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I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present, and emerging.

Can I acknowledge all those impacted by the current flooding. Ensuring we are there for the long haul to help with the recovery will be vital.

Let me start with three statements that some will find controversial and challenging:

- I am proud to be an Australian.
- I am proud of our country.
- And I am proud of the values that define us.

As a nation, we have built something special.

Any discussion about immigration should include what it means to be an Australian citizen and the values that underpin Australian citizenship.

The Aboriginal activist Noel Pearson talks about the three stories of Australia: our Indigenous heritage, our British inheritance, and our multicultural achievement.

I am proud of all three stories. They are equally deserving of respect, recognition and being honoured.

We should not pit one against the other. National cohesion is easily broken and not readily fixed.

We are a vibrant, thriving country today because we have successfully blended these three stories, guided by our values.

And immigration has been a key driver of this story.

Done correctly, Immigration is nation building.

Our values and way of life are — and always will be — the greatest advertisement to any migrant looking for a better life.

We believe in the freedom and dignity of each individual, in freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of association.

We value the rule of law, the presumption of innocence, democracy and equality of opportunity.

Our economic freedom empowers us to pursue our lives and dreams, to provide for our family and to be part of our community.

In short, our values allow us to aspire to a better life.

When we erode any one of our values, it weakens all the things that make us great and dims the beacon that immigrants search for when looking for a new life.

In a globally competitive world, that harms our ability to attract young, skilled migrants. When it comes to freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the basic principles of justice, I am deeply concerned this is already happening.

When the forces of political correctness seek to shut down discussion in the public square we should worry. The fact that Michael Rowland from the ABC has to publicly defend hosting opposition MPs on the national broadcaster demonstrates just how intolerant we are becoming.

What happens when we dismiss contributions to society informed by a reasonable religious belief?

Sadly it makes it clear: your religion and your religious views are not welcome here. What message does this send to new and potential immigrants whose religion is an important part of their life?

According to the most recent census, 69 per cent of recent migrants indicated a religious affiliation, compared to 54 per cent of the general population.

Globally, the proportion of people who identify as having a religious affiliation continues to grow. It will reach 86.8 per cent of the world's population by 2050, according to the Pew Research Centre. Religious freedom has to be a factor when highly-skilled migrants are choosing where to live.

What does it say of Australian values when the court of public opinion can rush to find someone guilty based on an accusation, without the presumption of innocence, a right to respond, or even the opportunity to test the allegation?

Were Alistair Clarkson and Chris Fagan treated fairly?

We should also question a federal anti-corruption commission with such wide-ranging powers that NDIS workers are afforded less protection than terrorists.

What has happened to the fair go when we treat transgressions differently, not because of the intent, or harm caused, but because we don't like the politics or religion of the transgressor?

Why is Andrew Thorburn hounded from his job because of the actions of someone else in his church yet Adam Bandt gets a free pass when his colleague Lidia Thorpe bullies a respected indigenous elder, directs disgraceful abuse towards a Liberal senator and celebrates Old Parliament House being set on fire?

Is that a fair go?

We should be able to debate serious issues in a serious way.

But when it comes to defending the values that make Australia great and that are central to being a good citizen, good people are cowed into silence.

Small business organisations should be able to ask whether the Australian Human Rights Commission or Fair Work Ombudsman should have the power to enter and investigate sexual harassment accusations in their workplace, yet they are afraid to do so.

In 2018, I argued for a religious discrimination act and, as Education Minister, I championed the French Model Code to protect free speech and academic freedom at universities. Both have been resisted. This should deeply concern us.

If we are to continue to attract the international talent we need to build this nation to even greater heights, we must protect the values that provide the foundation stone. Migrants come to this nation because we will protect them, their families and their freedoms.

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We run a successful immigration program when the Australian people trust their government to keep the borders secure, to operate a system with integrity and to ensure there is an economic dividend.

John Howard knew this.

Howard's first immigration minister and Australia's longest serving immigration minister, Philip Ruddock, said the following in his valedictory speech:

The most difficult task I had to undertake as Minister for Immigration was restoring integrity to an immigration program that was driven by fraud and family reunion...I am most proud that today we have an immigration program that is supported by the Australian people as a whole and that is now seen as an economic program that is about nation building.

The immigration system that Howard inherited in 1996 from the Labor Government lacked a coherent rationale.

Howard upended immigration by focussing on skilled migrants; overhauling the points system for new arrivals to get a visa and introducing new skilled worker and business-based visas.

He also understood that his immigration policy would only be accepted if the Australian people had confidence in their borders and the government's ability to keep them safe. What he said in 2001 is still the Coalition's approach today:

We will defend our borders and we'll decide who comes to this country. But we'll do that within the framework of the decency for which Australians have always been renowned.

The second half of that statement is often omitted but is just as important as the first. When Labor came to office in 2007 they dismantled Howard's legacy, and as result lost control of Australia's borders. That Labor Government was responsible for arguably the greatest humanitarian tragedy and policy failure in modern Australian history. You know the facts.

Under Labor:

- 1200 people, including children, died at sea.
- 8,000 children were forcibly placed in detention.
- 50,000 people arrived on more than 800 boats.
- The cost to taxpayers of managing illegal boat arrivals blew out by \$10.3 billion.

Three of the four Labor immigration ministers responsible for this failure are now ministers in the Albanese Government.

Chris Bowen, Tony Burke and Brendan O'Connor oversaw a humanitarian tragedy. They took a strength and turned it into a disaster. Given their track record, all three warrant close scrutiny in their new portfolios.

The Coalition fixed Labor's policy mess over our most recent term of government. And through gritted teeth, Labor have adopted our key policies, because—and they will never admit this—John Howard was right.

But the world is watching to see if Labor truly has the stomach to make the tough decisions to keep our borders secure.

If Labor waver, the people smugglers will be back in business.

And let me be clear, we don't want the boats to start again.

As a nation we are still dealing with the aftermath of Labor's failures ten years on.

During the most recent election, an analysis found at least 14 Labor politicians and candidates had rejected or talked down boat turnbacks, including the current immigration minister Andrew Giles.

In a speech at the ALP Conference in 2015, Giles said:

I do disagree with you when it comes to turnbacks. I am unconvinced by their effectiveness. I regard them as inherently unsafe.

Just look around the world where illegal arrivals are stretching resources, impacting on communities and becoming a major political issue. Illegal immigration has not stopped.

No good comes from losing control of your borders. The Coalition successfully stopped the boats with a three-pronged suite of measures: boat turnbacks (where it is safe to do so), offshore detention, and temporary protection visas.

This enabled us to run a successful skilled, temporary and humanitarian immigration program.

Now two of those three measures are under threat.

- Albanese's Labor made an election promise to end temporary protection visas and Minister Giles has recently confirmed that is still on the agenda.
- And we don't know Labor's position on the Andrew Wilkie private members bill that will effectively abolish offshore detention.

Maintaining border security for the duration of this term of parliament will be a key test on which the Albanese Government is judged—but it is not the only test.

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Labor must operate an immigration system with integrity and it must make the case for its immigration reforms.

According to a Resolve poll published in the Nine newspapers at the end of last month, only a third of Australians back the Albanese government's decision to raise the permanent migration cap.

Resolve director Jim Reed said nervousness about immigration had been a trend in polling for a long time that reflected people's fears about the negative impacts of immigration.

To be successful, and to bring the nation with them, the Labor Government will need to deliver a policy that balances the economic benefits of immigration while being cognisant of its impact on local jobs and skills, community cohesion, economic growth, infrastructure and the environment.

At the skills summit the focus was on workforce shortages, but Labor are yet to detail how the additional 35,000 permanent migrants will address this issue.

We are yet to see how Labor's focus on increasing the skilled migrant intake will operate in coordination with Australia's current record low unemployment or Labor's skills and education policy.

One priority for any government should be to keep Australians in a job, and to educate the next generation of Australians to get a job.

That's why, as Education Minister, I introduced the Job-ready Graduates reforms to make it cheaper for Australians to study a degree in areas of expected job growth — teaching, nursing, languages, engineering, IT, science and agriculture.

Immigration must support Australian employment not compete with it.

There are public reservations about increasing immigration numbers because Australians want to see the benefits and costs of immigration better shared.

Currently, our large capital cities, especially Sydney and Melbourne, attract the lion's share of migrants.

And areas within those cities pay a high price —in terms of competition for housing, congestion on roads, and overstretched resources.

As my new neighbour in Parliament House Dai Le said in her maiden speech:

If we are to bring in more migrants, the government has the duty to ensure that there are immediate plans to build more housing, more public transport infrastructure and more local services to accommodate this planned increase.

Labor will be responsible for ensuring that planning and infrastructure provision keep pace with their migration intake.

And they haven't got off to a great start.

Labor have focussed on lionising permanent migrants and demonising temporary migrants, calling Australia a "guest worker economy".

When I was trade minister, I negotiated and signed free trade agreements with the United Kingdom and India that included comprehensive mobility clauses, so that young Australians can take opportunities to work and gain experience in other countries.

Those agreements also increase the size of the pool of talented, temporary workers that can make an economic contribution in Australia.

Labor need to strike a better balance in the way they deal with our permanent and temporary migrants. It is not as binary as one good and one bad.

Labor are yet to explain how they can run an uncapped temporary migration program and a capped permanent program, while dangling the carrot of permanent residency to temporary visa-holders.

Under Labor, our immigration settings run the risk of being less targeted. We have seen no detail on what visa classes – both onshore and offshore – are being prioritised for processing. This is causing concern amongst visa holders.

To be a success, and bring the population with them, Labor will have to explain why their approach won't have a negative impact on people's quality of life, our unemployment rate and the environment.

This is what is meant by a better Australia not simply a bigger Australia.

Properly planned and well managed immigration is a good thing.

Ad hoc policy development is not.

The Prime Minister has already flown the kite about changing our immigration settings to give temporary residents from New Zealand voting rights that other temporary migrants do not enjoy - this flies in the face of Labor great Bob Hawke's commitment to a non-discriminatory immigration policy.

Mr Albanese has also said that he will be more lenient when it comes to allowing New Zealand criminals to stay in Australia. He needs to provide more details about which criminals he will allow to remain in our country and why.

The Coalition refused or cancelled 10,206 visas under the character provision of the Migration Act, including 335 who were Outlaw Motorcycle Gang members, associates or organised crime figures. We did this to keep Australians safe.

Whose interests does changing this approach serve?

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So what should our immigration policy look like?

We are an ageing population and our migration policies have to help stem this tide not exacerbate it.

As Treasury's 2021 Intergenerational Report says:

A well-targeted, skills-focused Migration Program can better support our ageing population by supplementing the stock of working-age people, slowing the transition to an older population, and improving Australia's fiscal outcomes.

Our immigration policy must be unashamedly about targeting young, highly-skilled immigrants.

The question that Labor need to answer is how many migrants under their increased permanent intake will be from this cohort?

Because the post COVID global competition for young highly skilled migrants is already intense.

We need a plan to identify, market, recruit and support these people to come to Australia. Reversing income tax cuts is not a great advertisement.

It is also alarming to see reports that Labor are lowering standards across English, experience and qualifications in their bid to attract more permanent migrants. Even the NSW teachers' union describes this as a "recipe for failure".

Australia is a world-leading destination for immigrants. We should be targeting and accepting young, highly skilled workers — and we should be setting them up to succeed, not to struggle with the language or to fail local employment requirements.

We need to make it easier for highly skilled doctors, nurses and teachers to move to Australia, not lower the standards of the professionals we are willing to accept in order to meet an arbitrary target.

If we don't fill our permanent migration cap with young, highly skilled workers we will be making a bad situation worse.

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Labor must also demonstrate that they understand that regional Australia isn't just what you fly over on your way to Europe for holidays.

Can Labor deliver an economic dividend for rural Australia from their immigration settings?

A good start would be retaining and expanding the agricultural visa, which the Australian Workers Union, and therefore the Labor Party, oppose.

Regional Australians and farmers are telling me this visa program needs to be expanded beyond our agreement with Vietnam, not abolished. There is no good reason regional Australia shouldn't have access to the Pacific workers scheme and the agriculture visa if both programs are run with integrity.

Regional Australia also need flexibility to adjust settings so they work best for different regions. The designated-area migration agreements - or DAMAs - can do this, but they are currently beset by bureaucratic inertia.

As the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has noted, businesses in DAMA areas require additional support and flexibility from the department to realise the potential of the agreements.

When it comes to DAMAs, the department must act quicker and be more responsive to local needs.

We also need a plan to keep migrants in the regions for the long term, and this includes our humanitarian intake.

For too long we have pointed to the success of settling the Karen refugees in Nhill and the Yazidi refugees in Wagga.

We need to create more success stories.

Humanitarian arrivals should be better supported to relocate to our regions and train in areas of worker shortage. This will require education and training, housing, healthcare, in-language support and a supportive regional community.

This approach can also provide a model for attracting highly skilled migrants to our regions, that's why I will be closely watching the recently launched Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot trial.

The Coalition provided \$9.2 million to fund a four-year pilot that will facilitate community sponsorship of up to 1,500 refugees and humanitarian entrants across Australia.

Community-driven settlement can be effective at delivering successful outcomes but only if supported by the community, working with all levels of government and the non-government sector.

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Businesses and farmers are telling me they want a more flexible immigration system. Small business is telling me that navigating the visa system is too complex, bureaucratic and time-consuming.

We need to make the immigration system more user friendly for smaller businesses without large HR and legal functions.

Labor should work with small business to create a streamlined process for accredited, trustworthy businesses to bring in highly-skilled migrants through a simplified system. It should reintroduce an internal review mechanism.

This change in approach could transform the use of DAMAs to address regional immigration which, in turn, would better share the benefits and costs of immigration between the city and the country.

Businesses want timeframes for visa applications, clear KPIs for the department when it comes to processing and tracking, and less form filling bureaucracy.

The Coalition awaits the review of Australia's migration system that is due to report by the end of February. Hopefully it will address the issues I have raised today. The clock is ticking and we are yet to see the review's terms of reference or know who will lead the review.

The review panel must include individuals with expert knowledge of the migration system and the needs of employers.

It is a sad indictment that this review is needed at all. Labor had nine years in opposition to put together a coherent policy.

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Today, I have set out my initial thinking on immigration and the framework that will drive our policy development.

I have raised questions that Labor must answer.

These are similar questions, I imagine, that the two-thirds of Australians who don't support an increase to our immigration cap have.

- Can you protect the values that make us a desirable destination for migrants?
- Will you keep the borders secure?
- Can you bank the economic benefits of immigration while dispersing the costs?
- How will you ensure infrastructure and public services keep pace with your higher immigration levels?
- Will you accept more young, highly skilled migrants to increase the economic dividend for the nation?
- Do you have a plan for immigration and regional Australia? Can we see it?
- Can you get the balance right between temporary and permanent migration?
- And, ultimately, the most important question of all: will you deliver a better Australia, not simply a bigger Australia?