



# Sustainable Population Australia Inc.

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## Media release for Thomas Malthus's birthday

Tomorrow, 13<sup>th</sup> February, is the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of English population pioneer, Rev Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) who warned of the dire consequences of population growth.

With the world population of 7.4 billion still growing at more than 80 million a year, it is time we focused more on population control, says environment group Sustainable Population Australia (SPA).

Malthus was the first to point out that, because population increases at an exponential rate while food production increases at an arithmetic rate, unchecked population increase would inevitably lead to resource shortages and mass starvation. Ahead of his time, he advocated family planning in the form of celibacy and late marriage to reduce the birth rate.

Malthus' concerns proved to be premature as he could not have foreseen the use of fossil fuels which has led to the sustenance (although by no means the full nourishment) of today's billions of people.

SPA president, Sandra Kanck, says that while Malthus might have been wrong in the short term he was essentially right in the long term. This is because we cannot have an infinite number of humans on a finite planet with finite resources. Rather than living sustainably we are continually eroding the planet's life support systems. For instance:

- the Worldwide Fund for Nature has calculated that we are using up natural resources such as topsoil, fresh water, forest and fish stocks at a rate 1.5 times faster than they are regenerated;
- the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization has pointed out that despite land and water resources already being severely under pressure "future agricultural production will need to be more productive and more sustainable at the same time" to cope with future population growth;

The 'green revolution' was able to increase food production, but at a cost: half of the world's population now lives in areas where water tables are falling as a result of unsustainable irrigation practices. The fossil fuels that created that revolution are finite and are causing potentially catastrophic climate change thereby placing further stress on food production.

In most Australian cities we are continuing to lose good agricultural land as a consequence of the need to house growing population numbers. Ironically, those extra people will need the food that once grew on that land.

"It is high time we took heed of Malthus' warnings" said Ms Kanck.

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**About Sustainable Population Australia:** SPA is an independent not-for-profit organisation formed in 1988 to promote an understanding of the effects of human population numbers on the biosphere and society.