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Sustainable Population Australia – Newsletter

Patrons: The Hon Bob Carr • Professor Ian Lowe • Professor Tim Flannery • Dr Mary White • Dr Paul Collins • Youth Ambassador: Bindi Irwin

Latest news from SPA's national president

By Sandra Kanck

We participated in the inquiry being conducted by the House of Representatives' Environment Committee about the tax deductibility for donations to registered environment organisations. This included a written submission and appearing before the committee at a public hearing in Adelaide. We found ourselves under hostile attack from Coalition MPs during that hearing. From amongst the hundreds of submissions lodged and with no knowledge of it on our part and no forewarning from the Chair, he quoted from just one submission that was totally devoted to denigrating SPA. The attacks were so dishonest that we wrote to the Speaker of the House of Reps arguing that the submission was an abuse of parliamentary privilege and asking for its removal from the parliamentary website. The Speaker referred our letter to the committee's Chair, and we were invited to send a supplementary submission to refute what was said, and that has duly been done.

New prime minister

Following his ascendancy to the position of prime minister, I wrote to Malcolm Turnbull mentioning some of the attacks made by the Abbott



Sandra Kanck

government on the environment movement, including the above-mentioned inquiry. I concluded by saying, 'SPA looks forward to a more enlightened approach towards environmental advocacy from a Turnbull-led government, and we congratulate you on assuming the singularly important role of leading our nation'. At the time of writing there has been no response.

SPA website update

We are still moving slowly in establishing a new website. Because it is going to involve the transfer of membership information to a new database, and providing greater interactivity, we are finding that progress is not as fast as we wanted, but I can assure you that we are still progressing this.

National AGM 2016

The Vic-Tas branch is organising our next national AGM (followed by a public forum) to be held on 23 April, 2016, in Melbourne. Please pencil

it into your diaries – we will provide more information as we get closer to the date. In this issue of the newsletter you will see a nomination form for the executive positions, to be decided at that AGM. We are very light-on at the moment: we have neither a vice-president nor a webmaster, and while we can have as many as five committee members, we currently have only three. All in all, it's hard to share the load among such a small group. The national executive meet via a phone conference every two months. **I strongly urge you to consider nominating for one of the positions.**

Inaugural SPA awards

At the AGM we will be announcing the winners of the inaugural SPA awards for good and bad writing on the population issue, but we need to have a catchy name for the awards to ensure we get appropriate media coverage. Brickbats and bouquets is the model, and we plan to announce a short-list of finalists about a month before the AGM to whet the appetite of the media. If you have a good idea for the name of the awards, please drop me a line: president@population.org.au.

Opinion poll on population

I wrote to all members recently inviting you to help us fund a professional opinion poll. I'm absolutely delighted to tell you that your donations now total more than \$13,000 – meaning the project can go ahead. Thank you all so much!

Sandra Kanck is SPA's national president.

Seven reasons why some progressives don't get population

By Simon Ross

Some progressives, including Adam Ramsay, [whose piece 'The charity which campaigned to ban Syrian refugees from Britain' appeared in *openDemocracy* on 23 September], don't get population. This seems surprising. Progressives seek poverty alleviation, environmental conservation and a better future, all goals of population concern. Like population concern, progressives are concerned about the disempowered: women, the poor, other species and future generations. When population concern was more popular, many progressives supported it, including Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, Martin Luther King, Pete Seeger and Jane Fonda. Many on the right did, too, but then environmentalism is a broad church. [My organisation, Population Matters, has] patrons including conservationists David Attenborough, Jane Goodall and Chris Packham, scientists Partha Dasgupta and James Lovelock, family planning providers John Guillebaud and Malcolm Potts and former Green Party luminaries Sara Parkin and Jonathon Porritt. The Green Party has a population policy. We all live on the same planet.

However, not everyone quite realises that. Let's make that the **first** of seven reasons why some progressives don't get population. Many, especially young male ones, seek a target to attack. Since well before ancient Athens, the rich and powerful have tried to hold onto their wealth and power and the poor and disempowered have tried to get hold of it. So progressives aren't always happy with something that doesn't fit their simple dichotomy of rulers vs. ruled. Population concern, which says that we all have a responsibility and can make a difference, disrupts an 'us vs. them' world view which holds that it's the bosses/government/ establishment/ system to blame. Some progressives go

further and deny that disempowered people are responsible for anything, though they can draw the line at crime. Similarly, some feminists argue that women have rights but no responsibilities. This seems to run counter to progressives' faith in society. If society is a public good, hasn't its members a responsibility to it? The number of one's children has a greater impact on the environment than anything else one does.

The power of the disempowered has always been their force of numbers in opposition to the wealth and structural control of the establishment. That tactical insight and idolisation of the masses should not extend to assume that more people is always better. Some progressives, with their admiration for humanity, can also be anthropocentric. Today's continuing elimination of many other species should not be treated with equanimity.

The **second** reason for ignoring population is idealism, i.e. living in the world of ideas. Marx based his analysis on an understanding of the material world. By contrast, some progressives, then and now, are more interested in moral condemnation than practical solutions, or fear contaminating 'rights-based' campaigns with real world problems. Ignoring reality does make it easier to preserve one's values and avoid distasteful compromises. But it doesn't make it go away – the physical world doesn't take account of what people think. In reality, the climate kept on changing and biodiversity kept collapsing in the background as human numbers doubled in the last half century alone. Similarly, it is no coincidence that conflict-ridden regions are characterised by competition arising from limited water (and hence food) supplies and rapid population growth. Thus, the population of Syria and Iraq has risen sevenfold since 1950.

A **third** reason is some progressives'

desire for simplicity. They need a slogan: 'One solution, revolution' or 'It's consumption, not population'. The world is more complicated. Population Matters was launched in 1991, not because we thought that addressing population was the only solution, but because it was the only one being ignored. Yes, inequality and waste should be addressed, though that may be less practical and fruitful than some imagine. We should eat less meat and explore promising technologies. But it is fanciful to think that a projected 50% increase in human numbers by the end of this century is inconsequential and should be unaddressed. Promoting smaller families is not an 'or' but an 'and'.

This desire for simplicity is related to an unwillingness to make connections, perhaps because we live in an increasingly specialised and professionalised society. Thus some progressives comfort themselves on population with the thought that the world's poorest people, who have the largest families, don't consume much and thus their exploding numbers are immaterial. This reliance in combating climate change on people remaining poor is impractical and hardly moral. People don't like being poor. They will, resources permitting, industrialise and prosper, or move to somewhere with better prospects. Many progressives, indeed, work hard in development to increase the consumption of the world's poorest, somewhat undermining their argument that such communities can be relied upon to remain poor. Encouraging migration from poor to rich countries has a similar effect. There is, too, the argument that once communities become prosperous, they will have smaller families, so there's no necessity to intervene in this blissful progress. Of course, by the time this prosperity arrives, if it does, populations will be several times larger than currently and total consumption will be vastly higher.

Moving from south to west, progressives typically ascribe responsibility for environmental degradation and resource depletion to the richest economies, which generate most emissions and consume most resources. That's true, so doesn't it make sense to 'join the dots' and promote smaller families in such countries and limit migration to them, to avoid making an unjust situation worse?

This leads me to the **fourth** reason why progressives don't get population and that is migration. Migration is running at unprecedentedly high levels and is the British public's greatest concern. People can see the impact of one of Europe's highest levels of population density and population growth, particularly in London and the south east – a growing insufficiency of affordable housing, conveniently located education, responsive healthcare and comfortable transport. These all hit the poorest hardest. However, progressives typically consider themselves internationalists, with a hearty welcome for others, and so would rather not address the issue. We think there has to be limits to migration for any society concerned about environmental sustainability. That doesn't mean no immigration. If well managed, UK emigration of 300,000 each year provides plenty of leeway for admitting some refugees while achieving balanced migration. That said, the huge numbers involved, with 3 million fleeing Syria alone, preclude migration being a solution for most. There are also significant outflows from Somalia and Sudan, and that's just one letter. Negotiating to end persistent conflict and properly funding refugee camps is much more helpful. In the longer term, directing development aid to improve family planning provision and women's empowerment in the poorest countries, as recommended by UK parliamentarians, is the only sure way of reducing migratory pressures. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, is experiencing a population explosion, driven by improved health and nutrition, just as climate change and overexploitation threatens already precarious natural resources.

Another kind of idealism, in the sense of being guided by ideals rather than self-interest, is the **fifth** reason. Succouring the poor, like the Good Samaritan, is meritorious. We, too, think the poor should be helped. However, providing most people with a state subsidy for every child, no matter how many they have, sends the wrong signal in a world where rising numbers increase everyone's cost of living and lowers their quality of life. That's why we, like the public, think phasing in a two child limit to child benefit, while maintaining support for poorer families, is right, particularly in the UK, which



population matters

has one of Europe's highest proportions of large families. While on poverty, ending world poverty isn't made easier if the number of poor keeps increasing. Moreover, population growth actively impedes development by putting pressure on limited services and diverting resources from productive purposes.

A **sixth** reason is some progressives' lack of comfort with sexual and reproductive health and rights – a very British response. Progressives, especially feminists, are vocal about allegations of forcible sterilisation. It doubtless occurs; human rights abuses do, though many far more common abuses receive vastly less publicity. However, forcible sterilisation is universally illegal and condemned by all international and civil-society organisations, including ourselves. Unsurprisingly, it is rare. Conversely, deaths and disability

from pregnancy, especially when frequent or occurring at a young age, and from abortion in unsafe circumstances, are all too common in resource-poor settings. Moreover, women's impaired rights over their fertility are inescapably bound up with impairment of other rights, such as to education and employment. Promoting smaller families empowers women. Couples who can access affordable and appropriate family planning and thus have a real choice usually have smaller families. Some have one child, some none, and these should be accepted choices. Those who have larger families anywhere are often under the influence of conservative, patriarchal and hierarchical traditions. We don't apologise for promoting smaller families. Encouraging socially responsible behaviour is not coercive – it's what progressives do.

Reproductive health is not an issue only for the global south. The UK has relatively poor sexual health – poor sex education in schools, ineffective family planning provision and a high rate of unintended pregnancies. Addressing this would help bring the UK birth rate down to the European average, yet how many progressives are campaigning alongside Caroline Lucas for compulsory sex education, or against cuts to public health?

The **seventh** and final reason is lack of foresight. It is only human but hardly prudent to think only about the here and now. Admittedly, politicians, to remain politicians, must be re-elected, business leaders, to stay in post, must increase profits, employees must satisfy their employers, while progressives must campaign for change and thus many focus on today. Yet sustainability is a long game. Use of fossil fuels must end, because of depletion or their environmental impact. Seafood is a finite resource which is declining. Fertile land and water supplies are falling due to overuse and climate change. Areas remaining to be exploited are declining. Fertiliser and some minerals will become less freely available. Meanwhile, demand

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SPA at National Science Week: can science save humanity?

SPA member Rod Taylor has been running public events for National Science Week for the past few years. With help from former SPA president Jenny Goldie, he obtained a grant for a recent event from the National Science Week funding body. The event ran at the Academy of Science Shine Dome in Canberra on 23 August this year.

Rod Taylor: Can science save humanity? I don't know about you, but this is such a big question, I cannot fit it into my head. So let's break it down. One hour. When we all file out those doors in one hour, how will the world be different?

The first thing is, there'll be approximately 9,000 additional people on the planet. That's 9,000 births over deaths. Nine thousand mouths, and if you're lucky, times three meals per day. Nine thousand bottoms, doing what bottoms do.

That's 9,000 people wanting houses, cars, hospitals, mobile phones, flat-screen TVs, trips to Europe. And in the next hour, there will be 600 hectares of land deforested. Seven hundred hectares lost to soil erosion. The figure for oil consumption is so big I can't even get my head around the figure for one hour. So how about this: one second. Gone. One thousand barrels of oil, a finite reserve. Mostly burnt, contributing to 4 million tons of CO2 into the atmosphere.

Will Steffen: We are already seeing global average temperature increases upwards of 0.85 degrees since pre-industrial times. But more importantly we're seeing an increase in extreme weather events. The climate system has been destabilised by human activity; 90% of that is caused by burning fossil fuels, and the other 10% from deforestation.

With momentum in the system, we're

probably already committed to a one-and-a-half degrees [increase], but time is running out, and the jokers in the pack are the tipping points – melting of the polar ice sheets, and ocean circulation.

That's the bad news, but the good news is some major players are taking this seriously. The US has greatly ramped up its ambition on climate change. China and Europe are also taking steps. If everyone took that level of ambition, we'd have a fighting chance.

Hillary Bambrick: Humans are not isolated from our environment. Through its effects on water, food, and air, climate change alters the relationship between us, and our life-support system. The effects on human health are many, including deaths and injuries from heatwaves, flooding and bushfires, mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue.

In Australia we have the wealth, but climate change is not fair. Other countries are extremely vulnerable. The consequences of climate change fall disproportionately on the world's poor. The biggest effects are going to come from things like crop failures, sea-level rise, wars over increasingly scarce resources, and forced migration.

We've known for decades what's causing the Earth to warm, and we've known for decades what we should be doing about it.

I don't know about you, but if my doctor told me I have a 5% chance of developing cancer because I was doing something, I'd be stopping that habit in a heartbeat. We have to stop treating the economy as if it were a deity. We have to stop giving disproportionate time to those with vested interests.

Michael Jeffery: It seems to me that one of the great problems this planet

is going to face is how to produce sufficient food and clean water for us to survive, given the population is going from 7 billion now to 10 billion by 2050, and in the process we need to nearly double food production. Technology such as GMs may have an impact, but we have a problem unless we look after our soil. Across the planet we are losing 1% of our arable land per year, which is a lot.

The great food bowls of Africa, India, the Middle East, China, and parts of the US are drawing their water from aquifers supplied over geological time. That water is running out. Rivers such as the Ganges are degraded. The global water situation is very serious.

Stephen Bygrave: We don't have time to wait for any more science to come in. The story is clear, we need to act now. We can do that with the technologies we have. If we wait for the next breakthrough, the game's over.

Will [Steffen] mentioned the target of two degrees. What that means is zero emissions. It means moving beyond zero emissions by the second half of this century. We've shown that it can be done, that we can have an electricity grid based 100% on renewable energy. We have aging electricity infrastructure which has to be replaced, and renewables are cheaper than coal anyway.

People always mention the cost. If we took the money to build Badgery's Creek [airport], that would build the high-speed rail between Sydney and Melbourne. This is the fifth-busiest air route in the world, so there is demand.

There are also buildings, and we've shown that with nine steps we can drastically reduce emissions.

Clive Hamilton: Economics can't answer the big questions. We find

Opinion



Photo shows panelists Clive Hamilton, Steven Bygrave, Michael Jeffery, Hilary Bambrick, Will Steffen, and Rod Taylor (host). Photo by Broderick Matthews.

ourselves in an extremely perilous situation. It seems to me there is no more important question [than can science save humanity].

It's a great temptation to think that the scientists and the technologists will come back with a great engineering solution to fix it all. When we look at geoengineering the climate, we see why it's such a dangerous way of thinking.

These ideas are aimed at substituting the social or the political fix. But each of these so-called solutions just open up a series of questions that are much more difficult. Who should do research into geoengineering? Whose scientists: Australian, Chinese, North Korean?

Who should fund it? We're now seeing a bunch of billionaires with a messiah complex. They see themselves as

someone who'll save the world. Some climate deniers now even support the idea, which [raises] the question: why would you want to solve a problem that doesn't exist?

Who should decide when to deploy? The UN? The US? China?

And if it all goes pear-shaped, who decides when to stop it?

Rod Taylor: So can science save humanity? The answer from the panel was clear. We need science, but only humanity can save humanity.

Professor Will Steffen is a climate-change expert and researcher.

Professor Hillary Bambrick is an epidemiologist from the University of Western Sydney. She's been

researching the effects of climate change in Australia, and vulnerable communities in the Pacific, and Ethiopia.

Michael Jeffery is a former governor-general now working in ways to save Australia's soils.

Dr Stephen Bygrave is CEO of Beyond Zero Emissions.

Clive Hamilton is professor of public ethics at Charles Sturt University and author of books including *Requiem for a Species* (2010) and *Earthmasters* (2013).

This article is based on an edited transcript of the event. You can hear a recording at <http://fuzzylogicon2xx.podbean.com/e/can-science-save-humanity/>

The end of Western Europe?

By Mark Beeson

The current influx of asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants into Western Europe presents a profound challenge to the European Union's values, solidarity and capacity to simply manage and accommodate such a rapid inflow of people.

True, other countries and poorer regions have taken in more refugees. But Europe's leaders will surely want the new arrivals to be fed, housed, educated and ultimately integrated into European society in a manner that is similar to the indigenous population.

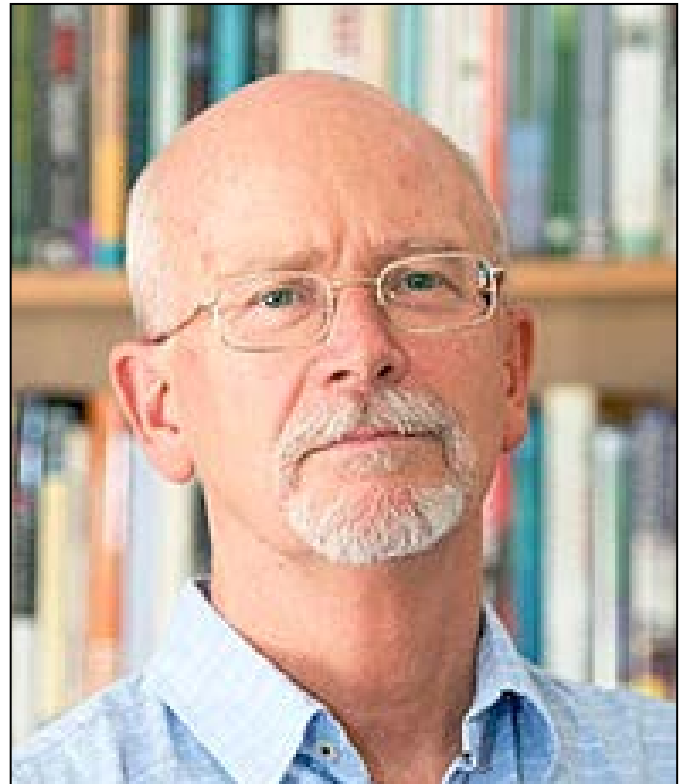
The experiences of countries such as France and Britain demonstrate just how difficult this process could be. Integrating large numbers of immigrants with different cultural values and capacities into an existent social order requires an immense, long-term effort and commitment of resources. Unfortunately, Sweden's experience illustrates how even the most admirable of intentions can lead to the inadvertent creation of ghettos and an absence of social cohesion or common values.

When the values in question are pluralism, tolerance, emancipation, equality, and freedom of expression, then this can hardly be regarded as a cause for celebration. And yet, in the crisis-driven political circumstances that are rapidly redefining European politics, such fundamental questions are not likely to be on the policy agenda. On the contrary, in the current atmosphere simply managing from one day to the next seems to be the height of Europe's collective ambitions.

Paradoxically, an absence of leadership is not the principal failure in the current crisis. Angela Merkel has acted uncharacteristically rapidly and decisively to offer asylum to nearly 1 million refugees a year. She has tried to badger and shame her European counterparts into doing something similar.

And yet no matter how noble and well-intentioned Merkel's response may have been, it is far from clear that other leaders will follow suit, or that all Germans are equally enthusiastic about opening their borders – much less their homes – to the new arrivals.

Questioning the wisdom or sustainability of a policy of open borders is not necessarily either racist or heartless. No doubt something must be done, but it is far from clear that allowing hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, perhaps tens of millions of people to move where they wish is practically or – even more importantly, perhaps – politically feasible.



Mark Beeson

If Germany really commits to accepting 1 million refugees a year it will rapidly make 'Germany' a very different country. It is difficult to imagine that this will be seamlessly accepted there or in any other country, for that matter.

No doubt some will argue that this is a unique set of circumstances and the West has a collective moral responsibility to take in Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans who are the innocent victims of the West's misguided interventions (or non-interventions) in Middle Eastern politics. Perhaps so, but why would this logic not also apply to other historical victims of Western imperialism in Africa and elsewhere?

Why shouldn't anyone who is a victim of oppression or insecurity have the right to move to Europe or other Western countries like Australia where they have at least the prospect of a better, more secure life? At the level of universal human rights perhaps they do. Simple demography suggests that such rights are likely to prove impossible to realise or – more worryingly for those in the West, perhaps – actually sustain.

A recently released report from the UN pointed out that before the world's population starts to decline it is likely to increase to more than 11 billion by 2100, and by more than 1 billion over the next 15 years alone.

Most of this population growth will occur in Africa. The populations of Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Somalia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia are projected to increase at least five-fold by 2100.

These are already some of the poorest, most badly run, unstable and insecure places on the planet. No doubt some of their problems can be traced to the impact of colonialism and the predations of multinational capitalism. But whether we attribute state failure and a lack of economic development to local or Western elites, the net effect is the same: moving to an oasis of political and social stability that is underpinned by high living standards looks like an attractive, perhaps an irresistible, option.

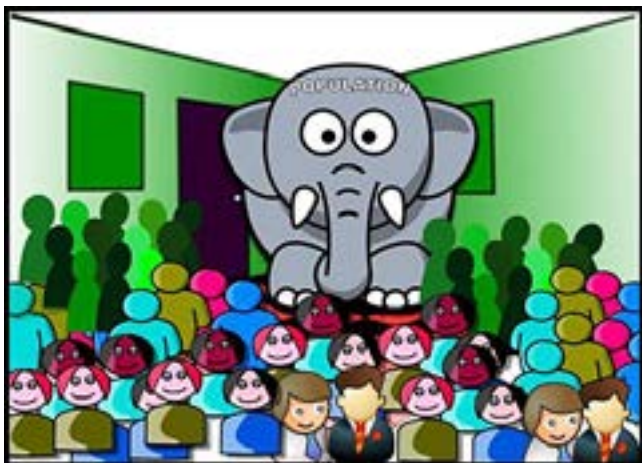
The relative attractions of Europe are only likely to increase over time as the governments of impoverished nations struggle to provide jobs for rapidly expanding populations with equally rapidly rising expectations. In the global village, everyone knows who the poor relations are and where the grass is quite literally greener: a degraded natural environment is likely to provide another powerful “push” factor to add to Europe’s economic allure.

When seen from the perspective of the Anthropocene perhaps this is just the way the world works. Migration has, after all, been one of the big drivers of human development for millennia. Political boundaries are a fairly recent construct and perhaps they really shouldn’t determine where human beings can and cannot go.

Certainly this is the sort of abstract argument that is made by some contemporary political theorists. I’m not sure such claims will provide much of a guide for navigating our collective way through the immediate future, however. I’m equally unsure that Western Europe as we now know it will survive the experience.

Given the EU’s inability to come up with an effective response to the crisis we may get to see what a policy of open borders actually looks like in practice. It may not be a pleasant sight.

Mark Beeson is professor of international politics at the University of Western Australia. This article appeared on The Conversation on 10 September.



By Sylvia Tetlow

Can we decouple?

An interesting paper was recently published in the journal *Nature* titled ‘Australia is ‘free to choose’ economic growth and falling environmental pressures’. Its lead author was Steve Hatfield-Dodds from the CSIRO.

This paper is a spin-off from the CSIRO’s 56-page October report ‘Australian National Outlook 2015’ – which looks ahead to 2050 and can be downloaded from here: <http://www.csiro.au/nationaloutlook/>.

On page 35 it gives its population assumptions – we will have 36 million by 2050 – so there is no high, low or medium population scenario: apparently our population growth is set in stone. The paper and report seem to be saying that it is possible to decouple economic growth from environmental harm, if only we get the policy settings right and choose the right technology.

(This is similar to what the ecomodernists are saying – those who believe we can have a ‘good Anthropocene’. Clive Hamilton has an interesting critique of ecomodernism here: <http://clivehamilton.com/the-technofix-is-in-a-critique-of-an-ecomodernist-manifesto/>.)

This is a debate that divides many environmentalists, and some economists, so it will be interesting to read the academic responses to the research when they are published over the next few months and even years.

At the time of writing I do not know what the main reactions are, but I doubt that those with a strong ecology or earth-systems background will be without criticisms (Hatfield-Dodds trained in economics).

Can we have our cake and eat it too, as ‘cornucopians’ seem to think? The work of people like Graham Turner – who is tracking the predictions from the book *The Limits to Growth*, and finding that collapse may be not too far away under our business-as-usual scenario – seems to contradict this rosy future where technology can save us and we can go on consuming and growing the economy.

So I guess there are three main possible futures among environmentalists: (1) collapse – no matter what we do (as we are too far gone); (2) a good Anthropocene where we continue on much as we are but with more tree planting, more desalination, more solar panels, carbon capture and storage(!) and more electric cars; or (3) a change to a more simple way of life that recognises planetary boundaries and energy constraints, puts quality first and quantity second, with less work, less spending, less travel and (eventually) less people.

You can read Hatfield-Dodds’ summary of his paper here: https://theconversation.com/study-australians-can-be-sustainable-without-sacrificing-lifestyle-or-economy-50179#comment_826307

SMH economics editor Ross Gittins seems to like the CSIRO report and you can read his summary of it here: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/economic-growth-doesnt-have-to-hurt-the-environment-20151109-gkuxgd>

Stephen Williams

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is relentlessly upward. Those who do not eat enough, want more. Those who are vegetarian want more varied, albeit much less environmentally friendly, western-style fare. Those of us who should eat less, struggle to do so. And there are annually 80 million more to feed as people live longer, as the number of mothers increase, and as birth rates decline only slowly. Resources will become scarcer and those with the least will suffer most.

Let me sum up. Humanity is consuming too much for sustainability, even though almost 800 million people eat insufficient for good health. Slowing and reversing population growth through improving sex education and family planning, women's empowerment and promoting smaller families, is not the only solution, though it is the cheapest, most reliable and most beneficial one. However, making the world a better place is not a competition between exclusive alternatives. Promoting sustainability is about adopting and combining all factors that contribute to improvement.

What I would say to progressives, is this. Our policy positions are public. Do support what you would anyway: sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's empowerment and reducing inequality (yes, we support this – gross inequality is not sustainable). For other policies, like limiting subsidies to larger families and to net migration or promoting smaller families, consider how they help address the need to secure and retain resources for the poor, other species and future generations.

There is a real danger from wishful thinking and comforting platitudes and it is this: that needful action is not taken and that, consequently, future generations have to deal with the consequences of human numbers several billions greater than the world can provide for.

Simon Ross is the chief executive of UK group Population Matters. This article first appeared in openDemocracy on 28 September 2015.

How many is too many?

The progressive argument for reducing immigration in the United States.

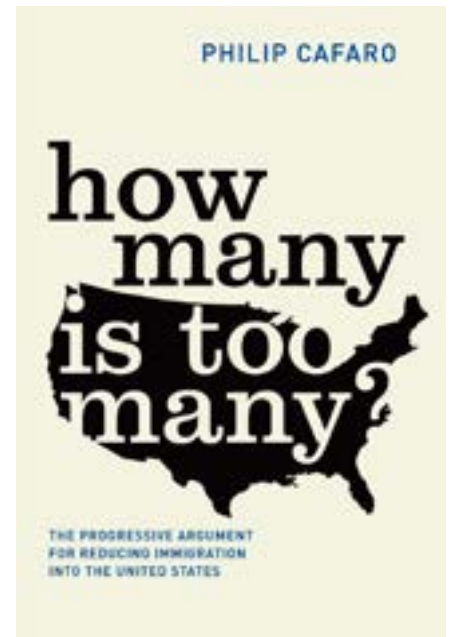
by Philip Cafaro

The University of Chicago Press, London and Chicago, 2015, 305pp.

Review by Jenny Goldie

What better person to write a book on the need to reduce immigration to the United States than Phil Cafaro? As well as being a driving force behind Progressives for Immigration Reform (<http://www.progressivesforimmigrationreform.org/>) he was co-editor of the best book on population in many years: *Life on the Brink: Environmentalists Confront Overpopulation* (2012).

The grandson of an Italian immigrant, Cafaro accepts that when America was teeming with resources, job opportunities and wide-open spaces, immigration may have been a good thing. Times, however, have changed. He now sees that current immigration levels – the highest in US history – are undermining attempts to achieve progressive, economic, social and environmental goals. He describes how flooded labour markets have driven down local workers' wages in numerous industries, not least construction. Indeed, he starts the book with the stories of two men working in his home state of Colorado: Javier, a Mexican illegal immigrant working as an electrician's assistant; and Tom, born and raised in Denver, who sprays custom finishes on interior walls. Although Javier was an electrician, he could not find work in Mexico without paying corrupt officials up to two years' wages up-front just to start a job. So he came undocumented to the US in 1989, married another illegal immigrant and now has two daughters. All he wants is a permit to work and a decent life for himself and his family. Tom, meanwhile, set up a successful company in 1989 with 12 people running three trucks, but



now it's just him and his wife as he's not able to compete with other construction companies that almost exclusively employ immigrant labour and who don't pay the taxes and insurance that Tom pays.

Any immigration policy will have winners (Javier) and losers (Tom). Not that Javier is entirely a winner, as he's afraid to go out to stores and restaurants for fear of being detained. Most illegal immigrants working in construction or agriculture have neither insurance nor workers' compensation so if they are hurt on the job or worn out they are discarded and replaced. There are trade-offs that come with immigration: cheaper prices for new houses versus good wages for construction workers; accommodating more people in the US versus preserving wildlife habitat and vital resources; and increasing ethnic diversity versus enhancing social solidarity.

Cafaro has a history of environmental activism. In both Georgia and Colorado he has campaigned to stop the damming of local rivers (Oconee and Cache rivers respectively), only to see his efforts overwhelmed by population growth, new housing and, in turn, the need for new reservoirs. 'As along the Oconee', he writes, 'environmentalists cannot hope to keep sufficient water flowing freely in the Cache in the context of endless population growth.'

As in Australia, population growth would come to an end in the US without immigration. Cafaro, however, does not want to end immigration, merely reduce it to levels that would result in stabilisation of population numbers. He proposes that legal immigration be cut from 1.1 million to 300,000 a year, and that illegal immigration be reduced by mandating a national employment verification program (see <http://www.uscis.gov/e-verify>) for all new hires and then strictly enforcing sanctions against employers who employ undocumented workers.

Cafaro recognises the need for other countries to reduce population growth and to that end proposes support for international family planning efforts and other measures. Most interesting, and one perhaps Australia should consider, is to deny foreign aid and immigration slots to nations that fail to commit to stabilising their populations and to sharing their wealth among its citizens.

There are many other lessons for Australia in this wonderful book. Highly recommended.

Jenny Goldie is a former SPA president.

End Game

Tipping point for planet Earth?

By Anthony D. Barnosky and Elizabeth A. Hadly

*William Collins, 2015, 264pp.
\$29.99*

Review by Jenny Goldie

What if population pressures hit a threshold that 'tumbles the dominoes of food, energy, water, climate, pollution and biodiversity, which in turn break up the intricate workings of the global society?' That would be a global tipping point. The world would change from one of relative comfort to one marked by conflict over ever-diminishing resources.

Are we close to such a tipping point?

Yes, suggest the husband-and-wife paleo-ecologist authors, although if we play our cards right, we might just avert a dystopian future.

The problems are many: overpopulation, overconsumption, climate change, hunger, thirst, toxins, disease and war. But the chief driver is overpopulation, according to the authors. Intense competition for limited resources is the ubiquitous effect of population growth, be it easy access to a good college in the US or simply food in Africa or India. Most of future population growth will take place in already-poor countries, and some will experience a five-fold increase between 2013 and 2100: Burundi, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. One country that experienced rapid population growth – Sudan, with a seven-fold increase between 1950 and 2014 – endured a 22-year civil war that split the country in two, with genocide in Darfur, widespread hunger, disease and death. Fighters were drawn in from neighbouring Uganda. Humanitarian aid skyrocketed. The prime lesson from Sudan is that rapid population growth, local wars and escalating global conflict are closely linked.

The authors have travelled extensively, often with their daughters, as part of their work. What makes this book so readable is that each chapter starts

with a personal anecdote illustrating the issue at hand. Liz Hadly, for instance, was in Nepal studying pikas but was hoping to also see red pandas in the undergrowth, except there was very little undergrowth. Indeed, there were no low branches on the trees, only ones high up creating a canopy. The low ones had been cut by the villagers for firewood and indeed, while she was there, a vicious fight ensued within the village when the son of one family was caught stealing firewood from the pile of another family. Not only was it a case of too many people and too few resources (firewood), but it had resulted in a loss of biodiversity (red pandas).

Anthony Barnosky, meanwhile, deals with the problem of 'stuff'. Take mobile phones, for instance, that are now for many not luxuries but essential items, facilitating everything from getting water, mobilising social movements in places like the Middle East, and negotiating global crises. Unfortunately, they require rare earths like yttrium and neodymium, the majority of which are mined in China. Unless new mines can be brought online to supply ever-growing world demand, shortages may occur that may result in price spikes and trade wars. Processing one tonne of rare earths leaves 2,000 tonnes of toxic waste, often ravaging the surrounding countryside and poisoning people who live there.

Nevertheless, the authors maintain an optimistic and folksy style, though it's hard to ignore the grim realities of our global situation. How we can possibly feed another 2 or 3 billion people when most of the growth will be in countries experiencing hunger right now – and ones most vulnerable to the effects of climate change? The World Bank warns that by 2030, 'drought and heat will leave 40% of the land now growing maize unable to support that crop'.

Indeed, a tipping point may be closer than we think. But do read this book: I hope it will be a wake-up call, just as Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* was in the late 1960s.



Branch reports

New South Wales

SPA NSW put forward three motions about population growth to the recent Nature Conservation Council of NSW annual conference. Two were passed unanimously but the motion calling on the organisation to write to the federal government requesting that net overseas migration be capped at 70,000 to ease the pressure on natural ecosystems was keenly debated. Several members of the executive were opposed to the motion, mainly I suspect for fear that the call for lower immigration could easily be misinterpreted as being a smokescreen for xenophobia or racism. There were also many members speaking in favour of the motion, arguing that in the defence of nature we cannot afford to be silent on the issue of population growth and immigration no matter how uncomfortable it may be to raise it. In the end the motion was passed with a modest majority.

SPA member Nola Stewart put in a huge amount of work to get the motions before the conference and the committee thanks her for her tireless efforts.

The NSW branch AGM and Christmas party has been set for Friday, 4 December, 7pm at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts. The meeting will be followed by a screening of the BBC documentary *Too Many Immigrants* and a group discussion on the dumping down of the immigration debate. Drinks and nibbles will conclude the evening.

The North Sydney federal by-election will be held on 5 December with William Bourke standing as a candidate for Sustainable Australia. We wish him well in the poll and hope that the voters of North Sydney have the sense to vote against the massive population growth and overdevelopment that is occurring in their electorate.

Kris Spike, president

Victoria-Tasmania

The branch held its AGM on 5 September when the following executive committee

was elected: president, Michael Bayliss; vice-president, Jenny Warfe; secretary, Jill Quirk; treasurer, Suzanne James. The committee members are Gloria O'Connor, James Sinnamon and Vivienne Ortega. Guest speaker at the meeting was Angela Munro whose topic was 'Kennett's commonsense revolution and the Melbourne growth machine'. This can be viewed at <https://candobetter.net/node/4613>. Outgoing president, Sheila Newman, complemented the main speaker with a talk 'Kennett's population policy, numbers and flow-ons: regional migration and industrial law under Kennett'. <https://candobetter.net/node/4612>.

The branch is preparing for the national AGM next year, to be held at 10am on 23 April at Hawthorn Arts Centre (Zelman room), 360 Burwood Rd, Hawthorn. There will be a seminar in the afternoon, with details to be announced nearer to the date (see the executive nomination form with this newsletter).

Jenny Warfe has given several talks to local organisations, especially those based around the coast and concerned with development and shipping traffic where Jenny has been able to point out the role of ongoing population growth.

All the problems of population growth continue in Victoria, placing increasing pressure on land, housing, resources and services.

Although members of the branch continue to have letters published in the press, so do many others who we don't know at all, so it appears the effects of turbo-charged population growth are disliked by many in the community.

Jill Quirk, secretary

South Australia

There was considerable consternation in SA after John Rau, the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Housing and Urban Development (who also happens to be Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Justice Reform, Minister for Industrial Relations

and Minister for Child Protection Reform) claimed that people opposed to the Weatherill government's planning reforms were mildly mentally retarded. According to a 29 October article in the online newspaper *InDaily*:

'In parliamentary debate last night, opposition MP Steven Griffiths said while "it is fair to say that the development lobby likes" the changes, "the community groups that have contacted me are vehemently opposed to it."

"[That's] because they don't understand it," replied Rau. "Because they're morons."

Rau later apologised for the comment.

With politicians like these it's no wonder that it is so difficult to have a rational discussion regarding the pros and cons of eternal population expansion.

On a happier note, John Coulter organised for Population Media Center president, Bill Ryerson, to pass through Adelaide on 19 November during his visit to Australia. Amongst other things, Bill described how his organisation "works in 53 countries changing behaviour to enhance the health and welfare of people using culturally appropriate health, human rights, environmental and economic information".

Lastly, we intend to hold the AGM of the SA branch during December.

Michael Lardelli, president

ACT

On 23 August, Rod Taylor conducted a Science Week event entitled 'Can Science Save Humanity?'. (A full report appears on pages 4-5 of this newsletter.)

Our marquee was erected at the annual Living Green Festival on 4 October, which proved to be a pleasant, sunny day. We again reminded the environmentally conscious public that population is the paramount concern when striving for sustainability. This festival continues to attract more than

Branch reports

5,000 visitors.

This year the branch sponsored the high-school final of the ACT Debating Union competition, held on 14 October. We were able to give a short presentation while the adjudicators deliberated and we took the opportunity to present the libraries of both schools taking part with the *Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot* book.

On 17 October we held a 'conversation' between SPA's Mark O'Connor and Henry Sherrell of the Migration Council of Australia on the question 'Is the migration program an advantage to the current Australian population?' Henry and Mark alternated, each giving three eight-minute speeches and then the debate was open to the floor. All but one of the 18 contributions from the floor came from SPA members and Henry was given a well-deserved round of applause for discharging his difficult task.

Nick Ware, president

Queensland

The Queensland branch's August meeting discussed the new UN global population projections. Since only five years ago, the expected population in the year 2100 has increased by more than 1 billion people. Yet the projections are still expecting more rapid fertility decline in Africa than has been occurring, so further upward revisions are likely unless family planning gains more widespread support. September was dominated by the European migration crisis.

The branch AGM was held on 16 November with 15 members attending. The new committee consists of Jane O'Sullivan (president), Tony Matta (treasurer), Anne Tennock (minutes secretary), David Robertson (membership officer), and John Roles and David Boyd (general members). Many thanks to the three who are joining the committee this year, and to Jan McNicol, who has left the committee after five years of fantastic support for all our activities. The

meeting was followed by a talk and discussion with Dr Paul Williams, an academic in political science and journalism at Griffith University and a columnist for the *Courier Mail*, who has written several terrific articles on the folly of population growth. He gave us valuable insights into the formation and promulgation of public opinion in our rapidly evolving media landscape, in which there are now five PR people per journalist and social media is the filter through which most young people encounter news.

On 28 November, a strong contingent of branch members will walk our banner in the People's Climate March. SPA is assisting some of our African colleagues to attend the United Nations climate summit in Paris.

Jane O'Sullivan, president

Western Australia

'How soap operas can change the world' was the theme of Bill Ryerson's talk - hosted by the SPA WA branch - on 14 November.

Bill is from the US Population Media Center, a non-profit, international nongovernmental organisation that strives to improve the health and wellbeing of people around the world through serialised TV and radio dramas (soap operas). These soap operas are based on the Sabido methodology for positive behaviour change. The storylines address topical health and social issues as the audience's favourite characters evolve into positive role models, which leads to positive behaviour change in the audiences. Soap operas have been found to be one of the most effective ways of changing public behaviour and the impact of PMC's dramas is dramatic and, as it turns out, can change the world.

The WA branch has created a new website dealing with population (www.populationWA.net). The purpose of the site is to provide the WA community with information on branch activities, contact details of the local and national committees, and general information

about local population-related issues. There are also articles and videos on population subjects. This is a work in progress and will be updated regularly as time and information allows.

John Weaver, treasurer

SPA news

Reducing SPA's costs

SPA is encouraging members who receive a paper copy of this newsletter to opt for receiving an electronic copy only. The cost of the paper copy, including postage, is high and will only increase with time. Then there is the cost to the environment. So please email president@population.org.au and opt for the electronic copy only.

Greens blind on population

If you have been concerned about overpopulation for more than a short time you will wonder why the green movement in general does not lobby more earnestly for population control (Simon Ross gives some reasons starting on page 2 of this newsletter).

This blindness is very frustrating for those of us trying to rally support for action against overpopulation, as you would think that environmentalists would get with the program before other sectors of the community.

As another example of how this attitude plays out, *The Guardian* ran an article in October titled '10 green leaders on best ways you can fight climate change'.

Each of the 10 'green leaders' in the UK gave their top three tips, making 30 tips in all.

And guess what?

Not one of these 'experts' said a word about limiting population growth.

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Instead, their advice included: doing your washing on windy weekends; blocking your street off from cars for a day while you hold a party; make a list of things you want and give it to your MP; join the ecomodernist movement (these are people who think technology will save us); boycott the Maldives; and stand in solidarity with refugees.

Yep, that should fix climate change.

You can read these words of wisdom at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/oct/08/10-green-leaders-on-best-ways-you-can-fight-climate-change>

Another journo 'gets' population?

As we all know, you can count the number of mainstream journalists who understand the population problem on one hand, and then have fingers to spare. Leith van Onselen, who writes for *MacroBusiness*, is the best informed I know of, and he repeatedly highlights the ponzi scheme that population growth is a part of. In July, Fairfax economics writer Ross Gittins wrote quite a good column titled 'How population growth can make us worse off' (<http://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/how-population-growth-can-make-us-worse-off-20150704-gi57fx.html>). And then in November, Mike Secombe, writing in *The Saturday Paper*, has penned a reasonable piece titled 'Big Australia's date with density' (<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2015/11/07/big-australias-date-with-density/14468148002599>).

I think all three deserve to be in the running for the inaugural SPA prize for good writing on the population issue.

Webmaster needed

SPA is seeking to fill the voluntary position of webmaster, so if you have some basic computer skills and a few hours to spare a week, SPA would like to hear from you. We are moving to a Wordpress website, so experience with that software would be handy, but not essential, as training can be provided. Email president@population.org.au for more information.

Book for sale

SPA still has some copies of the terrific picture-book *Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot*, recently published by Global Population Speak Out and the Foundation for Deep Ecology. It costs \$50 plus \$15 postage within Australia. Send your payment with your name and address to SPA, PO Box 3851, Weston Creek, ACT, 2611, email info@population.org.au or phone the SPA office on (02) 6288 6810 with your credit card details. If you donate \$100 or more to SPA, you can buy the book for \$10.

Website: www.population.org.au

The SPA newsletter is published quarterly: in March, June, September and December. Members are welcome to submit material to the editor, to be published at the editor's discretion. Deadline for the March edition is February 1.

Membership applications and renewals should be done via the SPA website or sent to the national office. General inquiries should also go to the national office.

SPA national office

Successful Alliances, 2C, 18 Napier Close, Deakin, ACT, 2600

PO Box 3851, Weston Creek, ACT, 2611, Phone: (02) 6288 6810, Fax: (02) 6288 7195, Email: info@population.org.au

Newsletter editor and publications officer: Stephen Williams, editor@population.org.au

SPA national office bearers

President: Sandra Kanck (08) 8336 4114, president@population.org.au

Vice-president: vacant

Correspondence secretary: David Robertson

Meetings secretary: Nola Stewart, (02) 9686 3542, meetingssecretary@population.org.au

Treasurer: Rob Taylor, treasurer@population.org.au

Webmaster: vacant

Committee: John Coulter, Jane O'Sullivan, Paddy Weaver.

Trustees of the Population Fund

Ross Kingsland, Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe, Denis Saunders

Regional branches

NSW: president: Kris Spike, Ph (02) 9680 3245, nsw@population.org.au

WA: president: Harry Cohen, Ph (08) 9386 1890, wa@population.org.au

VIC-TAS: president: Michael Bayliss, vic@population.org.au

ACT: president: Nick Ware, Ph (02) 6262 5966, act@population.org.au

QLD: president: Jane O'Sullivan, Ph (07) 3379 8090, seqld@population.org.au

SA-NT: president: Michael Lardelli, sa@population.org.au

Disclaimer

While every effort has been made 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.

Nomination Form: Elections for the SPA National Executive Committee 2016

Any financial member of SPA may stand for a position (or a number of positions), or nominate or second another member.

(Please ensure the nominee, proposer and seconder are all financial members as at the date of signature.)

Nomination of (print name of nominee)

.....

Positions nominated for: (Please tick)

President	<input type="checkbox"/>	Correspondence secretary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vice-president	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meetings secretary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Treasurer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Committee member	<input type="checkbox"/>

Nominated by: (please print clearly)

I (name).....

(Signature).....

Date

hereby nominate the above-mentioned nominee, for the position(s) indicated above.

Seconded by: (Name).....

(Signature).....

Date

I agree to be nominated:

(Name).....

(Signature)

Date

Send to the SPA Returning Officer (postal address below), to arrive by Friday, 22 January 2016.

Nominees: please provide by email to editor@population.org.au, a candidate statement for publication (no more than 200 words) to be included as an insert in the March 2016 SPA newsletter. You may also attach a recent photograph.

NOTICE OF MOTION: Motions for inclusion in the AGM should be sent to the SPA Returning Officer, Margit Alm, PO Box 513, Eltham, Vic, 3095, to arrive by 22 January, 2016.