



NEWSLETTER

Sustainable Population Australia Inc

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Australia's Rapid Population Growth Continues



*Kelvin Thomson MP,
18 December 2014*

ABS figures show Australia's population reached 23.5 million at the end of 2013-14, having increased by around 365,000 during the past year.

The natural increase in population – the number of births minus the number of deaths – was over 150,000 for the eighth year in a row, again making a nonsense of claims that without migration Australia's population would stop growing.

Net overseas migration was over 212,000. This is consistent with the average for this decade so far, which is nearly 50,000 higher than the average of 165,000 during the previous decade, and two-and-a-half-times the 80,000 average of the 1990s.

There is no precedent for Australia running such a migration program at a time of 6 per cent plus unemployment. It is a certain recipe for rising unemployment, long-term unemployment and job insecurity, with all the personal misery and social problems which arise from that.

Rapid population growth also leads to wildlife habitat destruction, increasing carbon emissions, rising cost of living, and makes it harder to balance the books. It is a short-sighted and greedy drive for profit from the big end of town which prejudices the future of our young people.

http://kelvinthomson.blogspot.com.au/2014/12/australias-rapid-population-growth_18.html

Local workers sold out

Also by Kelvin Thomson, 8 January 2015

A new temporary entry visa for skilled migrants, without any of the safeguards of labour-market testing and English-language requirements, would be a betrayal of Australian workers.

Unemployment has risen to 6.3 per cent. Over 775,000

Australians are out of work. The total number of hours worked in Australia in November actually fell by 0.3 per cent. Youth unemployment is at a 15-year high of 13.8%. In the northwest of Melbourne it is 17.2%, up from 13.1% in 2013.

The Liberal Government would be much more helpful if it cut back our migrant-worker programs that are placing unfair competition on local young people, and invested instead in our skills and education sectors. The billions of dollars in cuts by the Liberal federal and state governments to our skills, training, TAFE, higher education, secondary and primary education sectors hampers job opportunities for young people. Making young people ineligible for the Newstart Allowance is punitive and will do nothing to tackle the real reasons behind rising unemployment.

Despite the rhetoric that high skilled migration is needed for the mining and agriculture sectors, the reality is a high proportion of migrant workers come to Victoria. The Skilled Migration Program grew from 125,755 places on 2011-12 to 128,973 in 2012-13. In 1995-96 the Skilled Migration Program was just 24,100. The occupations with the highest number of primary visa grants were professionals (4,656 or 51.1%) and technicians and trade workers (2,416 or 26.5%) in the 457 Visa Class.

As skilled-migration researcher Bob Birrell has said:

'There are already significant problems with graduate employment in professions such as dentistry, computer science, medicine and engineering. Liberalisation such as that being mooted is going to crash head-on with that situation.'

The Liberal Government should be focusing on how to maximise employment opportunities for our own university graduates and apprentices, and strengthening requirements for employers to advertise jobs locally before recruiting workers from overseas, not making it easier for companies to bypass Australian workers.

<http://kelvinthomson.blogspot.com.au>

How to recognise a demographer



by *Peter McDonald*

Professional registration helps us to recognise medical practitioners, nurses or dentists as well as accountants, lawyers and most engineers. For most professions, however, such as mathematicians, physicists, biologists, historians, economists and demographers, there is no formal registration. Each night on the news, people

from financial institutions, referred to invariably as economists, provide commentary on the latest fluctuation in the market or the dollar, but are they dinkum economists? Likewise, people who make comments on the characteristics of buyers in the market often call themselves demographers because they are making demographic statements, but are they ridgy-didge demographers?

In the absence of professional registration, conventionally we look to qualifications to assess a professional. We expect that a professional biologist will have a degree in biology. However, when it comes to demography in Australia, there are no undergraduate degrees in demography, just a smattering of courses available in a range of different discipline areas. Since 1976, there has been a Masters coursework degree in demography at the ANU but this is the only coursework degree available in Australia. There has been a PhD degree in demography at ANU since the 1950s, but until recently, this was a degree by thesis only and many of its graduates went away with excellent theses but very little demography in the technical sense.

I refer to 'demography in the technical sense' because this is probably what people expect in a professional demographer. At the least, this is a person who can calculate an increment-decrement life table, comprehends that the existing age structure of the population is an important component of future population growth (the concept of population momentum), understands how changes in the timing of births can distort the annual fertility rate, knows what a Lexis diagram is and appreciates the importance of using the correct 'population at risk'. Beyond this technical knowledge, however, people probably want a demographer to make pronouncements on why a particular demographic rate (e.g. fertility) has gone up or down, and to make educated predictions of future demographic trends. But how can we recognise a

person who can do all of this without setting an examination?

Perhaps recognition could be verified by membership of a professional association such as the Australian Population Association or the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP). But you don't have to prove that you are a demographer (in the technical sense) to join any of the standard population associations. When I was president of IUSSP, in assessing new members, I was concerned only with ensuring that the organisation was not being taken over by extremists with no professional skills. Anyone with a genuine interest in population issues was welcome to join even though most members are recognisable as demographers.

To get to the nub of the matter, we might ask why we need demographers. The answer is because demography has important associations with the economy, society and the environment. Indeed, it could be said that it is only through these associations that we have any interest at all in demography. Without consideration of these associations, population policy has no real meaning. But, unfortunately, many demographers, recognisable in the technical sense described above, are not great in understanding the associations of demography with the economy, the society and the environment, which, admittedly, are complex and often conflicting. At the same time, many economists, sociologists and ecologists are not great at understanding the demography. For example, occasional contributions to this newsletter make reference to the 'exponential' growth of world population as if the world has been subject to and will continue to be subject to a constant rate of exponential growth. If the world's population growth had remained constant from 1970 to 2014, today the population would be 12.1 billion. In what should be recognised as one of the most important changes in human history, increasing control over fertility, in just over 40 years, has reduced the world's potential population by 5 billion. Demographers provide an understanding of how and why this has happened and, accordingly, how world population may change in the future. This is why we need demographers. But we also need economists, sociologists and ecologists who respect the value of the demographer's perspective.

Professional registration is all very well at a basic level but it does not distinguish the really good professionals from the not-so-good. In the end, whether it is a doctor, a biologist, an economist or a demographer, recognition is more a matter of reputation and credibility. A demographer who does not have credibility will...

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Unemployment for November 2014



by **Leith van Onselen**
Roy Morgan Research (RMR) released its unemployment estimate [in early December] for the month of November, which registered a 0.9% jump in the unemployment rate to 10.0% from 9.1% in October. However, unemployment was down 0.2% over the year.

According to Gary Morgan, employment reached the highest level ever recorded in November, but this growth is still not enough to soak up the additional workers from Australia's rampant population growth:

'Australia's real unemployment in November was 10.0% – 1.26 million (down 8,000 from a year ago, November 2013) and an additional 1.231 million Australians (up 95,000) were under-employed – a new record high. This is a total of 2.491 million Australians (up 87,000) either unemployed or under-employed – marking three years (36 months) of more than 2 million Australians looking for work or looking for more work.

'Although these figures are worrying, the Australian economy is generating jobs – just not enough new jobs to cope with a rising population. Australian employment rose to a record 11,396,000 in November – up 210,000 over the past 12 months. The increase in employment has been driven by strong increases in both part-time employment to 3,843,000 (up 127,000 from a year ago) and full-time employment to 7,554,000 (up 84,000 from a year ago).

'November is traditionally a month in which young people finishing up at school and university either look for full-time work or seek part-time employment over the summer months. Both the Australian workforce and total Australian employment have increased in five out of the last six years since the Global Financial Crisis (2008-09).

'Today's Roy Morgan employment figures underline the increasingly casualised nature of the Australian workforce with under two-thirds of employed Australians now employed full-time (66.3%, down 0.5% from a year ago) compared to the increasing proportion of employed Australians now employed part-time (33.7%, up 0.5% from a year ago).'

As explained each month, RMR measures employment differently from the ABS.

According to the ABS definition, a person who has worked for one hour or more for payment or someone who has worked without pay in a family business, is considered employed regardless of whether they consider themselves employed or not.

The ABS definition also details that if a respondent is not actively looking for work (i.e. applying for work, answering job advertisements, being registered with Centre-link or tendering for work), they are not considered to be unemployed.

The Roy Morgan survey, in contrast, defines any respondent who is not employed full or part-time and who is looking for paid employment as being unemployed.

Since Roy Morgan uses a broader definition of unemployment than the ABS, it necessarily reports a higher unemployment figure. In addition, Roy Morgan's measure tends to be far more volatile, owing to the fact that it draws on a smaller sample than the ABS and is not seasonally adjusted.

The difference between the ABS unemployment rate (6.1% NSA) and the unofficial RMR measure is now 3.9%.

This article first appeared in Macro Business in early December 2014 where Leith writes as the Unconventional Economist.

New bumper sticker for SPA



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eventually be recognised, hopefully before much damage is done. I have no doubt that I am a demographer. As for others, each must state and stake their claim.

Peter McDonald is Professor of Demography, Crawford School of Public Policy, The Australian National University. He completed a PhD in demography from the Australian National University in 1972. The only course in demography that he ever took was a reading course in 1967 with Prof W.D. Borrie.

Finding the right size



Melvin Bolton

The following is an extract from an Ockham's Razor talk by Melvin Bolton, broadcast on 14 December 2014. Having a science background, Melvin spent some time explaining why big things in nature are necessarily more complicated than small ones. He referred to the work of professor JBS Haldane, who once pointed out that just as there are optimum sizes in nature, so there must be for human institutions.

Melvin takes it from there:

So, is it still true today that there is an optimum size for human institutions, for nations, for cities? We hear political leaders on all sides of politics declaring that they believe in a big Australia. They don't say how big, though they can't possibly think we can keep making things bigger and bigger indefinitely. They just say they believe in a big Australia as if it is a matter of belief; an article of faith.

Why do they believe it? Usually they say it's because it will produce a better quality of life for all Australians. Is that likely? How many Melbournians think that life will be better in a Melbourne that's twice the size it is now, with twice the number needing housing, services and transport?

Is there any evidence for thinking either way? Well, we can start by looking at the Human Development Index. This is published each year by the United Nations Development Programme and it ranks the UN member countries according to how well their people are doing in terms of health, education, lifespan and general standard of living.

For the past few years, Australia has come second after Norway, with Denmark third. Another index, that goes further than the United Nations one, is put out each year by the Economist Intelligence Unit, based in London. Originally called the Quality of Life Index, it's now known as the Where to be Born Index, which I suppose makes it sound more forward-looking for prospective parents as well as investors. In addition to all the basic welfare issues of health, education, security and so on, it factors in people's feelings of satisfaction with life, based on scores derived from Gallup polls.

And with all that, the interesting thing is that it places exactly the same countries in the top 10 that the United Nations comes up with. They are in a slightly different order; Australia comes second, with Switzerland first and Norway third. Six of those top-10 countries have

smaller populations than Australia.

We can look at cities in the same way. Every year, the Economist Intelligence Unit produces liveability rankings for cities around the world. These are based on scores reached under headings that include stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education and infrastructure. In the most recent report, released in 2013, Melbourne came top of the list of 140 cities, followed by Vienna and Vancouver. Of the top 10 cities, seven were smaller than Melbourne.

Another major liveability index for cities is produced by the American consulting firm, Mercer. The Mercer Quality of Living Survey for cities is continually being updated and it ranks more than 220 cities on scores under dozens of different criteria of liveability. In this list Vienna has come top for three years in a row and Sydney has come in at number 10, also for the past three years. Melbourne doesn't make it to the top 10 and the other nine have populations smaller than Sydney's.

Now, these league tables may not prove anything but they certainly don't offer any support for the belief that getting bigger and bigger will do anything to improve the quality of life for all Australians. They suggest, if anything, that Melbourne and Sydney are doing well despite their size, not because of it.

And such evidence as there is from surveys in Australia indicates that most Australians are putting up with high population growth rather than wanting it. Why we are putting up with it is another question entirely, and your guess is as good as mine.

When Big Australia believers are quizzed about their reasoning, some of them back off and say simply that our growth rate is unavoidable so we just have to keep on accommodating it – building upwards, over farmland, making more flyovers, freeways, by-passes, tunnels, whatever it takes to cope with centres getting further and further from peripheries and all the other complications of increasing size.

But in a country with baby bonuses, paid parental leave schemes and a high immigration intake, to argue that rapid growth can't be avoided is like claiming that speeding is inevitable while your foot is on the accelerator.

The full talk can be heard at

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/ockhamsrazor/finding-the-right-size/5946368>

Before retirement Melvin Bolton was an ecologist, mainly for the Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. He now keeps busy writing, especially educational books. A slim volume on population biology was reviewed and recommended in SPA Newsletter No. 100, October 2011.

Humanity is in the existential danger zone, study confirms

by James Dyke

The Earth's climate has always changed. All species eventually become extinct. But a new study has brought into sharp relief the fact that humans have, in the context of geological timescales, produced near instantaneous planetary-scale disruption. We are sowing the seeds of havoc on the Earth, it suggests, and the time is fast approaching when we will reap this harvest.

This in the year that the UN climate change circus will pitch its tents in Paris. December's Conference of the Parties will be the first time individual nations submit their proposals for their carbon emission reduction targets. Sparks are sure to fly.

The research, published in the journal *Science*, should focus the minds of delegates and their nations as it lays out in authoritative fashion how far we are driving the climate and other vital Earth systems beyond any safe operating space. The paper, headed by Will Steffen of the Australian National University and Stockholm Resilience Centre, concludes that our industrialised civilisation is driving a number of key planetary processes into areas of high risk.

It argues climate change along with 'biodiversity integrity' should be recognised as core elements of the Earth system. These are two of nine planetary boundaries that we must remain within if we are to avoid undermining the biophysical systems our species depends upon.

The original planetary boundaries were conceived in 2009 by a team lead by Johan Rockstrom, also of the Stockholm Resilience Centre. Together with his co-authors, Rockstrom produced a list of nine human-driven changes to the Earth's system: climate change, ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, alteration of nitrogen and phosphorus cycling, freshwater consumption, land use change, biodiversity loss, aerosol and chemical pollution. Each of these nine, if driven hard enough, could alter the planet to the point where it becomes a much less hospitable place on which to live.

The past 11,000 years have seen a remarkably stable climate. The name given to this most recent geological epoch is the Holocene. It is perhaps no coincidence that human civilisation emerged during this period of stability. What is certain is that our civilisation is in very important ways dependent on the Earth system remaining within or at least approximately near Holocene conditions.

This is why Rockstrom and co looked at human impacts in these nine different areas. They wanted to consider the risk of humans bringing about the end of the Holocene. Some would argue that we have already entered a new geological epoch – the Anthropocene – which recognises that *Homo sapiens* have become a planet-altering species. But the planetary boundaries concept doesn't just attempt to quantify human impacts. It seeks to understand how they may affect human welfare now, and in the future.

The 2009 paper proved to be very influential, but it also attracted a fair amount of criticism. For example, it has been argued that some of the boundaries are not in fact global in scale. There are very large regional variations in consumption of freshwater and phosphorus fertiliser pollution, for instance.

That means that while globally we may be in the green, there could be an increasing number of regions that are deep in the red.

Updated boundaries

The latest research develops the methodology so that it now includes regional evaluations. For example it assesses basin-level freshwater use and biome-level species extinction rates. It also includes a new boundary of 'novel entities' – new forms of life and novel compounds the likes of which the Earth system has not experienced and so impact of which is extremely challenging to assess. Ozone-depleting CFCs are perhaps the best example of how a seemingly inert substance can produce planetary damage.

The paper also gives an update on where we stand on some of the planetary boundaries. At first sight, it looks as though there may be some good news in that climate change is no longer in the red. But then closer inspection reveals that a new yellow 'zone of uncertainty with increasing risk' has been added to the previous green and red classification.

Climate change impacts are firmly within this new yellow zone. Our atmosphere currently has about 400 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide. To recover back to the green zone we still need to get back to 350ppm – the same precautionary boundary as before...

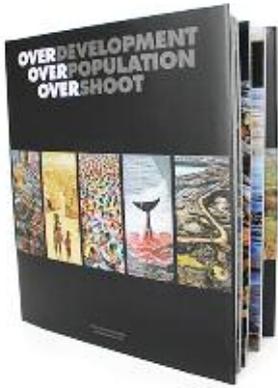


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James Dyke

Book Review

Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot



Tom Butler (ed), William Ryerson (intro), Musimbi Kanyoro (foreword), Eileen Crist (afterword).

Published by Foundation for Deep Ecology in partnership with Goff Books (2015)

Available from Sustainable Population Australia
www.population.org.au

\$60 plus \$15 postage.

Reviewed by Jenny Goldie

The day I re-read *Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot (OVER)*, a paper was published in the journal *Science* saying humanity had exceeded four of nine planetary boundaries. *OVER* is a large-format book which, through highly compelling photographs and excellent text, depicts the way human numbers and behaviour have damaged the very biosphere on which we so critically depend. It complemented the *Science* paper completely.

OVER is not for the faint-hearted. Some photos are not so much *compelling* as *repelling*. The one of 17 men carrying a massive silverback mountain gorilla tied to a platform is enough to make you weep. The photo of at least 30 severed gorilla feet makes you retch, as does the ship deck covered in shark fins. The one of a huge pile of ivory tusks made me turn away in horror, as did the one of the dead polar bear. And we are all familiar with the horrific photo of the collapsing, emaciated African toddler with the vulture waiting in the wings.

Some photos deserve a prize from a purely artistic perspective, like the bag of rice being thrown from a truck to numerous outstretched arms. Some are sheer joy, like the one of dolphins leaping through waves. Others make you laugh, albeit in semi-horror, such as the one of swimmers, all in plastic tyres, absolutely wall-to-wall, or rather, tyre-to-tyre.

Accompanying the first photo in each of the sections is a short introduction such as that for Climate Chaos which says: 'Climate change may be the purest expression of humanity's toxic effect on the biosphere'. Or in Elbow to Elbow, we read: 'Time and space – time to be alone, space to move about – they may well become the great scarcities of tomorrow'.

All other photos have a quote, for instance, in the section *Trashing the Planet*, there is one from Jacques-

Yves Cousteau: 'Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans'. The photo of a surfer coming through a curling wave filled with garbage only too well illustrates Cousteau's point.

Another quote, this one from *Material World*, is from David Suzuki. 'There are some things in the world we can't change – gravity, entropy, the speed of light and our biological nature that requires clean air, clean water, clean soil, clean energy and biodiversity for our health and well-being. Protecting the biosphere should be our highest priority or else we sicken and die. Other things, like capitalism, free enterprise, the economy, currency, the market, are not forces of nature, we invented them. They are not immutable and we can change them. It makes no sense to elevate economics above the biosphere.'

With such a wealth of visual detail, it would be easy to overlook the major text. William (Bill) Ryerson of Population Media Center, well known to us in SPA, provides an excellent introduction. He asks the crucial question: 'How many people can the Earth sustain, at a reasonable standard of living, while leaving room for diversity of life to flourish?' He concludes: 'We are already doing severe and irreparable harm to the planet. Something has to give.' Ryerson writes that given population dynamics is central to determining the welfare of future generations, what the world needs is a wake-up call. 'This book is that wake-up call.'

At the other end of the book in the afterword, called *Choosing a Planet of Life*, deep ecologist and philosopher Eileen Crist, co-editor of the brilliant book of essays on population *Life on the Brink* (2012), addresses the devastating effect that food production has already had on the planet and contemplates the prospect of having to feed even more billions of people. She notes that agriculture is already responsible for more than 30 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, consumes 70 per cent of available freshwater, and causes not only erosion and desertification, but also nutrient run-off, leading to eutrophication in lakes and seas.

Crist writes: 'From a deep ecological perspective ... the unprecedented ecological impact demanded for the production of so much food has demonstrated our capacity to take a magnificent planet – second to none in the known universe – and turn it into, or use it as, a human feedlot, and then muster the arrogance to call this act of pilfering and degradation, an achievement.'

This is a magnificent book, albeit confronting at times. SPA is extremely fortunate to have been given a number of books to sell and distribute in Australia.

Book Review

Cull



by Stafford Ray

JoJo Publishing, Melbourne
2014, \$22.99 through
<http://classic-jojo.com/shop/fiction/cull/>

Reviewed by Nick Goldie

It's the future, but only just. Vladimir Putin is out of politics, but is still a force to be reckoned with in Russia. US Ambassador to the United Nations Harry

Fromm has a charming wife Felicity, a radio journalist in Washington, who gets her husband into deep water by suggesting that US nuclear facilities should be subject to international inspection.

Cull is a very contemporary thriller by NSW South Coast writer Stafford Ray. Ray dedicates the book to his grandchildren, 'in the hope that they will achieve what my generation has not: the preservation of the planet'.

Underpinning the quick-fire thriller is a trio of deadly serious issues. The science of climate change has been clear for decades, but international efforts to halt the decline have come to nothing. At the same time, global population increase has reached unsustainable levels, and unscrupulous players, not more than an arm's length from the US president, are using population pressures to destabilise friends as well as enemies. And over all hangs the threat of unconfined nuclear proliferation.

Getting straight into the action, President Mason Tanner's cabinet meeting agrees with the Vice-President: 'unless the planet achieves zero emissions and quickly, we will face rapid decline into unprecedented conflict.' The question is, how? The answer is Operation Cuckoo.

'Today,' says President Tanner, 'we propose a plan for a managed withdrawal from the overpopulation and unsustainable levels of resource use that are driving climate change. This plan will ensure the survival of the natural world and our three nations along with civilised society.'

At first sight, this horrific plan for the depopulation of half the world seems over the top, implausible, (and what would one of our local writers know about meetings in the Oval Office at the White House anyway?) But author Ray manages to convince, mostly, with good detail and life-and-death dilemmas.

Before the critical planning session, Ambassador Fromm and his interpreter Ling Mae make an official

visit to China. Among the standard expressions of goodwill, there's an odd message, included at the insistence of the US religious right, condemning the Chinese for their official condoning of 'bigamy' (in fact polyandry).

'Last time I was there' says Ling Mae, 'I was propositioned by three men together!'

'You mean, a foursome?'

'Yes, a foursome, but a foursome as in a multiple-husband marriage.' She was blushing under her Eurasian tan. 'They all wanted to marry me together.'

This is just one of China's mechanisms to control over-population. In Washington, other measures are being taken, starting with a massive program of bribery by the CIA encouraging waves of 'boat people' to converge on Australia. But even this is trivial compared to Operation Cuckoo.

Fromm, as US Ambassador, travels about the globe, dealing with Chairman Ho of China one day, Prime Minister Charles Mulaney of Australia the next, President Tanner and his sinister Camp David cabal, and a cast of hundreds (it is sometimes necessary to turn back a page and check: who was that again?).

Ray is at his best when the action gallops along. There are a few purple patches of laboured prose ('Powerful jet engines howled their long glissando and screamed in terminal agony ...') that an alert editor might have, ahem, culled.

It's all in the genre of Tom Clancy, whose thrillers overwhelm the reader with technological details, apparently factual descriptions of secret venues, and more-or-less credible personalities. Ray uses something of the same dramatic style: very short chapters, a great deal of dialogue, moving rapidly from place to place, following the fortunes of several distinct groups of people whose stories come together as the plot speeds up and the end of the world looms.

Carefully placed clues serve to discomfort the careless reader. What was the charming Ling Mae doing in the prime minister's bed, while claiming to be at the Canberra Raiders club? Who was Harry Fromm's reliable secretary talking to behind her hand? What is an ex-KGB agent really up to?

It's a bleak picture and (outside the Vietnamese refugee boat) there are few redeeming characters in the large cast. The resolution narrowly averts disaster. But for how long?

An edited version of this review appeared in the Cooma-Monaro Express

Letters from Members

Matters of fact

In searching out other national population groups I discovered that two members of the European Population Alliance had adopted the name Population Matters. They are Population Matters (United Kingdom) and Population Matters (Sweden).

I like the name Population Matters as it is descriptive of both purpose and matters of concern. Also it might help encourage greater international coherence between like-minded organisations.

Perhaps SPA should consider becoming Population Matters (Australia) as the executive is asking members to consider the appropriateness of SPA as a name.

This would reinforce a global link between population organisations for what is now very much a global issue and appropriately indicate our location. It would also put population at the forefront of our name instead of entangling us with sustainability at a time when this term is significantly losing any meaning.

The organisations listed below are members of the European Population Alliance:

Assisi Nature Council (Italy)

BOCS (Hungary)

Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management (United Kingdom)

Club of 10 Million (Netherlands)

Demographie Responsable (France)

Ecopop (Switzerland)

Herbert-Gruhl-Gesellschaft (Germany)

One Baby (Belgium)

Population 2.0 (Belgium)

Population Matters (Sweden)

Population Matters (United Kingdom)

RientroDolce (Italy)

Paddy Weaver, Perth, WA

Sensible idea

Regarding the potential SPA name change as mentioned in the last newsletter, how about leaving it as SPA with the 'S' standing for Sensible. But I do see your point about the misuse of the word sustainable. It is even used to describe growth – yikes!

Glen Daly, Coominya, Queensland

If it ain't broke

Any PR company would advise choosing a name that is brief and to the point. We could shorten our name to 'Population Australia' which adequately states what we

are about, without limitation as to ecology, economics, ethics, resource use, immigration, town planning etc. But do we need more words to be more definitive, such as 'ecologically' or 'sustainable'?

'Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population' was a grammatically correct, 18-syllable half sentence. It was not only a poor-sounding name, but it needlessly seemed to cut off ecology from related matters. 'Sustainable Population Australia' was a great improvement. To then add the adverb 'ecologically' is unnecessary, too narrow and too much. Let's stay with SPA.

Oliver Howes, Wollstonecraft, NSW

A stable solution

I agree, as SPA's previous newsletter pointed out, that:

a) the word 'sustainable' has been systematically abused and included in such oxymorons as 'sustainable growth';

b) some members of the public have even wondered, based on our name, if we want the population to grow or not.

These two problems with the word 'sustainable' are not fixed by adding the equally abused and ambiguous 'ecologically'. The two problems above also fall on the phrase 'ecologically sustainable' as well as 'ecologically'.

I suggest we keep the abbreviation SPA but remove the ambiguity by changing the S word to Stable: SPA - Stable Population Australia.

Greg James, Queens Park, NSW

Ecological slant

Regarding the name change discussion on page 8 of the last newsletter, I would support a name change to include 'ecological' in the name of the group.

I don't have a preference for either ESPA or ESP – either would suit me and ESP (Extra common Sense on Population) might even work in our favour as a means of catching someone's interest.

Thank you for the article on environment groups and population policy. I have been a member of Friends of the Earth since 1975 and although I support strongly most of what they campaign on, I am exasperated that green groups can't see the obvious. I will endeavour to have some input to Friends of the Earth.

As I keep saying in conversations, if there were around 2.5 to 3+ million Aboriginal people living for thousands of years within the coastline, how come we think that we can carry on as we are with 23 million using up the planet's resources within a few hundred years. It is way

Letters from Members

past time when we should go cap in hand to the Aboriginal nations and apologise for what we have done and ask humbly how we can sort out the mess. We owe aboriginal Australia a huge debt of gratitude and an apology for the massacre of their people and country.

Mike McKeon, Dingley Village, Victoria

Population a world problem

I have no problem with the current name except to suggest it could be better as Sustainable Population Earth (or World). The population problem is a world one, not restricted to Australia even if we put a lid on our own growth. Australia will still have negative impacts from overpopulation in other parts of the planet. There's no need to put 'ecological' in our title because true sustainability must occur obeying ecological principles. I understand why some may want to include 'ecological' to differentiate our title from the warped concept of sustainable economy (read 'growth') bandied about by some economists who fail to see how their idea of a sustainable economy compromises the biosphere which is the only life-support system we have available to us in the universe. If some members of the public are confused by our SPA name, i.e. wondering if we want the population to grow or not, then they need to be encouraged to join and find out – and tell their friends to join too.

Ian Brothers, Grenfell, NSW

We are not just environmental

The problem with using 'ecological' in a new name for SPA is that it narrows the focus to the environmental implications of the population issue. The population issue also has massive implications for the economy and people's quality of life. It reeks of being a knee-jerk reaction.

'Ecology' effectively eliminates economy and quality of life aspects from the discussion (or relegates them as secondary considerations). It casts SPA as a purely environmental organisation. The environment seems to have slipped down people's concerns these days as they are becoming increasingly self-centred. Finding a job, health and education are much bigger issues in the mainstream mind. Also, there is currently a confusing jungle of environmental organisations and ecology would be lost in the mire.

The economy is the number-one issue nowadays so even just the title 'Economically Sustainable Population Australia' would be more marketable and more directly address people's concerns.

However, this is a very difficult question. I agree that the word sustainable is now overused so perhaps a change would be a good idea. A name change would

also help dispel some of the confusion between SPA and the SPP (Sustainable Population Party).

There are two key considerations: (i) this is a very big issue as the name creates the first impression people form about our organisation and it is vital that it presses the right buttons; (ii) the name needs to complement our short-, medium- and long-term objectives.

I think a rushed name change is dangerous. A name change may be a good idea but it needs to be carefully tied to a deeper medium-term strategy. The best course would be to select a small committee to properly consider this issue, then report back to the executive and the members. It would even be worth considering employing a consultant on this.

Martin Tye, Broulee, NSW

More than money

I think the addition of 'Ecologically' in the organisation's title would be a good thing. It highlights the need to act on behalf of the environment and not just consider the financial aspects of sustainability, as many people are wont to do.

George Lemann, Glenquarry, NSW

Focus on ecology

I agree that 'ecological' would make it easier for others to understand where we are coming from.

Shirley Proctor, Spring Hill, Vic

Zeroing in on problem

The word 'sustainable' has become overused, and therefore does not attract attention. We should revert to the original name for our movement, i.e. Zero Population Growth. This is distinctive and clear.

Bob Couch, Marino, SA

Situation is dire

I was quite disappointed in the book *Sustainable Futures*. The situation is dire; we'd need a century of one-child families to get down to the viable 4.8 billion and universal carbon neutrality by 2025 to halt climate change. I'd have liked a lot more on stopping growth and (the almost completely ignored) renewable energies. And 4°C of warming – nobody mentioned the theory that this could cause photosynthesis to fail, hence all life on Earth to die.

Paul Prentice, North Fitzroy, Vic

Thanks to Nick Car

Nick Car is stepping down as webmaster after four years in the (voluntary) job. He's given a lot of time to it while leading a busy life as a scientist and father. Many thanks Nick! We wish you all the best.

SPA News

BRANCH REPORTS

NSW:The 2014 AGM resulted in the reappointment of the existing committee. The meeting was followed by a screening of the recent Australian documentary *Surviving Earth* and then some discussion of the many issues raised in the film. There was general agreement that the film deserved to be seen by a wider audience and the branch will be investigating the possibility of staging a more substantial event, built around a screening, in the first half of 2015.

The committee remains Kris Spike (president), Graham Wood (vice-president), Peter Green (secretary), Ralph Bennett (treasurer), Nola Stewart, Rob Child, Guy White, Brian Thompson and George Carrard. *Kris Spike*

SA:Planning for the SPA AGM and the symposium 'Population and Ageing: Disaster or Triumph?' on Saturday, 7 March, in Adelaide is continuing.

Confirmed symposium speakers at the moment are Katharine Betts, Phil Lawn and Jane O'Sullivan. Please contact Michael Lardelli at michael.lardelli@adelaide.edu.au if you want to visit Adelaide and require billeting.

Sandra Kanck has arranged a meeting with South Australia's Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation, Ian Hunter, on 4 February at which several viewpoints on population-environment issues will be advanced. *Michael Lardelli*

ACT: The Department of Immigration conducted an open online survey canvassing opinion on the 2015-16 permanent migration program. The closing date for the survey was December 5 and news of the existence of the survey came so late that the circular email to ACT members was not sent out until 3.28pm on the closing date. Many thanks to those members who managed to complete the survey on time.

On 6 December the annual Christmas get-together was held at the Goldies' property south of Michelago on the edge of the Mount Clear Range. Twenty-eight attendees feasted and socialised and gave close attention to a talk by Chris Watson who gave an update on Duncan Brown's book *Feed or Feedback*.

On 8 December The Conservation Council, SPA ACT branch and the Frank Fenner Foundation sponsored the premier screening of *Surviving Earth*, a film directed by Peter Charles Downey. Thanks to the dedication of Jane Olsen, the event was very close to a sell-out. After the film there was discussion by a panel comprising Julian Cribb, David Holmgren, Ian Lowe, Peter Tate and Virginia Young and chaired by Jenny Goldie. *Nick Ware*

VIC/TAS:The holiday period has been a good time for letters on population to be published in the main

Melbourne newspapers, with many, especially those by Vivienne Ortega, appearing in the past few weeks.

On 1 December a petition requesting a reduction in immigration, initiated by Vivienne Ortega, was presented to the House of Representatives and has been referred to the Minister for Immigration and Border Control – we await advice on any action or outcome.

Vice-president Jenny Warfe gave a talk on 12 January to the Westernport and Peninsular Protection Council on port expansion in Victoria in which, as in all her talks, she emphasised that developments of ports, freeways, and high-rise along rail corridors etc. is all reliant on population growth, and that anyone who cares about planning/environmental issues needs to join the dots between that and population. She notes: 'sadly, many so-called conservationists seem willfully blind to the relationship'.

New SPA member Roland Johnson last year saw the need for a brochure explaining the main issues related to population growth, globally and in Australia, and set about producing one. The brochure has just been printed in full colour with a first edition of 10,000 copies. SPA member Katharine Betts assisted with the production of the brochure with the cooperation of the SPA Vic-Tas committee. President Sheila Newman who was supportive of Mr Johnson in this ambitious task has published the brochure and made it available to all at <http://candobetter.net/node/427>. It will be a most valuable resource. *Jill Quirk*

WA:Over this festive season, the WA Branch joined the "Places You Love" alliance set up by the Australian Conservation Foundation (<http://www.placesyoulove.org/>). The initial coalition of 42 Australian environment groups, the Places you love Alliance offered membership to both individuals and organisations. Environment concerns to be addressed are classed under 4 major themes:

- Australia's natural infrastructure is in decline
- The places Australians love are under threat
- The decline in nature affects our health
- Australians consume more than is necessary for our lifestyles.

The WA Branch also subscribed to the information service ".id" (<http://home.id.com.au/>), whose stated aim is provision of accurate population data to ensure better decision making for Australian communities. They want to make demographic information accessible to the broadest possible audience, promoting evidence-based decision making and thus contribute to a fairer and more sustainable society. This certainly is a much needed service which could offer a valuable resource for the future.

SPA News

With The Palms (our usual meeting place) returning to normal, we hope to regain our booking for this venue with future events again being held there for the 2015 calendar.
John Weaver

QLD: The Queensland Government's snap election campaign has engrossed a number of the Qld branch members, in attempts to raise population growth issues in the election campaign or campaigning for candidates with some level of population focus. Unfortunately (as the Premier intended) the short time and holiday season meant it was very difficult for minor parties to field candidates and mount campaigns, so no Sustainable Population Party representative is in the ballot.

Jan McNicol managed to raise population growth in several of the environmental discussions at the Woodford Folk Festival. The festival has had the occasional panel on population in the past, but the organisers and contributors in general remain oblivious to its relevance across the range of environmental issues they address.

Members of the Qld branch have been busy progressing plans to redevelop the SPA web site, and are collating ideas for both content and presentation. If you have suggestions for the web site, please send them in to qld@population.org.au. We expect to engage a professional web designer soon.
Jane O'Sullivan

Message from outgoing President



Jenny Goldie

My favourite birthday card shows a finger-wagging nun on the front saying "So many sins!" and inside it says "So little time!" My decision not to re-nominate for president was based on a variation of this: "So many weeds! So little

time!" After four years as editor and two years as national president, not to mention a wet spring and summer, I am surrounded on my property by a sea of yellow (*Hypericum perforatum*) and blue (*Echium vulgare*). Particularly in the last two years, which included organising the 2013 Fenner conference and editing the book arising from it, I have been too busy to attend to anything else much, not least family and farm. So I'm having a Sabbatical. I hope after a year or two the weeds will be gone and I'll be 10 kg lighter! I'll still be involved in SPA through getting out the OVER books, and representing us at a conference in Baltimore in August, but for a while, other things must take priority. *Au revoir!*

Appeal for funds

As immediate past president of SPA, Jenny will give a paper (co-written with Prof Chris Dickman) at the centenary conference of the Ecological Society of America in August in Baltimore, Maryland in August. Other speakers in that session include Madeline Weld (Population Institute Canada), Roy Beck (Numbers USA), Bill Ryerson (Population Media Center) and possibly Robert Engelman (Worldwatch Institute). Organisers are only partly paying her fare so more funds are needed to get her there to speak on the effects on wildlife from population expansion in Australia. Send cheque or credit card details to SPA, PO Box 3581, Weston Creek ACT 2611, requesting your donation (tax-deductible) be directed for this purpose.

SPA AGM and Symposium

AGM 10 am Saturday 7 March 2015

Bradley Forum, Hawke Building, University of South Australia, City West Campus

Cnr North Terrace and Fenn Place, Adelaide.

Symposium, 1-5pm

"Population and Ageing: Disaster or Triumph?"

Confirmed speakers are:

Sociologist Assoc. Prof. Katharine Betts who has analysed the consequences for Australia's tax base and workforce of an ageing population

Economist Assoc. Prof. Philip Lawn who is an expert on ecological economics and alternatives to the impossible dream of eternal economic growth

Agronomist Dr Jane O'Sullivan who has very interesting observations on the infrastructure costs of population growth, population age structures and the effectiveness of family planning strategies in stabilizing populations.

Incoming National Executive

The 2015 Returning Officer for SPA, Mr Aussie Kanck, has declared the following people elected as there were no other nominations:

President	Sandra Kanck
Vice-President	Graham Wood
Meeting Secretary	Nola Stewart
Correspondence Secretary	David Robertson
Treasurer	Rob Taylor
Committee	John Coulter, Paddy Weaver, Jane O'Sullivan, Martin Tye, Jan McNicol

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Perhaps most importantly the research produces a two-tier hierarchy in which climate change and biosphere integrity are recognised as the core planetary boundaries through which the others operate. This makes sense: life and climate are the main columns buttressing our continual existence within the Holocene. Weakening them risks amplifying other stresses on other boundaries.

Reasons not to be cheerful

And so to the very bad news. Given the importance of biodiversity to the functioning of the Earth's climate and the other planetary boundaries, it is with real dismay that this study adds yet more evidence to the already burgeoning pile that concludes we appear to be doing our best to destroy it as fast as we possibly can.

Extinction rates are very hard to measure but the background rate – the rate at which species would be lost in the absence of human impacts – is something like 10 a year per million species. Current extinction rates are anywhere between 100 to 1000 times higher than that. We are possibly in the middle of one of the great mass extinctions in the history of life on Earth.

James Dyke is a lecturer in Complex Systems Simulation at the University of Southampton. This is an edited version from The Conversation.

RECENT RESEARCH

Planetary boundaries: guiding human development on a changing planet

Will Steffen et al, Science, 15 January 2015

The planetary boundaries framework defines a safe operating space for humanity based on the intrinsic biophysical processes that regulate the stability of the Earth System. Here, we revise and update the planetary boundaries framework, with a focus on the underpinning biophysical science, based on targeted input from expert research communities and on more general scientific advances over the past 5 years. Several of the boundaries now have a two-tier approach, reflecting the importance of cross-scale interactions and the regional-level heterogeneity of the processes that underpin the boundaries. Two core boundaries—climate change and biosphere integrity—have been identified, each of which has the potential on its own to drive the Earth System into a new state should they be substantially and persistently transgressed.

DISCLAIMER

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.

From June 2014 the SPA Newsletter will be mailed quarterly to members of Sustainable Population Australia Inc. For further information, please contact the SPA Office or your nearest branch. All membership applications and renewals should be sent to the National Office. Newsletter contributions should be sent directly to the editor.

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