



NEWSLETTER

Sustainable Population Australia Inc

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Patrons
Professor Ian Lowe
Dr Mary White

Hon. Bob Carr
Professor Tim Flannery
Dr Paul Collins

'Break the taboo', says Attenborough



Photo courtesy of Population Matters

This is an edited speech delivered by broadcaster and naturalist Sir David Attenborough to the Royal Society of Arts in London on 10 March 2011.

We now realise that the disasters that continue increasingly to afflict the natural world have one element that connects them all - the unprecedented increase in the number of human beings on the planet.

There have been prophets who have warned us of this impending disaster, of course. One of the first was Thomas Malthus. His most important book, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* was published over two hundred years ago in 1798. In it, he argued that the human population would increase inexorably until it was halted by what he termed 'misery and vice'. Today, for some reason, that prophecy seems to be largely ignored, or at any rate, disregarded. It is true that he did not foresee the so-called Green Revolution which greatly increased the amount of food that could be produced in any given area of arable land. But that great advance only delayed things. And there may be other advances in our food producing skills that we ourselves still cannot foresee. But the fundamental truth that Malthus proclaimed remains the truth. There cannot be more people on this earth than can be fed.

The population of the world is now growing by nearly

80 million a year. One and a half million a week. A quarter of a million a day. Ten thousand an hour.

All these people, in this country and worldwide, rich or poor, need and deserve food, water, energy and space. Will they be able to get it? I don't know. I hope so. But the Government's Chief Scientist and the last President of the Royal Society have both referred to the approaching 'perfect storm' of population growth, climate change and peak oil production, leading inexorably to more and more insecurity in the supply of food, water and energy.

Consider food. Very few of us here, I suspect have ever experienced real hunger. All of us who have travelled in poor countries have met people for whom hunger is a daily background ache in their lives. There are about a billion such people today – that is four times as many as the entire human population of this planet a mere two thousand years ago at the time of Christ.

Climate change tops the environmental agenda at present. We all know that every additional person will need to use some carbon energy, if only firewood for cooking and will therefore create more carbon dioxide, though of course a rich person will produce vastly more than a poor one. Yet not a word of it appeared in the voluminous documents emerging from the Copenhagen and Cancun Climate Summits.

Why this strange silence? I meet no one who privately disagrees that population growth is a problem. No one – except flat-earthers – can deny that the planet is finite. We can all see it in that beautiful picture of our earth taken from the Apollo mission. So why does hardly anyone say so publicly? There seems to be some bizarre taboo around the subject. "It's not quite nice, not PC, possibly even racist to mention it." And this taboo doesn't just inhibit politicians and civil servants who attend the big conferences. It even affects the people who claim to care most passionately about a sustainable and prosperous future for our children: the environmental and developmental non-government organisations. Yet their silence implies that their

Speech

admirable goals can be achieved regardless of how many people there are in the world or the UK, even though they all know that they can't.

I simply don't understand it. It is all getting too serious for such fastidious niceties. It remains an obvious and brutal fact that on a finite planet human population will quite definitely stop at some point. And that can only happen in one of two ways. It can happen sooner, by fewer human births - in a word by contraception. This is the humane way, the powerful option which allows all of us to deal with the problem, if we collectively choose to do so. The alternative is an increased death rate - the way which all other creatures must suffer, through famine or disease or predation.

The sooner we stabilise our numbers, the sooner we stop running up the 'down' escalator. Stop population increase - stop the escalator - and we have some chance of reaching the top. That is to say, a decent life for all.

To do that requires several things. First and foremost it needs a much wider understanding of the problem, and that will not happen while the absurd taboo on discussing it retains such a powerful grip on the minds of so many worthy and intelligent people. Then it needs a change in our culture so that while everyone retains the right to have as many children as they like, they understand that having large families means compounding the problems their children and everyone else's children will face in the future.

It needs action by Governments. In my view all countries should develop a population policy and give it priority. The essential common factor is to make family planning and other reproductive health services freely available to everyone and empower and encourage them to use it, though of course without any kind of coercion.

According to the Global Footprint Network, there are already over a hundred countries whose combination of numbers and affluence have already pushed them past the sustainable level. They include almost all developed countries. The UK is one of the worst. There the aim should be to reduce over time both the consumption of natural resources per person and the number of people while, needless to say, using the best technology to help maintain living standards. It is tragic that the only current population policies in developed countries are, perversely, attempting to increase their birth-rate in order to look after the growing number of old people. The notion of ever more old people needing ever more young people, who will in turn grow old and need ever more young people and so on ad infinitum, is an obvious ecological Ponzi scheme.

I am not an economist, nor a sociologist nor a

politician, and it is their disciplines that should provide the solutions. I am a naturalist. But being one means that I do know something of the factors that keep populations of different species of animals within bounds. I have seen how increasing populations of elephants can devastate their environment until, one year when the rains fail on the already over-grazed land, they die in hundreds.

But we are human beings. We have ways of escaping such brutalities. We have medicines that prevent our children from dying of disease. We have developed ways of growing increasing amounts of food. That has been a huge and continuing advance that started several thousand years ago, a consequence of our intelligence, our increasing skills and our ability to look ahead. But none of these great achievements will be of any avail if we do not control our numbers.

And we can do so. Wherever women have the vote, wherever they are literate, and have the medical facilities to control the number of children they bear, the birth rate falls. All those civilised conditions exist in the southern Indian state of Kerala. The total fertility rate there in 2007 was 1.7 births per woman. In India as a whole it is 2.8 per woman. In Thailand in 2010, it was 1.8 per woman, similar to that in Kerala. But compare that with the Catholic Philippines where it is 3.3.

But what can each of us do - you and I? Well, there is just one thing that I would ask. Break the taboo, in private and in public - as best you can, as you judge right. Until it is broken there is no hope of the action we need. Wherever and whenever we speak of the environment, add a few words to ensure that the population element is not ignored.

Make a list of all the environmental and social problems that today afflict us and our poor battered planet, not just the extinction of species and animals and plants, that fifty years ago was the first signs of impending global disaster, but traffic congestion, oil prices, pressure on the health service, the growth of mega-cities, migration patterns, immigration policies, unemployment, the loss of arable land, desertification, famine, increasingly violent weather, the acidification of the oceans, the collapse of fish stocks, rising sea temperatures, the loss of rain forest. The list goes on and on. But they all share an underlying cause.

Every one of these global problems - environmental as well as social - becomes more difficult, and ultimately impossible, to solve with ever more people.

See the whole speech on <http://www.thersa.org/events/vision/vision-videos/sir-david-attenborough>

A bigger Australia teeters on the edge

by *Barney Foran*

This is an edited excerpt from 'People and Place' (vol 18, no.4, 2010) which describes the content and fortune of two science-based explorations of Australia's population options: the 2002 CSIRO report Future Dilemmas and the 2010 report Research into the Long-term Physical Implications of Net Overseas Migration, (referred to here as 'Physical Implications') undertaken by Flinders University and CSIRO. Both were commissioned by the Immigration Departments of their time - DIMIA and DIAC respectively. In each case, the very Department that had commissioned the report sought to distance itself from it.

Introduction

Globally, there is little doubt that humankind is placing increasing pressures on core biophysical functions of the earth through the continued expansion of human population, and the goods and services required to supply its needs and wants. Globally scaled science is rapidly developing the capability to both integrate and analyse the global implications of the whole, composed logically of the sum of many parts. This has led to the concept of a 'safe operating space' for humanity defined by eleven 'planetary boundaries'. Each boundary defines an earth function where humanity's total pressure has moved well beyond local and regional impacts, and thus threatens the globe's capacity to maintain its biophysical integrity. Two areas, biodiversity loss and the nitrogen cycle, are already well beyond the globe's safe operating space while climate change is rapidly approaching its boundary.

Cities: Disasters are few but constraints abound *Sydney*

The loss of food production from the Sydney Basin repeats a story of cities worldwide since humans began aggregating into larger units. The food security of many global cities is now a serious policy issue should the extended supply chains and the aviation fuel and diesel that underpin them become broken. However, personal quality of life issues around increasing congestion, urban amenity, polluted waterways and declining biodiversity assets seem to loom large now and will worsen with rapid population growth. The transport expert responsible for Perth's integrated transport network defines the resilient city as one that is reducing its ecological footprint while increasing its citizen's quality of life. Sydney's resilience is declining on both counts. Its ecological footprint of seven to eight hectares per capita is more than three times the limit set by the planetary boundary concept.

Melbourne

Melbourne's geography and history confer some advantages compared to its arch rival Sydney but water supply becomes a critical issue for high population growth rates around 2030 if drying trends see a 20 per cent reduction in rainfall and a 50 per cent reduction in surface runoff. Even in the 2010–11 La-Nina high rainfall event, Melbourne's biggest storage the Thompson Dam was only 37 per cent full and its overall system 54 per cent full.

Melbourne's proximity to the nation's food bowl located in nearby regional Victoria confers a reasonable assurance of immediate food security for day-to-day supplies of fresh milk and vegetables, but recent drought years severely affected fresh commodities and so most cities will rely on other cities' hinterlands hoping that that rains are good somewhere in Australia and that delivery systems remain timely and fluent. Melbourne faces most of Sydney's problems but at less severe levels. Its biodiversity assets will be whittled away by urban development and political compromise, most of its urban watershed has polluted streams with poor biological health, and its transport system is over-reached and collapses during heat waves.

Perth

Perth's main problem is water supply now and even more so with the extra 1.6 million people promised by a bigger Australia. By late 2011, 30 per cent of Perth's water requirements or 100 gigalitres will be from the climate independent sources of two desalination plants. Conceptually, desalination projects could roll out regularly and maintain the supply ahead of population growth, particularly if each plant is fully powered by wind power or other renewable electricity sources. The current drought in the Perth region sees storage capacity currently at 29 per cent and easily available water at 11 per cent of capacity. For Perth, it appears that the future



Barney Foran

Paper

is now.

Perth has invested strategically in an integrated transport system that could require new rolling stock for major capacity increases rather than the expensive augmentation works required for Sydney and Melbourne. Similar to other stress zones in a bigger Australia, Perth's expansion will impact on the remaining biodiversity and wetland assets. The additional knock-on effects of water pollution are helped by the sandy soils of the region which easily transmit nutrients from septic systems and farming to produce eutrophication and algal blooms in the waterways that represent an important quality of life asset for Perth's citizens.

The need for policy coherence?

The planetary boundary concept proposed a brace of absolute physical limits within which the globe, a nation and a region and a city should develop, and embrace its future opportunities. By any account Australia and the three cities in focus in the *Physical Implications* report, are currently operating well outside their boundaries. Water extraction, biodiversity loss and greenhouse emissions are three of the eleven planetary boundaries. Moreover, they will accelerate further past their planetary boundaries if the bigger Australia analysed in the 2010 *Physical Implications* report happens with the lack of forethought and attitudes typical of Australian public policy and private capital over the last two to three decades.

It is not that Australians cannot envisage the low-impact development and lifestyle required to live within our environmental means; it's just that they choose not to. There is always an immediate crisis, a flood, a fire, a drought, a cyclone that steers public policy away from the fundamental reforms that refurbish our rivers, remake our soil, augment our biodiversity and set us on the low carbon transition path.

Dealing with population growth and economic growth issues as they tug and push at critical planetary boundaries will require designs so that each extra Australian lives within a safe operating space. Cascades of unintended consequences that require patch-up and catch-up work should not occur. Both the *Physical Implications* and *Future Dilemmas* studies have extracted robust lessons from Australia's future to 2050 and beyond. In both cases the Immigration Department has sought to demean the science behind the findings and to limit public access to the implications of current policies for subsequent generations. It is true that a bigger Australia could provide the rationale and finance to design and implement an urban form better than anything done to date. Unfortunately, recent history suggests that public policy making and implementation is concerned mostly with bigger rather than better.

Letter

A consequence of population growth exceeding Nature's capacity to cope with human demands is increasing incursions into more dangerous technologies to fulfil our 'needs/wants'. Drilling for oil in the deep sea and use of nuclear reactors for electricity are two recent examples. The costs are financial as well as environmental.

It is often claimed that nuclear-generated electricity is cheap but decades ago the US Congress legislated to absolve the nuclear industry from its insurance liabilities, passing the Price Anderson Act. This Act was extended in 2005 up to 2025. One can only speculate what insurance premiums would be if insurance had to reimburse the total cost of the Fukushima disaster and provide cover for these sorts of happenings across the nuclear industry.

Joe Romm, writing in *Climate Progress*, said: "Nuclear fails the key tests not because Japan shows nuclear power is inherently unsafe. Nuclear fails the test because it is wildly expensive, and Japan makes clear there is a good reason for that."

But on the issue of safety there have been some remarkable statements by pro-nuclear spokespeople. Only a short time before Chernobyl blew its top, the Deputy Director General of Nuclear Safety with the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mr B.A. Semenov, described the Chernobyl type reactor in the Bulletin of the IAEA: "The design feature of having more than a thousand individual primary circuits increases the safety of the reactor system – a serious loss of coolant accident is practically impossible".

This is the body the world relies on to guarantee nuclear safety.

And the Sydney Morning Herald on 8 April 2010 reported Ziggy Switkowski as saying, "If you are ever in a stressed situation, an earthquake, typhoon or cyclone, run to the nuclear power station."

Tell that to the Japanese of Fukushima.

John Coulter, Scott Creek, SA

A Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia

In SPA's submission to the Government's population issues paper, SPA President Sandra Kanck has urged that Australia stop growing its population as soon as possible, saying that there was 'abundant evidence' that the 22.5 million now living in Australia were not doing so sustainably.

To view SPA's submission, go to <http://www.population.org.au/burkeinquiry-spasubmission.pdf>

Population growth in retrospect and prospect

Professor Roger V. Short, University of Melbourne

This was the introductory paper from a special edition of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* on 'The Impact of Population on Tomorrow's World'. 10.1098/rstb.2009.0144 *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* 27 October 2009 vol. 364 no. 1532 2971-2974.

The papers that follow in this issue provide us with an intellectual feast, even though they will leave a bitter taste in the mouth afterwards. World experts, in a wide range of disciplines, explore the ways in which the inexorable increase in human numbers is exhausting conventional energy supplies, accelerating environmental pollution and Global Warming, and providing an increasing number of Failed States where civil unrest prevails. Few can be left in any doubt that calling a halt to future population growth in both developed and developing countries is the greatest challenge now facing our world.

It is therefore surprising that when the United Nations announced its eight Millennium Development Goals in 2000, halting population growth was not one of them; it has since been added as an afterthought. Perhaps this is a lesson we must learn for the future; International Organizations, Governments and Religious Leaders will be the last to appreciate the gravity of the current situation, and the last to implement effective measures to halt further population growth.

As Global Warming makes its presence increasingly felt all around the world, more and more people are beginning to accept it as a reality. Al Gore chose his words wisely when he called it 'An inconvenient truth'. But there remains a major credibility gap; people have yet to draw the obvious conclusion that since Global Warming is the result of human activities, too many people will only exacerbate the problem. Thus, the developed world must curb its profligate use of non-renewable energy and the developing world its exponential population growth, if we are to arrest Global Warming in the years to come.

When the Book of Genesis was written 3000 years ago, there would only have been a few million people on earth. Hence it made sense to enjoin mankind to: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1, 28) In the intervening centuries, we have done just that. The world's population is now 6.8 billion, and we have achieved dominion over every living thing. Paul

Crutzen, the Nobel Laureate, has recently proposed that in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the world could be said to have entered a new geological epoch which we should call the Anthropocene, since that was when human activities, spurred on by the Industrial Revolution, began to dominate all the ecosystems on earth.

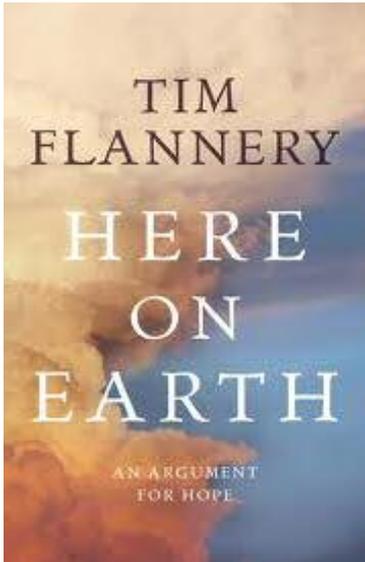
This also coincided with another major change—the development of a Global Economy. In 1776, the pioneer Scottish economist, Adam Smith, issued a prophetic warning in his book *The Wealth of Nations*: The desire for food is limited in every man by the narrow capacity of the human stomach; but the desire for the conveniences and ornaments of building, dress, equipage and household furniture, seem to have no limit or certain boundary. Adam Smith had foreseen the fatal flaw in the Economy—it is a human artefact that gives unlimited power to our Selfish Genes, with no negative feedback controls. The global economic recession which began in 2008 was driven by that very greed that Smith identified as having 'no limit or certain boundary'. When empowered by such an Economy, this greed will ultimately run counter to the inherent ecological constraints of the planet. This may prove to be our Achilles Heel. Unless we can ensure that the Economy is kept subservient to our Ecology, we will self-destruct.

Achieving such ecological dominance will be an uphill struggle, since many of the developed world's leading economists are population neutralists. For example, Nicholas Stern in *The Economics of Climate Change* (2007) makes no mention whatsoever of population in all its 692 pages, and Ross Garnaut in a similar weighty tome, *The Garnaut Climate Change Review* (2008), commits the same sin of omission. It takes an enlightened economist with a real concern for the developing world, like Jeffrey Sachs, to address the issue head-on in his *Common Wealth—Economics for a Crowded Planet* (2008). He wisely concludes that in the future the challenges of sustainable development – protecting the environment, stabilizing the world's population, narrowing the gaps between rich and poor, and ending extreme poverty – will take centre stage. Sachs specifically advocates that we should attempt to stabilize the world's population at eight billion or below by 2050. Halting population growth makes sound ecological common sense.

<http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/364/1532/2971.full?sid=983fecb6-cefc-4a24-8e51-72900750864b>

Correction: Jane Addison, author of an Opinion article in the February newsletter, lives not in SA but in Alice Springs and is enrolled at the UQ, not Flinders. *Apologies!*

Book Reviews



Here on Earth – an argument for hope

by *Tim Flannery*

Text Publishing,
Melbourne 2010

316 pages

Reviewed by *Jenny Goldie*

If you read Clive Hamilton's *Requiem for a species* and despaired, you probably needed an antidote. *Here on Earth* is as good as you'll get in that respect. As the sub-title suggests, it is an argument for hope in this 'world of wounds' in which much of the ecological damage has been wrought by humans themselves.

Tim Flannery is a SPA Patron, former Australian of the Year and now chair of the newly created Climate Change Commission. In this his 17th book, he explores the question of whether we as a species can achieve sustainability or whether we are, in fact, suicidal. His starting point is the evolution of earth from a cloud of gas to a planet with a metallic core and the beginning of life within a billion years. He moves on to the evolution of humans through *Homo erectus* to our own species *Homo sapiens*.

Flannery draws on the theory of evolution as espoused by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace, though favouring the latter since Wallace saw cooperation as much a form of natural selection as competition. It is this cooperation that might ultimately help humanity meet the many environmental challenges it faces and work its way through to a sustainable state.

The author generally embraces James Lovelock's Gaia theory which conceptualises the planet as an integrated living system. One reviewer worried about 'aspects of Gaian theory that seem to stray dangerously near to intent, purpose or design', but Flannery avoided that successfully. In fact, having long dismissed Lovelock's concept, I personally found Flannery's version surprisingly amenable. Indeed, central to Gaian theory are the goals of connectivity. As we become more globally connected through the internet and other means, he argues that we can become a global species that can properly react to global issues like climate change or biodiversity loss. A prime example is the Montreal Protocol that saw the banning of chlorinated

fluorocarbons that destroy the ozone layer.

Flannery describes ant colonies, in particular, the leaf cutter ant. Such 'superorganisms', in which the individual works for the good of the whole community and there is distinct division of labour, have existed for millions of years. Flannery argues that 'the concept of the superorganism is central to our understanding of interconnectedness'. A superorganism is inherently more competent and productive than the sum of its parts. No ant carries around the 'blueprint of the social order in its head', but they 'create strength from weakness by pooling their individually limited capacities into a collective decision-making system that bears an uncanny resemblance to our own democratic processes'.

Thus, he argues, the human family can act like a superorganism in which individuals will act for the greater good. Therein lies the potential for us to make the transition to genuine sustainability.

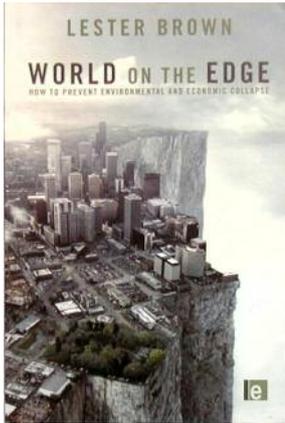
But what of population? Twenty years ago, Flannery took a radical position on population, citing 6-12 million as a sustainable level of population for Australia. Since then he has been less specific, and with respect to mitigating climate change, has said for some time now that slowing population growth is too slow a lever. In the book he notes that, if we wish to act morally, 'we can reduce our population only slowly' and while 'population is a critical element in the long-term solution to our problems, we cannot make it our only focus as we seek to deal with immediate challenges such as our destabilising climate.'

You wish for a stronger stance, and indeed, he is way too sanguine in assuming that population will peak at 9.15 billion in 2050 and that we will be able to feed that many. The UN now deems their earlier projections to be underestimates. But these are minor quibbles. *Here on Earth* is a significant work that informs, educates and entertains. Flannery displays a huge breadth of knowledge. As Sir Crispin Tickell wrote in the *Financial Times*: 'His book is a triumph of interdisciplinarity'. For a scientist, that is a wondrous thing.

Some may accuse him of being irrationally optimistic in light of the gravity of the world's problems. Nevertheless, the book has an endearing quality. Some time ago, a newspaper columnist wrote: "If we don't all love one another, we'll all be dead." Flannery reflects this in his final words: "But I am certain of one thing – if we do not strive to love one another, and to love the planet as much as we love ourselves, then no human progress is possible here on Earth."

Amen to that.

Book Reviews



World on the Edge – How to prevent environmental and economic collapse

by Lester Brown

Earthscan, Washington and London

2011 240 pages

Reviewed by Jenny Goldie

In 2009, UK's chief science adviser John Beddington warned that the world would face a 'perfect storm' of food shortages, water scarcity and costly oil by 2030 that could lead to social collapse. A week later, Jonathan Porritt, former Chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission, agreed but said this perfect storm would occur much earlier – more like 2020 than 2030. This book is a response to the questions: How much time left before our global civilisation unravels? And how do we save civilisation?

Lester Brown is President of the Earth Policy Institute, non-profit organisation based in Washington DC whose purpose is to provide a plan for sustaining civilisation and a roadmap of how to get from here to there. This book certainly embodies that purpose. Brown worries that Beddington's 'perfect storm' or the 'ultimate recession' may come at any time, hence the reference to 'on the edge' in the book's title. He believes it could be triggered perhaps by another crop-withering heatwave like the one the Russians endured last year. Such an event would reduce global food supply and send prices skyrocketing with the possibility of social collapse. (Indeed, high food prices were part-triggers in the recent uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.)

Brown and the Earth Policy Institute had already developed a plan – called Plan B – to restructure the global economy and reverse the environmental decline. There are two planks to Plan B. The first is to restructure the tax system by lowering income tax while introducing a carbon tax. The second is to redefine security. Instead of armed aggression, the threats to our future are 'climate change, population growth, poverty, rising food prices and failing states'. Thus resources must be taken away from the fossil fuel and defence industries and instead directed to 'reforestation, soil conservation, fishery restoration, universal primary school education, and reproductive health care and family planning for women everywhere.'

The first part of the book deals in detail with the deteriorating situation: falling water tables, shrinking harvests, eroding soils, expanding deserts, rising

temperatures, melting ice and food insecurity. In the next section he elaborates on the likely consequences of these problems. Brown amasses a large number of impressive facts and examples from all over the world. Then he introduces the response to these – Plan B again. This includes building an energy efficient economy, harnessing wind, solar and geothermal energy, restoring ecosystems, eradicating poverty, stabilising population, rescuing failing states and feeding eight billion. What is so admirable about Brown is that he not only provides a plausible solution but he says how much it will cost! Overall, reaching basic social goals will cost \$75 billion a year, earth restoration \$110 billion giving a total of \$185 billion a year. Not much to save the earth and its inhabitants, really, when you consider it is a mere 12 per cent of the world military budget.

Someone accused Lester Brown recently of not being concerned enough about population. Whoever it was, clearly had not read *World on the Edge*. I lost count of the references to population growth as one of the causes of environmental and social decline, and of the number of times he cited stabilising population as part of the cure.

Consider what Brown writes in the chapter on restoring the economy's natural support systems:

The traditional approach to protecting biological diversity by building a fence around an area and calling it a park or nature reserve is no longer sufficient. If we cannot stabilize population and climate, there is not an ecosystem on earth that we can save, no matter how high the fence.

Or in considering how to slow world population growth, Brown insists that all women who want to plan their families must have access to family planning services. He quotes former US AID (Agency for International Development) official J. Joseph Speidel who noted that:

'...if you ask anthropologists who live and work with people at the village level...they often say that women live in fear of their next pregnancy. They just do not want to get pregnant.'

One statistic stood out in this respect. If we could meet the needs of the 215 million women who lack reproductive care and effective contraception, we could prevent 53 million unwanted pregnancies each year. *53 million!*

If you read only one book this year, choose this one. It may lack the literary flair of Tim Flannery, but it is the best and most readable guide around as to how we might survive the future.

<http://www.earth-policy.org/books/wote>

National Snippets

Bigger may not be better for Melbourne, says key minister

Herald Sun, February 15, 2011

MELBOURNE should not become bigger at the expense of its liveability, says a key State Government minister. Planning Minister Matthew Guy blamed the former Labor government for seeking unchecked population growth.

"I think the days of focusing on being the biggest for the sake of being the biggest are over," he told the *Herald Sun*.

"It's no use being the biggest if you're going to sacrifice liveability."

In 2005, then Premier Steve Bracks welcomed Melbourne's rampant growth, saying "we could become the largest capital city in the country, it's a possibility".

Melbourne's population has grown from 3.6 million in 2003-04 to more than four million today and is tipped to pass five million by 2026 given high migrant intakes...

Environment Protection Authority chief executive John Merritt said that population intensity was a threat to the quality of the environment.

Mary Drost, from residents' action group Planning Backlash, said that huge population growth was making Melbourne more and more unliveable.

"We are all suffering in the trains, on the roads and in the schools," she said.

"We are gradually strangling our city to death."

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/bigger-may-not-be-better-for-melbourne/story-e6frf7kx-1226005987008>

The second last straw in affordable housing

Sydney Morning Herald, January 24, 2011

Sydney ranks as the second-most-unaffordable housing market in the English-speaking world, stoking fears runaway price increases have made Australia a less equitable country.

Sydney was ahead of only Hong Kong in a survey which ranked 325 markets by their affordability. Melbourne came in at No. 321 and the Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast also rated badly.

The Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey ... found that the ratio of house prices to median annual household income was 9.6 in Sydney. It put the median house price at \$634,300 and median income \$66,200.

<http://www.smh.com.au/business/the-second-last-straw-in-affordable-housing-market-rankings-worldwide-20110123-1a18f.html>

Doctors join Dick Smith in saying 'no' to Big Australia

8 February 2011

National medical group, Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA), will this week wade into the population debate with the release of a poster to convey the health risks associated with unfettered population growth.

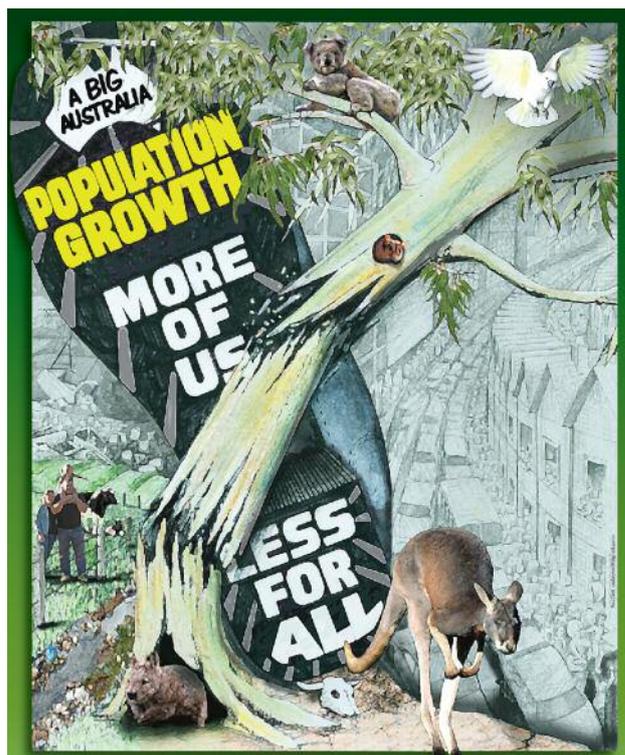
Twenty-four thousand GPs will receive copies of the poster entitled "Advancing Australia Fairly this week to display in waiting rooms around the country.

DEA asserts Australia's population size should be based on a scientific understanding of the carrying capacity of our "fragile continent" and not on the views of those with vested interests.

DEA Spokesperson and GP, Dr George Crisp, said Australia's population growth rate was higher than India, the Philippines and Cambodia, and described this as "ill-considered" and "harming our quest for liveable communities".

"Doctors have a commitment to protect human health," Dr Crisp said, "which is why we feel compelled to take a position on this issue..."

http://dea.org.au/images/general/DEA_Population_Poster_press_release_final.pdf



From the DEA poster Advancing Australia Fairly!?....

International Snippets

50 million 'environmental refugees' by 2020, experts say

SMH, 22 February 2011

Los Angeles: Fifty million "environmental refugees" will flood into the global north by 2020, fleeing food shortages sparked by climate change, experts warned at a major science conference that ended here Monday.

"In 2020, the UN has projected that we will have 50 million environmental refugees," Cristina Tirado, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, said at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

"When people are not living in sustainable conditions, they migrate," she said, outlining with the other speakers how climate change is already impacting the amount of food we have - food security - and food safety, or the healthfulness of that food.

<http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/50-million-environmental-refugees-by-2020-experts-say-20110222-1b314.html>

Asia-Pacific at risk from climate migration: report

Planet Ark, 8 February 2011

Governments in the Asia-Pacific region face the risk of unprecedented numbers of people displaced by floods, storms and other impacts of climate change, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) said in a report on Monday.

The bank and climate scientists said the region, home to four billion people, will be among the regions most affected by the impacts of climate change, leading to major migration both within and between nations, stretching resources.

<http://planetark.org/enviro-news/item/61122>

UN 'concerned' by world population growth trends

BBC News 3 February 2011

The world population growth rate must slow down significantly to avoid reaching unsustainable levels, says a new UN report.

To have a reasonable chance of stabilising world population, fertility must drop to below "replacement level". It must then be maintained at that level for an extended period, says the report.

The world population is already poised to reach 7 billion later this year and this figure potentially could double to 14 billion by 2100 if action is not taken.

"Even countries with intermediate fertility need to

reduce it to replacement level or below if they wish to avoid reaching unsustainable population levels," Hania Zlotnik Director, UN Population Division.

The UN Population Division has produced six projections of potential future population change based on different changes to fertility level and other factors. In the medium scenario, world population peaks at 9.4 billion in 2070 and then starts to decline.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-12338901>

'Make large investments in family planning right now'

John Bongaarts, vice-president of the UN Population Council, said: 'For 20 years, there's been very little investment in family planning, but there's a return of interest now, partly because of the environmental factors like global warming and food prices. "If we make much larger investments in family planning right now, the number of people (by 2050) could be closer to 8 billion. Such an investment would have a very beneficial impact on human welfare and any environmental issue we care about."

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1359217/An-unrecognisable-world-Global-population-9-billion-compete-food-supplies-2050.html?ito=feeds-newsxml>

The birth of a revolution

Ottawa Citizen, February 26, 2011

Today's Arab rebellion began rising three decades ago as a neonatal bulge rippling across the Middle East and North Africa.

As fertility rates climbed in the villages of Bahrain and Algeria and the streets of Cairo, Damascus, Tunis and Sana'a, experts warned countries to brace for an unparalleled 'youth bulge' that would some day demand skills training, jobs, homes and prosperity.

Autocrats who failed to take heed and harness the advancing multitude with economic opportunities risked rebellion.

That day, of course, has arrived with incendiary force.

With a record 100 million young people aged 15 to 29 in the Arab world — and tens of millions of youngsters behind them — the age imbalance has matured into a leviathan of civil unrest bent on crushing the region's most sclerotic regimes.

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/technology/Birth+Revolution/4350946/story.html>

Report

National President

Have you ever told your local MP your thoughts on population growth in Australia? Even if you have, does the same MP hold the seat now as the one you have already contacted? And if your local MP is up-to-date with your thoughts, then how about tackling the Senators for your state?

It's really important that we do this. While we've got exceptional MPs such as Kelvin Thomson, he needs other MPs to be saying the same things thus giving his position greater credibility. And the more parliamentary voices we have singing our tune, the greater the chance we will have of convincing Government, Opposition, Greens or independents that an environmentally sustainable level of population is essential for our nation's future survival.

I'm not just talking about writing a letter - as a former MP I know the difficulties of reading all the correspondence that comes through. A meeting has much more impact so, over the next few months, let's beat a path to their doors. Let's tell them what we think about the direction in which Australia is heading with recent and current irresponsible levels of immigration-driven population growth.

It may take time to secure an appointment with some MPs, especially if they hold a ministerial portfolio, so it is likely you will have plenty of time to prepare yourselves if you start asking now for a slice of your local member's time. If you can get two or three others to join you, that will give you greater priority as MPs are busy (one-on-ones, while they might be nice, are not necessarily good use of an MP's time).

Not sure who your local MP is from the House of Representatives? Go to

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/mi-elctr.asp> and double click on your

electorate for contact details of your MP. For senators, go to

<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/senators/homepages/index.asp?sort=state> and click on their names.

If you need more advice or assistance contact me at president@population.org. If you are successful in getting an appointment, please share your experience.

Sandra Kanck, National President

Branch Reports

South Australia

The SA group has begun a series of monthly talks, held on the last Friday of each month at the rooms of the Conservation Council of SA at 157 Franklin St in the city at 7.30 pm. The two talks held so far in 2010 have been:

February 25 - Dr James Ward, UniSA, on the uncertainties surrounding the "climate change vs. peak fossil fuel" debate

March 25 - Bob Couch on his thinking, methods and experience in launching his 'Stop Population Growth Now Party' and its participation in the last federal election.

For April 29 - Dr Jonathan Sobels, from the National Institute of Labour Studies at Flinders Uni, will speak to his new report, 'Research into the long-term physical implications of net overseas migration - Australia in 2050', published late last year.

SA members are being sent emails about these meetings. If members reading this newsletter are not receiving the emails, yet are able to and would like to, please contact Peter Martin on poitgm@hotmail.com and we will update the list we are using.

By the way, if members have not caught up with the ACF's nomination of population growth as a key threatening process under the EPBC Act get hold of it; it is a brilliant document and exactly on target. All those pundits who ridiculed it as loony, badly need to bend their brains around this one and understand what it is telling us. It is very factual and well referenced, and represents a wonderful leap in perspective. The fact that the drafters of this worthy Act probably never imagined it could attract such a profound submission speaks volumes about the depth of our disconnect from the true ecological impact we are having. It's at http://www.acfonline.org.au/uploads/res/EPBC_nomination_22-3-10.pdf.
Peter Martin

ACT

ACT Branch President Geoff Buckmaster stepped down in February due to work commitments and Immediate Past President, Tom Gosling, was elected to take over until our next AGM on 9 April. The ACT committee has welcomed a new member, virologist Professor Adrian Gibbs. Professor Gibbs's was a colleague of Professor Frank Fenner at the ANU's John Curtin School of Medical Research.

More than a quarter of the 39 submissions to the ACT Inquiry into the Ecological Carrying Capacity of the ACT and Region were from SPA members. The ACT Branch made an official submission, which is published on the Inquiry's website.

Branch Reports

Several ACT members responded to a call from our Membership Secretary Greg Delaney to help in ongoing meetings with territory and federal politicians in the ACT. One meeting was held in February with the newly-elected (Labor) member for Canberra, Gai Brodtmann, and another meeting is scheduled for 1 April with ACT Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury.

Committee member Colin Lyons and other local members attended the ACT Property Council's forum on population on 18 February at which Mark O'Connor was a speaker.

Jenny Goldie addressed a U3A meeting on 18 March and discussed the population chapter in Tim Flannery's book *Here on Earth*.

A number of members of the ACT Branch will be attending The Australian Academy of Science symposium *Australia 2050: Population Challenges to Sustainability* on Friday 6 May. *Tom Gosling*

Victoria

The Victorian branch held a three-day stall Friday 18-Sunday 20 Feb at the *Sustainable Living Festival* this year on the banks of the river near Federation Square. Special thanks to Geoff Buckmaster for travelling from Canberra to do a morning's work for the organisation! Local volunteers were Gloria O'Connor, Jill Quirk, Kit James, Jonathan Page, Steven Armstrong, Vivienne Ortega, Jennie Epstein, Jenny Warfe, Nicholas Howe, Luke Spring, Margit Alm, Mark Feltrin and Rod Binnington. Mark O'Connor gave a talk near our stall as part of the festival on the Saturday which precipitated a rush of interest in SPA and in *Overloading Australia*.

Jill Quirk and Sheila Newman spoke to 3rd year Environmental science students in an economics unit at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University) on 21 March where the lecturer initially outlined the essentials of Malthus' and Ricardo's writings on population. Jill gave background information on the conservation movement, the forming of AESP/SPA and population growth. In her lecture, Sheila highlighted the differences between the classic demographic transition and comprehensive demographic transition theories (see Global Population Speak Out website) leading into her own theory of incest avoidance as the means of population spacing in human and other animals detailed in a recent publication *The Urge to Disperse*. *Jill Quirk*

NSW

The NSW branch recently held two very different events. The presentation by Sebastien Henry, one of the people personally trained by Al Gore, was a serious and thought-provoking affair which made a very strong case

for urgently reducing emissions before some of the trends become irreversible and tipping points start to kick in. The presentation did not specifically correlate rising emissions with population growth. The impact of an extra 100 million Americans, however, would be a good counter argument to that point, as well as the fact that people in developing countries inevitably aspire to higher living standards that will raise per capita emissions. That session was followed by Dr. Haydn Washington who has recently written a book about climate change denial. Many of the psychological factors he talked about seemed equally applicable to population growth denial.

Rod Quantock gave us his thoughts on the human race's impending doom in a much more light-hearted fashion but the effect was equally serious. He had the near-capacity audience in stitches with his plans to weigh our excess population in kilograms and then devise ways to work out who to eat first. Underneath all the gags is a man who is clearly concerned about the direction humanity is headed in, and happy to mock any politician who deserves to be on the receiving end of his razor-sharp wit.

The state election appears to be a decided outcome already but one new dimension is the participation of two candidates with population as part of their main policies. William Bourke will be contesting the seat of Ku-Ring-Gai against premier-to-be, Barry O'Farrell and NSW SPA committee member, Nick Car, is an outside chance in the seat of Hornsby.

The Branch's next event is a talk from Nicole Rogers from Beyond Zero Emissions on April 16. *Kris Spike*

WA

The national AGM will be held at 10am on Sunday 3 April 2011 at the Alexander Library Lecture Theatre, State Library of Western Australia, 25 Francis Street, Perth Cultural Centre.

A public meeting will follow, from 11.15am to 5pm addressing

"The Resources Boom: Benefit or Burden?"

Will it bring greater wealth and a higher standard of living, or rising costs, unaffordable housing, congestion, overcrowded hospitals and water shortages?

Speakers include Dr. Mal Washer MP, Mr. Mark O'Connor and Dr. Jane O'Sullivan.

They will be followed by an open forum at 4pm, with lead in by public interest lawyer, Sandy Boulter, "*In defence of NIMBYs*".

Community groups welcome. Free, all welcome.

Enquiries 08 9386 1890

Paddy Weaver

POPULATION CLOCKS

According to the US Census Bureau, at 05:41 UTC (Coordinated Universal Time) on March 22, 2011, the world population was

6,907,293,270

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australia's resident population on 22 March 2011 at 04:45:24 PM (Canberra time), was projected to be:

22,596,178

The most recent state by state figures from ABS are for the June 2010 quarter, released in December.



Be fruitful and multiply...



Now divide.

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Australia 2050: Population Challenges to Sustainability

This one day symposium on 6 May – part of a three day conference - hosted by the Academy of Science in Canberra will examine a range of issues around population from the carbon footprint and implications for our cities to the economics, water, agriculture and infrastructure requirements.

Speakers include - Minister Tony Burke, Professor Lord Bob May, Australian of the year Simon McKeon, Professor Tim Flannery, Professor Roger Short and many more.

Details of the Science at the Shine Dome program: science.org.au/events/sats/sats2011/index.html

If you would like to attend, please register as soon as possible at: science.org.au/events/sats/sats2011/registration.html

Climate Summit 2011

April 9-11, 2011 Melbourne University
The Spot Basement Theatre, Business and Economics Building

198 Berkeley St, Carlton

www.climatesummit2011.wordpress.com

ABOUT SPA

Formerly Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population.

The SPA Newsletter is mailed bi-monthly to members of Sustainable Population Australia Inc. For further information, please contact the SPA Office or your nearest branch. All membership applications and renewals should be sent to the National Office. Newsletter contributions should be sent there or directly to the editor.

Newsletter editor: Jenny Goldie
editor@population.org.au 256 Barooka Road,
Michelago NSW 2620

Webmaster: Tom Gosling
webmaster@population.org.au

Website: www.population.org.au

SPA NATIONAL OFFICE BEARERS

President: Hon Sandra Kanck Phone 08 8336 4114
president@population.org.au

Vice-president: Dr John Coulter 08 8388 2153
vp@population.org.au

Minutes Secretary: Nola Stewart 02 9686 3542
secretary@population.org.au

Correspondence secretary: Jill Quirk 03 9509 7429
secretary@population.org.au

Treasurer: Dr Michael Banyard 02 6285 6203
treasurer@population.org.au

TRUSTEES OF THE POPULATION FUND

Mr Gordon Hocking

Mr Ross Kingsland

Dr Bill Sorby

SPA NATIONAL OFFICE

Administrative Office: Successful Alliances
Office: 2C, 18 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600
Address: PO Box 3851, WESTON CREEK ACT 2611

Phone: 02 6288 6810 Fax: 02 6288 7195

Email: info@population.org.au

REGIONAL BRANCHES

NSW: President: Mr Kris Spike. Ph:02 96803245
nsw@population.org.au

WA: President: Dr Harry Cohen AM Ph: 08 9386 1890
wa@population.org.au

VIC: President: Jill Quirk Ph: 03 9509 7429
vic@population.org.au

ACT: President: Geoff Buckmaster Ph: 02 62532296
act@population.org.au

SEQ: President: Dr Jane O'Sullivan Ph: 07 3379 8090
seq@population.org.au

SA: President: Peter Martin Ph: 08 8178 0287
sa@population.org.au

NQ: President: Dr David Kault Ph: 07 4721 0487 (ah)
nqld@population.org.au

TAS: President: Tomas Nilsson 03 6225 4678
tas@population.org.au