really stood out to me.

You've written, not merely do we have an aging population, as a population we're aging more quickly than expected, and we're also living longer than expected. The last 20 years in particular have seen a huge expansion of government-funded caring services. The care that was once insourced to families we now require an army of publicly funded workers for.

The care economy is labor intensive. You can't look after seniors or toddlers or people with disabilities with machines or AI. As the Australian economy has become more service-oriented and less production-oriented, it has needed more workers rather than fewer. you know, as you just mentioned about the the issue of, regional healthcare services essentially being propped up by

Migrants, this is really about the broad reshaping of the Australian economy. the health and caring workforce is about nine percent of all jobs in the eighties and nineties and as of twenty twenty five is sixteen percent. Why does that matter to this question of how much immigration is, you know, quote unquote good for Australia?

Bernard Keane (16:19)

Well, yeah, I mean, as I as I pointed out there, our economy is is become more labour intensive in the sense that we've we've moved to services and services are more labour intensive than manufacturing, for example, which can be highly automated and may not actually need particularly many workers, but you need living people to provide the kind of care that we look for in relation to age care, health care, childcare and and disability care.

And because of the way that we've aged as a society, you know, our demand for healthcare and aged care has increased quite significantly. And we've made policy decisions as a community that we want to, you know, have a childcare sector, a very big childcare sector, and you know, we want to have a disability care sector. So we require you know armies of workers to provide those kinds of services. partly because we're getting older,

But partly because we just need so many more workers, you know, we really do have a problem, and we have had a problem for a long while now, of not having enough workers. know, I think I remember Joe Hockey saying that he'd been challenged by a liberal MP back in the the

the early 2000s when the Howard government was putting more money into childcare. A Liberal MP said to him something like, you know, why aren't you looking after stay-at-home mums? And his response was, Look, we're running out of workers. You know, we need

Crystal Andrews (17:35)

Mm.

Bernard Keane (17:35)

to be investing in

childcare in order to you know get more women into the that was his response nearly 25 years ago. And it's far more massively the case now. The caring sector now is, you know, if not twice as large then certainly dramatically bigger than it was now. And it is heavily reliant on migrants. You know, you you know anyone who goes to a hospital know we'll will discover the extent to which our healthcare system is reliant on migrants.

You know, if you've got if you you use childcare like I do, that workforce is heavily dependent on migrants. Same thing with disability care. same thing with age care. I made an observation on on social media recently about exactly that, that you can't go to hospital without realizing that the idea that we should be slashing migration is just nuts. A lot of people came back and said, Well, you know, it's all because we had so many migrants in the first place that

we need to have so many migrants working in our health system. Well that doesn't make any sense whatsoever. Our country has gotten dramatically older, as baby boomers have aged. And we've got older faster than we expected. Why? Because we're living longer than we thought, and Australian women are not having anywhere near as many kids as we predicted. For 20 years plus, each

Intergenerational report that Treasury prepares every couple of years has been predicting sunny uplands of fertility for Australia over 1.6 kids per woman. It it hasn't been 1.6 for for ages and it's never going to go back to being 1.6. It's now below 1.5. Those that may not sound like big numbers, but in the context of a population-wide level of fertility, they're absolutely massive. And

You know, a lot of this is because we've made deliberately made it harder for young people economically. We've made it harder for them to get into housing. We've made the economy more precarious. We've placed, you know, enormo the inordinate burden burden of tuition fees on them. And then we turn around and go, gee, what's going on with fertility? Why aren't why aren't young couples having more kids? Australia's demographic challenge of being an aging society, is worse than

we thought it was going to be back in the the early two thousands. And that in turn, you know, significantly impacts the number of workers that we've got. And migration is the best solution possible to that problem. Because Australia does not have some hollow log of hidden workers

just waiting to come out and you know start looking after seniors and start being nurses and start being

pediatricians and and childcare workers. Our participation rate, which intergenerational report after report predicted was going to fall, it has stayed at a very high level at a historic level. But it's not going to get any higher. You know, it's we're not going to see any further significant increases in the participation rate. Australians are now retiring very differently. There are a lot more people are kind of transitioning into retirement. They're continuing to work part-time rather than just simply stopping working

You know, it's 65 or 68. but the demographic challenge means that, you know, at some point our participation rate is gravity is going to grab it and start pulling it back down. And that's when we're really going to find out that we are in a global competition for workers because migration is, really the only solution when you have a big workforce shortage. And, you know, it's not just in healthcare. It's not just about the caring economy. We don't have enough construction workers.

We don't have enough tradies. That's why you can't find a tradie in Sydney to to come and even give you a quote, because you know they're just so busy. we don't have enough don't have enough accountants, we don't have enough software engineers. Everyone's saying AI wipe wipe out software engineers as a profession. Well, in the United States, demand for software engineers has actually gone up in the last couple of years, despite all the warnings about about AI. You know, it's not just it's not just a caring economy, it is

significant sections of Australia's workforce just do not have enough workers and the only place they're going to come from is migration. And you know if you want to keep your current standard of living, if you want to have a society where yeah you can get someone to actually come and fix something, if you want to have a society where yes you can put your kids in childcare knowing that they're going to be well looked after or put your you know put your grandparents in a

a a care facility knowing that they're going to be well looked after by qualified staff, then you've got to have migration. You've got to have a lot of migration because we don't have enough workers. And that's that's the bottom line here. everyone who wants to talk about culture and values and and identity That's not going to change the demographic reality that we need workers and we need a lot of workers and

until that dawns on policymakers, you know, we're gonna be stuck with this rather inane debate about, you know, how many migrants should we be bringing in?

Crystal Andrews (22:22)

I guess the argument against that, and and we have a a comment from a crikey subscriber actually who gets to the crux, I think, of what you're saying, but presenting the other side. So Tony McIntyre says, One problem with the skilled migration program is that when you bring in a skilled migrant, that is one added to the supply side, but you have also added one to the

demand side. The reality is that our immigration problem has created more demand for construction work.

workers than it has supplied in construction workers.

That is a widespread argument that I see everywhere that, the current migration levels, that they are, they're providing supply-side solutions, but simultaneously creating demand side issues. And for some people, they think more demand-side issues than supply-side solutions. Particularly, I see this discussion around housing that yes, while we need, migrants to come and work in our health and caring industries.

Those people need somewhere to live. I mean, we we kind of touched on this at the top of the episode. All of those people will need somewhere to live and that creates more demand pressure on on housing. I it's a very big question, BK, but like that dynamic between the supply and demand balance, what did your research sort of say?

about that. P I I think particularly when it comes to housing. Like is this creating more problems than it's solving in other in other sectors?

Bernard Keane (23:43)

So absolutely right that s someone who comes to Australia is adding to demand. that's got to be factored in. But there are a couple of issues to raise about that. One is that in economic terms, migration is very beneficial. So stepping back for a moment from the demand side of the equation, it's pretty well established that migration is associated with higher economic growth, it's associated with higher wages.

And it's associated with higher productivity, which is one of the reasons why it links to higher wages. that's when you have skilled migration. If you have a migration program that's all about family migration, for example, and you're not really looking at the pro skill profile of the people coming in, then yeah, sure, you are adding directly to demand and you're really not doing much to address the supply side of the equation in terms of labor. But if you have a really well-focused

skilled migration program, then the people that you're bringing in are actually addressing you know weak points and shortages within the workforce we also know that skill migration is a very very beneficial thing for our government's there's a a pretty good study by the Grattan Institute.

I think that explores the lifetime impact of a skilled migrant compared to ordinary Joe Plo, a citizen. And a skilled migrant adds substantially to the net level of transfers to government compared to an ordinary citizen. Why? Because they're younger, they've got higher skills, they will continue to produce economically for a number of decades, paying tax.

across that time compared to the average citizen who is older, probably not as skilled and not going to be paying as much tax and maybe using more services as they get older. So the difference over a lifetime amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars in terms of additional

funding that is available to governments. That's why when people say, people do an economic or or fiscal analysis of of what Pauline Hansen wants to do.

In terms of migration, the fiscal impacts are actually absolutely massive. They'll amount to tens of billions of dollars in lost revenue an extended period because of this positive fiscal impact that you get from migration. So in terms of the direct impact of a a migrant in terms of supply and demand, yeah, there is a balancing issue to be done there, but that's

best addressed through making sure that we have highly skilled migrants who are addressing workforce shortages and enabling us to get the economic and the fiscal benefits. And let's not forget by the way that when you know if you address a workforce shortage in a particular area, you are going to reduce inflation from that particular area. So if you have

a lower level of workforce shortage in a particular industry that is going to feed through into lower costs and lower prices for the producers working in the industry and then on through to other consumers and other businesses. that also has a a significant impact in terms of you know overall economic outcomes. So know again it's this intersection of different issues, fiscal issues, economic growth versus

You know, the the specific issue of, you know, someone arriving adds to demand as much as supply. So, you know, it's not to wish away the fact that someone who comes and lives here, you know, needs a place to live, needs to consume goods and services, needs to use infrastructure and needs to use the healthcare system. But, they're more likely under a skilled migration program to be younger and therefore to have a substantially lower impact on overall levels of demand.

and a higher impact on levels of supply than compared to your ordinary citizen or from a migrant who's arriving under a you know a general family based migration strategy.

Crystal Andrews (27:36)

does it then come down to, I mean, to try and bring it back to the the house pricing the types then of visa categories that should look to be reduced, if anything, that there's obviously a lot of discussion about the high levels of international students who you know, again, as as we were discussing, are not necessarily the people who are coming to stay in Australia for a very, very long

extended time as in they're not necessarily coming here to resettle their lives and you know start a family and and become Australian for want of a better phrase. but they're coming here for a certain amount of time. They need somewhere to live that is putting pressure on housing accessibility. Is it about having a reduction in specific categories like that? Or do you think it's really not worth looking at

the impact of migration on housing prices at all.

Bernard Keane (28:24)

I think if we allow our migration policy to be dictated by housing policy, then you know we're allowing an area that we've grievously stuffed up to dictate an area where we've actually been highly successful. let's just focus for a moment on know the the the you know which category that we might want to reduce, might want to increase.

At the moment, we really don't have much of a kind of general immigration program left compared to what we had back in, you know, the sixties or the seventies or the eighties. As we're talking about this sort of you know shift in the way that we've you know conduct migration policy. today it's much more about skills, it's much more about temporary visa holders who come here and who become, if you like, the feedstock for our permanent migrants. So a lot of our permanent migrants are

People who've come here as skilled migrants, who or who've come here as a foreign student and who, you know, have been given permanent residency. that I think signals that Australia has substantially shifted toward a much greater emphasis on skills and a much greater emphasis on workforce potential than we used to be when the idea of the migrant was, you know, someone from Italy arriving with their with their wife

and kids and they you know didn't have a job but then gonna set up, get them find their feet and then get them still established in the community. So we really don't have a whole lot of areas to reduce, I don't think, or that we need to reduce. The the the change that I would like to see, and it's it's the one that the Grattan Institutes advocated for for quite some time is we get rid of all the ridiculous bureaucracy around skilled temporary skill visas. You know, there is an inordinate amount of bureaucracy.

that is put in the way of employers wanting to bring someone with skills to Australia to do a particular job. You know, there's a there are, you know, there's lists of jobs that are priorities. regularly bureaucrats will go through that list and decide what occupations to get rid of, what occupations they're going to add. I mean, you know, it's it's quite bizarre that there are a lot of construction industry occupations that aren't on the priority skill list.

at the moment when the whole construction sector is crying out for more workers. so I think we can do a lot better in terms of of skilled migration by a pretty simple s change, which is that you say to employers, all right, you don't need to go and do a workforce test to see if there are potential applicants for a job. You don't need to conform to

a bureaucratically determined list of occupations. If you want to bring someone in to work in a particular job that job is paid, you know, a certain level above average weekly earnings, say it's one you know it's 1.5 times average average weekly earnings, then you can just do it. Just bring them in. You don't need to muck around with you know levels of bureaucracy and ticking off lists and complying with onerous

requirements. You don't need to talk about, you know, things like how much training you've invested in. You can just bring people in. And I think that would strengthen our skilled migration program. It would, help us further reduce workforce shortages. And, you know, there's an inbuilt protection there, which is that they have to be paid quite a bit above average weekly earnings. So there's there's no risk of employers trying to use the scheme to bring in cheap labour.

Ultimately everyone who's employed in Australia's got to be paid at a level determined by an award or above. And this sort of system would tend to reinforce that because the people who are coming in would you know still be highly skilled people who are paid well above average weekly earnings. So getting rid of that sort of bureaucratic rig morale, I think, would go a long way toward you know fixing the biggest problems with our skilled migration program. but other than that, you know, look broadly we've moved from

you know, this old model of migration in the twentieth century to a much more demand driven model in which, you know, people apply to come to Australia and if they meet base certain basic rules, then they can come. but, you know, we've still got this kind of obsession with bureaucracy and bureaucrats picking and choosing who gets to come in our skill migration visa categories. And I think we can get rid of that pretty easily.

Crystal Andrews (32:36)

I I'm sure a lot of people would say excess bureaucracy is indeed Australian way. BK, I think where I'd like to end this is just asking you this is not a this is not a a an issue or a topic that is unique to Australia. it's playing out globally in different countries in very different ways. Is there any any other country

in the world that you think we should be taking cues from? Or is Australia actually leading others when it comes to immigration, getting the levels right and making sure that it has, you know, these net benefit impacts on our economy and our society?

Bernard Keane (33:11)

I think we're doing immigration actually pretty well. And I th do think other countries could take a take a lead from us. people talk about Australia being a successful multicultural society. We're a really successful multicultural economy. ever since the years after World War Two, we have been constructing an economy based on relatively high levels of migration and it has paid off for us in terms of our standards of living, you know, in terms of our

quality of life. And, you know, in doing so, yeah, there's always been debates about the the level of migration. There's always been people going around saying there are too many migrants. I mean I grew up when, you know, people from you know the Mediterranean countries were were, routinely publicly called WOGs and you know, an array of much worse terms. And there was almost a, you know, institutionalized ethnocentrism to it. But

slowly, far too slowly, but slowly, you know, we become accommodated and adjusted to the idea that yes, we are a multicultural society. And, you know, many of us have ended up marrying

people from other cultures who are also Australians. you know, as part of a process to, accelerate that. So we have become a really successful multicultural economy. that's one of

the things that really sets us up beautifully in what's going to be a global war for talent over the coming decades, because there are very few countries on earth that are seeing rapid increases in population. And certainly no developed countries other than Israel. There are instead a number of countries like Japan Italy Greece, I think as well, which are seeing population declines.

And the number of countries that are seeing workforce declines is far bigger. So between now and 2100, I think we are gonna see an increasing global war for talent. countries are gonna want migrants because they aren't able to maintain their standard of living without them. you know, as we age and we need more and more people to look after our seniors. And Australia is really well placed.

In that context, because we can point to a really good history of bringing in large numbers of migrants and benefiting economically from it. And look around at some of the countries that might compete with us for talent. Look to the United States. Well, Donald Trump and MAGA have ensured now that anyone who thinks about you know, going to the United States, particularly from another developed country, is going to think twice about it. Or they may not simply just not be let in because of this intense hostility.

To migration. UK.

Crystal Andrews (35:45)

Compared to twenty years ago, it's certainly a much less appealing option. I mean, even less than twenty years ago, I think ten to fifteen years ago, anecdotally, you know, the number of people in my age bracket who would talk about wanting to, you know, wanting to get a green card, going to find work in the US

Bernard Keane (36:01)

Mm, yeah, exactly.

Crystal Andrews (36:03)

because that's where the opportunities are. You just you don't really hear those discussions in the same the same way anymore.

Bernard Keane (36:09)

No, and you know, it's it's the UK's had its own issues around migration. That's what drove Brexit. I mean, the weird thing about Brexit was it was driven by this hostility to all these migrants in the UK from the EU. And after Brexit, all those migrants from the EU left and they were replaced by migrants from outside the EU. ultimately Britain needs migrant workers, no

Crystal Andrews (36:30)

Mm.

Bernard Keane (36:30)

matter where they're from. So Australia can go into this competition for workers.

with a really big advantage. And then, you know, if think about a country like China, which has got a huge problem with an aging population, or Japan, those are countries which don't have virtually any kind of tradition of migration. So good luck to them in you know competing in in the war for talent over the coming decades, because they just simply have no tradition of being the kind of society that opens itself up to migrants and you know is really good at fitting them in culturally and

economically, but Australia, you know, Australia has got that in spades. And, you know, that's why this what I call the Trump moment of, destabilization and you know the crystallization of resentment against free market economics and the, you know, the political rations that that's caused, despite the fact that it presents enormous difficulties for a country like Australia, it also presents really big opportunities. And one of those opportunities is for Australia to say to the most talented people around the world,

Hey, we want you to come here, we need your skills, come and work in our economy where we've got a great standard of living, we've got high levels of pay, and you know we're we're open to you staying permanently. That I think makes us enormously appealing as a possible destination. And I think it's gonna really stand us in good stead over the coming decades as you know we we all get older and we need more and more help in you know continuing to function.

Crystal Andrews (37:57)

Well, we've bitten off about as much as we can chew for one episode of Cut Through. I'm sure people will have opinions about the content of this episode. Send them in. The details for how you can contact us are in the episode description as always. BK, thanks very much for your time today and good luck with the book launch this week. It's in it's in stores this week, am I right?

Bernard Keane (38:20)

It's in stores today, wherever good books are sold, as they used to say in the classics. So

Crystal Andrews (38:26)

Fantastic. Well, thank you very much and we'll we'll chat again soon.

Bernard Keane (38:29)

Thanks,

Crystal.