



The world cannot cope with another two billion people by 2050

Top scientists call for new UN Sustainable Development Goal on Population

A group of distinguished scientists have called for rapid action to reverse unsustainable population growth as global tipping points and ecological boundaries become more apparent.

The evidence was set out at an online conference organised by Scientists Warning Europe to mark this year's World Population Day on July 11.

The human ecological footprint is already 170 per cent of Earth's renewable bio-capacity. The secretary-general of the United Nations, Antonio Guterras, has warned, 'humanity is waging war on nature'. This is suicidal. Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century.

Globally, most of the projected population growth will happen in the poorest countries, deepening their poverty and making them vulnerable to hunger and further conflict. Infrastructure and job creation can't keep pace with the growth. High consumption countries must act too. A return to 'business as usual' cannot continue.

Dr William Rees, Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia and originator of global ecological footprint accounting said: *"The world is in eco-overshoot, in which consumption and waste production by too many people greatly exceeds the regenerative and waste assimilation capacities of the planet.*

"We should be aghast that growth-oriented mainstream economic models contain no useful information about the dynamics of ecosystems or even social systems with which the economy interacts in the real world. Sometimes our social constructs are little more than shared illusions."

We are facing a much-reduced energy future without fossil fuels. Modern 'renewables' cannot substitute quantitatively --we have to use less. Humans are the major consumer species in all the world's major ecosystems. We can't decouple from nature. The human enterprise must contract. We face chaotic collapse or one chance for a more intelligent, well-planned orderly transition."

"Just as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has set goals on how much and by when we need to reduce our climate emissions, we need to develop a strategy and timeframe for achieving a sustainable population. Perhaps 1 to 2 billion at a reasonable standard of living is realistic in the long-term."

Dr Chris Tucker, chairman of the American Geographical Society said: *"It is critical that the world scientific community achieve a consensus with world leaders and a dialog with citizens on how many people the Earth can support, if we are to navigate our climate and ecological crisis."*

Dr Tucker suggests that before 2030 we need to have reached a total fertility rate* (TFR) of 1.5 per woman. (It is currently just over 2.4. Replacement fertility is 2.1, but our population momentum is such that lower TFRs are needed to reach sustainable equilibrium).

(*Total fertility rate (TFR) of a population is the average number of children that would be born to a woman over her lifetime).

Professor Phoebe Barnard of University of Washington and University of Cape Town observes that *“The UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015 – 2030 are a wish list of aspirations with sustainability sprinkled in. Most of the SDGs are critically linked to underlying population impact but this has been consistently side-lined by world leaders and business leaders.”*

“What kind of leadership got us to the predicament we’re in today? And what kind of leadership and economic system is needed to sustain us into the future? We are out of time for bickering, finger-pointing accusations. It’s time for collaborative efforts on population, consumption, and planetary boundaries. Women’s voices from around the world have not been sufficiently heard.”

“Since the mid-1990s overpopulation denialism has sapped political will from programs that served women’s health and reproductive rights,” says Dr Jane O’Sullivan, Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Queensland, who challenges many myths that are used to dismiss concerns about population growth. “Ageing populations don’t mean fewer workers, they mean fewer are unemployed. A contracting population offers many benefits for healthier, happier, more equal and more environmentally sustainable societies.”

She adds: *“Voluntary family planning programs were the most effective interventions ever implemented for promoting economic development and empowering women. Poor countries simply can’t get ahead while population growth remains high. There is no case of rapid fertility decline without robust family planning programs.”*

Notes.

Scientists Warning Europe evolved out of the outreach platform run by environmental campaigner Stuart Scott, to promote the 2017 and 2019 Scientists Warnings. Stuart is battling terminal cancer and moved on to develop *facingfuture.earth* as a legacy project. We remain in close touch with the team.

The talks are on our U-Tube. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_sQ--ZzHHGcqmITWz7Kr-A

For Media Enquires our speakers can be contacted as follows. Slide sets used can be found on the SWE website and are subject to acknowledgement of the source:

www.scientistswarningeurope.org.uk To contact SWE ed@scientistswarningeurope.org.uk

Dr William Rees wrees@mail.ubc.ca is a population and ecological economist, Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia; a Fellow of the Post-Carbon Institute; a founding Director of the OneEarth Initiative. He is the originator and co-developer (with his graduate students) of ‘ecological footprint accounting. Dr Rees was elected to Royal Society of Canada in 2006 and received several international awards include the Blue Planet Prize.

Dr Chris Tucker tucker@americangeo.org is chairman of the American Geographical Society, an academic, geospatial strategist and author of Planet of 3 Billion: Mapping Humanity’s Long History of Ecological Destruction and Finding Our Way to a Resilient Future – A Global Citizen’s Guide to Saving the Planet. He gained his PhD at Columbia University New York. See @PLANETtucker and @Planet3Billion. @girlplanetearth

Prof Phoebe Barnard phoebe.barnard@consbio.org is a global change ecologist, associate science, policy analyst and affiliate professor at the University of Washington Center for Environmental Politics <https://depts.washington.edu/envirpol/faculty> and honorary research associate, University of Cape Town. She is also involved with the African Climate and Development Initiative and Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology. She co-runs with Chris Tucker, <https://www.girlplanet.earth>, a global women’s dialogue on population, consumption and planetary boundaries.

Dr Jane O’Sullivan j.osullivan@uq.edu.au is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Queensland. She researches the environmental and economic impacts of demographic change, challenging the many myths that are used to dismiss concerns about population growth. She also represents The Overpopulation Project with Professors Frank Götmark and Philip Cafaro.