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Sustainable Population Australia -- Newsletter

Patrons: The Hon Bob Carr • Professor Ian Lowe • Professor Tim Flannery • Dr Katharine Betts • Dr Paul Collins

SPA co-organises successful conference on sustainable agriculture

The Fenner Conference on sustainable agriculture co-organised by Sustainable Population Australia was held at the Academy of Science's Shine Dome on March 17 and 18. It was deemed a success by its attendees, both in-person and on-line. While the need for sustainable agriculture was its main focus, population was front and centre with a number of speakers citing the need to stabilise population numbers so everyone could be fed. Not just fed, but without destroying the natural systems on which we all depend. Indeed, as speaker Dr Jane O'Sullivan said, we can only feed 3-4 billion people if we are to keep within planetary boundaries. Unfortunately, we have nearly eight billion on Earth at the moment and heading for 10 billion or more by end of century.

Those projected figures, of course, may not eventuate. Hunger, starvation and war may intervene. As a number of eminent climate experts pointed out, climate change is already reducing farm productivity and profits and this may get worse should temperatures and associated extreme weather events continue to rise. Prof Will Steffen warned we had already transgressed six, and possibly even eight, of the nine planetary boundaries. We have already crossed over into the uncertain Anthropocene from the stable Holocene, and we cannot continue as we have done. Things have to change.

And agriculture has to change if it is to be sustainable. Industrial agriculture currently allows eight billion people to survive, but it is largely not sustainable. Top soil is being lost at an enormous rate, soils are degrading, and farming produces nearly one third of global gas emissions, exacerbating the extreme weather events that reduces farm productivity.

So how do we make Australian agriculture sustainable, in environmental, social and economic terms? Soil health is criti-

cal and a number of speakers addressed how this could be restored and maintained. Dung beetles help by burying dung and allowing nutrients and water to penetrate deep below the surface. Biochar is a potential life-saver but still has problems about its widespread use. Regenerative practices that maintain plant cover all year round can keep water in the landscape and allow farms to survive through dry periods.

Climate change is the real worry, of course. Should we go to four degrees warming, we can largely kiss agriculture good-bye in Australia. The aim has to be to contain warming to less than two degrees, or ideally 1.5 degrees. Ian Dunlop warned us that our political leaders are ignoring what the scientists have been telling us, that we need to get on a war footing to deal with the problem. Greenhouse gas emissions have to be around 75% less than 2005 levels by 2030, and net zero by 2035.

Why did we, as an organisation concerned with population, run a conference on sustainable agriculture? Because if we are to have a sustainable population, we have to have sustainability in the systems that support us, including natural systems and food production. We have to feed people! Thomas Malthus warned us over 200 years ago about the possibility of famine if populations grew too large. The 18th century agricultural revolution that used fossil energy to run machines, along with mass migration to the Americas, saved Europe then. Paul Ehrlich warned again of famine in 1968. The Green Revolution saved us again from mass starvation but, as its father Norman Borlaug warned, it was only "buying us time". Now with a war in Ukraine stopping people from planting crops that would have fed people in places afar like Malawi, hunger and starvation loom again.

JG



Fenner Conference in progress at Shine Dome.
Photo Rod Taylor

Closing Remarks 2022 Fenner Conference

Emeritus Professor Ian Lowe

We were reminded today that our recognition of indigenous leaders should be much more than a ritual. Because we have been reminded that Aboriginal Australians worked out over many thousands of years how to live within the limits of the changing natural systems in this harsh and unforgiving continent. And they embodied those knowings; not just in custom and practice, not just in songs and dance and ceremonies, but in their system of laws. And that is a system that contrasts with our weak knee-ed environmental laws, which are designed to protect the natural environment as long as it makes money. Unless we embody our knowings in the practices of sustainability and within the system of law, then we do not have much of a future as a civilisation.

I spent a year running a little Commonwealth agency known as The Commission for the Future. That was back when we had Barry Jones as Science Minister. And there was this funny idea that we might have a better future if we thought about it rather than just letting it happen.

The future is not something where we are going, it is something we are creating. And we often ask experts to tell us what the future will be. But it is difficult to make forecasts about the future, because at any given time, there are many possible futures. And which one materialises will be the product of our decisions and actions as individuals, as members of households, as members of the community and as members of institutions. And so we shouldn't be asking the experts to tell us what the future will be like; we should be asking ourselves, as we have been doing for the last two days, what we want the future to be like and then thinking about how we can bring it about, rather than the dystopian future which is a product of "business as usual."

Will Steffen reminded us of that, with the exception of stabilising the ozone layer, all of the world's significant environmental problems are getting worse. We have lost 100,000,000 ha of forest in the last 25 years; freshwater per capita is down 25%; greenhouse gas emissions have more or less doubled; climate change is accelerating. But perhaps the most alarming thing; vertebrate species abundance in 1992 at the time of the world scientists' first warning was 60% of the 1970 level. Today it is 40% of that level. And heading south at the rate of knots. So, as we were reminded, we are in the middle of the sixth major extinction event. And we are responsible for that.

Ian Dunlop reminded us of the Club of Rome report on "Limits to Growth". There is now a new report from the Club of Rome, entitled "Transforming for sustainability". And it argues that, for civilisation to survive we need, not just minor changes; we need transformative change. Because on the current trajectory, by 2030 we will only have met 10 of the 17 Sustainable Development goals. But we will have transgressed eight of the nine planetary boundaries. So, we will already be well outside the safe

operating space for a significant majority of the world's population. And many of them are still living in conditions no better than they were at the turn of the century. And that is clearly not socially sustainable. The report on the economic outlook for the Asia Pacific region produced about a decade ago, by the UN, said: "If the legitimate material aspirations of the people in our region are to be met within the limits of natural systems, we need a new industrial revolution in which we produce our material needs, using 20 to 25% of the resources that we now use to meet them." It argued that this would be possible. In terms of the report from the Club of Rome, what we have to contemplate doing is, in the language that we have all got used to in the last two years, "bend the curve." Shifting the trajectory of human development off the path, which is clearly not sustainable, and onto one which would be sustainable into the distant future.

We have talked a little bit about how you effect change and I would argue that change comes about when there are four things. Firstly, there needs to be discontent, because if you are satisfied, there is no motivation for change. But that is not enough. There needs to be a vision for a better way. Because unless you have a vision for a better way, change might make things worse, rather than better. We have sketched out today, several examples of a better way. Towards which we should work purposefully. But even that is not enough.

You need to see a viable pathway from where we are to where we need to be. And many utopian visions have foundered because there was no obvious pathway from where we were to where we needed to be. So, the obvious task that is coming out of our meeting is to devise viable pathways for getting to the destination which we all agree we need to reach. One in which we are within the limits of the Earth's natural systems, providing the material needs of the community and particularly the food.

When we effect the real change, we need to use all of the levers in the toolbox. Yes, we can use price signals. But when you think about how we have changed smoking in a confined space or driving while intoxicated, we have not relied on the market. We have also regulated and we have also educated the community. And if we are serious about overcoming climate change and shifting to a sustainable trajectory, we have to use all the tools in the toolbox. Price signals will not do it. We need to regulate; we need to educate the community so that they understand that it is in their self-interest to shift their pattern of behaviour.

It is difficult to tell people that the party is over, especially if they have not got to the bar yet. And it seems that one of the problems that has been articulated a few times is that of convincing people that the party is over. Particularly as they have not got to the bar. So, I think what we have to do is to tell people that the party which

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is over is one that is based on delusions. Delusions that there are infinite resources. Delusions that natural systems have unlimited capacities to withstand whatever abuse we inflict on them.

In that sense we have to tell them not that the party is over. We should be telling them about the better party that we are envisaging. It is a better party because we will not run out of food and drink. It is a better party because the neighbours won't be having to peer through the windows, because they will be invited in. It is a better party because it will not leave us with a nasty hangover of the degraded landscapes and intractable waste. And it is a better party because our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy it when we are no longer here. And they will welcome the fact that we left them a good inheritance rather than a bad one.

Charles Massy said when he was introducing this forum that, despite the negative dithering in the building across the lake (the name of which for the moment escapes me), there are many signs of hope and practical solutions. And emerging signs of hope what we need to cling to. And the practical is what we need to expand on.

A ground for cautious optimism is to recognise that human systems are profoundly non-linear. And they can change very rapidly from one stable state to another. And historically, change has come about when enough people have wanted change badly enough and have worked purposefully for it.

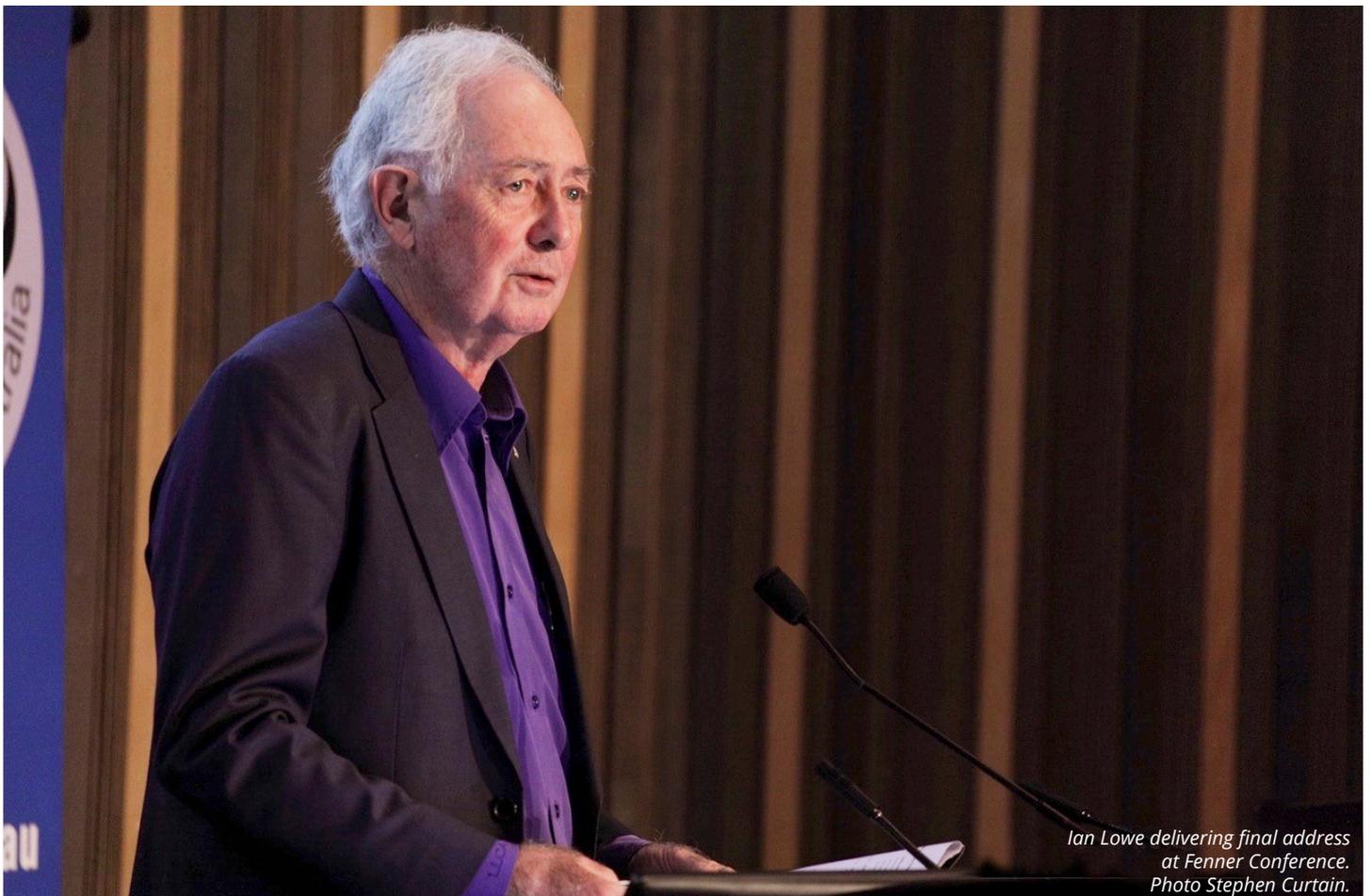
I remember being in France and seeing a postcard that said in French "we are going to change the world". And then in small print it added "if it is not you who is going to change the world my little one, who will it be?" It is a reminder that we need to be the change that we want to see in the world.

If we want change, we have to work purposefully for it. And we have to demonstrate that change to others. That is what we were reminded of yesterday and what Thomas Berry called "the great word".

And because we are really the last generation that can bend the curve, we are the last generation who can save civilisation by getting us back onto a sustainable path. In that sense shaping a sustainable future is our obligation to the first Australians who nurtured this land for tens of thousands of years. And it is our obligation to future generations.

And it is our obligation to all of the other species with whom we share this continent.

So, I urge you, in leaving this wonderful conference (and I want to pay tribute to the organisers, not just for assembling a wonderful group of speakers but also for an organisational structure that has given us plenty of time to interact informally and nurture friendships and learn from each other), build on what you have learnt in the last two days to build on hope and the practical solutions and go forth resolute and determined to bend the curve.



*Ian Lowe delivering final address at Fenner Conference.
Photo Stephen Curtain.*

Sprawling cities are rapidly encroaching on Earth's biodiversity

William F. Laurance and Jayden Engerta

This commentary on a paper by Simkin et al appeared in the journal PNAS 2022 Vol. 119 No. 16 e2202244119 on March 31, 2022, and is reprinted with permission. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2202244119>



Fig. 1. Locally endemic wildlife imperilled by urban sprawl around Manaus, Brazil, the largest Amazon city with 2.2 million residents. (A) Manaus harlequin frog (*Atelopus manauensis*). (B) Pied tamarin (*Saguinus bicolor*), a small rainforest primate. (C) Landsat satellite image of Manaus and Ducke Forest Reserve (the square forest tract), a 10,000-ha nature reserve being engulfed by urban development. Image credits: frog: Alexander Monico/National Institute for Amazonian Research; tamarin: # TT News Agency/Alamy Stock Photo; satellite image: NASA Earth Observing System Data and Information System: image Manaus-081101 (2). Published by PNAS.

One of the most important demographic events of the past half-century is the dramatic growth of urban areas worldwide. Growing cities, like insatiable amoebas, tend to engulf and devour their surrounding lands, often at the expense of biodiversity (Fig. 1). In PNAS, Simkin et al. project the regional and global impacts of urban expansion on more than 30,000 species of native mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians from 2015 to 2050. Their findings reveal that burgeoning cities are a far more serious driver of biodiversity decline than many realise, with environmental impacts comparable with those of planet-altering activities, such as agriculture and forestry.

Two broad trends underlay the global proliferation of cities. The first is intrinsic population growth. Earth's populace has risen fivefold since the beginning of the nineteenth century and is now nearly eight billion people. According to the median projection of the United Nations Population Division, the global population will continue to grow apace this century, reaching 9.7 billion by 2050 and 11.2 billion by 2100, before roughly stabilising thereafter. These increases largely result from rising human numbers in developing nations, which are primarily located in tropical and subtropical regions that are the epicentres of global biodiversity.

The second global trend is a growing proportion of city dwellers, as rural or remote-area residents increasingly move to urban locales in search of work, education,

health care, or other needs. As a result, rural populations are shrinking or plateauing across much of the world, whereas urban populations are still growing apace. Currently, more than half (56%) of the global population resides in urban areas, and this figure will surely continue rising, with at least two-thirds of all people expected to be city dwellers by 2050.

By projecting land-cover changes driven by population and urbanisation trends across the globe's land surface, Simkin et al. identify the wildlife species that will bear the brunt of these changes as well as hot spots of urban expansion. Urban footprint growth is modelled under three development scenarios (corresponding to "sustainable," "high-growth," and "fossil-fuelled" scenarios that describe an array of possible futures).

A key finding of the present study is just how rapidly urban areas are growing in extent. Urban areas expanded by 1.9 million ha/y from 1990 to 2000, a rate projected to rise to 2.3 to 4.4 million ha/y between 2015 and 2050 (depending on which of the three development scenarios is used in the analysis). Despite the serious and growing scale of urban impacts, global agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, are still lagging behind the realities of urban expansion as a major driver of environmental change.

Simkin et al. predict that, by the year 2050, habitat loss from urban expansion will impact around a third (26 to 39%) of the 30,393 land-dwelling vertebrate species they studied. Among these threatened species, up to 855 will be seriously impacted, with each losing at least a 10th of its remaining habitat. Growing urban clusters that most imperil biodiversity are largely located in sub-Saharan Africa, South America, Mesoamerica, and Southeast Asia. Crucially, these are all tropical regions that harbor much of Earth's biodiversity as well as large tracts of intact habitat essential for the survival of myriad disturbance-sensitive species. Urban expansion in these species-rich regions will be a particularly serious threat to nature.

Some nations are planning to construct entirely new urban centres in far-flung locales, with the potential for considerable environmental harm. Indonesia, for example, is planning to build a new capital city, Nusantara, in eastern Borneo starting in 2024. This echoes the construction of Brazil's new capital city, Brasilia, completed in 1960 in the country's then-remote interior, and Abuja, Nigeria's new capital completed in the 1980s. Growing demand for natural resources and expansion of new extraction frontiers across the developing world will help to spur migration into rural and remote areas, thereby spawning new urban centres in regions with high biodiversity. In addition, massive "development corridors" straddling low- and middle-income nations in Asia, Africa, and the Americas will clearly promote human migration and urbanisation, leading to further disruption of biodiversity-rich lands.

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Although Simkin et al. conclude that urban expansion will cause significant habitat loss for only 2 to 3% of all studied species, other anthropogenic impacts associated with human presence—such as habitat fragmentation, illegal mining, air and water pollution, and wildlife poaching—might be just as threatening to species survival. Urban areas and their haloes of supporting infrastructure are potentially impenetrable barriers to dispersal for many species. Finally, burgeoning cities tend to consume favourable landscapes, such as flatter or more productive areas, pushing vulnerable species into marginal habitats where they may struggle to survive. According to Simkin et al., urban areas will double or triple in global extent between 2015 and 2050, a striking increase by any measure. The creation of urban landscapes, including buildings, roadworks, and extensive supporting infrastructure, will require vast quantities of raw materials. Extraction of such resources, including limestone, sand, and metals,

is already putting serious strains on threatened ecosystems, such as karsts and certain rivers and coastal zones. Groundwater supplies based on overharvested natural aquifers can also be seriously depleted by growing urban populations.

Using global-scale datasets, Simkin et al. show that urban land expansion will be a potent and continuing driver of habitat and biodiversity decline in the coming decades. They emphasise that urban land expansion has received relatively little attention as a driver of biodiversity decline when compared with other global-scale drivers, such as agriculture and forestry. Cities are proliferating and growing so dramatically that we would be reckless not to heed their warnings.

¹R. D. Simkin, K. C. Seto, R. I. McDonald, W. Jetz, Biodiversity impacts and conservation implications of urban land expansion projected by 2050. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.*, 10.1073/pnas.2117297119 (2022).

Letters

Growth or sustainability?

Two competing paths for Australia's future are being promoted. Advocates of a "Big Australia" want a return to the high growth model of the past 20 years. They believe that high migration fuels growth. The alternative view is a sustainable Australia and prosperity achieved with a stable population.

The path we take could result in an Australia that is substantially different from today. A growth rate of 1.5% would double our population of 26 million to 52 million in 48 years and a 2% growth rate would see the doubling in 36 years.

This decision is too important to be left to politicians, with their use of scare tactics, pandering to special interest groups and decisions made on winning the next election. We were led through the pandemic by scientists and medical experts. We need the advice of independent experts like economists, demographers, and environmentalists to give us an unbiased assessment on the two options for Australia.

Which option gives the highest real wage growth and the highest quality of life? Is there a long-term skills' shortage or can our universities and TAFEs provide these skills? Would increasing our participation rate meet our labour requirements?

What is the best option for housing affordability? Would the high growth option result in a continual urban sprawl or would people accept high density housing as the norm? And how do we meet our climate emergency obligations with an increasing population as well as the demands on the environment and water resources?

*Barry Lizmore
Ocean Grove, Vic.*

Response to February newsletter

It was a pity to see in the obituaries of the three great conservationists (February 2022 SPA newsletter) that they did not always get it right.

Well said, Edward O Wilson, about the raging monster of population and the biosphere not belonging to us, however, there were two flaws in the 'Half-Earth' concept. First, it should have been half of the fertile land, excluding areas beyond 60 degrees N and S, and second, there was no word about the human population needing to be halved.

And Thomas Lovejoy was spot-on in his comments on habitat loss, but not in his worries about the unpopularity of sustainability and reproductive control by states - it must be exerted and they are the proper bodies to do it. Worse, like various other people, he only talks about slower population growth when that is totally useless. It's decrease that's essential and that will occur in unpleasant ways.

The human race won't become extinct, Mr Leakey, it will survive in small numbers and very harsh conditions. Oh well, nobody's perfect!

*Paul D Prentice
Nth Fitzroy, Vic.*

Book Review

Herman Daly's Economics for a Full World: His Life and Ideas

by Peter Victor

Earthscan from Routledge, 2022. 300 pp.
Soft copy RRP \$73.99 (discounts available online)
ISBN: 978-0-367-55695-2

Reviewed by Jonathan Miller

Neoclassical economics is the dominant language of politicians and the media, and ongoing economic growth is the pre-eminent goal of nearly every nation. Yet, this is taking humanity to the brink of disaster at exactly the time we need prominent voices emphasising the dependence of our societies on a healthy environment. Peter Victor's biography, *Herman Daly's Economics for a Full World: His Life and Ideas*, is therefore timely. Herman Daly stands out for developing models that place economics within its environmental context. He is best known as a founder of ecological economics and for proposing principles for a steady state economy.

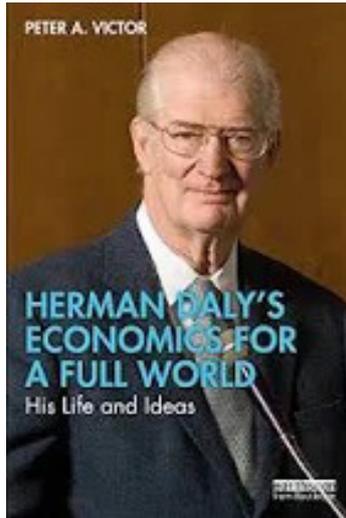
Victor's early chapters describe Daly's childhood and professional life and the major influences on his thinking. Victor is not a professional writer, however, and these sections sometimes feel pedestrian. What emerges, nonetheless, is a picture of Daly as a humble man of high integrity, strongly influenced by his Christian faith and his encounters with those less fortunate.

The majority of the book is devoted to Daly's ideas and his intellectual engagement with critics and supporters. Victor's writing is stronger here, reflecting his standing as another highly-respected ecological economist. Given his strong friendship with Daly, it is unsurprising that Victor provides a generally sympathetic assessment of Daly's arguments. This book, however, is not a hagiography and also identifies shortcomings in Daly's work.

The biography includes a chapter on population and migration. Daly apparently believes that "more people...are better than fewer, but only if they are not all alive at the same time!" In his earlier formulations of the steady-state economy, he prescribed a stable population, but he later relaxed this requirement so long as resource throughput were relatively constant. Daly's early population concerns were informed by his work in north-eastern Brazil, where he observed that contraception was readily available to the wealthier entrepreneurial class, but not to the labouring poor. While not a Marxist, Daly saw the denial of contraception to the poor as exploitative, providing an expanding pool of underpaid workers for capital. Daly argued that slowing population growth was critical to improving living standards for the poor.

Some of Daly's other population perspectives were controversial and decidedly politically incorrect. Borrowing

from the environmental economic 'cap and trade' model, Daly proposed that adults be given transferable birth licences. Daly foresaw the problems with enforcement, but strangely seems not to have engaged with broader societal views and taboos on having children.



Daly also developed a stance on immigration. While he supported continuing 'legal' migration into the USA, he favoured controlling borders and ending illegal immigration. His motivation, however, was not nationalistic but rather a concern for American labour standards. He saw illegal immigration as again serving employers by creating a pool of cheap labour, thereby weakening unions, decreasing wages and increasing profits. Daly's support for substantial migration levels was partly to provide a generous quota for refugees, especially for those fleeing the consequences of American military and political interventions. Daly's views on immigration accord with his desire to roll back globalisation.

Victor also includes chapters on Daly's positions on economic scale, distribution and allocation; measuring the economy; the steady-state economy; money and banking; and globalisation, internationalisation and free trade. These topics may sound dull to non-economists but Victor's treatment makes clear why they are of critical importance to sustainability advocates. The chapter on economic growth provides very useful global data on the rapid expansion over the last century of the use of natural resources and the generation of wastes.

In his work across these subjects, Daly has faced criticism both from natural allies and from the economic establishment. Marxists have criticised Daly's steady-state proposals for using free market, capitalist mechanisms. Victor gives special attention to Daly's frustrating relationship with his brilliant but fickle teacher and mentor, Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen. Daly's most difficult dealings were not surprisingly with leading neoclassical economists and he would pay a high professional price for challenging the academic status quo. Daly's work highlights fundamental problems with neoclassical economics, particularly its flawed consideration of the natural environment.

Victor's biography is relatively light on economic jargon and includes few mathematical formulae. It will, however, best suit those who have a basic understanding of economic terms and theories. This book and 'Sustainability and the New Economics' by SPA's Stephen Williams and Rod Taylor are excellent primers for those wanting to understand how economics should operate in a full world. (See review following.)

Book Review

Sustainability and the New Economics: Synthesising Ecological Economics and Modern Monetary Theory

Stephen J Williams and Rod Taylor Editors

Springer, 344 pp, ISBN 978-3-030-78794-3,
or 978-3-030-78795-0 (e-books)
Hardcover \$228.88 Kindle \$186.15 (through Amazon)

Reviewed by Jenny Goldie

When one of the editors, Rod Taylor, put this book into my hands, I turned to the contents page and gasped. Here was a collection of Australian authors you could only dream of: earth scientist Will Steffen; ecologists Chris Dickman and David Lindenmayer; climate and health expert Colin Butler; historian and writer Kerryn Higgs; economist John Quiggin; environmental academic Ian Lowe; energy expert Ian Dunlop; economist and author Steve Keen; ecological economist Philip Lawn; renewable energy expert Mark Diesendorf; former Justice of the High Court of Australia Michael Kirby; modern monetary theorist Steven Hail; and the other editor but also author, Stephen Williams who, like Rod Taylor, is a SPA stalwart.

This is a book of great depth and, as various environmental and social crises bear down upon us, of extreme importance as it may well provide the cornerstone of solutions to the crises. Frankly, we're in a mess. The first third of the book spells it out. We are leaving the stable Holocene and entering the uncertain Anthropocene; the Australian environment is in a parlous state; health is declining as climate change bites; and, worthy as they are in intent, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals have a number of shortcomings.

The middle section of the book examines issues relating to how the mess evolved, including: the evolution of neoliberalism; population growth; the Club of Rome's Limits to Growth report of 1972; the role of the fossil fuel industry; and the economic failures of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The last section focuses on solutions, such as ecological economics, sustainable energy systems, climate change litigation, and paying for a Green New Deal through understanding modern monetary theory. The main message of the book, however, is that 'nations should aim for a steady state economy of an optimum size and urgently abandon the discredited cult of perpetual economic growth'.

Will Steffen warns of the extreme urgency of the need to mitigate climate change as we head towards irreversible tipping points. Ice loss is accelerating in Greenland and West Antarctica; drought is increasing in the Amazon rainforest; the Atlantic circulation is slowing; permafrost

is beginning to thaw; and boreal forests are experiencing increasing fire and insect attacks. The decade of the 2020s is critical in turning the situation around. Time is running out.

Meanwhile, the five State of Environment reports since 1996 paint a picture of inexorable decline in the diversity and condition of Australia's ecosystems. The overarching pressure on natural systems is human overpopulation. A salient statistic is that, for every addition of a million people to Australia over the past 50 years, almost one native vertebrate species has become extinct.

It's not just the environment of course. There are massive social inequities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are meant to solve them, but they are flawed. Higgs notes that without significant reform, if not transformation, of the economic system, the SDGs will fail to deliver.

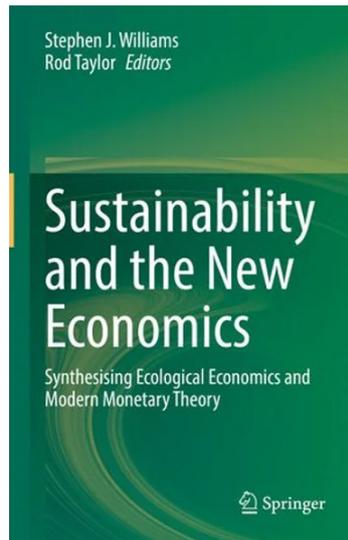
What then is the alternative? Ecological economics for a start. In contrast to neoliberal and neo-classical economics, ecological economics stresses that the economy is embedded in society, and society is embedded in the biophysical world.

But this largely Earth-centred philosophy 'still needs a macroeconomics that can explain things like the nature and history of money; how money is created in the modern world; the relation between spending, inflation and unemployment; the ecological as well as the economic effects of monetary and fiscal policy; the role of taxes and their potential uses; and numerous other things.' And this is where Modern Monetary Theory comes in – it explains how these elements interact. It may be the very tool we need to lead us down the path to sustainability.

And what of population? It permeates the whole book. Not only is there a whole chapter devoted to it but, in the very fine chapter on Ecological Economics by Lawn and Williams, there is a very long section called 'Population Size Matters'.

This book has an excellent glossary of financial terms and another on general economic terms that are invaluable for those of us untrained in economic theory. An index would have been helpful but the glossaries make up for its absence to a large extent.

It's an expensive book so get your library to order it. It would be a shame to miss out on reading such a splendid publication, edited by two of our own.



National President's report

This is an edited version of the report delivered to the national AGM in Canberra on 19 March 2022 by Jenny Goldie.

Over the past year, our Membership and Marketing Committee (MMC) has become the principal driving force behind the majority of SPA's outreach and promotional campaigns. I want to extend my thanks to the MMC for their huge body of work, in particular, Michael Bayliss and VP Peter Cook.

Last year, the MMC revamped SPA's media contact list and streamlined our media release systems. This has not only resulted in our media releases being more efficient and easier to manage, it has also finally delivered some pleasing media attention.

The MMC also focused on SPA's 'branding' and key messaging, applying basic principles of marketing and communication analysis. The 'Let's Rethink Big Australia' tagline was used as a basis to create social media videos (slideshows) on environmental and employment themes. Furthermore, the MMC partnered with Your Life Choices online journal to promote the Let's Rethink Big Australia message to their readership.

MMC launched the pilot 'My Bulging City' video which explored overdevelopment issues in Canberra, produced and directed by Rod Taylor. The video was popular on SPA's YouTube channel, resulting in 7600 YouTube views.

In February 2022, SPA released a new discussion paper on population and climate change, authored by Ian Lowe, Jane O'Sullivan and Peter Cook. This is the third in the discussion paper series, following the infrastructure (2019) and ageing (2020) papers. We give special thanks to Peter Cook for editing and coordinating the discussion paper projects.

In the case of the recent climate discussion paper, we promoted this widely by targeted emails to approximately 120 environmental organisations, 50 think tanks and to all federal politicians, in addition to our distribution to our media contacts. Printed copies are also mailed to state, national and parliamentary libraries, and there will be printed copies for purchase via local SPA branches.

Michael Bayliss continues to host the Post-Growth Australia Podcast, or PGAP. This podcast serves to extend the conversation beyond population into a broader discussion on limits to growth. PGAP now sits comfortably within the top 10% of all podcasts worldwide and has established its own following.

As the MMC have refined their promotional campaigns, the results for SPA have been tangible. We are appearing more often in the media and our work is being picked up by our international colleagues. Visits to our website continue to trend upwards. Our social media and You-

Tube following has been increasing steadily. New memberships have been trending upward since July 2020 to almost double the number of new members each month by February 2022.

One key observation made by the MMC over the past year is on the increasing contribution of social media and online advertising to get SPA message out there. However, moderation of our social media is time-intensive. Therefore, SPA will be looking to employ a paid Social Media coordinator this year in order to strengthen and professionalise our online presence.

Following the national membership survey, MMC reviewed the results and drafted recommendations which the National Executive incorporated into action points. One finding from the survey is that there are many in SPA who are not aware of SPA's campaigns and resources, including our YouTube channel, which houses 45 mostly in house produced videos. Therefore, many of the action points from the survey include ways in which SPA can strengthen communications with our members.

Looking immediately ahead, the MMC will be launching a social media awareness campaign in April in anticipation of the Federal election.

As well as the significant MMC work, SPA did some important new conceptual and policy work last year. First there was our new 'Population position and policy statement', which replaced our earlier policy statement from over a decade ago.

In addition, we developed new statements on 'population and racism', and 'diversity and social inclusion'. These pages are now on our web site and provide us with a way to counteract unjustified smears that are sometimes made against anyone concerned about population growth.

And, last but by no means least, the weekly e-news and the quarterly newsletter continue. My thanks to Steve Williams for his excellent compilation of news for the former. I have enjoyed doing the newsletter but seek a replacement as I have been too stretched for time which is shared these days with climate action work at a local level.

In conclusion, I conclude that SPA has moved along the path from being an amateur organisation to a professional one, even though most people doing the work are unpaid or underpaid. I thank them all, including members of the national executive, not least VP Peter Cook, Meetings Secretary Sandra Kanck and Treasurer Tony Matta who all provide exceptional expertise.

Vale Bruce Dinham

John Coulter



Bruce Dinham

Bruce Dinham, an SPA S.A. member died in March 2022 at the age of 97. He was a gentle man who applied himself where 'the truth' led writing vigorously and often on the urgent need to limit both population and economic growth. He was especially critical of mainstream economists and the use of GDP as a measure of human progress.

Bruce was born into a South Australian farming family in 1924, his mother a teacher. The depression hit the family hard. He attended Adelaide Boys High School. When he turned 18 in 1942, he immediately joined the RAAF and by early 1943 had completed his pilot training and was on a troop ship bound for the UK.

Bruce hoped to fly Spitfires but when that was not offered, he became a bomber pilot joining 55 Squadron RAF flying night bombing missions in A-20 Boston twin-engine bombers.

On one occasion, engine failure forced him to perform a textbook one-engine landing.

On another, his aircraft was hit by flak, causing a serious fuel leak. Bruce gave the order to bail out, but when one of his crew admitted he had forgotten his parachute, Bruce managed to nurse the plane, awash with fuel, back to base. That crewman, radio operator Jack Machon, remained a lifelong friend.

After the war, Bruce studied aeronautical engineering. He graduated from Sydney University in 1949 and hoped to re-join the air force as a pilot but was turned down because of not quite perfect eyesight. He then joined the navy, hoping to

become a navy pilot, but found himself confined to the engine room of the ageing heavy cruiser Australia. Bruce left the navy in 1951 and returned to Adelaide, planning to look for aeronautical work overseas. But his cousin, Tony, who had just left a job at the Electricity Trust of SA (ETSA) told him they were looking for engineers. Bruce applied, thinking this would only be a temporary job, but he remained with ETSA for 32 years, eventually becoming general manager in 1976.

It was about this time I first met Bruce having been appointed to a committee given the task of writing the Environmental Impact Statement for a new coal-fired power station at Port Augusta. (That station has now come and gone, 2016)

Bruce and I shared an interest in sailing. We had both built our own boats. Bruce was crew on the ketch, Ingrid, which won on handicap the 1952 Sydney Hobart race. Waiting on Constitution Dock was Pamela Jenkins whom Bruce married in 1954. Pam and Bruce visited our home several times. They had three children: Julie, Suzy and Michael.

Under Bruce's management ETSA, which dealt with all aspects of S.A.'s electricity production, distribution and sale, S.A. had the cheapest electricity in Australia. Bruce became a very critical opponent of the privatisation and breakup of ETSA writing a steady stream of letters to The Advertiser. His correct judgement is now reflected in the high cost of electricity in this state.

Sandra Kanck reports that Bruce was of great assistance to her as a member of the S.A. Legislative Council during the privatisation debates.

Bruce was a gentle, brave, honest Australian who went where the truth led. Why aren't there more like him?

Some parts of this Obituary have been copied from an obituary in The Advertiser Saturday 1st May 2021

Proposed Changes to the SPA Constitution

These changes were proposed by the Constitutional Review Committee which met after the SPA AGM on March 19.

Rationale: **The liberation of branches**

Imagine if your branch was able to spend reduced time checking out the constitution about what it can and can't do, the positions it must fill, and what makes a quorum etc. We want branches to be as effective as possible. The Executive will be proposing substantial changes to liberate the branches from the rigid framework now embedded in the constitution, allowing them to spend more time on the activities which will push the population message along.

Branches to be managed by a procedure

The proposed changes will see the removal of all rules relating to state branches from the constitution. Branches will instead be governed by a set of rules that will be approved by the executive and documented in our procedures' manual. These changes will allow more flexibility in how branches run their affairs, enable more responsiveness to changing circumstances, and remove some inconsistencies

and anachronisms that currently exist.

These changes are not about closing or undermining branches. The state branches add great value as centres of community for SPA members and for performing tasks specific to states such as holding face to face meetings, running events and making submissions to state government inquiries. None of these tasks necessitate state branches with a separate AGM, bank account etc.

SPA is not a federation of branches. The branches are not separate legal entities. The constitution says that "Upon receipt of a request from members, the Executive Committee "may" resolve to establish Branch Committees". Since the branches are set up at the executive's discretion and the executive is legally responsible for managing them, it makes sense that the executive has discretion to set rules on how they are run. This change will simplify the process by which such rules are made.

SPA News

Limiting the Executive to Ten Members

The proposed new constitution would limit executive numbers to ten. This change seeks to return to the sound governance principle and practice of avoiding a large and unwieldy executive committee. A membership of ten is considered ideal for the conduct of business and sufficient to include members from all states if members from those states wish to nominate candidates. Where there is a need for special committees, these can be brought into being as and when needed. For example, a committee of state presidents that could offer some mutual support and cooperation.

Permitting members to join any branch of their choosing.

Another proposed change is to enable a member to join any branch of their choosing, rather than it being geographically limited. Why should a member not be able to simply choose the committee/branch they want to be part of rather than being constrained to join the nearest one? In this vast country, there is no particular reason why a member in Cairns should belong to the Brisbane based branch rather than the Sydney one if that group is doing something they

wish to support. As well as region-based committees, we might have national special interest groups that focus on foreign aid, social media, contraception, immigration, etc.

Technology is allowing us to become more efficient

CIVI, our member database, is an improvement that allows us to delete the constitutional requirement for branches to keep member lists. Centralising the accounting can also help. Some branches may not wish to have a treasurer or do their own bank accounts. They can just forward expense reimbursement requests to the national committee. The national treasurer can provide them with financial reports at any time.

Branches are still shrinking in number and size. The internet has also provided us with much easier and faster communication. The additional flexibility of moving the branch provisions out of the constitution and into the hands of the executive can only help the organisation to better adapt to fast changing times.

Draft documents will be ready shortly. Members are invited to look at these and provide their comments.

To join the discussion, please contact treasurer@population.org.au

Branch News

QLD

Queensland Branch has had yet another insight into life on the other side of overshoot when some of its branch committee's city went underwater in late February. Brisbane City Councillor Jonathan Sri has been calling for an end to residential development in flood effected areas and Edward Smith met with him to explain that population growth directs a wall of money against cogency in town planning in general and land buybacks in particular. While he remains unconvinced of the relevance of population to sustainability, he was open-minded enough to meet and to hear our concerns. SPA's discussion papers were an invaluable tool in this meeting, as they always are.

Our branch is doing its best to leverage the election campaign to draw attention to the benefits of smaller populations. The branch committee has compiled some talking points for engaging with politicians and on 7 April held a virtual state meeting to discuss how we can best push the population issue. Particular thanks must go to Jane O'Sullivan for her editorial input to the talking points. Queensland branch has now emailed these talking points to all members and is holding two more meetings about this on 28 April and 3 May to which all members are invited. Please contact qld@population.org.au for more information.

Edward Smith

ACT

The last three months has been a relatively busy time for the Branch, helping to host the Fenner Conference at the Shine Dome at ANU on the 17 and 18 March as well as the SPA National AGM the next day.

The Fenner Conference was very well attended and included an impressive range of speakers and variety of topics.

On the 2 April, we held our Branch AGM. This time we did not have a guest speaker and this may have contributed to a modest turnout. Despite this, there was a vigorous discussion about the prospects and challenges facing the organisation and how we might galvanise greater impact in the community of population and immigration issues. It is hoped that we will be able to attract some new faces to our committee in coming months to fill a couple of vacancies. We have continued to hold our meetings via Zoom which seems to work well for the most part.

Colin Lyons

WA

Due to circumstances beyond my control, I was unable to participate in the February SPA Exec Zoom meeting. Not only did Michael Bayliss kindly step in but he also provided a very full report of the proceedings at the Branch's next meeting several weeks later. Our Sec/Treasurer Warwick Boardman had organised to receive the Friday's presentation of the Fenner Conference and had kindly asked me down. This involved a 3am start for me and I'm still not sure whether it was dedication or stupidity to accept, but it was worth the effort.

We have at last got on the list to be notified of any forthcoming open-days at Curtin Uni. No idea why it has been so hard. Whether due to Covid or not there seems to be a dearth of fairs or fetes at the moment. Not much recent activity to report I'm afraid though now some of us are involved with the forthcoming election.

Judith Odgaard

Branch News

SA/NT

At our last branch meeting on 22 February, discussion was held with three speakers on the extent to which it is physically possible for our growth-focused economy (whether we are thinking globally or locally) to truly transition to 100% renewable energy (not just electricity supply).

Is such a transition actually possible, given our current rates of consumption of all types of resources, let alone our determination to have endless growth?

1. *Dr John Coulter* believes there is no technological pathway to a sustainable future. Directing our effort toward reduction of population and per capita environmental demand provides the only path to an environmentally sustainable future.
2. *Dr John Tons* spoke about Green Capitalism: The Renewable Energy Delusion. He says, 'Green Capitalism refers to campaigns that urge individuals to become sustainable and responsible actors in contributing to the well-being of our "mother earth" but only in a manner that is tightly interwoven with neoliberal capitalist agendas'.
3. *Michael Dwyer* elaborated on the aftermath of the growth-based market economy. In his words, 'Novel economies will be local or regionally-based and will have alternative drivers to the market. The attempt to turn the world's thinking away from the economic-growth-forever dogma will be unsuccessful. Let it fail and look ahead.' Michael challenged us all to become "post-doomers".

John Tons also spoke at an evening function in the city hosted by Flinders University.

The next meeting will be in late May (date tbc) with a talk by Adelaide Uni's Professor Bob Hill, who was on local radio recently criticising population growth as an economic strategy.

Peter Martin

VIC/TAS

The Victorian and Tasmanian branch has just finished its AGM. This was our first gathering since these second lot of lockdowns and restrictions from the Covid pandemic that restricted us from gathering. We were lucky to have Professor Michael Buxton as our guest speaker talking on "Problems for planning in an ever-expanding city". It was fantastic talk, and we thank Professor Buxton for his dedication to these critical issues.

Our branch secretary Jill Quirk, also announced her resignation from the committee. We thank Jill for her many years of selfless dedication to the population cause. I found Jill to be an inspiration with her passion for the environment and wildlife. From us all, thank you Jill.

If any Victorian or Tasmanian members would like to volunteer for the branch secretary position it would be greatly appreciated.

We hope in the coming months to return to organising branch dinners, stalls and other events where opportunities arise, and when as a branch and committee we have time to dedicate to the planning of those activities.

Daniel Webby

NSW

Two NSW committee members attended The Fenner Conference and reported the conference to be an outstanding success.

The proposal I am developing called "Their Future is in Your Hands – a Strategic Plan for Humanity", as briefed in previous newsletters, is still being refined. This was discussed with various delegates at the conference. The content of several conference presentations has been incorporated into the Plan, such as including treating topsoil as a valuable non-renewable resource and carbon sequestration. The presentation by Admiral Barrie on key strategic issues with our Asia-Pacific neighbours of migration and climate refugees has also been incorporated.

The Plan has been updated with 2022 IPCC Working Group III Assessment Report 6 and the latest Climate Council Report called "The Lost Years". Several individuals have offered to review the draft.

NSW Strategies for 2022 have been prioritised. The letter writing team and the Strategic Plan, have been given priority and contacting lapsed and newer members by our Membership Officer will commence shortly.

At our next Executive Committee meeting scheduled for May, we will be discussing our other strategies – particularly in relation to letters to the editor and lobbying, along with the details and date for our AGM.

Graham Wood



*Paul Ehrlich
photo Centre for Conservation
Biology Stanford University*

Happy 90th birthday Paul Ehrlich!

On May 29, Paul Ehrlich turns 90. SPA wishes him many happy returns and good health. Paul with his wife Anne co-wrote the 1968 seminal book "The Population Bomb" that had a profound influence on so many of us. Paul and Anne attended the 2013 Fenner Conference that SPA organised on "Population, Resources and Climate Change" at which Paul was keynote speaker.

He remains intellectually active even if his eyesight is failing a little. Recently he distributed a paper to colleagues called 'Population, Ecological Footprint and the Sustainable Development Goals' by Partha and Aisha Dasgupta and Scott Barrett that you can find here:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10640-021-00595-5>

Report

Communication Manager's Report

Michael Bayliss

Although I am often involved to some degree with SPA's national campaigns, I couldn't do it without the tireless dedication of the Membership and Marketing Committee, or the direction, guidance and counsel from the National Executive.

In terms of national campaigns, we're aiming and reaching higher with each passing year. But this comes with a greater need to professionalise, especially when considering our increasing use of online media. As such, I will be assisting SPA to employ a 'Social Media and Promotions Coordinator' to further professionalise and streamline our online presence. Do you know of anyone who is a social media wiz and might enjoy working with SPA? More information can be found on our website <https://population.org.au/spa-is-seeking-to-employ-a-social-media-and-promotions-coordinator/> or contact media@population.org.au for more information. Applications close 28th May 2022.

Until then, I remain proud of the outcomes of the many campaigns and projects in the past few months that I have helped bring to light. Recent episodes of Post-Growth Australia Podcast – that I host – have included interviews with Charles Massy to promote the Fenner conference just past, and Ian Lowe and Jane O'Sullivan to promote SPA's 'Population and Climate Change' discussion paper. Speaking of the discussion paper,

I have been very impressed the response to the paper from the broader community, which included an interview with Ian Lowe on ABC Radio National's 'Science Show'.

In the lead up to the federal election, I have been launching an online 'Let's Rethink Big Australia' (LRBA) campaign, directing people to the SPA website, providing them with further information and advice in regards to how they can lobby population policy as an election issue. Two weeks into the campaign and traffic to our website is 150% higher than average, which is a great sign.

Below is one of our images used in the LRBA campaign.



About SPA

Website: www.population.org.au

The SPA newsletter is now published every four months: in February, May, August and November. Members are welcome to submit material to the editor, to be published at the editor's discretion.

Newsletter editor: Jenny Goldie
editor@population.org.au

Letters to editor welcome but 300 words maximum and in electronic form!

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

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Disclaimer

While every effort has been made to ensure the reliability of the information contained in this newsletter, the opinions expressed are those of the various authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of either SPA or the editor.