



NEWSLETTER

Sustainable Population Australia Inc

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Ageing a triumph, not a disaster



Katharine Betts

In the lead up to the Federal Budget a significant study by Dr Katharine Betts was published. Called 'The ageing of the Australian population: triumph or disaster?' it attracted considerable media attention.

It found Australia is coping well with its ageing population and

will continue to do so in coming decades.

Between 1978 and 2013, the average age of Australians increased from 29 to 37, yet labour force participation is at an unprecedented 53 per cent. In the coming decades, labour force participation will only fall to levels about those of the late 1970s, yet still above rates of the mid-1960s when the nation prospered.

Some countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands – with older age profiles than Australia's – have a higher portion of aged people in the workforce. Dr Betts notes the prevailing discrimination against older workers in Australia and suggests in 'a more positive social environment labour-force participation rates for older people would be even higher'.

The study notes that while the cost of the age pension has grown faster than GDP over the last decade, demographic ageing was not the cause. The rising costs were instead due to discretionary policy changes such as the abolition of income tax on superannuation payments, increased access to the age pension and the lifting of benefits.

'Even low rates of per capita economic growth should allow governments to continue to pay aged-pension costs, an outcome that would be even more readily achieved if some of the extraordinarily liberal provisions for middle-class retirees were reformed,' says the study.

What about health care costs? The evidence is that people are living longer because they are healthier and serious illness is compressed into only the last two years of life. Indeed, data on 31 OECD countries show that 'there is no statistically significant association between the proportion of the population aged 65 plus and health-care expenditure as a percentage of GDP'.

The study acknowledges the significant voluntary roles played by older people. Nearly half the children receiving child care were looked after by their grandparents, and around a fifth of over-65s act as carers for someone with a disability, usually a family member. A third of those aged 65 to 84 work as volunteers in the community.

A beneficial scenario for the country would be replacement level fertility of 2.0, high life expectancy and nil net migration, according to the study. If fertility were allowed to fall to 1.6, however, the median age would become very high and lead to hyper-ageing.

Mass immigration is often cited as a cure for ageing yet the study found that high net overseas migration makes little difference to the median age but a considerable difference to the size of the population, including the size of the population aged 65 and over.

The study cites the Productivity Commission report on ageing that points out that the infrastructure spending needed to manage population growth over the next 50 years will be five times the total that was needed over the last 50 years. 'This investment in capital widening must seriously weaken Australia's capacity to invest in the capital deepening that would boost productivity.' Population growth, by imposing pressure on infrastructure and adding to congestion, depresses productivity. In fact, 32 OECD countries show no positive association between population growth and growth in labour productivity.

An older age structure is an advance in human well-being, and to be celebrated.

<http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/cpur/files/2014/05/Ageing-of-the-Australian-populationV2-1.pdf>

A bigger population will not guarantee more prosperity

by Nicholas Stuart



Nicholas Stuart

A couple of weeks ago the Lowy Institute's Michael Fullilove packed the National Press Club. He provocatively called his talk "a big Australia" and didn't disappoint. His answer, it seems, to pretty much all our problems is simple: grow. With size comes influence; we'll be more robust; and barriers preventing us from realising our potential will disappear. He's so confident of his assertions he even backed them up with an opinion piece in *The Australian*.

That's a simplification; of course the detail of his argument was more nuanced. But it all boiled down to an old, simple, idea: bigger is better.

Now this is one of those fundamental ideological positions you either hold, or you don't. Intellectual arguments don't seem to make much impression on those in favour or those against the idea that we can be "bigger", and this is really a debate about population size. No one's suggesting levelling mountains to reclaim land from the sea and nobody's asserting we shouldn't play a significant world role. So let's brush aside the distractions and focus on what this debate's really all about. Big is code for more people. Fullilove accepted this was a critical part of his argument.

Years ago Kevin Rudd pushed the same line in an interview. The way he articulated it, it didn't appear he thought the idea was controversial. But he backed down in response to a storm of protest. Rudd seemed surprised. He didn't really seem to understand what people were on about. He should have. The idea we should grow isn't a motherhood issue any more.

I wouldn't wish to be associated with some of the people who don't want us to get bigger, but just because you worry about the carrying capacity of Australia doesn't mean you're a racist. Or an extreme, anti-development Green. It just means you've some understanding of the fragility of the land, coupled with enough imagination to perceive the risks accompanying our current trajectory.

Lets focus, first, on what Fullilove was contending, because by examining his assumptions it's possible to witness them falling apart. He argued, for example, that

more effort should be placed on diplomacy, particularly in Asia. This is unexceptional – of course he's correct. But motherhood statements such as these aren't paid for, and if you're going to wrap yourself in things it's impossible to criticise it's equally incumbent to explain how such projects will be funded. Without filling in the detail you're being lazy, but Fullilove wasn't prepared to do this.

The possibility emerged that extra diplomats would be paid for by cutting aid projects. This, however, is very different from the simple proposition that we need to spend more on foreign affairs. Declaring a diplomat is worth more than an aid worker is an assertion that many would challenge. Particularly in, say, Afghanistan or Indonesia.

Equally, everyone can nod at his insistence we need more foreign languages, but how will this be achieved? Lowy's well resourced, so where's the detail, or is this just another obvious statement? The ANU, for example, offers those speaking other languages extra ATAR points – an idea I think is marvellous. They're putting money to motherhood statements. But if that's what you want, argue the specific case, don't find yourself slipping into vague generalities. If you do, your argument should be dismissed as the collection of platitudes it is.

But this isn't where "big Australia" comes a real cropper. The problem lies at the heart of the very proposition itself. The basic idea is that as the country grows it will obtain the scale to make a difference. Three elemental flaws spring immediately to mind.

The point is to ask where the money's coming from. It's stating the obvious to say new Australians don't spring into being from nothing. They need houses, roads and services and the substantial burden of creating these new estates is borne by you – the existing taxpayer. Sure, some will buy existing houses but that simply disguises the problem. New buildings are needed; people are squashed together or pushed further out. Growth means increased competition and people work harder. In the long run only a few benefit.

The second difficulty is that having more Aussies won't necessarily increase our economic or cultural "weight". It simply means lower standards of living. Benefits flowing from existing assets are distributed over a greater number of people. Gina Rinehart's got a well-thought-out philosophy for developing the country – but this doesn't involve sharing her mining wealth with those in the cities. She wants more tax breaks and the ability to bring in foreign workers who she believes will work harder for less. Maybe she's right. She could do it

(continued on back page)

High immigration is creating an illusion of growth

by Leith van Onselen

Business Spectator's Callam Pickering has written another good piece:

<http://www.businessspectator.com.au/article/2014/4/22/economy/big-australia-illusion>, this time questioning the merits of Australia's world-beating immigration program, which risks lowering the living standards of the pre-existing population:

...high migration levels are not achieved without a cost. High population growth puts pressure on existing infrastructure and commonly leads to greater congestion on our roads and public transport. Not to mention the impact on our natural resources and environment.

There is also considerable debate as to whether high migration policies benefit the existing population. The Productivity Commission has found that... the real beneficiaries of migration are the immigrants themselves who benefit from higher domestic wages and relatively better infrastructure...

Unfortunately, it is doing little more than creating the illusion of growth...

Immigration is not a substitute for productivity and so far Australian residents are seeing little benefit from Canberra's immigration policies...

The end result is an economy that is being driven by population growth, with little consideration of the long-term implications. How will we deal with the additional traffic congestion? What about increasing the housing supply? Does anyone care about the environment or natural resource depletion?..

Spot on. The key issue when it comes to Australia's immigration policy is whether expanding Australia's population by more than 1 million people every three years is beneficial to the existing population. Sure, while it might be great for Australia's business elites - who enjoy the fruits of an expanded market - it imposes real costs on the rest of us, who must endure increased costs of congestion, higher housing/infrastructure costs, lower environmental amenity, and minimal uplift in material economic well-being.

From a narrow economic perspective, population growth (immigration) is good only if it raises the real incomes of the pre-existing population (e.g. real GDP per capita). While it is true that Australia's high population growth over the second half of the 2000s boosted Australia's real GDP (more labour inputs, other

things equal, means more outputs), evidence is sketchy as to whether real GDP per capita increased due to population growth. In fact, real GDP per capita has remained lacklustre since 2007, suggesting that while the overall economic pie has increased in size because of high population growth, everyone's share of that pie has barely grown.

The question around living standards becomes more important when infrastructure constraints and the environment are taken into account.

Indeed, a big negative of Australia's high rate of population growth is that it is placing increasing pressure on the pre-existing (already strained) stock of infrastructure and housing, which reduces productivity and living standards unless costly new investments are made. Further, controversial and expensive investments like desalination plants would arguably not have been required absent such population growth.

Further, when infrastructure and housing investment fails to keep up, it places upward pressure on inflation, requiring higher interest rates, which can then damage productive sectors of the economy. As explained in a 2011 speech by the Reserve Bank of Australia's Phil Lowe, these factors were certainly in play in the late-2000s, when rapid population growth placed upward pressure on rents, as well as caused a big surge in utilities prices as the capacity of the system struggled to keep pace with the growing demand, requiring costly new investments.

Ongoing high population growth also places additional strain on the natural environment, causing greater environmental degradation, increasing water scarcity and pollution, and making it more difficult for Australia to reduce its carbon footprint and meet international pollution reduction targets.

A related concern is that Australia earns its way in the world mainly by selling its fixed mineral resources (e.g. iron ore, coal, natural gas, and gold). More people means less resources per capita. A growing population also means that we must deplete our mineral resources faster, just to maintain a constant standard of living.

As noted in part by Pickering, modelling by the Productivity Commission has also found that immigration is neither beneficial for the economy or living standards, nor can it alleviate the impacts of an ageing population.

(continued on back page)



Leith van Onselen

Ethics of Migration

Population, resources, environment in the 21st century

Associate Prof William Grey, UQ



William Grey
photo by Rod Taylor

This is précis of his presentation at the Ethics of Migration symposium on 6 April organised by SPA.

Issues in environmental ethics have been discussed since antiquity but it is only since the 1970s that environmentalism became a mainstream social and political concern. The human impact on the natural world has come to be perceived as a matter of urgent concern as a rapidly expanding human population extensively modifies and degrades the natural world.

Technologies such as the chain saw and the drift net can transform biological systems far more rapidly and violently than neolithic axes and spears. Environmental problems are often consequence of technological triumphs.

More people than ever before now live in a state of affluence, free of hunger and disease; yet more people than ever also live in poverty.

The accelerating loss of biodiversity and habitat degradation prompted environmental philosophers to question the adequacy of traditional ethical constraints on human conduct. In particular, it is argued that a satisfactory environmental ethic must take into consideration more than purely human interests. We need also to consider 'the rights of nature'.

Sustaining the natural world is also a matter of self-interest. The primary economic system is the ecological system, in which nature transforms living and non-living material into the 'goods and services' which provide our natural resources, waste assimilation, life support, and life amenity. These are the fundamental economic goods. Within this system, and dependent upon it, lies the human economic system.

Navigating a path through the competing tangle of competing concerns is a serious challenge. We need to extend our concerns to include the interests of future generations and also those of non-humans.

Extending concern towards the future is embodied in the notion of *sustainability*. At the beginning of the 21st century, the unsustainability of industrial civilisation has become plain.

Problems for industrial civilisation include: climate change (fossil carbon emissions); water (fossil water aquifers and ice field depletion); biodiversity loss;

topsoil depletion and sustaining agriculture; toxic waste; ozone depletion; and social exploitation (social and global injustice). All of these problems are exacerbated by a global human population spiking up towards 10 billion.

Sustainability means that growth has to end.

We are a resource-privileged generation. Our needs for nutrition, shelter, education, employment, safety, health care, and social support are (for most of us) very well addressed.

Future generations may not be so lucky. Fossil carbon carries substantial risks and costs — its current rate of release at levels well above the planet's carbon sink capacity is changing the heat storage capacity of the atmosphere, the acidity of the oceans, and risks destabilising the mild interglacial climate that has prevailed for the last 10,000 years which made agriculture and human civilisation possible. We live prosperously, however, by treating the atmosphere as an open sewer.

The term 'energy crisis' was coined in 1970 to indicate the increasing scarcity of oil. The *real* energy crisis is that high energy use produces entropy more rapidly than it can be dissipated. Earth remains in thermal balance because entropy is eliminated by radiation of low grade heat into space. Human economic activity, however, is now generating more degraded energy than the biosphere can cope with at its previous thermal equilibrium. Human life can continue only as long as the biosphere can deal with the entropy that we generate.

Our challenge is live within an entropy (hence energy) envelope which maintains the thermal equilibrium of the planet at a level that isn't hostile to human civilisation (and, most importantly, agriculture).

Just over 700 mountain gorillas survive in the wild today, and none exist in captivity, so the ratio of humans to mountain gorillas is 10,000,000:1. A world where humans outnumber gorillas 10 million to one is a world out of balance.

A sustainable future requires a stabilised population. The rapid expansion of Australia's population is largely fueled by immigration; however, this creates multiple problems, for example, for urban infrastructure. Maintaining quality urban living, and preserving the natural environment, is more straightforward if we stabilise population. Australia could do so by reducing levels of immigration. Reducing immigration is compatible with a much more generous intake of asylum seekers and refugees. Why, then, do we have such harsh policies for the treatment of seaborne refugees?

Ethics of Migration

Climate change, other disruptive socio-environmental changes and human wellbeing and health

Tony McMichael AO

Professor Emeritus, ANU



Tony McMichael
photo by Rod Taylor

Humans have flowed between regions of the world for millennia. Those movements have occurred particularly during downturns in climatic and environmental conditions. Today, the Asian Development Bank assesses that Asia and the Pacific is the world region most prone to natural disasters ... “It is highly exposed to climate impacts, and is home to

highly vulnerable population groups who are disproportionately poor and marginalized.”

The report foresees tens of millions of people being displaced over the next several decades (<http://www.adb.org/publications/addressing-climate-change-and-migration-asia-and-pacific>).

Today’s politicised and demonised ‘boat people’ problem will be as nothing compared to the demographic and geopolitical instability and fluidity likely to arise as climate change and its many fundamental impacts advance.

Ethical questions that we need to recognise, and hopefully address, include:

- If climate change – along with other demographic and environmental changes – increases the pressures for migration, enforced displacement, or refugee flows, should averting the problem of climate change assume higher priority than ameliorating the (already partially unavoidable) adverse and distressing human consequences?
- If the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – famine, pestilence, war and conquest – re-emerge rampant, to what extent would rising levels of distress, death rates and destruction in the Asia-Pacific region increase our ethical responsibilities as a rich country?
- Who migrates? Will an increased flow of people deprive source countries of precious human capital at a critical time when home-front action is needed?
- Following our species’ dispersal from an East African ‘Commons’ (70,000 years ago) to Global Dispersal, is there a case, now, for creating a Global Commons? And if Australia then increased its intake of needy and displaced, what compensatory constraints on other sources of

population growth would be acceptable?

The third of the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment reports on climate change (April 2014) broke new ground in this 25-year-long series by focusing attention on security. The range of climate change-related security threats include increases in diseases and deaths, food shortages, the oft-devastating impacts of amplified weather disasters, and increased conflict, displacement and migration. The world, including Australia, is poorly prepared for those threats.

Migration morals in the balance

Bob Douglas AO

Emeritus Professor, ANU



Bob Douglas AO
photo by Rod Taylor

The world now faces a series of five interconnected crises including excess population; climate change; a fractured economic system; ecological footprint and consumption excess with its environmental destruction; and breakdown of governance. We cannot fix one without attending to the others.

Our own per capita ecological footprint is about three times the global average and is unsustainable. We have five per cent of the world’s land mass (much of it admittedly uninhabitable) but only 0.3 per cent of its human population. It is inevitable that as misery increases elsewhere millions will want to come to Australia.

Deciding what is ethical in these circumstances is complex. My moral yardstick here is the golden rule. On this basis it seems right to treat refugees with compassion and understanding and to share our good with those less fortunate than we. It is wrong in our globalised world to assume that Australians have absolute entitlement to the territory which we currently control and manage. It is wrong to continue to plunder the earth and not dramatically contract our footprint. It is wrong not to work on ameliorating the core problems that threaten our human world.

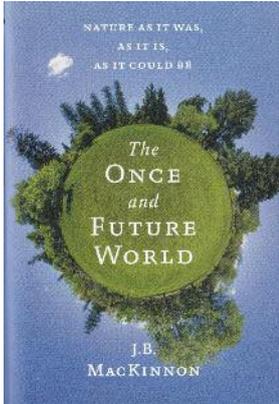
The more difficult question is how, in a collapsing world, to regulate the flow of refugees in ways that do best possible justice to their needs and ours.

When people lead with vision, governments follow. We must urgently build a new vision for Australia that begins with transformative economic change. We should set 10-year population targets, justified by evidence of our declining ecological footprint. We should substantially increase our foreign aid on

(continued on page 11)

Book Review

The once and future world – Nature as it was, as it is, and as it could be



By **JB MacKinnon**

Houghton Miffler Harcourt,
New York, 2013. 232 pp.
\$35.95

Reviewed by *Jenny Goldie*

It is difficult to understand the sheer abundance – the plenitude – of nature before humans arrived on the scene. At the end of the last ice age, mammoths and mastodons

roamed the North American grasslands in densities of more than seven per square mile. The continent also hosted pampatheres (armadillos the size of overturned rowboats), the armoured glyptodont (the size of subcompact car), huge ground sloths, herds of wild horses, tapirs, wild oxen and cattle. There were camels, moose, elk, llamas and boars – all giants - and beavers the size of bears. And not for the faint-hearted were packs of large wolves, the flesh-eating short-faced bear, the saber-toothed cat (‘with serrated fangs as long as chef’s knives’) and prides of American lions, even bigger than today’s African and Indian lions.

Then the megafauna began to disappear, in North America and in all corners of the globe except Africa, at roughly the time *Homo sapiens* arrived. Perhaps it was a function of changing climate as well, but anywhere on land where the megafauna had not evolved with man, they declined and became extinct. North America lost 33 genera. In Australia, 21 genera (with an average weight of over 220 pounds) disappeared in the millennia following the arrival of humans 50,000 years ago. New Zealand did not lose its giant fauna – 15 species of the flightless moa – until 800 years ago when the Maoris arrived.

In most places, the new human inhabitants settled down within a new, albeit diminished, natural world and most established a certain ecological sustainability, often with strict laws. In Hawaii, for instance, following the appearance in about 1250AD of Polynesians in canoes with their pigs, dogs and 40 species of plants, the populations of various native species crashed including flightless birds, turtles and monk seal. ‘It was the usual pattern of human history,’ writes MacKinnon, ‘we came, we saw, we left a deep scar.’

Before long, the lowland native plants were eclipsed by ‘canoe plants’. For about 100 years, the Polynesians continued their long canoe journeys but then the Hawaiians lived for 500 years in isolation. Extinctions slowed dramatically, coral reefs stopped their dramatic

decline after early overfishing, sea turtle numbers recovered and most birds endured – all despite the human population growing to 800,000.

How did they achieve this apparent balance with nature? As in Australia, there were taboos – in Hawaii called *kapu* – that helped sustain the islands’ richness. Breaking a taboo, such as killing petrels from the shore rather than from the mountains, or bathing in a pool of drinking water, could be punished by death.

It was the Europeans’ arrival in various lands – Australia, North America, Hawaii, New Zealand - that caused the real havoc, both to the ‘indigenous’ human populations and to existing flora and fauna, whether it had been there for millennia or for a mere few hundred years. Degradation of nature continues to this day – from the highly complex to the ever simpler with far fewer species - as human populations appropriate ever more land for their own purposes. But how do we turn this situation around? How do we restore ‘wilderness’, if not the natural world before humans arrived but that of pre-European times, albeit modified?

MacKinnon is an ecologist who recognises we must restore complexity through rewilding – restoring animals like the grizzly bear, bison and wolf to their original habitats. Opposition has been understandable, not only from farmers who don’t want their stock eaten by free-ranging predators, but also by hikers who prefer to travel with safety in the so-called wilderness.

As an ecologist, MacKinnon feels the loss – the extirpation – of nature keenly. Surprisingly, however, he is optimistic we can restore at least some complexity to the natural world and put a stop to the sixth great extinction that we find ourselves in.

How many people can live in this rewilded world? Hawaii in its period of isolation supported 125 people per square mile. Currently the world supports seven billion people at 123 per square mile – about the same. Most of the world isn’t lush, green and fertile as Hawaii was, of course, but MacKinnon believes that with what we have now that the Hawaiians did not – access to the collective intelligence and technologies of the world’s 7000 cultures, and supercomputers – we might not only survive on this world but stop the decline of the natural world and watch it ‘return to astounding, perpetual life’.

This is a lovely, well written book. It was a joy to read.

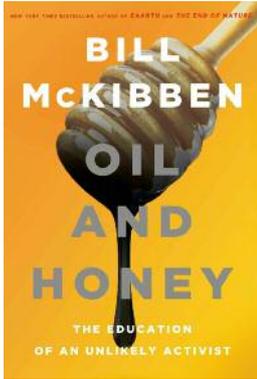
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<http://www.population.org.au/donations>, donate, and a receipt will be issued electronically. Many thanks to those of you who have already made donations.

Book Review

Oil and Honey – the education of an unlikely activist



By **Bill McKibben**

2013. Published by Black Inc.
Collingwood, Vic. 255pp

Reviewed by *Jenny Goldie*

Here we go again – reviewing a book with *no* mention of population in it! Nevertheless, given the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently acknowledged population growth as a major

driver of climate change, reviewing any book on the latter is probably justified, or at least forgivable.

And besides, in 1998 Bill McKibben wrote that lovely book *Maybe One; the case for smaller families* about how he and his wife debated whether they should have any children at all in an overcrowded world and in the end decided to have just one, despite the prevailing prejudice against ‘the only child’. Their daughter Sophie is now in college and *Oil and Honey* is dedicated to her. Fellow Vermonter Bill Ryerson of Population Media Center says McKibben is no longer outspoken on the population issue but perhaps he’s just preoccupied with other things.

Oil and Honey is about two of those things: the fight against oil companies over climate change, and about making honey. All this against a background of severe weather events, not least Hurricane Irene causing damaging floods in his home state of Vermont, the west wracked by severe drought and Superstorm Sandy flooding McKibben’s beloved New York subways which he wrote about when a staff writer for the *New Yorker*. And of course, the Arctic sea-ice reached new low levels.

This book is really a memoir covering the battle by 350.org– he was co-founder – to stop the Keystone XL pipeline that will take oil from the tar sands of Alberta in Canada, south across the US to ports on the Gulf of Mexico, once given the OK by President Obama. James Hansen, climate scientist and formerly of NASA, had said that were the tar sands to be fully exploited, it was “game over” for the climate. As part of this campaign, in 2011 McKibben led the largest civil disobedience campaign in 30 years in Washington and spent three days in gaol. (Several people to a cell; a communal toilet in the cell with no privacy; no washing; bologna sandwiches at 3am and 3pm if you put your hand out through the bars; a few inches of water in a cup likewise.) Soon after, Obama postponed his decision despite the Republicans anxiety to push it through. In

April this year, the Obama Administration announced that it was, once again, putting off a decision on the Keystone XL pipeline and one is now unlikely until after the mid-term elections.

Meanwhile, McKibben came across a bee-keeper called Kirk who lived and worked making bee-hives in rented accommodation nearby but without the funds to buy land to be a proper apiarist. Despite the onslaught of the varroa mite on the bee populations in the United States, Kirk had managed to keep his bees healthy by breeding and without the use of chemicals. McKibben bought land for him – to be bequeathed back to Sophie on his death – where Kirk built a barn, then a house, and set about trying to farm the land as sustainably as possible. One tactic was to simply cut the grass without baling it so nutrients could be restored back into the soil.

The quiet rhythms of the countryside and Kirk’s work were in contrast to the frenetic life-style that McKibben was by now undertaking. Once the civil disobedience campaign against Keystone abated, 350.org and McKibben moved on to its divestment-from-fossil-fuels-campaign aided by such luminaries as author Naomi Klein. For three months in late 2012, McKibben criss-crossed the country by plane and bus, often speaking at a different city each night. As his fame grew, the crowds grew bigger, culminating in a 50,000 strong rally in the Washington mall.

McKibben interweaves the story of Kirk and his bees with his own campaigning and the often hurtful personal attacks on himself. He worries about 2012’s crazy weather that caused havoc for bees and wrecked the honey crop around the world; record rainfall in Britain; drought in Australia, New Zealand and Spain. No flowers and hence no nectar. Too much oil, too little honey. Perhaps they had started the fight against the oil companies too late. Nevertheless, they *were* started. As he flew back home one February morning, the ground was white with snow. Spring was still ‘a ways away’.

I knew the hives I flew above were full of resting bees, and I knew they’d soon be in flight. The old cycle we’ve known is very nearly gone, but not quite. It lingers yet, and while it does the fight is worth the cost.

Position Vacant

(subject to final release of funds)

Editorial assistant leading to editor in 2015

SPA newsletter and enews

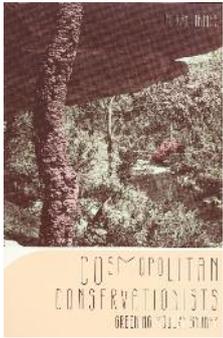
\$18,700 one day a week

Job description and applications: contact Jenny Goldie
president@population.org.au

Applications close COB Friday 20 June.

Book Review

Cosmopolitan Conservationists: Greening Modern Sydney



by **Peggy James**

Australian Scholarly Publishing,
Kew, Victoria. \$39.95

www.scholarly.info

Reviewed by **Janine Kitson**

SPA members will find this book of interest as it describes the environmental history of Sydney pre-1970s and how the pressures of population had serious

environmental consequences.

'Cosmopolitan Conservationists' celebrates Sydney's early conservationists who, with their professional and social networks, shaped many government initiatives, policies, and legislative reforms from 1900-1960s that led to the creation and protection of Sydney's parkland, bushland, national parks that we still enjoy today.

These 'cosmopolitan conservationists' were:

David G. Stead [1877-1957] Internationally recognised for his study of fish, David Stead went on to found one of Australia's first conservation groups - the Wildlife Preservation Society in 1909. He campaigned for legislative changes to end the native bird feather trade in the 1900s. Later he campaigned to end the hunting of koala fur for the US market.

Walter Burley Griffin [1876-1937] On arrival in Sydney he went for long bushwalks, with botanical experts, to learn to identify Sydney's wildflowers. Disillusioned by the bureaucratic and political interference with his Canberra work, he put his energy into town planning organisations, his architecture practice and designing Castlecrag which reflects his vision of how architecture could facilitate a bond between democratic communities and nature.

Charles Bean [1879-1968] Barrister, journalist, war historian, resident of Lindfield, who spent a lifetime promoting the civic and health values of parks and playgrounds for children and communities through the Parks & Playground Movement. He actively promoted a green belt of parkland around Sydney and proudly lobbied for a new recreational reserve around Kurnell, only to be short-lived with the Sydney's post war demand for petrol.

Thistle Harris [1902-1990] Teacher and later Botany lecturer at Sydney Teachers College. In 1938 she published the book 'Wildflowers of Australia' which was instrumental in the promotion of Australia's flora internationally. After the death of her husband David G. Stead, she established one of NSW's first

environmental education centres, 'Wirrimbirra' at Bargo as a memorial to him.

Norman Weekes [1884-1972] Town planner who won the design to landscape Hyde Park which had been turned into a construction site for Sydney's underground railway. His town planning legislative work established Sydney's 'Green Belts' that attempted to preserve zonings for parkland, urban bushland and open space, something to later unravel in the post war years.

Marie Byles [1900-1979] First practicing woman lawyer, mountain climber, bushwalker and Buddhist. She successfully campaigned to establish Bouddi National Park. She provided legal advice to many conservation groups throughout her career as a lawyer.

Myles Dunphy [1891-1985] Marathon bushwalker, map maker, and architect - he was instrumental in establishing Sydney's bushwalking clubs and raising the funds to save the Blue Gum High Forest in the Blue Mountains from logging. He successfully campaigned to establish the Blue Mountains and Garrawarra national parks.

Annie Wyatt [1885-1961] Resident of Gordon who founded the Ku-ring-gai Tree Lovers League, promoted the planting of Australian trees, Wyatt campaigned to save the St Ives Blue Gum Forest during the Depression and went on to found the National Trust of Australia (NSW).

These conservationists were the 'critical mass' of their interwar generation. They successfully campaigned to conserve Sydney's bushland for reasons of wildflower protection, health, beauty and civic improvement. They wanted Sydney to be green, beautiful, forested, liveable, sustainable, and surrounded by a green belt. Their 'Garden City' vision for Sydney valued its bushland, trees, wildflowers, Aboriginal and European heritage, and its forests, lagoons and coastlines. They were acutely aware of the rapid degradation and destruction of Sydney's natural heritage.

The book reminds us how the 1890s plague, pollution, poverty and overcrowding of Sydney's inner city suburbs set of an agenda for environmental and town planning reform. Even in the 1920s, there was concern about Sydney's suburban expansion and its pressure on the city's wildflowers and wildlife.

Later in the post-war years, their influence waned as the 'phase of exploitation' came to dominate. State and Commonwealth governments boosted post-war housing and industrial growth with policies that encouraged rapid economic and population growth. However, even up to the 1960s, Sydney was blessed with areas of healthy, intact bushland.

Members' Page

Parliamentary Prayers

by Norman Carter



Early this year the matter of prayers at the commencement of Parliament was raised by Greens Senator Richard di Natale. Apparently, such is the diversity of religious belief and non-belief in Australia that some members cannot subscribe to them, at

least in their present form.

Members need a deity to which all can defer. Such was identified in a parliamentary paper published by a Senate Select Committee of Inquiry into water pollution in Australia over 40 years ago, which stated that, in spite of warnings that: '...unlimited growth may be leading us nowhere *'Growth is still the national religion and development is its prophet.'* (Water Pollution in Australia. Parliamentary Paper No. 98/1970, p. 170). (My italics).

I therefore respectfully offer the following as a short prayer for our parliamentarians to use at the daily commencement of their deliberations. It is admittedly somewhat Sydneycentric, but applies equally to all coastal cities and more and more to our regional centres, which are, praise Growth, now being blessed in the same way.

'Lord, Great God of Growth. Thank you for our leaders efforts to continue to Grow and Stuff our cities, to cover their public spaces and remaining well-watered farmlands with concrete, for fracking our farms and forests, dredging our reefs, spreading the noise and mining for more coal to increase our carbon contribution to the world and its future climate. And thank you for the no limit population policy which drives all of this, vastly increasing our nations needs for energy, food, housing and everything, and changing our lifestyle so that we can the sooner learn to enjoy the traffic congestion, the crowds, high rise cubicle buildings and car parks, and of course the rising sea levels.

*Growth, consumption and concrete without end.
Amen.'*

Ethiopian sustainable farming drowning under too many people

by Anne Tennock

We went to a seminar by a woman who has just spent a year volunteering in Ethiopia on environmental projects. Great speaker, but disturbing. They farm in a way that has enabled them to survive continuously in small farms across the land pretty well since farming

began - remember Ethiopia is part of the birthplace of our evolution. Now two things seem to be happening: population growing through the roof; and aspirations for lifestyle being raised by the current government.

So projects are afoot to try to improve the farming processes. Come on! Our farming processes have used up most of our soils in a few hundred years. We should be learning from the farmers of Ethiopia before they change.

The much bigger question is how to deal with overpopulation. The simplistic approach is to destroy the stable and sustainable lifestyle that has nurtured up to a certain number of people for thousands of years in the vain hope of nurturing more people for a while with the 'improved methods'. What alternatives are there? Radical vasectomy programs to cut the birthrate sharply? Starvation of those who don't have land? Ship all the excess people to Australia? Transport all the excess people who don't have land into the cities and put them in front of computers?

There are a lot of countries who now have populations well above their carrying capacity. They all face impossible problems. How did they get into this mess? Inattention to birth control and family planning? Maybe, but how did the farmers of Ethiopia stay within carrying capacity for thousands of years? Was the growth rate very low and the numbers finally grew too large? Or was the death rate higher? The current death rate, especially maternal, is very high there. Population explosion creeps up so suddenly and sharply because of its exponential nature. It just isn't obvious that it is happening until it is too late. And people have complex reasoning about controlling fertility. Ethiopia, for example, is a very religious country, predominantly Christian, and the rest Islamic. These are ancient traditions from times when not having enough people was more of a problem than plague proportions of people.

What to do with all the excess people who take down not only themselves but everyone else and all the environmental resources that were previously able to support the population? These people are alive now, wanting to be fed, wanting land to grow food on. The other problem is how to stop them all breeding and growing the problem more.

Overpopulation gives you hungry, dying, desperate people. Solutions anyone? I get very angry at the people who block family planning programs and access to good birth control for women.



Photo by Erin Gray/Mercy Corps

BRANCH REPORTS

ACT: We welcomed our new branch president, Nick Ware, during our AGM in May. Nick brings a practical and energetic approach to the ACT branch. He ably stepped into the role to welcome our speaker Dr Warwick Cathro, former head of resource sharing and innovation at the national library and spokesman for 350.org. Although the meeting was modestly attended, the talk was interesting and informative and recognised the role of population pressures in climate change, with Warwick Cathro fielding questions from the floor for half an hour after his speech.

Last month, the ACT branch hosted the SPA national AGM, which included a fascinating forum on the ethics of migration.

The new ACT committee has met to discuss the strategic direction of the branch, and is planning a more effective outreach to the local community through running a stall at upcoming events, using our location to more effectively lobby federal and local politicians, to co-fund some projects, and through maintaining our existing membership more closely. *Michael Thompson*

NSW: Over Easter, branch vice president Graham Wood and I visited the protest camp at Maules Creek where several major environment groups are going all out to disrupt the construction of a massive open-cut coal mine in the northern half of the Leard State Forest. The protesters are a very dedicated group doing all they can to stop this disgraceful carving up of a state forest which is home to threatened species of plants and animals. Naturally we tried to make the case that population growth is the main driver of the current trend to cut green tape and approve almost all mining applications that come before federal and state governments. With Australia being a country that now manufactures very little, it should seem clear that our high population growth means that each year our thirst for imported goods increases and this places great pressure on governments to increase our volumes of exports, much of which is mined, to keep our balance of payments figures looking good. It's hard to know if we convinced anyone that the mine was a symptom of a much bigger problem but it was good to spend time with such committed people.

This year's Climate Action Network conference in Sydney was also attended by many committed activists. Unfortunately there was no recognition of population growth as the main driver of emissions growth. There were many fine presentations but the complete absence of the word population shows that SPA still has much work to do to convince our fellow environment groups of the need to confront the issue. *Kris Spike*

QLD: The Queensland Branch is gearing up for a busy season of community festival stalls and talks. Three events around World Environment Day, at Logan, Sunshine Coast and Toowoomba, will be great opportunities to increase our exposure to communities beyond Brisbane. July brings the Peaks-2-Points festival in Brisbane. Jane O'Sullivan will be speaking to a food security group at University of Queensland on 3 June, the Celebrating Our Environment event in Toowoomba on 4 June, the Noosa Parks Association on 20 June and at the Geography Teachers' Association of Queensland conference on 26 July. Jane also recently spoke to a class of year 10 students in Victoria, via Skype - a great way to get face-to-face in classrooms without the down-time of travel. We're looking for ideas for child-friendly materials for our stalls, and would welcome suggestions. If any members in regional Qld want to run a stall at a local event, we'd be delighted to send you all the materials you need. For those in Brisbane, our third-Monday meetings at Toowong Library continue - May provided an animated discussion of the ethics of migration, after listening to a couple of the speakers from SPA's national forum on the same subject. *Jane O'Sullivan*

VIC/TAS: We are still not winning in Victoria! Population growth seems to be accelerating with the State government now accommodating 1.2 million more people than expected seven months ago by 2051. Victoria's population grew by two per cent in the year to September 2013, bringing it to 5.77 million. Victoria is also said to be the hardest place to find a job. Meanwhile population growth and human activities are wiping out the state's bandicoots and other wildlife. One of the first announcements of the new government in Tasmania was about trying to increase the population. The branch's star letter writers are still getting regular exposure in the mainstream newspapers. On 24 April, Jill Quirk gave a talk to members of the Humanist Society of Victoria on "Environment, population and the State, ethical considerations." The branch will be holding the 2104 AGM on 12 July at Balwyn Library meeting room and is now planning a large public meeting entitled "Must Melbourne keep growing?" in conjunction with Victoria First at the Hawthorn Arts Centre at 2.00pm on 14 June. In the previous report I omitted the contribution of committee member Kit James to the Sustainable Living Festival in February. Kit helped with both the display at the information stall. Thank you, Kit. Branch secretary Sue James was injured in a car accident in April and has endured quite a long recuperation period. We look forward to seeing Sue back 'on deck' and well again. *Jill Quirk*

SPA News

SA: The SA Committee met to discuss the issue of local membership, in particular the apparent increase in regulars becoming insolvent. The role of Membership Secretary was created, and Sandra Kanck agreed to take it on. Groups of lapsed members were allocated to the committee to follow up. The response was quick and useful, with several lapsed members simply unaware that their fees were overdue. There appears to be room for a more effective national reminder system, perhaps via email.

The SA Committee is also aware that the next national AGM will be held in Adelaide, and is suggesting a date in March to coincide with the Adelaide Festival or Arts, Fringe, Writers Week and the other arts events at that time. The local weather is also more likely to be comfortable and stable then. The topic of ageing and population was suggested as a theme for a public event that could be held in conjunction with the AGM, and Katharine Betts was proposed as a speaker.

Peter Martin

(continued from page 5-Bob Douglas)

population matters. We could accommodate many more people in Australia if we halved our ecological footprint.

Refugees are expensive migrants but they are considerably less expensive than our current policy of boat deterrence. We should increase our humanitarian intake to at least 80,000 per year and heavily scale back other elements of our migration intake. We should work collaboratively with the UNHCR, regional and source countries to identify who will be included in our expanded humanitarian intake. We should make it known that we will fly home to source countries those who arrive here by plane or boat and are not genuine refugees. We should phase out all the detention centres and grant citizenship, support and an apology to those thousands currently in mandatory detention.

Results of SPA AGM

5 April 2014, Canberra

The following were declared elected:

President: Jenny Goldie
Vice-President: Sandra Kanck
Meeting Secretary: Nola Stewart
Treasurer: Vacant, but Rob Taylor subsequently co-opted
Committee: John Coulter, Michael Lardelli, Peter Schlesinger, Nicholas Car, Paddy Weaver

The two constitutional amendments both passed.



John Coulter

Photo by Nick Goldie

SPA honours John Coulter

Former SPA national president Dr John Coulter was presented with a life membership award at the AGM in Canberra in April. Dr Coulter has had a distinguished career as a medical researcher and parliamentarian, leading the Australian Democrats from October 1991 to April 1993. He has been a member of AESP/SPA almost since its inception and has actively contributed at both state and national levels for the past 25 years. He is currently a member of SPA's national executive committee and continues to provide indispensable intellectual leadership in this role. Dr Coulter has been a conservationist for six decades and was a founding member of the SA Conservation Council. His understanding of environmental principles, including the need for a steady state economy to fit with these, has been exceptional. Perhaps most significantly, he has been at the forefront of the population movement in Australia, calling for a public debate about population and its impact on Australia's fragile ecology in the early 1970s and ever since.

SPA (Vic/Tas branch) & Victoria First

Discussion on Melbourne's population future

Saturday 14 June 14 at 2.00pm

Hawthorn Arts Centre, 360 Burwood Rd, Hawthorn.

Please come and have your say!

(continued from page 2-Nicholas Stuart)

at *The Canberra Times*, too. But exploiting resources in the outback won't create jobs in Geelong or Adelaide, and cutting wages won't benefit anyone.

The third problem is our environment. It's fragile. Despite last week's deluge, the rain isn't coming when or where we want it. The soil is thin and old. There are limits.

And that's why the whole idea's a con. Sure Australia might get bigger – but so are all our neighbours. The net result is we all remain the same. But it needn't be like this. There is another model.

This week I'm in Sweden. In the 1600s this was a mighty power. Today it's just a pleasant country; but I don't think it's lost anything in the transition. Normally, we rank alongside the Nordic countries in most measures of happiness and wellbeing, but a new trend is emerging. As we've been getting bigger we're falling behind. It's time the experts began thinking about what the data means – rather than simply being driven by illusory dreams of power.

This article first appeared in The Age and Canberra Times on 1 April 2014. Reprinted with permission of the author.

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/a-bigger-australian-population-will-not-guarantee-more-prosperity-20140331-zqowl.html>

(continued from page 3-Leith van Onselen)

All of which raises the question: what is the end-game of Australia's current population-based economic model? If all we are doing is growing for growth's sake, pushing against infrastructure bottlenecks, diluting our fixed endowment of minerals resources, and failing to raise the living standards of the existing population, where does it lead?

High immigration and population growth is fine if it is part of a grand plan. Otherwise, it is not a genuine economic driver, but rather a way of back-filling previous booms when we over-fattened ourselves; of sliding backwards without anyone really noticing.

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<http://www.macrobusiness.com.au/2014/04/high-immigration-is-creating-an-illusion-of-growth/>

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While every effort has been taken to ensure the reliability of the information contained in this newsletter, the opinions expressed are those of the various authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of either SPA or the editor.

ABOUT SPA

Formerly Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population.

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