

Scmp 7 AUGUST 84

1997 'won't influence Canberra'

By AGNES CHEN

Australia is unlikely to tighten its immigration rules simply because of a likely increase in the number of Hongkong people wishing to emigrate Down Under in view of 1997.

The Australian Commissioner, Mr Donald Horne, said he does not envisage any drastic changes in his country's immigration policy simply in terms of Hongkong in the coming few years.

After speaking to members of the Rotary Club of Tsimshatsui East yesterday, Mr Horne was asked whether his country was still worried about Hongkong people wanting to set up home in Australia following the recent statement by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, outlining a future agreement with China.

He replied: "I don't think that you can talk in terms of worries.

"We've got an immigration policy which is a world-wide, non-discriminatory policy ... that applies equally for all countries, including Hongkong."

He said the number of people who had headed to Australia from Hongkong had remained "fairly steady" in recent times.

And he did not foresee that the number would increase dramatically this year.

Asked whether it is likely that the Labour Government will amend its immigration policy if the number of Hong-



Mr Horne

kong people seeking settlement in Australia increases drastically, Mr Horne said:

"I'm not really in a position to talk on behalf of the Government on that sort of question.

"As I've said earlier, we do have an immigration policy that applies right throughout the world, a global policy, and at the beginning of each year the Government sets out a global figure for migrants."

He said that for the 1984-85 year, Canberra had increased the figure to 72,000, from 64,000 the previous year.

"This is the way policy has worked over the past 30 years. I don't see it changing really very much"

Asked about post-1997, Mr Horne said: "That's a long way down the track."

He said it is possible that there will be an increase in the number of Hongkong emigrants to Australia this year, but he added that he could not indicate a percentage figure at this stage.

(Last year, about 3,300 Hongkong people emigrated to Australia — about 50 per cent higher than the previous year.)

He said more people had settled in his country because of the relaxed family reunion policy.

On Hongkong investment in Australia, Mr Horne said getting exact figures was "extremely difficult."

He added that in general terms, however, there had been an increase in the movement of money out of Hongkong into Australia.

Mr Horne said Australia has very strong trade links with Hongkong, at the moment amounting to about A\$1 billion (about HK\$6.6 billion) per year and growing fast.

He said trade increased by about 50 per cent during the last financial year.

Mr Horne was asked whether Australia would allow more Hongkong students to study there.

"I don't know the answer," he said, adding that there had been two reviews of the overseas student policy during the past six months, and so far they had not come up with any conclusive recommendations.

Australia's neglect of HK 'a disgrace'

Canberra, Aug 6.

Australia should allow an increase in the number of skilled immigrants and business executives coming from Hongkong before China resumes control of the territory, the opposition Liberal Party says.

The Liberals issued a statement yesterday criticising the Government for not moving to attract more skilled immigrants and people with businesses to help develop the Australian economy.

Other Western nations are snapping up such immigrants, particularly from Hongkong, the party said.

"The Government's neglect of Hongkong in particular is a disgrace," the statement said.

"Canada, by contrast, is attracting migrants with capital and acumen in a major migration drive from Hongkong."

The statement appeared to be a reversal for the Liberal Party, which has been critical of the Government for what it contends is unrestrained Asian immigration to Australia.

—AP.

At present, there are about 2,000 Hongkong students studying in Australia in any one year.

Regarding settlement quotas for Vietnamese refugees from Hongkong, Mr Horne said he does not think his country will increase its quota at this stage.

He said Australia would take about 900 refugees from Hongkong in the next 12 months, equal to the figure for the previous year.

In his speech, Mr Horne said the region which most clearly commands the highest priority in Australia's foreign relations is the Asian-Pacific area.

"Its dynamism has presented major economic

and trading opportunities that have underpinned a very important redirection of our trading interests.

"Its cultural vigour and the increasingly active dialogue we share with countries of the region have stimulated close involvement by many Australians within the area," he said.

And he cited an example that last year almost 250,000 Australians visited Hongkong.

Mr Horne said relations between Canberra and China had developed considerably in the past 15 months.

He said: "We have cultural, agricultural, scientific and technical co-operation agreements."