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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 • Dr John Coulter

Immigration and the ‘everything shortage’



At the public meeting after the AGM in Adelaide on 20 April, Macrobusiness founder Leith van Onselen spoke of the consequences of Australia's record immigration levels. He noted that a record 549,000 net overseas migrants (NOM) had landed in the year to September 2023, yet “normal” NOM in the post-war period was around 90,000.

On top of that, in February, a record 2.4 million temporary visa holders (excluding visitors) were in Australia, about 400,000 more than the pre-pandemic peak. There were also 713,000 international students in Australia in February, around 100,000 more than the pre-pandemic peak. In other words, the Albanese government has delivered record permanent and temporary migration.

“Immigration drives all of Australia's population growth,” he argued. Not just directly as migrants hop off the plane, but indirectly as migrants have children.

“We continually read about worsening traffic congestion and shortages of economic and social infrastructure. In 2018, Infrastructure Australia (IA) modelled traffic outcomes for Sydney and Melbourne under various scenarios: expanded low density, rebalanced medium density and centralised high density.

“Under every development scenario, traffic congestion worsens, as does access to jobs, schools, hospitals and green space,” he said.

Traffic on our roads is directly proportional to population growth. IA's Urban Transport Crowding and Congestion Report (2019) estimated “that road congestion and public transport crowding cost the Australian economy \$19.0 billion in 2016. Without continued infrastructure investment in our cities, this cost will more than double by 2031 to reach \$39.8 billion”.

When it comes to hospitals, van Onselen said, barely a week passes without another story about chronic shortages in our health system. Some of these shortages are labour-related (which skilled

migrants can help address), but others are physical—we haven't built enough hospitals to keep pace with the population. According to the latest AMA Public Hospital Report Card, the proportion of Emergency Department patients seen on time is down sharply; median wait time for elective surgery is up sharply; and the percentage of Emergency Department visits completed in four hours or less is down sharply.

It's not just traffic and hospitals, it's schools. In 2016, the Grattan Institute estimated that Australia needed 400 to 750 new schools by 2026 to accommodate an extra 650,000 students.

And water. In 2019, IA modelled that household water bills would rise fivefold in real terms by 2067 as water desalination replaces traditional water supplies.

The big one, of course, is housing. Australia's housing construction has lagged behind population growth since immigration was ramped up from 2005. Australia added only around 166,000 homes to the nation's housing stock in 2023, against a population increase of 660,000. One home for every four new arrivals. And the latest ABS trend data shows that only 149,000 dwellings were commenced and approved in yearly terms; 91,000 below Labor's target of 240,000 homes a year.

The latest record immigration has driven rental vacancy rates to all-time lows. Meanwhile, Australian dwelling values have hit a record high despite 4.25% of interest rate hikes and an approximate 30% decline in borrowing capacity.

So why can't Australia just build more homes? After all, according to the OECD, Australia has one of the highest concentrations of construction workers in the world with 9.2% of Australian workers employed in construction in February 2024. To build more homes, however, we will need a bigger share of people working in construction and more housing requires more infrastructure (roads, sewers, hospitals, schools, etc). In addition, home builders are competing for workers against state government ‘Big Build’ infrastructure projects, and construction costs have also surged by 30% to 40% over the pandemic, curbing demand and supply. Then there are high-interest rates, which are also dampening demand and supply.

And what of public housing construction? Its collapse has occurred alongside surging population growth. The ratio of population increase to new public housing has soared from 14 in 1955 to 2020 currently.

“Increasing public housing provision is a worthwhile goal. But it will be futile under ongoing high immigration,” van Onselen said.



Leith van Onselen.
Photo - Aussie Kanck

Smoke and mirrors with refugees

by Crispin Hull



Crispin Hull

It was kick-a-refugee week again in Australia last week. Whether the Coalition or Labor is in power, it is the same smoke-and-mirrors game. Get demonstrably tough on a few refugees to distract attention from the massive, unsustainable surge in overall immigration.

Belt up a few people who come in by boat and ignore the hundreds of thousands of people arriving by air with visas that they hope one day to turn into permanent residency.

Labor took a leaf out of John Howard's propaganda book when it introduced draconian legislation last week to make it a criminal offence for a person not to cooperate with their own deportation and to empower the Minister to refuse entry for any national of a nation that does not accept deportations from Australia.

Sounds suitably tough to assuage voters who lapped up Pauline Hanson's racist "swamped-by-Asians" warning 28 years ago with regular updates, including another in the Senate a fortnight ago.

But we now know that Hanson was absolutely right it one respect: we are being swamped.

It does not matter whether we are being swamped by British, New Zealanders, Americans, Indians, or Chinese, we are still being swamped.

Hanson's reminder came in the same week that the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that Australia's population growth in the past year was greater (as a percentage) than at any time since 1952.

The increase was 659,800, of whom just 17 per cent were births and 83 per cent (547,600) were immigrants. Together, Sydney and Melbourne took nearly half the population growth.

This is self-immolating insanity. The only people who think they are profiting from it are the big retailers and construction companies.

The quality of life is getting poorer for the majority, especially the young and, ironically, the recently arrived who are being shut out of reasonably priced housing and are being squeezed by an ever-more-costly health system.

You need about 350,000 dwellings a year for this sort of population growth. Last year we built 170,000 and next year it will probably be less given labour shortages in the construction industry. The problem is worse if you consider the 20,000 dwelling demolitions each year.

Skills shortages have been caused by the long-term deterioration of Australia's training regimes as governments

withdrew money and support and added deterrents to training with HELP and HECs fees. Bringing in more people will only make it worse.

The notion that immigrants take existing jobs is largely disproved by low unemployment rates. But they do take housing or make it more expensive by putting unsustainable pressure on housing supply. It is not helped by the deformed tax system.

High immigration has also put downward pressure on wages, again mainly hurting young people and recent migrants.

The solution is not just to build more dwellings. That takes valuable agricultural land and encroaches on important wildlife habitat. Relaxing planning rules would make that worse, not better. Relaxing planning rules and cramming in more people also threatens the amenity of existing suburbs. More dwellings just adds to congestion.

A major problem with this debate is that so many people think that if you support multi-culturalism you must support high immigration and that not to support high immigration is racist. People like Hanson make that worse.

In fact, though, high immigration will ultimately be one of multi-culturalism's biggest threats.

The past 20 years of high population growth has coincided with poor wages growth; poor productivity improvement; lower home ownership; higher health, education and transport costs; and greater inequality. Inevitably that leads to scapegoatism and intolerance.

It also leads to higher crime rates, not just against property, but also violent crime as those missing out lose their sense of belonging and social cohesion and become alienated and angry.

It is standard criminology: no matter what the absolute wealth, higher inequality leads to higher crime rates. For example, the US is wealthier than most European countries but has a much higher crime rate.

In Australia we should watch out for this. In the year to March the number of billionaires in Australia rose 14 per cent to 159. That is up from 117 in 2020. The rich are getting richer. The poor are getting more resentful.

Last week's knee-jerk kick-a-refugee legislation continued the infectious trend of the past 20 years. In the haste to pander to fear, the legislation subverted humanity, proper processes and the truth.

The biggest lie is that Australia has control of its borders. After Covid restrictions ended the Government had no idea how many people would apply for and be entitled to a visa. Australian law sets conditions and if someone meets those conditions, in they come. It is uncontrolled.

The Minister can only set targets.

The Australian Parliament should set the annual number, not the Minister, because these days the governing party usually only has a third of the primary vote, and poll after poll shows that a majority of people think immigration is too high.

So, to disguise and divert attention from uncontrolled legal immigration, governments do what they did last week – go after refugees, in this case mainly Iranians.

But refugees are only a small part of overall immigration. Only 186 Iranians are in immigration detention. Only 10,000 boat arrivals before 2013 remain in legal limbo in Australia, all living in the community.

These are small numbers compared to the 550,000 who came in in just one year.

The sad thing is that if we ratcheted down overall immigration, it would be possible to take more refugees than we are now taking.

For the past 20 years the major parties have been wedging each other into ever more cruel positions on refugees while allowing each other to ramp up immigration

in a way that has been demonstrably against the broad public interest for the narrow benefit of some big donors.

This will not last much longer. All the polling is showing that younger people are getting angrier and more engaged with progressive causes and they are not getting more conservative and apathetic as they grow older, as happened with previous generations.

And they are getting mighty concerned about climate change, the environment and the effects of over-population.

Independents, Greens and other minor parties are the beneficiaries. Before long the major parties will not be able to form majority government and the price of power will be to end the immigration Ponzi scheme and to more fairly distribute the nation's wealth through tax, education, health, and housing policies and to look after the environment better.

This article first appeared in The Canberra Times and other Australian media on 2 April 2024.

Overpopulation Is Still a Huge Problem: An Interview with Jane O'Sullivan

By [Richard Heinberg](#), originally published by [Resilience.org](#)



Jane O'Sullivan. Photo - Aussie Kanck

March 25, 2024

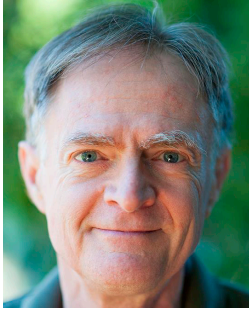
In February, I [interviewed](#) biochemist Chris Bystroff, whose peer-reviewed [analysis](#) suggests that world population is now peaking. I wanted a contrasting view on the matter, so I reached out to my friend Jane O'Sullivan, an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Queensland and author of the paper, "[Demographic Delusions: World Population Growth Is Exceeding Most Projections and Jeopardising Scenarios for Sustainable Futures.](#)" Dr. O'Sullivan has been active in debates about overpopulation in Australia and the world for many years, as both an analyst and an activist.

Richard: Fertility rates are declining sharply in OECD countries, and China's population is now dropping rapidly. Is world population growth in the rear-view mirror, a problem we no longer have to worry about?

Jane: "Declining sharply" and "dropping rapidly" are emotive terms that exaggerate the trends and distract from the far more rapid growth elsewhere. Globally we increase by somewhere between 70 million and 90 million annually, and that pace has been unrelenting for more than 40 years. We don't have hard evidence that the curve has started to bend, let alone that it is on track to peak any time soon. So, the problem hasn't gone away, and the impacts of the human population get more serious and intractable every year.

It's important because there are things we could do, that we know work because many countries did them in the past, and that we're not doing now. Not doing them is leaving hundreds of millions of women who want to avoid pregnancy without the services and means to do it. It is condemning their children to a world of increasing competition and diminishing opportunities, if not outright collapse of civil order.

What we're not doing is sufficient provision and promotion of voluntary family planning. We're not doing it because we have been taught, since the mid-1990s, that expressing concern about population growth will harm the people in high-fertility countries, as if all birth control programs involve forced sterilisations (very few did) and



Richard Heinberg

as if they'd be worse off with fewer children or siblings (they're much better off). The hopeful myth was that women would get better services, and fertility would fall faster, if we only championed their rights and shut up about population. But the opposite happened: without the motivation to reduce population growth for the sake of economic development, the funding and policy support for family planning plummeted, and women were left worse off.

As a consequence, fertility declines slowed or stalled in many countries, but the projections haven't adequately factored this in. In your recent interview with Chris Bystroff, he suggested world population could have peaked already, with birth rates much lower than the UN believes. In fact, the evidence all points in the opposite direction: that the UN has been over-anticipating fertility decline and underestimating population growth.

Every two or three years, the UN publishes an update of their population estimates and projections. Almost every update this century has revised the world population upward. Their mid-2022 release estimated the mid-2022 population to be 7.975 billion. This was 21 million higher than their 2019 projection anticipated it would be, despite more than 15 million unanticipated deaths due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was 177 million more than the 2010 projection expected, and 253 million people more than was projected in 2000. Despite their consistent underestimation of growth, their model continues to assume all high-fertility countries are experiencing rapid fertility decline, even though their historical data show they haven't.

Other research groups that attempt global population projections include Wittgenstein Centre in Austria, whose projections are used in climate change mitigation models. They anticipate faster and deeper fertility declines than the UN. History is proving them to be more wrong than the UN. This is worrying when all modelled scenarios that keep climate change below 2°C depend on world population growth quickly tapering off, without including any measures to help it do that.

However, the lower projections get a lot of support in the media because it is what people want to believe. They want to be reassured that doing nothing about population growth is safe and sufficient. So, they cling to myths and misrepresentations that fertility is "plummeting" everywhere and China's population is "collapsing."

China's population fell by about 0.14% last year. It is absurd to regard this as a "rapid" decline when 2.9% growth in Canada is presented as unproblematic. Growth is much more costly than shrinkage, economically, socially, and environmentally.

Richard: What are the implications for the non-OECD countries that still suffer high rates of population growth? And how could their problems spill over into the rest of the world?

Jane: The main implication is that they are stuck in a poverty trap that can only get worse. Back in the 1960s, when developing country population growth started to gather pace due to better health care, it was obvious to everyone that this would impede development. Everything you do is just running to keep pace, rather than getting ahead. You can improve farm yields, but the farmers' kids get less land each or become landless. When they flock to the towns and cities, there are not enough jobs for them, and it's impossible to house them decently. You struggle to improve education if you have to double school capacity every couple of decades. The situation breeds crime and violence, which makes good governance impossible and political instability virtually inevitable.

In contrast, all the countries that made efforts to reduce birth rates in the 1960s to 1990s are powering ahead economically. These days we're encouraged to believe birth control efforts did nothing but breach human rights, but this is a gross misrepresentation. Almost all national family planning programs were voluntary and based on improving people's lives by delivering better health and contraception services. They also worked to break down many of the patriarchal traditions that relegated women to childbearing, such as child marriages and son preference, and to ensure girls' access to education. By slowing population growth, they were able to improve job prospects and access to services such as electricity and sewage. Gradually, it became a virtuous cycle.

It didn't happen because they were richer or better educated, but because they gave family planning a high priority. For example, Thailand was much poorer and less developed than the Philippines in 1970, but is far better off now, and a major rice exporter, thanks to its family planning program. Bangladesh was the poorest of the poor, but promoted family planning while Pakistan didn't. Now it has overtaken Pakistan, where worsening conditions are leading to political instability.

The media rarely comment on it, but population pressure has played a large part in the recent conflicts in the Middle East and Africa. The Arab Spring uprisings were triggered by a world food price spike hitting hard in poor countries dependent on imported food. Others are coming close to famine conditions again. In Madagascar last year, hunger was blamed on climate change, but few if any media commentators mentioned that there are now seven Madagascans for each one the country had to feed in 1950.

Whether in war or peace, population pressure generates high demand for emigration. Gallup polls now show a billion people want to emigrate to a richer country, including more than half the adults in sub-Saharan Africa. Western countries are already seeing increased inflows,

and people who complain are labelled racist and xenophobic. But if these countries really had open borders, welcoming all comers, their welfare systems would instantly be overwhelmed. They will inevitably tighten border controls, but they will almost as inevitably have higher inflows anyway because the demand is growing so rapidly. This will be an ongoing source of social tension.

Beyond that are the environmental impacts. This is a difficult area to model, because every country that reduced fertility also got richer, so bigger footprints outweighed fewer feet, at least in the short run. But if we were able to reduce the energy demands of middle-class lifestyles, and to generate that energy without greenhouse gases, we'd still be left with the sheer scale of the food system. All the modelling suggests that we can't draw down carbon dioxide without expanding forests, and we won't reverse deforestation if global population keeps growing.

It's not about blaming poor people of colour; it's about creating the conditions needed to end poverty. It's about acknowledging all the ways humanity is unsustainable, and that we have to address every one of them. Family planning in Africa is no substitute for reducing the footprint of the rich countries, but even if we do the latter perfectly, we'll still fail if world population is too high. And it would be people in high-fertility countries who'd suffer most.

Richard: In your opinion, why have world leaders failed for so long to take this issue seriously?

Jane: In the post-War decades, leaders took the issue very seriously. Developing countries begged for family planning assistance, and several donor countries gave it high priority. But from the mid-1970s, in response to clear statements from the US Presidency in favour of population stabilisation at home and abroad, a concerted campaign started to build to undermine these commitments. It was mainly driven by leaders of the Catholic church, who wanted to defend their ban on contraception: if contraception is the only way out of poverty, then they are morally compromised. So, they worked hard to promote alternative economic theories that population growth is neutral for development—"every extra mouth comes with a pair of hands." They exerted political leverage on American politicians, particularly Republican presidents, to defund family planning activities. They got Catholic countries to veto attempts to get family planning onto the World Health Organization's agenda. They recruited evangelical churches to escalate the campaign against abortion. Then they cunningly linked family planning to abortion via the Mexico City Policy, announced by the Reagan administration in 1984 at the UN's population conference in Mexico City. It put a ban on US funding going to any entity that even gave advice to women about abortion. Despite modern contraception being the most effective way to reduce abortions, many family planning agencies refused to comply with this rule because they would not refuse women life-saving advice, so they were defunded.

The next line of attack was to escalate moral outrage about cases of coercive birth control, so that it seemed as if all family planning programs were coercive by default. In fact, coercion had been rare outside China, and never condoned by family planning agencies. The International Women's Health and Rights Movement was recruited to oppose birth control programs as an attack on women's bodily autonomy. The opposite happened—discouragement of birth control actually harmed women's rights.

This moral crusade against family planning has not been the only barrier to action. Big business wants to ensure cheap labor and fears a declining population, where employers have to compete to attract workers. They have concocted a barrage of myths about population ageing causing recession and bankrupting the welfare system. It makes for strange bedfellows when the moralising Left insists population growth is not a problem because that would be blaming the poor, and big business says population decline is a crisis because it wants to pay lower wages and charge higher rents.

Richard: How can nations use population decline to their advantage?

Jane: They don't have to do anything to reap the benefits of population decline, other than stop resisting it. It means not having to build so much infrastructure every year just to keep pace with growth. It means more affordable housing and less household debt. It means we can retreat from the most ecologically valuable or fragile places, and see them restored and rewilded.

Most people believe the scare-mongering about aging populations and think we'll keep getting older and older until there are no young people left. That's not how it works: at the moment, we're in a transitional phase where we have very high proportions of so-called "working-age" adults, by historical standards. After the transition, that proportion will stabilise at historically normal levels, around 54% if we have a stable population, and maybe just under 50% if the population is shrinking "rapidly" at a little over 1% per year. This isn't a problem, because workforce participation will be higher. We have to adjust to having more retirees and fewer children in the community, but that won't break the budget. The extra we shell out for pensions and health care is offset by less spending on infrastructure, childcare, and education and, in all likelihood, unemployment benefits, rent support, crime, and correctional services. We just need different measures of success than aggregate GDP and stock market earnings.



A Holistic Activism Approach to the Population Issue

by Mark Allen



Mark Allen

The issue of population is one of the most divisive in the environmental movement, but while we risk arguing about whether or not it is an issue, it is important to point out that high fertility rates are symptomatic of deeper, underlying social issues that are important in their own right. The planet does not care about our opinions, only the actions that we take and the impact that they have.

Sadly, the percentage of pregnancies worldwide that are unplanned remains at forty five percent which is a stark reminder of the limited progress that is being made on many of these issues. A major barrier to this progress is a growing movement towards pronatalism that is being perpetuated by influential global elites, in large part because neoliberal economies such as Australia and Canada are increasingly becoming reliant upon population growth. This is especially apparent in face of the falling per capita consumption that occurs when austerity, and housing investment are championed over government spending and housing affordability.

It is therefore unsurprising that Elon Musk and others in the one percent are pressing the panic button. It is also unsurprising that economies such as the UK that rely heavily upon growing the population at home, make cuts to the kind of proactive foreign aid that delivers universal access to healthcare, family planning, and infrastructure development. Therefore, to dismiss all discussion on the population issue risks overlooking the role that pronatalism and population growth in general, plays in propping up neoliberal ideology. Australia for example, pursues an economic model that is increasingly reliant upon development, real estate and hence population growth. This is leading to ongoing development-driven environmental challenges and housing shortages. If more acknowledgment was given to the role that population policy plays under the current system, we would be in a better position to develop an

economic model that does not pander to the interests of the Business Council and the Property Council. Our approach would instead focus upon delivering socially equitable development on a global scale.

Discussing population within its proper context rather than dismissing it outright, also helps to prevent the development of extremist views. Because calling someone a bigot for talking about population is more likely to make them into one than acknowledging their concerns. It is better therefore to direct discussion towards how population fits into the bigger picture.

That bigger picture must have at its core, the urgent need to reduce the emissions of the top ten percent in particular. But we will not see a drastic reduction in those emissions under a continuation of the current growth-based system. This is why adopting an economic model that among many other factors, embraces population decline will have an immediate environmental impact. Not because it will result in a net reduction in the number of people on the planet any time soon, but because of the behavioural and systemic changes that this approach would help to bring about.

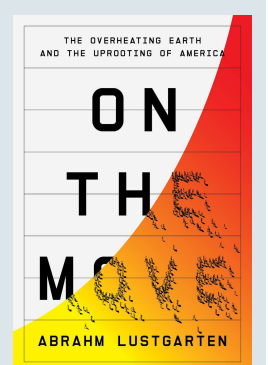
It would also help to dispel the myth that population growth is necessary in order to support an ageing population. In reality, an aging population is a medium-term consequence of any population stabilising or reducing in size, which is something that every population will eventually have to do. The issue therefore is not a lack of people or resources, it is about where we choose to allocate those people and resources.

Holistic activism is about examining the deeper issues that lie behind embedded narratives that the mainstream media refuse to question. This means putting emotive issues such as population into their proper context as opposed to dismissing them outright. That way we can ensure that proactive aid is integral to activism while ensuring that demography is decoupled from economics. All of this will contribute towards the development of a post-growth societal model that seeks to bring everyone in the world along with it.

Climate migration

"A climate-driven migration has already begun," writes climate change journalist Abrahm Lustgarten in his must-read book, "On the Move: The Overheating Earth and the Uprooting of America." Few places in the U.S. will likely see more climate migrants than Atlanta, which lies close to coastal areas of the Southeast U.S. where sea level rise can be expected to displace millions of people this century.

This book will be reviewed in the August issue of the SPA Newsletter.



Campaign update

Campaign Update

Michael Bayliss, Communications Manager



Michael Bayliss

At time of writing, SPA's 'Say No to a Big Australia!' campaign is going from strength to strength, with over 4,200 [position statement signatures](#) and 350 letters to MPs sent through our [DoGooder](#) app. Furthermore, many supporters have put up their hands to distribute over 14,000 campaign flyers.

This support from the broader Australian community is unparalleled in recent SPA history, with the statistics continuing to speak for themselves. This time last year, SPA had 400 non-member supporters. Twelve months later, our supporter numbers are over 2,000 - a fivefold increase!

We are expecting these recent successes to be just the tip of the iceberg. As I write this, we have just launched another online promotion campaign with our marketing partners at Media Precinct. Online ads will reach hundreds of thousands of Australians, specifically targeting marginal federal seat and regions of high rental stress. Media Precinct have a legacy of success with 'petition' style campaign drives, and already we are seeing great success with over 100 signatures per day. When this newsletter goes to print, I won't be surprised if we reach over 6,000 signatures.

Perhaps we are finally seeing some strong buy in to our cause from the Australian public due to the fact that the pressures of population growth are now so immediate. However none of this recent success would be possible without our Membership and Marketing Committee, who are the 'engine' behind many of SPA's outreach campaigns. Nor would it be possible without our social media team of Martin Tye and Mathisha Wahikala. Speaking of social media, yet another recent milestone has been reached with our Twitter handle reaching 4,000 followers.

Remember that the more signatures on our [position statement](#) and the more letters sent through [DoGooder](#), the easier the case is for SPA to lobby policy makers on behalf of the Australian public. This is because we'll have the proof in numbers that the Australian public are on OUR side of the population debate. As such, we encourage you to invite anyone you know to support the campaign.

While all this has been happening, I have also been working behind the scenes with our database team in order to streamline and improve our online payment system. Many of you have contacted us to share your issues with using PayPal on the SPA website. In response, I am pleased to share that we have transitioned to Eway online payments. We strongly believe that making online payments are much easier with the new system in place, but check for yourself and let us know. Remember, if you have any problems with card payments online, you can contact

head office at info@population.org.au or 0434 962 305 and our staff will be more than happy to explore alternative arrangements with you. I have also been informed that the bank no longer accepts cheques, so if this is you, please contact the info email.

A big shout out to Alex Verlei, Alex Geppert and Jess McQualter from our Civi database team who along with technical support from Agileware, means that SPA's database infrastructure can now keep up with this growth in demand!

As this Newsletter is published, I will have met many of you in person at SPA's AGM and Public Forum: "[From housing crisis to eco-crisis: Why Australia's population growth is unsustainable.](#)" I am very pleased that this event, as well as our 'Say No To a Big Australia' campaign, was promoted by Leith van Onselen in [MacroBusiness](#), bringing SPA's message to their substantial following. I'm trusting that this event will be another SPA success.

Our media releases have been published through local papers (such as The Toorak Times and Tasmania Times), Australian Independent Media Network, and EcoVoice, as well as interviews on state ABC and community radio. One of our media releases was also included, almost word for word, at news.com.au, however we were uncredited. Otherwise, the mainstream news are continuing to play it safe by keeping our side of the argument to the 'Letters to the Editor' section of the paper. Even then, dozens of letters on this issue are published every week from our dedicated members and supporters.

Our Post-Growth Australia Podcast ([PGAP](#)) has just finished its fifth season. Over five seasons, PGAP has steadily built a following and remains in the top 10% of global podcasts. PGAP aims to a broad exploration of all facets of the Degrowth movement while strongly advocating for population sustainability as a crucial contributor to this movement. This season, my co-host Mark Allen and I have interviewed some big names such as [John Seed](#) and [Timothée Parrique](#), as well as First Nations' cultural educator [Larry Blight](#), who is on side when it comes to domestic population policy.

I wish to pass on my thanks to all SPA members and supporters who have who have signed up to our cause, made donations, signed the position statement, distributed leaflets or written to your local MP and media outlets. Without your support - both financial and logistical - none of our recent milestones would have been possible.

Remember, you can support us by making a [DONATION](#), signing our [POSITION STATEMENT](#) (if you haven't done so already), sending a [LETTER TO YOUR MP](#) and tuning into our [PODCAST](#). If you are currently a supporter, I encourage you to consider becoming a [MEMBER](#), which means you can become more involved in your state branch and well as contributing to SPA's national direction. This is make or break time in Australia's history and we need all hands on deck if we ever have a chance of mitigating a bleak future just for the sake of a few more years of so-called 'growth'.

Meet our Members



Jenny Goldie

Jenny Goldie is our retiring National President and a founding member of SPA. We caught up with Jenny, who reflected on her journey, both in and out of SPA, across decades of environmental and population advocacy.

SPA: Jenny, tell us a little about yourself, including your professional history, activism, your passions and what drives you.

My father was a Presbyterian minister, so from a young age I was instilled with Christian ethics that included the imperative to end poverty and hunger. At Sydney Uni, I studied science under the great zoologist Prof Charles Birch who first introduced me to the problems of human population growth and numbers, particularly where it encroached on the habitats of other species and caused their decline. After graduating, I taught high school science in Papua-New Guinea before returning to NSW to teach, marry my first husband Ross, then move to Japan for a year. Here I commuted daily between Yokohama and Tokyo. The trains were so crowded that pushers were employed to cram as many people as possible into each carriage. On leaving Japan, we travelled through Asia and Europe en route to the US. In Calcutta we witnessed some of the half a million people sleeping on the streets, often with little more than a dirty newspaper on which to rest their head. The two years that we lived in the US radicalised me, as I confronted such issues as peace, racism and feminism - and also population. After the birth of our first child, we read Paul Ehrlich's 'The Population Bomb' and resolved not to have any more children of our own. We subsequently adopted a daughter from Korea, a son from Vietnam (where we worked for three months just before the end of the war), an Aboriginal son (Ross was first full-time doctor at the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern) and we long-term fostered a boy whose father was African-American. It is good to have a largely brown/black family if for no other reason it counters accusations of racism. I remarried - Nick Goldie - in the 1980s when we were both Parliamentary staffers for the Australian Democrats, in my case, for Senator John Coulter who was committed to the population issue.

SPA: Why is population sustainability a critical issue for you? Do you remember a 'light bulb' moment when you first started to learn about the impacts of population growth? How have people responded to your dedication to population sustainability, especially from the broader environmental movement?

Population underlies all the environmental, and often social, issues we face. The 'light-bulb' moment for me came when reading 'The Population Bomb' because it built on everything I had had learnt from Prof Charles Birch and from seeing so much crowding and poverty in my travels. There has been a mixed reaction in the environmental movement to my commitment to population. Generally the adverse criticism comes from people with a poor grasp of science, or they are ideologically driven, or they haven't got out much.

SPA: You have been with SPA since its inception as AESP in 1988. Can you tell us a little more about your memories of the first meeting and what was the feeling in the room? How has SPA changed and developed since then?

Some months after I arrived in Canberra, ten of us got together to form Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population (AESP). We met in each other's homes and there was good camaraderie between us. (Five of us are still alive - Chris Watson, Mark O'Connor, Greg and Eileen Dunstone and me; and five have died - Hellen Cook, Anne Edgeworth, Hugh Oldham, Duncan Waddell and Graham Caldersmith). AESP grew quickly to have a membership of 500, then 1300 nationally for many years. We were determined to have all policies based on science and that has stood us in good stead, differentiating us from the likes of Pauline Hanson. It took 30 or more years, however, to make real headway. We have done so thanks to having paid staff and excellent people on the national executive.

SPA: You have been involved with SPA for 36 years, across many roles and responsibilities over the years. Would you like to share some of these? What has been at least one highlight during your time with SPA?

Yes, I have been president a few times, secretary, media officer, newsletter editor and national director. The highlight of my years of involvement was running the successful 2013 Fenner Conference on Environment called "Population, Resources and Climate Change - implications for Australia's near future". The keynote speaker was my long-time hero, Paul Ehrlich. It was all deeply satisfying as I sensed we were now accepted as a professional organisation.

SPA: What was the prevailing attitude from the broader community toward population sustainability in 1988? Have you observed any changes over the years or has it always been a similar uphill challenge?

The golden years for population, of course, were the 1970s when my contemporaries and I were having children and were mostly aware of the problems of overpopulation. Then thanks to the efforts of the Catholic Church and, dare I say, feminists, things went downhill after that, particularly at the 1994 Population and Development Conference in Cairo. Now, we have the likes of David Attenborough and Chris Packham (BBC's Earth series) stating the obvious and there is growing acceptability of the issue again. The main opposition comes from economists who have no ecological awareness whatsoever.

SPA: Now you are retiring as SPA National President, what are your plans for the future?

Apart from remaining as SPA's newsletter editor, I will continue to work on climate issues, including a monthly column in my local paper. I may also be elected to local Council in September where I hope to address population and climate issues. This all has to be balanced with family health issues.

SPA: Being an advocate for a sustainable population is a real challenge, with the feeling like the rest of society is against us, and with the feeling that mainstream cut through is still evasive and out of reach. Why do you believe that people should continue to persist with the fight? Why should people support and be more involved with SPA?

Meet our Members

Thanks to my science background and mentors like Charles Birch and John Coulter, I have a coherent philosophy so am not unduly rattled if people disagree with me. Why do we persist with the fight? Because we stand at a critical time in history. I fear 'The Great Unravelling' has begun. We are seeing it in wars and insurrection across the globe. We have a climate crisis and the sixth mass extinction has started. There are too many of us using too many resources and producing too many wastes. I fear climate change will make

much of the world uninhabitable and we will not be able to feed eight billion people, let alone the projected 10 billion. I believe the more people there are, the greater the crash will be. That's why we have to keep supporting SPA. We have to deal with the very issue that underlies all the current and impending disasters, and hopefully ameliorate them to some extent.



Warwick Boardman

Warwick Boardman wears many hats in the Western Australia branch including Treasurer and Membership Officer. He has been instrumental in coordinating and manning several community stalls in Perth over the past couple of years. We are delighted to profile Warwick for this edition of the Newsletter.

SPA: Warwick, tell us little about yourself, your passions and what drives you and what you like to do in your spare time when not volunteering with SPA.

My strongest subjects at school were maths and science so science became my passion. I listened to the ABC's Science Show where I first heard the bad news of climate change and as a result I felt I had to relinquish my gas guzzling Landrover! This made me consider the costs of running a vehicle, both financially and environmentally, which is why I now endeavour to cycle whenever I can. I worked in sustainable forest management where my boss was involved in the campaign by the WA Institute of Foresters against mining for bauxite. I became interested in the environment and joined the Friends of the Earth and we saved whales and stopped nuclear power plants. When my kids went to school I joined the P&C and was asked if I'd like to help save a patch of natural bushland associated with the school. I've been weeding it ever since! I'm also passionate about democracy and the importance of the Union movement.

SPA: Why is population sustainability a critical issue for you? What are the impacts of rapid population growth on Australia's fastest growing city Perth?

In my job I saw firsthand that there was a conflict of interest between preserving WA's forests with the demands of a growing population. We have lost a lot of bushland and market gardens to housing. The Perth metropolitan area is now acknowledged by world bodies as a biodiversity hotspot which is sadly diminishing day by day due to the pressures of population growth. With a drying climate water became so scarce that our existing two desalination plants are no longer sufficient and we are currently building a third! As the cost of housing balloons, more people are being forced to fringe suburbs and I worry about how this impacts the quality of life for my kids' generation.

SPA: Tell us a little bit about your journey in SPA, including becoming membership officer with the WA branch.

I was very impressed by the intellectual strength of SPA – including in WA with president Dr Harry Cohen (dec), Dr Paddy Weaver (dec) and Dr Robin Collin being involved, which influenced my decision to get more involved. Unfortunately, the time came for Harry and the Weavers to retire. The position of treasurer was vacant and I felt comfortable taking that on as I had been treasurer for my son's district cricket club and as I was no longer working, had the time to commit to volunteering with SPA. Those of us on the committee were busy people but we didn't have much time for recruitment or organising talks like the Weavers had done. As such, the committee also needed a secretary and membership officer. Because I had more time than the others I also took on these additional roles.

SPA: Although smaller in size, the WA branch is admired nationally by its commitment to community stalls, attending at least two a year. Although it may sometimes feel like the work put in doesn't always match with the results out, do you have any reflections on the importance of showing up and having a physical presence in the community?

Robert Boni and I volunteered to staff a stall in the University of WA Orientation day. We had plenty of give-away supplies that the Weavers had accumulated, including Dick Smith books. At the recent Hyde Park Festival (a two-day event) the people who stopped to talk to us were already on side with the issue. We always hope that someone may take the extra step and join up as a member – but so far not much luck! The money raised by the event was to be donated to homeless charities. A girl who was looking for extra donations made the connection between population growth and housing insecurity and so came over to speak to us, which was nice. Running a stall is an ongoing learning experience in how to communicate this controversial issue with the broader public. As I say at the stalls, I care about our natural environment but I don't see people eager to take up the apartment-living lifestyle that our Big Australia proponents want them to.

SPA: Why would you encourage people to support, join, or become more involved with SPA?

Unfortunately, in Perth SPA is the only organisation talking about people pressure on the natural environment. I would strongly encourage anyone living in Western Australia to consider taking up a committee position with the WA branch. Some who come to visit us at our stalls understand that population growth is an "everything" issue whether it be sustainable timber supply, water supply, vegetable supply or power supply. The high rate puts pressure on the infrastructure and services budgets and there are limits to curbing traffic congestion and housing supply.

Vale Dr Harry Cohen OA MBBS MRCOG FRACOG

19 June 1932 – 30 March 2024

Jenny Goldie



SPA mourns the loss of a former national president, Dr Harry Cohen, committed champion of women's rights, the environment, sustainable development and peace. "One of the brightest stars in the myriad of people's lives," someone wrote in the death notices of the *West Australian*.

Harry Cohen had established his considerable reputation long before I met him. He was, first and foremost an obstetrician and gynaecologist, clinical director of King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women in Perth. Here he advocated for legislation in 1988 that removed abortion from the criminal code in WA, at the same time helping thousands of women to deliver their babies safely. It was for his work in the peace movement in the 1980s, however, that Harry became known nationally, becoming founding co-ordinator of the WA branch of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War (MAPW) in 1981, before going on to serve as president and vice-president of MAPW. He was Australian president of Inter-

national Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985. Ten years later, Harry was made a Member of the Order of Australia "for service to medicine, particularly in the field of obstetrics and gynaecology and to international relations".

Harry also served as president of the Conservation Council of Western Australia, the umbrella body for conservation groups and organisations in WA. With such a solid record on the environment, we warmly welcomed him as national president of SPA in the early 2000s. I was national director at the time and he was unfailingly supportive. A few years later he joined the Board of the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance when I was on staff, and again he was encouraging and amiable to work with. The last time I saw him was when he flew to Canberra in 2013 with his wife June to attend the Fenner Conference on the Environment that SPA organised called 'Population, Resources and Climate Change – implications for Australia's near future'.

We extend our condolences to Harry's beloved wife June of 68 years, their three remaining children and to the grandchildren who called him 'our loved renaissance man'.

President's Report

2024 AGM Of Sustainable Population Australia

This is my last president's report to you. I did not renominate because of family health issues. I thank you all for your support over the past three years.

SPA continues to grow in support, and somewhat in influence, though it is hard to make headway against the prevailing growth paradigm. The ABS showed population growth of nearly two thirds of a million (659,800) in the year ending 30 September 2023, of which 83% was from net overseas migration. The public, if not most politicians, are joining the dots between the housing crisis and these unconscionable numbers.

We still have a long way to go in terms of convincing politicians of our cause though some, such as Senator David Pocock, are clearly on-side. And recently, Dan Tehan, Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, called for lower immigration, adopting the Sustainable Australia Party slogan 'Better not Bigger'. We made submissions to both the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's Inquiry into *Migration: Pathway to Nation Building*, and to the Parliamentary Community Affairs References Committee's inquiry into Australia's worsening rental crisis.

On the international front, Jane O'Sullivan has worked closely with Isaac Kabongo, CEO of the Ecological Christian Organisation (ECO) in Africa, who has staffed stalls for us at recent COP meetings of the UNFCCC. We contributed \$15,000 to ECO's work last year for promoting family planning to refugees in Uganda.

We are also developing stronger ties with sister organisations overseas. Jane is being increasingly recognised internationally as a go-to expert on population.

We developed a Position Statement on Population and have been seeking signatures through social media and flyers that members are letterboxing. My thanks to Martin Tye, our social media manager, for his work on this.

We have issued numerous media releases through the year, two to three a month, responding to government announcements, to the latest demographic figures, or to mark international days such as World Population Day.

I wish to highly commend Michael Bayliss's work as communications' manager. In June 2023, thanks to Michael and Membership and Marketing committee (MMC), SPA rolled out an extensive public awareness campaign with marketing company Media Precinct. The campaign has included both the familiar (social media advertisements) and the new, including CatchUp TV Ads and online media content seeding, with SPA's branding appearing in mainstream online media including outlets such as Buzzfeed and Domain. Again thanks to MMC, we launched a letter writing campaign to Federal MPs using the DoGooder app.

Michael led the housing campaign, launched in April, which drew good engagement from the wider community. The report, "The housing crisis is a population growth crisis", which he co-wrote with Jane O'Sullivan, was distributed to hundreds of stakeholders in the housing and community support sector. The responses were encouraging.

The SPA sponsored podcast, Post-Growth Australia Podcast (PGAP) remains in the top 10% of global podcasts and the number of downloads continue to climb. PGAP is certainly a success story.

Finally, I would like to thank our donors, without whom we would not be able to employ staff. Without our staff, our outreach would be very limited.

I could not function, however, without the contributions of the members of the national executive, not least my vice president Peter Cook who not only has responsibility for our discussion papers, but manages the MMC; the treasurer Tony Matta who

is unfailingly professional in all he does; and probably the most competent secretary of any organisation I have ever been involved with in 50 years of community work, Sandra Kanck.

I am happy now to hand over the reins to Peter Strachan who will, I'm sure, take this organisation to new heights.

*Jenny Goldie
April 2024*

Sandra Kanck awarded life membership

At the AGM in Adelaide in April, national secretary and former national president, Sandra Kanck, was awarded life membership of Sustainable Population Australia.

Outgoing president Jenny Goldie had just noted in her president's report that Sandra was 'probably the most competent secretary of any organisation I have ever been involved with in 50 years of community work.'

In 1993, Sandra was elected as an Australian Democrat to the Legislative Council of the South Australian Parliament. Her first speech was on the need for an environmentally sustainable population for Australia. Sandra remained there until 2009 and that year became president of SPA for the first time. She held that position more often than not until three years ago, when she became national secretary. In presenting the certificate, Jenny said: "Sandra, you receive this, not just because you have been an excellent president and secretary of SPA, but because you have been an articulate spokesperson on the issue of population for decades, and we thank you for it."



*Sandra Kanck receiving her life membership
Photo - Aussie Kanck*

John Coulter becomes sixth SPA Patron



John Coulter

John Coulter was a GP, then medical researcher for over 20 years, university lecturer before entering party political life as an Australian Democrat Senator for South Australia in 1987. From the mid-1950s he has been very active in the conservation movement: marine protection, town planning and more generally strongly opposing the unsustainable for-ever-more-growth in both population and resource consumption. In this capacity he was responsible for a full page ad in

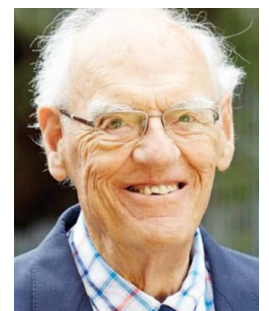
The Australian in 1971 signed by 730 scientists titled 'To those who shape Australia's destiny' including Sir Macfarlane Burnet and Sir Mark Oliphant - a year before the publication of 'Limits to Growth'. As soon as elected to the Senate he succeeded in instituting an inquiry into climate change. As the holder of the Aboriginal Portfolio for the Democrats he strongly supported the formation of ATSIC which would have failed without Democrat support. He has delivered very many speeches and written papers about the urgent need to limit both population and economic growth the most recent: <https://johnmenadue.com/the-guiding-criminal-lie-in-economics/> in April 2024. He led the Democrats from 1991 - 93 and retired from the Senate in 1995.

Unsung hero award goes to David Shearman

At the AGM, Emeritus Professor David Shearman was awarded the Mary E White Unsung Hero Award. Due to poor health, he was unable to receive the award in person but arrangements were made to deliver the certificate to him afterwards.

David had a distinguished career as a physician and academic. This included being an independent assessor for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), contributing to scientific assessments related to climate change and its impact on health.

He now writes eloquently for various publications such as John Menadue's online *Pearls and Irritations* on various matters, including population. He has been passionate about environmental issues for decades and co-founded Doctors for the Environment Australia alongside the late Professor Tony McMichael. (He no longer belongs to DEA, however, because they dropped their population policy.)



*David Shearman.
Photo - Croakey Health Media*

Excerpts

Excerpts from The Fragile Earth

writings from the New Yorker on climate change, first published 2020.

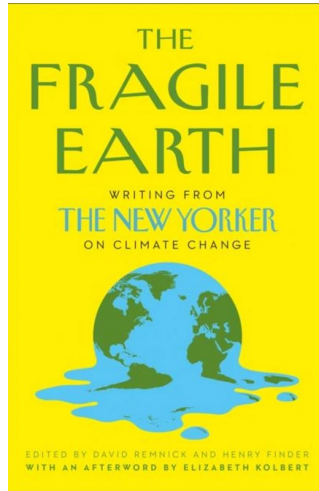
'Reflections: the End of Nature'

by Bill McKibben

(Originally published in the New Yorker on 11 September 1989.)

"The size and complexity of the industrial system we have built makes even small course corrections physically difficult.

"Not only is that system huge but the trend towards growth is incredibly powerful. At the simplest level – population – the increase continues, if not unabated, then only slightly abated. In some of the developing countries, thirty seven per cent of the population is under fifteen years of age; in Africa, the figure is forty five percent. Without a static population, even the most immediate and obvious goals, like slowing de-forestation or reducing fossil fuel use, seem far-fetched."



'The end of the end of the world'

by Jonathan Franzen

(originally published 23 May 2016)

"It's true that the most effective single action that most human beings can take, not only to combat climate change but to preserve a world of biodiversity, is not to have children. It may also be true that nothing can stop the logic of human priority: if people want meat and there are krill for the taking, krill will be taken. It may even be true that penguins, in their resemblance to children, offer the most promising bridge to a better way of thinking about species endangered by human logic: They, too, are our children. They, too, deserve our care."

About SPA

Website: www.population.org.au

The SPA newsletter is now published every three 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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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.