More than 15,000 scientists warn on overpopulation, collapse

By Stephen Williams


Signed by 15,364 scientists from 184 countries, it reiterates a similar warning from 1992, except that now the warning is even stronger as the situation is much worse. Namely, we are facing ecological (and therefore economic and social) collapse unless extreme measures are taken urgently to reverse environmental harm.

Importantly, the scientists do not pull any punches on population. Relevant population quotes include:

“Humanity is now being given a second notice, as illustrated by these alarming trends (figure 1). We are jeopardizing our future by not reining in our intense but geographically and demographically uneven material consumption and by not perceiving continued rapid population growth as a primary driver behind many ecological and even societal threats. By failing to adequately limit population growth, reassess the role of an economy rooted in growth, reduce greenhouse gases, incentivize renewable energy, protect habitat, restore ecosystems, curb pollution, halt defaunation, and constrain invasive alien species, humanity is not taking the urgent steps needed to safeguard our imperilled biosphere.”

“It is also time to re-examine and change our individual behaviors, including limiting our own reproduction (ideally to replacement level at most) and drastically diminishing our per capita consumption of fossil fuels, meat, and other resources.

“Examples of diverse and effective steps humanity can take to transition to sustainability include the following … estimating a scientifically defensible, sustainable human population size for the long term while rallying nations and leaders to support that vital goal.

“Soon it will be too late to shift course away from our failing trajectory, and time is running out. We must recognize, in our day-to-day lives and in our governing institutions, that Earth with all its life is our only home.”

Could anything be more clear?

Could anything be more dire?

Yet the Australian media, given the gravity of the situation, have, at the time of writing, given the warning scant coverage.

I also see this warning as an indictment against Australia’s primary so-called environmental groups, with the notable exception of SPA and Doctors for the Environment Australia, who actually have a population policy 


I would urge all thinking people to read the full article.


*Stephen Williams is the editor of this newsletter.*
Australia's population grew by a massive 384,000 in the year to March 2017, some 217,000, or 60%, of which was due to net overseas migration.

Immigration is the dynamic factor in this population surge, reflecting a record high permanent migration program and generous settings for temporary-entry visas.

The consequences are becoming obvious and are being reflected in increased public concern about quality of life and questions concerning ethnic diversity.

The Australian Population Research Institute (TAPRI) commissioned a national survey of Australian voters in August 2017 to assess the extent of this concern and its causes.

The survey found that 74% of voters thought that Australia does not need more people, with big majorities believing that that population growth was putting 'a lot of pressure' on hospitals, roads, affordable housing and jobs.

Most voters were also worried about the consequences of growing ethnic diversity. Forty-eight per cent supported a partial ban on Muslim immigration to Australia, with only 25% in opposition.

Despite these demographic pressures and discontents, Australia's political and economic elites are disdainful of them and have ignored them. They see high immigration as part of their commitment to the globalisation of Australia's economy and society and thus it is not to be questioned.

Elites elsewhere in the developed world hold similar values, but have had to retreat because of public opposition. Across Europe 15 to 20% of voters currently support anti-immigration political parties.

Our review of elite opinion in Australia shows that here they think they can ignore public concerns. This is because their main source of information about public opinion on the issue, the Scanlon Foundation, has consistently reported that most Australians support their immigration and cultural diversity policies.

How could Australia be so different from other Western countries? It has long been argued, including by the Scanlon Foundation, that Australians were insulated from the economic shocks of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008-09.

This means that we have a lower share of angry ‘left be-
Smith shows Aussie might

By Stephen Williams

The big population news over the past three months (apart from the two previous stories) has been entrepreneur and philanthropist Dick Smith's ramping up of his involvement in the issue.

Smith entered the fray in 2010 with his documentary Dick Smith's Population Puzzle, (which aired on the ABC) and his $1 million Wilberforce award (for someone aged under 30 who becomes famous for arguing against overpopulation and growth). This was followed in 2011 by the book Dick Smith's Population Crisis.

His awareness of overpopulation as a critical issue was apparently sparked by a question from his daughter Jenny about why there was no talk of overpopulation in the lead-up to the Copenhagen climate talks in 2009. This led Smith to read the O'Connor and Lines book Overloading Australia (2009) which had a profound effect on him.

Smith continued to nibble away at the issue over the years, but made a big push in August this year when he released his 'Fair Go' campaign, including a 'manifesto'. This was accompanied by a large amount of advertising and a recruitment drive for the Fair Go group (which has some similarities to GetUp).

The Fair Go campaign is designed to highlight the negative effects of population increase, with an emphasis on its role in increasing real estate prices. It also takes aim at the ABC's seeming unwillingness to engage with overpopulation as an issue. Further, it highlights the (few) winners and (many) losers of population increase.

If that's not enough, in September Smith announced that he had joined his first-ever political party – Sustainable Australia.

(Also in September, Smith released the results of a Galaxy poll he commissioned that found 83% of Australians want political parties to have a population plan.)

Sustainable Australia is one of the very few political parties that are willing to highlight population growth as a major problem, and in my view the only party that shows that it actually understands the problem.

So Smith's recent actions are a big deal when we consider how little traction the overpopulation movement has gained in Australia in the past few decades.

It is worth considering how unusual and courageous Smith's stance has been. First, although considered a maverick on many issues (air safety, buy Australian made), he is still a member of Australia's business elite, and, as a group, they have the most to gain – at least superficially – from population increase (I say superficially because even business barons, while insulated much more than the rest of us from overpopulation, presumably don't want a dysfunctional or collapsed society).

Second, Smith would have anticipated much of the criticism that is being thrown at him – especially from economists, politicians, and the media.

Yet he has taken the stage, no doubt somewhat unwillingly, spurred on by an ethical imperative to do something for current and future generations.

I can't claim to have read or heard every criticism of Smith's position, but those I have read or heard seem not to be engaging with his core arguments, either through laziness (not having read his book or his recent Fair Go manifesto) or because they don't know how to argue without resorting to logical fallacies, such as ad hominem attacks, begging the question, straw-man arguments, non sequiturs, or raising false dualisms.

Smith's core argument is in fact decades old: namely, that it is impossible to have continued economic expansion (sometimes exponential) on a finite planet. That is the guts of the whole issue, but how many times have you heard the pro-growth lobby, or say an ABC journalist, give a convincing counter argument?

Instead, you hear statements such as: Australia is a nation of immigrants (as if that has anything to do with the effects of the current rate of population increase); or that Australia has benefitted enormously from immigration (as if that proves we can grow forever); or that immigration 'grows the economy' (as if that is a solution rather than being a problem).

Smith's opponents want us to have faith: faith that more people will make us happier; faith that they will find substitutions for finite resources; faith that they will fix climate change even with more people; faith that much more food will magically be grown while arable land disappears; and faith that new technology will decouple 'growth' from environmental harm.

The Australian Skeptics famously have a standing offer of $100,000 for anyone who can show they have paranormal powers.

Perhaps Smith should offer a similar prize to anyone who can convincingly show that humanity can decouple infinite GDP increase from net environmental harm, remembering that the latter will inevitably lead to collapse. Or show how the population of Australia can increase forever. Or show how even the current population of Australia (24.5 million, and rising by almost 400,000 per year), can live sustainably. Or show how the current rate of population increase in Australia benefits the average Australian.

Yet he has taken the stage, no doubt somewhat unwillingly, spurred on by an ethical imperative to do something for current and future generations.

I think the Smith prize and the Skeptics prize would have a lot in common.
I think Tim Flannery and I would agree on one thing: namely, that a cataclysmic disruption will befall humanity if we continue with our business as usual course. Where I disagree with Flannery is whether a message of hope provides an adequate, or even the right stimulus for the necessary change of direction; and also, what that message of hope may contain.

In this new book Flannery continues the claim from his previous publications that giving people hope is key to turning the unsustainable juggernaut of resource exploitation, in all its many guises, towards a new and very different sustainable relationship with nature. That said, he does not pull his punches when outlining the scale of the emergent disaster.

His first chapter is devoted to population. He says humans will need 69% more food by 2050 while at present agriculture produces 24% of all greenhouse gas emissions; uses 70% of all fresh water; and 37% of the most productive land surface. Nonetheless he claims that the end of global population growth is in sight. I believe his use of global projections fails to recognise the globally destabilising effects of the very rapid, continuing and inevitable population growth in many of the poorest countries in Africa, as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan. The UN projections of 2017 for the year 2100 are higher than those made in 2012 (11.18 billion compared with 10.9 billion and with a range from 9.6 to 13.2 billion) suggesting that the global fertility decline may not be as rapid as hoped. Of course populations may crash due to the combined effects of hunger, water shortages, climate change, as well as intra- and international conflicts. The importance of addressing these high fertility problems is mentioned but I believe needs a primary emphasis.

Energy availability underlies every activity. Flannery recognises that both the speed at which we transition from fossil energy and the ability to make electricity reliably available at all times are key to a sustainable future. He is concerned that putting too much emphasis on wind and solar PV and not enough on storage would mean an increase in gas as an interim source (gas being a fossil fuel with similar problems to other fossil energy sources plus other problems unique to gas exploitation).

His favoured option is concentrated solar thermal (CST) although he is careful to point out the difficulties that some solar-thermal technologies have encountered. Birds have dropped as flaming corpses flying through the concentrated heat beams near tower-type collectors. Those using cylindrical parabolic mirrors and miles of tubing have suffered from leaks and inefficiency. A technique that Flannery has a personal advisory connection with and which he favours concentrates solar energy using a very extensive array of steerable mirrors. Instead of focusing this concentrated beam on to a tower containing liquid salt, its beam is focused on to a second mirror that directs the beam into a bed of fluidised sand and raises the sand to a high temperature. This heat can then be used for generating electricity at night, on overcast days, for driving chemical reactions, or distilling and purifying polluted or salt water.

So far so good! This may well be a very useful technique for generating modest amounts of electricity at night. But Flannery then goes on to describe the enormous areas of polluted land around the world, and especially in China, and asserts that this high temperature heat from CST could be used to clean up these vast polluted areas. To this reviewer the thermodynamics don't stack up.

Solar energy is dilute in the sense that not much falls on...
a given area. That is why achieving high temperatures requires an enormous array of mirrors covering hundreds of hectares, all focusing down on to a very small area. It does not compute to suggest this concentrated heat can be redistributed across a large polluted landscape and raise temperatures to the point of vaporising and destroying pollution.

To reduce CO₂ levels in the atmosphere, as well as produce food for stock and humans, he suggests extremely large (tens of km²) trays just below the surface of the world's oceans growing kelp. This gathers sunlight for photosynthesis, is provided with deep, nutrient-rich water brought up by solar-powered pumps. These would become environments for molluscs, crustaceans and fish for human consumption, with the kelp being harvested and sent to the bottom of deep ocean trenches and so sequestering carbon.

In defence of these futuristic yet urgent options, Flannery draws an analogy with the huge technical changes that occurred across the first half of the 20th century and points out that none of them could have been forecast in 1900. If these changes could not have been forecast, why should we think that huge changes such as he suggests are not possible?

I think Flannery is wrong. The changes he points to in the 20th century were brought about by forces that are not different. As C. S. Lewis made clear in his brilliant 1943 essay 'The Abolition of Man', the exploitation of nature is really about the exploitation of some humans by other humans in which the exploitation of nature and nature's resources is the means. This has not changed. It has become even more evident.

Should we give people hope? We should not give people hope that is based on politically unrealisable, anthropocentric, technological changes that reinforce their further separation from nature, providing more power to the already powerful. Bringing human population size down more quickly does not require any new technology, but a modest shift in political will in relation to foreign-aid programs. In this reviewer's mind, that's a cheaper and quicker path to a sustainable future. That's where hope lies.

Dr John Coulter is a life member of SPA.

Dynamic Balance

By Martin Tye
Self-published, 36pp, free (PDF) or $9 (including postage)

Review by Michael Bayliss

This is a short and easy to read book by long-time SPA supporter Martin Tye. Avoiding convoluted graphs and long-winded terminology, Tye uses an engaging, conversational style full of puckish wit, pithy quotes, amusing anecdotes, and, most important, direct questions to the reader to help them engage with the issues presented and to think for themselves.

Tye describes dynamic balance as: “the state where human activity operates to maximise quality of life for all, in balance with nature’s capacity to safely provide our inputs and recycle our waste, without being degraded”. In essence, this is pretty similar to the aims of many alternative economy ideas. However, compared to (say) zero growth or post growth, dynamic balance is a concept that better captures the imagination. It sounds more lively, optimistic and less stagnant and abstract than many similar concepts.

Tye does a fantastic job of spelling out the shortcomings of our current growth-obsessed economy. One of my favourite phrases from this section reads: “Of all the amazing array of human traits, we chose greed and materialism on which to found our future … oh dear!” Tye is skilful in making heavy concepts palatable to some time new to these ideas. He doesn't stop here though, as he writes: “It's no good being a critic if you can't propose an alternative. That's where Dynamic Balance comes in.”

Tye gives a few examples of what his alternative world would look like,
Reboot: a democracy makeover to empower Australia’s voters

By Richard Walsh
MUP, 120pp, $24.99

Review by Stephen Williams

I would like this slim volume to become a bestseller, despite its flaws, as the basic premise is profound: our Westminster political system is past its use-by date. Since we are heading towards becoming a republic, albeit slowly, Walsh says it would be best to overhaul the whole rotten political system rather than tinker at the edges. I wholeheartedly agree.

What’s that got to do with overpopulation? Well, under Walsh’s proposed system we will get experts running parliamentary debates rather than politicians in the service of vested interests.

In summary, Walsh suggests we have a popularly elected president with very limited powers (mainly a figurehead like the current GG) who works with a 12-person council to advise on appointments, such as the ABC board and so on.

We get rid of the senate entirely, leaving just a house of reps. There will be a prime minister and cabinet ministers, but the ministers will be experts in their subject areas, much like department secretaries today. (So the secretaries in effect become ministers, and today’s ministers disappear.) Importantly, only experts will engage in parliamentary debates and the elected MPs will sit back and listen, then ask questions, then vote on legislation. Also importantly, the MPs will not have one vote each, but as many votes as the number of people who elected them.

I do not have space to outline every piece of Walsh’s plan, but you get the drift. The idea is to increase democracy and decrease the power of vested interests and, indeed, political parties. In Walsh’s scheme elections would become a lot cheaper so people with deep pockets would lose political power on a massive scale.

Walsh’s plan would almost certainly contain some dubious ideas if put under the microscope, but the more important point is that it is a spark that could ignite the search for a better system along the general lines he suggests: neither American nor European but with hybrid vigour and some fresh meat.

With Walsh’s new broom there would be a much greater chance to sweep away the nefarious growth lobby that stifles debate on population and growth.

I suspect most Australians wrongly assume that our voting system is pretty good. Walsh’s book is a primer on better alternatives.

But given the difficulty in achieving even the modest change of a republic, I suppose we shouldn’t hold our breath while waiting for something like Walsh’s noble vision.

Even so, environmental groups like SPA and other progressives could do a lot worse than lobby for a more meaningful democracy that would more likely usher in changes towards sustainability.

From Page 5

but it is more of a call to action to achieve a series of goals. There is less focus on the prescriptive elements to achieve these goals, which may come across as a little lacking to those who are well read on the subject.

In sum, I highly recommend the book, particularly for those who are sceptical about our current political-economic paradigm but don’t know where to start reading.

To order Dynamic Balance (or make a donation to its cause), email DBisDynamicBalance@mail.com. Martin Tye is kindly offering the book free to SPA members, for the purpose of distributing it to friends and family who are new to post-growth ideas.

Michael Bayliss is the president of SPA’s Vic-Tas branch.
Drawdown: the most comprehensive plan ever proposed to reverse global warming

Edited by Paul Hawken
Penguin Books, 240pp, $35

Review by Jenny Goldie

Why review a book about global warming in a newsletter devoted to population issues? If for no other reason, there is a whole section on women and girls, but more of that later.

This *New York Times* bestseller is splendid in many respects. Based on a huge body of scientific evidence, it is written in “language that is understandable to all people from all points of view”. The colour photographs and illustrations that grace every second page are a joy.

*Drawdown* describes 80 existing measures by which carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases could either be avoided or removed from the atmosphere, and enumerates the quantity of avoided or removed emissions that would result between 2020 and 2050. It then ranks the various measures and estimates costs or savings for each one. They are divided into seven categories: energy, food, women and girls, building and cities, land use, transport and materials.

Take, for instance, concentrated solar thermal power (CSP), as recently approved for Port Augusta in South Australia. A CSP plant’s curved mirrors concentrate the sun’s rays to heat a fluid and produce steam which turns turbines to produce electricity. It has the added benefit of storage, usually with molten salt. Currently, CSP only provides .04% of the world’s electricity, but this could rise to 4.3% by 2050, avoiding 10.9 gigatons of carbon dioxide emissions. Mirrors are expensive, however, so implementation costs are high at $1.3 trillion, but net savings could be $414 billion by 2050. CSP is ranked 25 of the 80 in terms of most effective means of reducing emissions.

As well as existing practices and technologies, *Drawdown* describes another 20 or so potential technologies such as the artificial leaf, smart highways and intensive silvopasture. There is an endearing final essay, “reciprocity”, about species working cooperatively, rather than competitively.

So where do women and girls fit into the scheme? Ranking 62 out of 80, providing women small landholders in low-income countries with the same access to finance and resources as men would lift the productivity of their land. Reduced emissions are largely based on avoided deforestation. If women could lift the yield of their plots by 26%, then there would be an estimated 2.06 fewer gigatons of carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. Educating girls, however, has a far more dramatic bearing on global warming. Educated women have fewer children. By curbing population growth, emissions are mitigated. A 2010 study found educating girls was “highly cost-competitive with almost all of the existing options for carbon emissions abatement”. Another study in 2013 found educating girls was the single-most important social and economic factor associated with a vulnerability to natural disasters, of which we can expect many more with climate change. Today, 62 million girls are denied the right to attend school, particularly secondary school. With $39 billion to close the financing gap and achieve universal education in low- and lower-middle-income countries, 59.6 gigatons of emissions could be reduced by 2050.

*Drawdown* gives equal weight to family planning as it does to educating girls, though SPA’s Queensland branch president, Jane O’Sullivan, argues convincingly it is family planning that is the more significant means of curbing population growth. Nevertheless, the book is strong on the issue, citing the I=PAT (Impact = Population x Affluence x Technology) equation developed by Holdren and Ehrlich. For too long, it says, P has been overlooked by those addressing global warming – indeed, the topic is taboo in many countries and institutions. Finally, however, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its 2014 synthesis report, pointed to population growth as an important factor in greenhouse gas concentrations. *Drawdown* estimates that by doubling funds for family planning services in low-income countries, there would be a billion fewer people in the world by 2050 than if current funding levels were maintained. Another 59.6 gigatons saved.

In the rankings for emissions reduction, educating girls and family planning are equal sixth, after refrigeration, onshore wind turbines, reduced food waste, a plant-rich diet, and tropical forests. But why divide them? Why not add educating girls and family planning – call it population stabilisation/reduction – and declare it the outright winner by a mile?

This is an unfortunate shortcoming in an otherwise magnificent book.

Jenny Goldie is a life member of SPA.
Dr Olive Johnston, a foundation member of Zero Population Growth (ZPG) in South Australia in 1971 and a member of SPA since its formation in 1988, has donated a generous bequest to SPA.

Olive, who was born in Bournemouth, England, on 26 February, 1923, to parents of modest means, showed intelligence, dedication and a caring attitude throughout her long life. She graduated in 1946 in medicine from Kings College and the London School of Medicine for Women, the only London medical school which accepted women at the time. In 1948 she moved to South Africa, where she worked in TB hospitals and family planning clinics. With husband and children the family later moved to Adelaide, where Olive devoted herself to a career in maternal and child health. As senior medical officer at the Mothers and Babies Health Association in the 1970s, she became involved in parent and sex education. Her husband, Peter, died in 1997.

Olive's work led to the establishment of family planning services in Australia. She campaigned for abortion law reform, and had involvement with the Medical Women's Association, the Medical Association for the Prevention of War, ZPG and SPA, Amnesty International, and Soroptimist International.

Her involvement with ZPG got her into trouble with the Mothers and Babies Health Association, when she parked her car outside the headquarters building with a large ZPG sticker 'Control Your Local Stork'!

In 2008 Olive was awarded an OAM for service to medicine, particularly in the area of maternal and child health. Olive died on 13 September, 2016.

By John Coulter

Ralph Bennett, 1952 - 2017

By Kristofer Spike

Long-term SPA member Ralph Bennett died from a heart attack on 30 August, aged 65.

Ralph served as the SPA NSW branch treasurer for a number of years, worked as a geologist and, more recently, an audiologist.

Ralph became concerned about the effects of population growth when he was just a boy when he noticed an area of bushland that he used to play in being cleared by a bulldozer.

When he pleaded with the driver to stop, he was told that the population was growing and people needed to live somewhere.

It set Ralph on a life-long course of trying to get people to see the connection between population growth and the destruction of nature.

Ralph was also well versed in the economic arguments against continuous population growth and lamented the fact that most of our leaders were mindlessly convinced of the need to bring ever-increasing numbers of migrants into the country to grow GDP.

He joined the political party Australians Against Further Immigration but never felt comfortable with the xenophobic undertones associated with that group.

More recently he became an enthusiastic supporter of the political party Sustainable Australia and was keen to promote it as best he could.

Another political cause he supported was the quest to make Australia a republic.
As a member of SPA, Ralph will be remembered for his smile, sincerity and commitment to fighting for a country where the rights of nature would be valued as highly as the rights of people.

He felt great disappointment at seeing some of his fellow environmentalists shy away from discussions about the impact of rapid population growth; indeed, he held a degree of scorn for the Labor-Left-Greens political agenda of favouring high immigration, which he saw as being a betrayal of their origins.

Kristofer Spike is a former president of SPA’s NSW branch.

**Jenny Goldie adds**: Ralph Bennett of Queenscliff, Sydney, was an active member of the NSW branch of SPA almost from its inception. How we miss Ralph! You could always depend on him to turn up, to donate money when needed, to write a letter to the paper (most often the *Manly Daily*), to contribute to *PopForum* in a meaningful way, and to smile. His contribution to the population movement in Australia was significant. Would that we had 1,000 members like him – we would change the world!

**New South Wales**

The branch attempted to fit in a meeting with two speakers before the end of the year, but was unable to line up the speakers and venue for the one date, so that's to be tried again early next year. We have had some success with group emails sent out to NSW members, inviting their opinions on various things. The latest was to send the link to the YouTube video *Small Planet, Smaller Families*, produced by Population Matters (UK), and then ask for their opinions on how to get the message out. We had several constructive responses.

*Nola Stewart, NSW branch rep*

**Australian Capital Territory**

On 1 October the branch again had a stall at the Living Green Festival. This event continues to attract a good crowd and about 6,000 people attended this year. We sold the book *Overloading Australia* (2009) by Mark O'Connor and William Lines, and gave away copies of suitable articles. The statistics in a recent paper on climate change mitigation in *Environmental Research Letters* seemed to give food for thought: ‘The climate mitigation gap: education and government recommendations miss the most effective individual actions’. *Environmental Research Letters* v12 (7), 2017


This paper argues that population control is by far the most effective way to mitigate climate change. For instance, the effect of changing light bulbs is 0.1, living car-free is 2.4, while having one fewer child is 58.6 (in tonnes CO₂(e)/year/person).

*Nick Ware, branch president*

**Victoria-Tasmania**

The branch committee met on 4 November to work on many upcoming events. Our branch AGM was held on 25 November, with a seminar titled ‘Population Perspectives from Local to Global’. We had two excellent speakers. First, Jack Roach, from the Boroondara Rights Action Group, has been instrumental in creating and promoting a bill of rights, which aims to empower local residents to lobby local and state politicians on town planning and population concerns. Second, Adrian Whitehead is an environmental and post-growth activist who spoke about population sustainability as integral to the climate emergency.

Branch members Katharine Betts and Bob Birrell both spearheaded a survey and subsequent report titled ‘Australian voters’ views on immigration policy’ (see page 2 of this newsletter). One of many key findings of the survey was that 74% of voters said that Australia does not need more people. Overall, the results provide us with valuable insights in framing questions and targeting audiences. Many thanks to Dr Betts and Dr Birrell for their invaluable work.

Earlier this year I interviewed two indigenous advocates on their views on population issues. Both have affiliations with SPA and/or the political party Sustainable Australia. The interview was finally published in November on the website Candobetter. Given the literature on indigenous perspectives on population in Australia is scarce, this is one initial step in providing community outreach on the issue.

The branch has applied to run a stall again for the Sustainable Living Festival, in February 2018. We note that one of the key speakers, Paul Hawken, refers to fertility as an important component in addressing carbon emissions. Many of our past volunteers have once again put up their hand to help at the stall: thank you for your support.

*Michael Bayliss, branch president*
Western Australia

Given the difficulty the branch committee has had recently with illness laying low several members, the branch AGM held on 12 November at the Palms Community Centre in Subiaco was judged ‘highly successful’ by the 27 members attending. National vice-president Sandra Kanck travelled from South Australia to lead an inspirational talk focused on what SPA had achieved over the past 29 years, and the role that state branches could play in the future. Discussion after Sandra’s talk could easily have extended as questions came thick and fast.

At the AGM it was announced that Harry Cohen (president), Paddy Weaver (vice-president), John Weaver (treasurer) and Andre Day (committee) were retiring and not offering themselves for re-election. Warwick Boardman nominated for the position of treasurer and was duly elected, unopposed. Our current secretary, Noni Atkinson, was also re-elected to her position. As no other members nominated for the president or VP positions, it was decided to elect the committee members and allow the incoming members to resolve these positions among themselves. Former committee members Judith Odgaard, Greg Brennan and Robin Collin were duly re-elected to the committee and they were joined by John Massam, who had served on past committees.

Appreciation for the substantial work and long contribution of both Harry and Paddy to the WA branch and the national executive was expressed by all at the meeting. Both Harry and Paddy have led the WA branch since its inception but felt it was time to step aside. Andre has made a substantial contribution as a committee member over the past few years but has now retired to the country. As for myself, I felt it was time to hand the financial reins to others.

John Weaver, outgoing treasurer

South Australia-Northern Territory

The 27 September meeting of the branch featured a review by member John Hunwick of the book Too Late: how we lost the battle with climate change, by Geoffrey Maslen. A sobering account of too little action too late, scientist and journalist Maslen examines the critical state our planet is in, and how successive governments are responsible in their refusal to stand up to global corporates and vested interests.

On 3 October members of the committee had one of their twice-yearly chats with state Environment Minister Ian Hunter, who dismissed our suggestion for an enquiry into an optimal population size for the state. We also tabled a suggestion we had made earlier this year for the establishment of a research centre on sustainability, a proposal that had not been acknowledged. The minister gave us a copy of the Vox article he had liked by journalist David Roberts – a paper showing limited understanding and poor judgment in our view, and to which we later responded in writing.

The 25 October meeting included the showing of some short videos on population taken from the internet. The initial idea was to show and discuss the grab from the state premier in which he appeared to equivocate over endless growth (yes, it’s true, amazing as it sounds) at the end of a TV current affairs clip featuring SPA’s Sandra Kanck (https://www.todaytonightadelaide.com.au/stories/population-crash). On the night we couldn’t get it to play, although it still appears to be available. Other clips watched included two by Dick Smith – population warrior extraordinaire. The Hans Rosling YouTube clips using the Gapminder visual dynamics are also impressive.

For the 29 November meeting (not yet held at time of writing) we have asked local Greens leader Mark Parnell to address us on why the Greens continue to fail to act on their own population policy, and to suggest to us how we might penetrate their mental defences on this issue. It was clear from a discussion earlier this year in Adelaide with Richard di Natale that he felt the issue was politically toxic and he dared not go near it. We live in hope that eventually the Greens (and the ACF for that matter) will eventually summon up the wisdom and courage to once again publicly question the goal of endless population and economic growth.

Peter Martin, branch president

Queensland

The branch held its AGM on 16 October. The committee of Jane O’Sullivan (president), Tony Matta (treasurer) and Anne Tennock (secretary and membership officer) were re-elected. A good turn-out of members and supporters came to hear Cameron Murray speak on the subject of his recently published book, Game of Mates: how favours bleed the nation. The book has made a terrific contribution to exposing the ‘soft corruption’ ripe in Australian politics, especially by the property industry, which we know has so much hold over Australia’s population policy. Dr Murray is standing as a candidate in the Queensland government election, for the seat of South Brisbane, supported by the political party Sustainable Australia.

I’ve just returned from the International Population Conference in Cape Town, South Africa. This is the main gathering of the world’s demographers and related researchers in health and social sciences, and occurs only every four years. I’m very grateful to SPA donors for providing funding to support my trip. I presented three papers: on the cost of infrastructure for population growth and its impact on development; on the impact of avoidable population growth on climate change scenarios; and on the fact that...
Letters to the editor

Dear Editor
I refer to the November #2 eNews article that says high-rise living is worse for the environment than urban sprawl. That research comes as no surprise to me.

Forty-five years ago I did research at Melbourne University for a Master of Commerce thesis, into Melbourne’s CBD, and examined a range of economic and environmental effects of high-density living in the CBD and inner suburbs, with special attention to high-rise buildings and traffic congestion. Other effects, such as loss of open space and historic buildings, were also considered.

A range of evidence from overseas and Melbourne all pointed in the same direction: namely, that building costs per unit of floor area increase with height, and increase quite markedly, because of the need to counter the effects of gravity (stairs, elevators, plumbing, etc.). In addition, there was a range of potential social costs, such as atmospheric pollution, ugliness, loss of sunlight, and danger of building or scaffolding collapse, fire, and earthquakes. There have been some well-publicised examples of these dangers in Melbourne in recent years, and of course also earthquakes in overseas cities.

Justification for higher building costs lies in the increased land values and rentals associated with height and a concentrated location. These are a natural market response to population growth, but they represent a net loss to the economy. They also represent a redistribution of wealth in favour of landowners, with obvious political implications.

Social costs, on the other hand, fall outside the market system and should therefore be addressed by appropriate town planning (e.g., height limits). But again, this is frustrated by political conflicts of interest.

Robert Braby, Eltham, Victoria
Communications manager

Big news! I am delighted to announce the appointment of Michael Bayliss into the newly-created paid role of communications manager for SPA. Many of you already know Michael through his volunteer work on the national executive and as president of the Vic-Tas branch of SPA. I would like to thank the very generous members of SPA for their donations, which have allowed us to fund this position. I'd also like to thank our national treasurer, Rob Taylor, for overseeing the recruitment process. I am really excited to see Michael step into this new role and am hopeful of what might be achieved as he dedicates several days per week to the task of getting SPA's message heard in the media and public. Watch this space!

Correspondence

Thanks to all who write to me. In my last newsletter column I mentioned that I intended to write back to several of you and – to my shame – I have not yet responded to all letters I have received. For this I must apologise. Rest assured, I read every letter I see, and I reply to as many as I possibly can.

Executive activities

National vice-president Sandra Kanck travelled to Perth to attend and speak at the WA branch AGM in November. The meeting was well-attended with 27 people (not bad for a state branch AGM). This satisfies the constitutional requirements for the branch continuation, which is a great relief, although at present the branch is without a president or vice-president. In October, Jane O’Sullivan travelled to Cape Town, South Africa, to attend the International Population Conference, where she presented several papers including one titled ‘Role of Family Planning in Climate Change Response’. Jane's research shows that – contrary to widespread belief – it is the investment in family planning that drives fertility down, and this pays a dividend in terms of education and economic development. This makes intuitive sense, and is an important counter-argument against the dominant view that trade and development (without family planning) will automatically lead to reduced fertility. The Media & Marketing group are continuing to work on the main project for this year, which is the new website (PopCulture), while developing several short videos to help publicise the downsides of population growth with an Australian focus. This project has moved slower than we had hoped, but with any luck our new communications manager will boost our productivity in this space. I continue to have sporadic contact with ACF boss Kelly O'Shanassy, and remain hopeful that we can continue to seek common ground between our respective organisations.

James Ward, national president