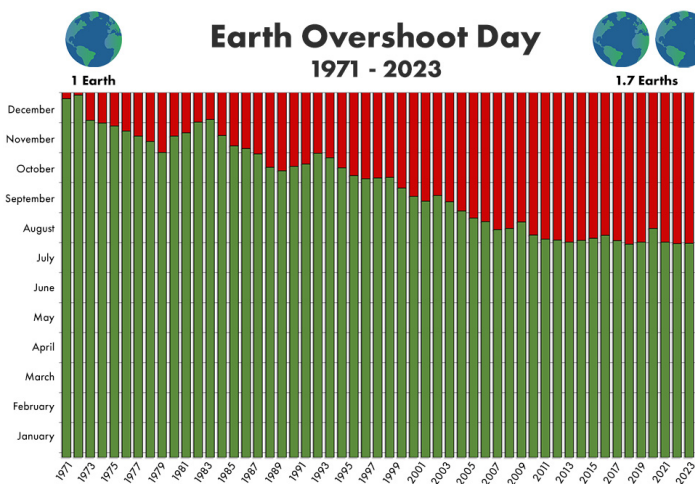




Sustainable Population Australia -- Newsletter

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

August 1 marks Earth Overshoot Day 2024



Ryerson writes: "The crucial question is: How many people can Earth sustain, at a reasonable standard of living, while leaving room for the diversity of life to flourish? There is no precise answer to the question, but the facts overwhelmingly support one conclusion: We cannot go on the way we are going. We are already doing severe and irreparable harm to the planet. Something has to give."



Crist began by noting that "we face gruelling challenges, each immense in its own right but dizzying in their unpredictable synergies: biodiversity destruction, climate change, diversity destruction, climate change, freshwater depletion, ceilings on agricultural productivity, all manner of pollution, topsoil loss and ocean acidification to mention some prominent examples."

Climate change in the meantime, of course, has emerged as an existential threat. If not mitigated, it will exacerbate all other crises. The Earth has experienced a whole year in which each month was the hottest for that month since records began, with temperatures exceeding the 1.5oC benchmark agreed to under the Paris Agreement.

But back to Crist. She writes that "... knowledge of the multiple stresses on the biosphere, along with an understanding of the adverse, volatile ways these may compound each other, yield the recognition that scaling down the human project is the most realistic approach to imminent catastrophes."

She goes on to argue that "food production is the most ecologically devastating enterprise on Earth". Yet should global population reach 10 billion or more, we will need to double food production and even triple it by the end of the century. Behind the discourse is that we *can* do this through managerial and technological innovation, and *will* support the coming billions. Yet, if any species exceeds its carrying capacity, she writes, "the consequences are implacable: starvation, disease and death follow, and the population is brought back within a sustainable range."

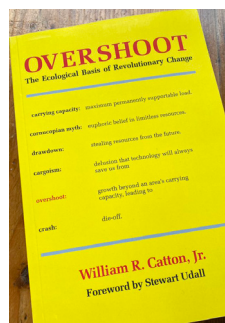
It was, of course, Thomas Malthus who first warned of this back in the late 18th Century. The population crash didn't happen as he predicted but only because humans converted the world's most fertile lands for agriculture and, in the process, took over the carrying capacity of other life-forms.

Crist asks us to consider something more enticing: "that by choosing the wisdom of limitations and humility, humanity can reject life on a planet converted into a human food factory and allow for the rewilding of vast expanses of the biosphere's landscapes and seascapes."

It will entail population reduction, of course, by women voluntarily choosing to have only one or two children, until we can get back to sustainable levels which may be as low as two billion globally. *JG*

Source: National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts 2023 Edition data.footprintnetwork.org

Earth Overshoot Day marks the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year. The closer it is to the end of December, the better. Since 1970, it has moved ever earlier, though for the past few years it has bumped along around where we are now. There is no room for complacency, however, as we need to make it later and later in the year. If we don't, our natural resources will get scarcer and scarcer as they are not being replenished fast enough.



It was William Catton Jr's seminal 1980 book "Overshoot" that highlighted the direct correlation between scarcity and population growth. It was, perhaps, as important as Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" though not as widely read. Nevertheless, the word "overshoot" became common parlance, and biology students at least learned that ecological overshoot occurs when the demands made on a natural ecosystem exceed its regenerative capacity. As applied to population, overshoot occurs when a population exceeds the environment's carrying capacity.

Nine years ago in 2015, the Foundation for Deep Ecology published a coffee table book called "Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot" or "OOO" as we called it. It contained splendid though often depressing pictures of the effects of human overshoot. The most harrowing picture was of an emaciated African toddler, unable to stand from weakness, while a vulture waits in the wings.

SPA distributed hundreds of copies to those who had ordered them through the Population Media Centre (PMC) in the US. PMC's founder and then president Bill Ryerson wrote the introduction to OOO and the afterword was written by renowned author and deep ecologist Eileen Crist.

A population policy anyone?

by Stephen Williams



Imagine you have been asked by the Australian government to draft its new population policy. You first ask to see the old policy but are told there isn't one: immigration policy has been the de-facto population policy for as long as anyone can remember.

You start to make a list of relevant issues.

First, you think it would be a good idea to know how much fresh water is available on an ongoing basis, leaving a good safety margin for mega droughts under climate change. You vaguely remember reading that some capital cities are already vulnerable, and groundwater reserves are declining. Desalination might be OK for emergencies, but it is expensive even when not running and has energy and environmental costs.

The next issue might be food. You believe Australia is a net food exporter (of some products at least) but we also import a lot of food. You strongly believe that a nation should ideally be able to feed itself, so you will have to look into the question of food scarcity of some products. You know that agriculture relies heavily on fossil fuels, so you wonder how much food we can produce without them.

Agriculture has other problems such as limited phosphorous supplies, soil loss, salinity and natural habitat destruction. And there is also the question of water and irrigation in a changing climate. The Murray-Darling system seems to be in constant crisis.

You then think about energy. You know that nothing happens in society without it and energy use has a very close correlation with GDP. Australia is supposed to be moving off fossil fuels – the so-called energy transition – and you wonder how much electricity we can produce if we go fully electric, including transport, and fully non-fossil-fuelled.

More people means more energy use, although there would be some savings from energy-efficiency measures. Global greenhouse gases are as high as ever despite the IPCC being established in 1988. Solar and wind seem to be additional to fossil fuel use rather than a substitution.

Housing is your next problem. Australia is in a housing crisis thanks to a mismatch between supply and demand. You know that demand has risen sharply in recent decades

since former PM John Howard dramatically increased net migration in the early 2000s as a response to the first Intergenerational report in 2002. Most recently the Albanese government opened the floodgates in the wake of the Covid border closure. Housing is increasingly **costly relative to incomes**. Do you want to add to demand when supply is already lagging? You think you could make some improvements at the margins, by taxing empty houses or foreign buyers, but that doesn't get to the core problem.

New land is always needed to build new houses on, even if there is scope for some in-fill or medium density. Greenfield development adds to urban sprawl and destroys habitat. That won't help the extinction crisis which marches on relentlessly as our population increases. And we already have too many houses in flood-prone or bushfire-prone areas.

You then think about hospitals, schools, roads, sewage treatment plants, courts, jails, bridges, parks, and so on. More people means more infrastructure of all kinds and there's no getting around that. But could that be a good thing? It will certainly mean more GDP and work for someone, but aren't we supposed to be in a skills crisis?

You know that all infrastructure needs maintenance and has a limited lifespan. So all our existing stuff needs constant maintenance, and then needs to be replaced at regular intervals. Do we really want to add to that infrastructure pile? Is it being maintained properly now? How much infrastructure can we support on an ongoing basis?

The big picture is that no nation can increase its population forever and why would you want to anyway? The better policy would be to stabilise the population close to some optimum rather than overshooting it and then needing to shrink the population.

Aren't we supposed to be moving into a wellbeing era with wellbeing budgets? And aren't we supposed to be thinking about future generations as yet unborn?

Like most OECD nations, Australia has a below-replacement fertility rate but births still exceed deaths and that will continue for some time. Happily, we can always adjust our total population – up or down – by altering net migration (because we have fairly high **emigration as well as immigration**).

You decide Australia needs a permanent expert panel to continually assess what our optimum population might be, taking into account all relevant issues and not pandering to special-interest groups. Sleepwalking into doubling our population every 30 or 40 years is lunacy.

This article first appeared in John Menadue's Pearls and Irritations on May 24, 2024.



Stephen Williams

Making more babies to drive economic growth

by Nandita Bajaj



Nandita Bajaj

Governments worldwide are in a race to see which one can encourage the most women to have the most babies. Hungary is slashing income tax for women with four or more children. Russia is offering women with 10 or more children a “Mother-Heroine” award. Greece, Italy, and South Korea are bribing women with attractive baby bonuses. China has instituted a three-child policy. Iran has outlawed free contraceptives and vasectomies. Japan has joined forces with the fertility industry to infiltrate schools to promote early childbearing. A leading UK demographer has proposed taxing the childless. Religious myths are preventing African men from getting vasectomies. A eugenics-inspired Natal conference just took place in the U.S., a nation leading the way in taking away reproductive rights.

The push for more babies to increase our numbers is hardly a new phenomenon. Longstanding forces of reproductive control have always favoured population growth. These go back 5,000 years to the institutionalised male domination and patriarchy that emerged upon the rise of early states and empires centred in cities. Societies at the vanguard of civilisation had two main goals: population expansion and seizure of resources. These were realised by coercing women to have as many children as possible and by pressuring men to become soldiers. Because of the dangers of both childbirth and war, birthing and soldiering had to be exalted and reinforced through social controls. To this day, pronatalism and militarism remain among patriarchy’s key features.

Its strength undiminished over the course of millennia, pronatalism serves powerful institutions of the state, the church, the military, and the economy by preaching that parenthood is an obligation, not a choice. Pronatalism runs so deep in our society, has become so pervasive, that to this day it colours the most important policy discussions and social norms.

As the Earth system groans under the burden of too many people consuming too much stuff, a new twist on this ubiquitous ideology – one that contemptuously sees women as mere procreative vessels – plays out on the global stage. While scientists warn that human numbers are a key driver of ecological and social crises, the subject of overpopulation gets short shrift by policymakers, think tanks, and even environmental groups. We are told that numbers don’t matter; what matters is solely the level of per capita consumption.

For example, when the revered Jane Goodall spoke about the harms of population growth, environmental

journalist-cum-activist George Monbiot attacked her by insinuating that she was proposing the culling of people. Elsewhere he wrote, “It’s no coincidence that most of those who are obsessed with population growth are post-reproductive wealthy white men.”

I am a woman, born in India and now living in Canada, happily childfree as I near the end of my reproductive years. I am grateful to have a steady income, but I am not wealthy. Some might say I’m obsessed with overpopulation, though obsession isn’t the right term to describe a rational assessment of the role of population in the ecological degradation that makes humanity’s future precarious.

But Monbiot’s is just one example. Environmental journalist David Roberts acknowledges that population growth is a problem and then goes on to explain why “there’s much downside and not much upside to talking about population.” Katherine Hayhoe, chief scientist at The Nature Conservancy, an organisation that has been accused of “promoting false climate solutions,” says in an interview, “As a climate scientist, I know that it’s not the number of people that matters. It’s how we live.” A formal statement by The Union of Concerned Scientists reads, “We’re sometimes asked ‘Isn’t population growth driving climate change?’ But that’s the wrong question—and it can lead to dangerous answers.”

Let’s unpack these statements, all of which fall into what political and social theorist Diana Coole has called the discourses of population denialism.

The first of these, “population shaming,” justifies silence about population by pointing to the excesses of “population control” movements of the past. And it is true that these coercive efforts deserve repudiation. Beginning in the 1970s, India forcibly sterilised millions of poor people (and it was backed in this endeavour by some Western powers). That was a dark moment in a benighted time, which focused on decreasing population growth in the lower-income countries rather than on moderating dramatically higher per capita consumption in the high-income countries.

But it would be fallacious, and a disservice to the valiant history of family planning, to suppose all approaches to curbing population growth are destructive. During and following India’s reprehensible conduct, family planning programs in Thailand, Costa Rica, Iran, and elsewhere not only advanced greater personal and reproductive autonomy for girls and women, but also led to significantly lower fertility rates, decreases in poverty, and gains in environmental conservation.

You can continue to read the full article at <https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/06/04/making-more-babies-to-drive-economic-growth/>

No Minister, high immigration will cost us \$320 billion

by Geoff Davies



Geoff Davies

Treasurer Jim Chalmers has [chastised](#) Opposition Leader Peter Dutton for proposing temporary cuts to permanent immigration numbers, claiming the 25% cut would cost 'the budget' tens of billions of dollars. But the far bigger costs of providing durable assets for immigrants are routinely overlooked, or mis-counted as a plus because they add to the GDP.

Evidently Chalmers, along with most of the political mainstream, thinks we Aussies can't build our own houses, can't train our young people, don't pay enough taxes and can't even earn our own livings. He says a 25% cut in permanent immigration would cost 'the economy' billions and do a lot of damage to the nation's skills base. Government revenues would also lose billions.

Immigration rates have varied from near zero during the pandemic to over 500,000 last year, and somehow we survived. So Chalmers is playing cheap politics in making a big deal out of Dutton's proposed 25% cut.

Dutton, for his part, is playing to the widespread perception that housing prices are pushed up by high immigration rates, so he is also politicking. Immigration rates are far from the only cause of high house prices, but it is also disingenuous of many commentators to claim they are irrelevant.

Chalmers' claim of lost billions in revenue evidently comes from a study by the [Grattan Institute](#), which indicates the proposed cuts would reduce government revenues by \$34 billion over the lifetimes of those migrants in Australia (presumably meaning if those migrants had been in Australia). Well that is on the order of \$1-2 billion per year, not really worth the fuss Chalmers is making.

Presumably also Chalmers was referring to revenue lost to the federal government, not to all governments in Australia. Overlooked or confused in these slanging matches is the cost to our whole society.

Trent Wiltshire of the Grattan Institute is quoted as saying the long-term benefit to the economy is 'huge', including filling skills shortages and improving productivity. When people say 'the economy', they usually mean 'the GDP'. It is true immigration induces a lot of economic activity, and that will be counted as a plus in the GDP. But the GDP is not a measure of wellbeing, even material wellbeing.

GDP counts exchanges that involve money (adjusted to avoid double counting). Somebody is paid, and somebody pays. GDP doesn't tell you who paid, just that somebody did.

Who pays for much of the economic activity generated by immigration? We do. Each extra person costs us around \$500,000 for new houses, shops and public infrastructure (schools, transport etc.) according to [Dr. Jane O'Sullivan](#). Note that this includes both public and private expenditures. They are all costs that our society must cover, one way or another.

The logic of this calculation is straightforward. If the population were steady we would have to replace 'durable assets' at a steady rate, let's say 2% per year. If the population increases by 1% per year then new durable assets have to be built at a rate of 3% per year. Figures are available for annual costs of durable assets and, in this example, around one third of the cost would be to provide for extra people. O'Sullivan's calculations are a decade old, so likely to be considerable under-estimates by now.

So, we who are here have to pay for the new 'durable assets', or put up with under-funded facilities. Hence transport is overcrowded, there is a shortage of housing and back yards are disappearing. There is downward pressure on wages and upward pressure on housing costs.

If we use the old numbers and a moderate permanent immigration rate of 160,000 per year we get \$80 billion per year or \$320 billion over the four years of forward estimates. Temporary residents also need a roof, food, transport and so on, so this is also likely to be an underestimate. You could take care of a lot of the needs in our society for that amount.

Studies have shown that immigration does little to [change the age profile](#) of the population, so that is a furphy. Anyway if there are more oldies then there are fewer kids to support. Our low birthrate is not the economic disaster it is often portrayed as, it is a secondary issue easily dealt with. In fact countries in eastern Europe and east Asia that already have [shrinking populations](#) are doing better than Australia by most economic and wellbeing measures.

High immigration rates are a heavy burden on our society. It is the developer and builder lobbies and the big end of town that try to persuade us otherwise. The cry of 'skills shortages' is merely cover for poor education policies. Gutless or captured politicians are the ones who force this unpopular policy upon us.

This article was first published on 29 May 2024 in John Menadue's Pearls and Irritations.

Book Review

On the Move: The Overheating Earth and the Uprooting of America

by Abrahm Lustgarten

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2024. 325pp.
\$53 hard cover.

Reviewed by Jenny Goldie

I was raised in a good Christian home and the term 'bejesus' was forbidden. The only way to describe my reaction to this book, however, was that it scared the bejesus out of me. It's one thing to talk about a few degrees of temperature rise or centimetres of rising sea-levels, and quite another to address the ramifications. What climate change means in real terms is longer and more severe droughts, more intense flooding, earlier and worse cyclones, inundated coastlines and more frequent and widespread bushfires. And they affect people.

It's already happening, not just in poor developing countries but wealthy countries like the US. It is happening to us here in Australia. The Black Summer of 2019-20 and the 2022 Lismore floods are still front of memory. People affected by extreme weather events, wherever they are, flee to safer places – maybe just to high ground in the case of floods, but in the case of constant drought, as in the case of Central American countries, they leave the land for a small town, then a large town, then a city, perhaps even beyond their country. It's called climate migration, even when there may be a host of other issues, including overpopulation, that drive them to seek a better climate.

As the author Lustgarten notes, "scientists began to see climate change's fingerprints on almost every migration event they studied." There was the 2011 uprising and civil war in Syria, and then in 2015 the mass migration to Europe following the Arab Spring. This had been prompted by Russia, after a bad wheat crop, cutting off grain to North Africa. A 2017 study confirmed that those countries that had sent ever-large numbers of refugees had experienced worsening climates.

But this is a book largely focussed on the US, a country in which I have lived and know reasonably well. It always seemed to me a country of great abundance, certainly in comparison to my largely arid home continent. Now as climate change begins to bite and seas rise, higher temperatures are driving people out of Phoenix, Arizona; receding coastlines along Louisiana and the rest of the Gulf of Mexico are pushing people inland; drought

and bushfire in California are driving people north, or anywhere; and the people of the mid-West, faced with increasing aridity, no longer have the option of shifting to California in *Grapes of Wrath* style, but are heading north or east instead.

It will get worse. Extreme heat days will become far more frequent across Texas, Florida and Arizona and generally across the South. The ideal human habitat will shift in coming decades closer to the Canadian border, the upper Midwest and the Great Lakes. This is where people will want to move. It's not exactly virgin territory, not that it was 500 or so years ago when Europeans arrived. This time, though, it's far more crowded. What will people do? Where will they live?

Globally there is growing unliveability. Today about one per cent of the world is in an unliveable hot zone, centred largely across the southern Sahara. By 2070, however, that area could rise to 19 per cent – from Brazil through to Central America, a large swathe of Africa and the Middle East, Southeast Asia and northwest Australia. People can stay indoors cooled by air-conditioners, but what of those who have to work outdoors? What of those too poor to afford air-conditioners or the electricity to run them? What of those too poor or ill to move to a better climate?

What can be done? Clearly, we need to pull out all stops to mitigate climate

change by decarbonising all sectors of our economy. There is a moral duty to at least try, even if we don't succeed in achieving net zero emissions by 2050. But then there is adaptation. Some consequences of climate change are simply unavoidable so there is no choice but to adapt. At least it will turn 'down the dial' on the scope of the disruption, as Lustgarten says. Adapting to human disruption – climate migration – means preparing for new arrivals, helping people cope better in those places where they choose to stay in place, building sea-walls, managing forests to forestall megafires, but also making a whole raft of social investments to strengthen communities and families, so that when the climate shocks arrive, people are financially sturdy enough to withstand the change.

This is a well-researched and well-written book. Read it, though you may want to wait for the cheaper paperback version.



Book Review

To know the lovely night. The extraordinary life of acclaimed Australian scientist and writer Mary E White

by Barbara Eckersley

Published by Nebula Books, Bundanoon. 2024. RRP paperback \$33.

Reviewed by Jenny Goldie

Palaeobotanist Dr Mary E White was an active Patron of Sustainable Population Australia from 2000 to 2018. For two and a half years before her death she had been in a nursing home in the southern highlands of NSW with severe vascular dementia following a massive heart attack. In early August 2018, I called in to the nearby home of her daughter Barbara and husband Richard to collect some of Mary's books from their garage. I stayed awhile and chatted.

A few days later, the phone rang. It was a reporter from the *Canberra Times*. "Mary White has died," she told me. Before I could rally my thoughts, she continued, "...and her daughter Barbara has been charged with her murder."

Thus began an horrendous three years for Barbara and her immediate family. She was already depressed and weary from years of looking after her mother. Mary had come to live with them well before the heart attack that left her mentally and physically debilitated. Mary was to have been transported to another nursing home near a son in northern NSW but she died two days beforehand. Barbara, in an effort to calm her mother down before the big trip, gave her something that unintentionally killed her. After three years and many court hearings, a jury found Barbara guilty of manslaughter but the judge gave her a non-custodial sentence, recognising the great love she had for her mother.

This book is part autobiography and part biography by Barbara based on letters to and from family. Mary was born and university educated in South Africa but much of her childhood was spent in what was then Rhodesia – now Zimbabwe. Her father was Professor of Entomology at Stellenbosch University but soon became Director of Agriculture in Salisbury, Rhodesia. Mary writes of her father: "... mature, wise, gentle and a father who taught without ostensibly teaching so that we were all fairly competent general scientists, botanists, entomologists and thinkers before we went to high school." Mary's studied Botany and Zoology at the University of Cape Town, winning the Botany Medal. Dr A L du Toit, South Africa's famous geologist and father of 'Continental Drift', advised her to study

prehistoric plants "because there was no palaeobotanist in Africa". It set the stage for her future career. She went on to write a PhD thesis but failed to submit it, marrying her geologist husband Bill instead.

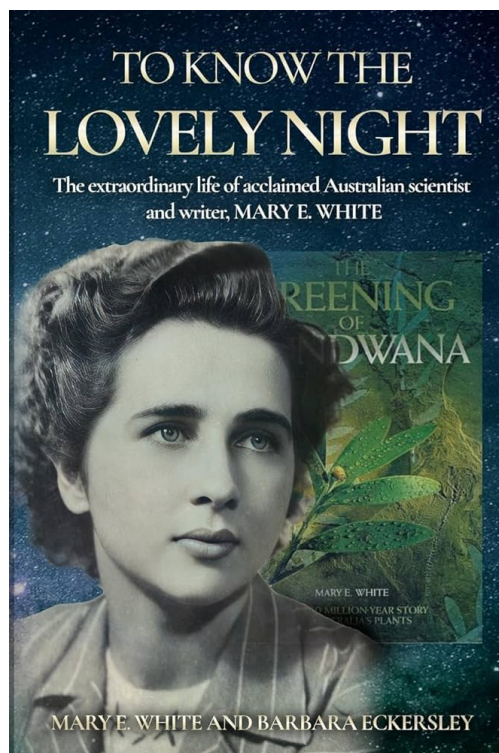
It was at times dangerous, following Bill around Africa with two small children in tow, Barbara and her older brother David, while her husband did geological surveys. In Somaliland – now Somalia – native tribesmen were not amenable to white men walking around their land on official duty, but women! They were "unclean". On one occasion, Mary had to help deliver a baby in a hut where the young woman had been in labour for days with no medical help, nor any other help. Mary thrived on the outdoor life though, baking bread, sewing dresses, writing poetry, often in the midst of nowhere. Forever the botanist, she would collect plants from around the camp-sites, cataloguing them as she had at university.

Africa was no place to raise children, however, and in 1955, the family moved to Australia, first to Canberra and then Sydney. Before they left, another daughter had arrived and in Australia, two more sons were born. Mary was the consummate wife and mother. Accommodation, however, was crowded and difficult until Bill bought a house at the idyllic Forty Baskets Beach, not far from Manly and the ferry to the city. Mary would

snatch a few hours work at the Australian Museum, curating their massive collection. Bill died prematurely in 1981 and, when their youngest son moved away, Mary was finally able to sit her desk, looking across the water, and write her first Book "The Greening Gondwanaland." Three others followed. They were received with great acclaim and Mary duly received a number of awards including four honorary doctorates.

The second last phase of her life was selling the house at Forty Baskets Beach and buying Falls Forest Retreat, a remarkable piece of unspoilt rainforest at Johns River on the NSW mid-north coast. Here SPA held a successful conference in 2006 when Mary was 80 years old, and still vibrant.

We were lucky to have her as a Patron. Australia was lucky to have her as a citizen. Mary's last few years of illness were sad and her death unfortunate, but she has left a lasting legacy. This book is testament to that.



Campaign Update

Michael Bayliss, Communications Manager



Michael Bayliss with the Media Precinct team

Over successive newsletters, I have been very pleased to share with you SPA's progress on our campaigns and projects as we go from strength to strength. With this report, I'm delighted to share with you that our recent successes have eclipsed all expectations.

Our Position Statement has now been signed 15,300 times, including such notable names as Dick Smith, Leith van Onselen and our Patron Ian Lowe. Importantly, it was also signed by thousands of Australians from all walks of life, all concerned with the many consequences of runaway population growth in Australia. Many signatories have chosen to become SPA supporters, If this sounds like you – welcome! You are among 5,700 new supporters since we launched the position statement last year. This is the only kind of population growth we like to see at SPA!

The Position Statement was the central focus of our ['Say NO to a Big Australia'](#) campaign, to which we launched a three month online promotion campaign from April to June. Hundreds of thousands of Australians saw our advertisements through display ads (which showed up in apps including 'Wordscapes' and 'Footy Live'), through content seeding (where our ads appeared across many publications including 'The Guardian' and 'TimeOut') and on Facebook.

This online campaign made a whopping 18 million impressions – by far the largest reach of any online SPA campaign to date. Further, this resulted in over 60,000 click throughs to our website and over 150 signatures to our position statement per day during the peak of the campaign.

I would like to thank Media Precinct for running this campaign in collaboration with the Membership and Marketing Committee of Sustainable Population Australia. I would also like to give my heartfelt gratitude to our Social Media Coordina-

tor, Martin Tye, for managing and responding to the thousands of comments that came through our Facebook page. A herculean task indeed.

It is one thing to gain over 15,000 signatures and 4,000 supporters in under three months. The question remains, now that SPA has shown itself to be a leader and a voice for Australians on the population issue– how we will apply this to lobby for real political change.

I am pleased to report that we are making huge inroads in one arena – the media. Over the last couple of months, SPA's media releases have been published or cited dozens of times, including mainstream outlets such as news.com. Our National President, Peter Strachan, has been interviewed many times on radio, including twice on 2GB within a month. I was myself interviewed on TV for Channel 7 news. The early signs show that our campaign success has earned a new respect from the media, who are recognising SPA as the experts on the population debate.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members and supporters who generally donated in response to our end of financial year appeal. Funded through your generous contributions, SPA upgraded our subscription to Medianet. This enables us with full access to a comprehensive mailing list of journalists, while receiving high quality advice and training around best practice media release strategies.

Recently, we sent emails to over 100 resident action groups and stakeholders in the housing support sector, to notify them of the response to the issue from thousands of Australians, to encourage their organisations to sign the SPA position statement and to read our report ["The housing crisis is a population growth crisis."](#)

We would strongly encourage you, our members and supporters to contact your local resident group, state tenant union, or housing charity (such as Salvation Army) to share your concerns on the population issue. The more people who communicate their concerns on population respectfully, the more likely they will take the issue on board. Please contact me anytime at media@population.org.au for more information.

I have also begun the process of contacting key federal MPs and, at time of writing, have a meeting scheduled with the office of Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil which will be attended by myself and Peter Strachan. I suspect SPA's higher profile has been instrumental in securing a meeting with a senior politician. I look forward to sharing with you all the progress of our political advocacy.

In the meantime, you can write to your MP on the housing crisis through our [DoGooder letter campaign](#), which creates a pro-forma letter for you and automatically finds your representative Lower House Federal MP. All emails are copied to Hon. Julie Collins, Minister for Housing. I was very pleased to see that so many of you responded to the president message in a recent eNews, with nearly 50 emails sent in under a day.

For more ideas on what you can do, please visit the SPA website, especially the page ["How You Can Make a Difference"](#).

SPA News

July 11 was World Population Day with SPA contributing to this day of observation across many fronts. Our [media release](#) was picked up by several commercial radio and print media outlets. Our Jane O'Sullivan wrote a critique of the UN's approach to population growth in [The Overpopulation Project](#). The SPA supported [Post-Growth Australia Podcast](#), hosted by myself and fellow SPA member Mark Allen, also produced a [special episode on the day](#). If you are interested in delving deeper into the world of Degrowth and the fallacy of infinite growth on a finite planet, I recommend checking out this podcast.

I would like to thank all volunteer members of the Marketing and Membership committee, including Mick Thompson, Peter Cook, Peter Strachan and last, but not least, Sandra Kanck, who was a recipient of SPA's 'life member' award this year. Sandra is profiled for this Newsletter edition of 'meet our members'. The MMC are the 'engine' that keep SPA's campaigns and projects running.

I would also like to thank all our members and volunteers who contribute to debate wherever you can, whether this is through social media, article comments, letters to the editor, or if you participate on the members exclusive [SPA PopForum](#). If you are currently a supporter, I would encourage you to consider becoming a [SPA member](#). In addition to access to the PopForum, this is a good way to become more involved with your local branch.



Overdevelopment is suffocating our environment.

Sign our statement to stabilise population growth.

SIGN NOW

Example of Media Precinct online campaign ad that made millions of impressions

Meet our Members

Sandra Kanck

Sandra Kanck is a former South Australian MP, a passionate and dedicated SPA member and our National Secretary. She has held various committee roles such as National President, Vice President and Meetings Secretary. In April, her years of valuable volunteering in SPA were recognised with a 'Lifetime Membership Award' at the National AGM with outgoing President, Jenny Goldie, describing Sandra as 'probably the most competent secretary of any organisation I have ever been involved with in 50 years of community work.' SPA caught up with Sandra to reflect on some of her experiences, in and out of SPA, soon to be explored in further detail in her upcoming memoir.

SPA: Sandra, tell us a little about how your life experiences informed your views on population sustainability, environmental activism, and social justice concerns.

Sandra: Growing up as the oldest of seven children was an in-your-face experience of a population explosion. Aged six, inexplicably I discovered the Tooth Fairy gave me less money than my friends while the Easter Bunny gave them more and/or bigger eggs than me. By the time I was nine, my awareness of disadvantage was heightened by the wearing of second-hand, outdated clothes. My father's tradesman wage, once adequate for a family of five, was not so when the same wage had to be spread

amongst nine. The resulting poverty triggered my sense of fairness, setting me on the path to becoming a social justice advocate.

There was a pivotal moment when, as a young mother, I heard about increases in radiation being detected in Sydney following the testing of nuclear weapons at Mururoa Atoll. Learning about the potential uptake of this radioactivity into the bones of babies and young children, potentially turning into cancers in their later lives, I was determined this should not happen to my child. So, it was off to my first public meeting to learn what I could do. Step by step, I made the connection between nuclear weapons and uranium, then learnt about the environmental impacts of the Northern Territory's Ranger uranium mine. I had transformed into an environmental activist participating in anti-uranium rallies, with my son in tow.

SPA: What are your reflections of your political career? What was one highlight for you and what were some of the challenges and barriers you faced?

Sandra: I served for 15 years in the upper house of the South Australian Parliament, representing the Australian Democrats. At our best we had three representatives, which meant each of us carried a heavy legislative load

Meet our Members

of approximately 12 portfolios. In my final three years I was on my own, responsible for the carriage of 100% of the bills with just two staff members to assist. Sixty-hour weeks were the norm, increasing to 80 hours in parliamentary sitting weeks. When I announced my retirement I received many accolades from the wider public, particularly for 'speaking truth to power'.

Legislation to sell off SA's electricity infrastructure was a highlight, placing my party's balance of power role front and centre of the political debate. Following three months of research, visiting people and authorities in four states to determine the economic risks of the emerging national electricity market, I was proud to announce to a packed news conference that we would not support the legislation. The state government howled with rage and frustration. During those 15 parliamentary years, I often learned the powerful do not want to hear truth.

SPA: Do you remember when you first joined SPA and what inspired you to become a member? How have you seen the organisation change and evolve over time? What has been one highlight during your time at SPA?

Sandra: Through my involvement in the environment movement, I met one of SPA's Patrons, Dr John Coulter, who at that time was the President of the Conservation Council of SA. He engaged me in conversation about population growth and, as I seemed receptive to the issue, he asked me to join Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population (SPA's earlier name). He got an immediate 'Yes' from me. Given the personal population problem of my childhood, it was a no-brainer.

I've seen SPA become more effective largely through the generosity of our membership. So many members hold voluntary positions and/or donate and/or choose to bequest funds in their wills. That generosity in recent times has allowed us to seek services from professional entities, in turn resulting in greater outreach to the media and public, for instance with our position statement. Our series of discussion papers has also added to that professionalism.

SPA: There are many environmental charities and advocacy groups out there. Why do you believe SPA is an organisation worth supporting and volunteering for?

Sandra: Human population growth is an environmental problem of the highest order. Saving the Murray-Darling Basin, fighting climate change, or re-greening scarred land—all of which I, of course, support—are symptoms of that larger problem. But it does not stop there because population growth is a catalyst for social injustice and international tensions. In Australia it shows with increasing homelessness, lack of rental accommodation, and the cost of housing being out of reach of young people. And on the international stage, when we see civil wars in African nations which are largely about land and resources, we are being given a heads-up about what will face a growing world population in the future. I can't remember who it was that said it, but the statement

'population is the everything issue' says it all for me. SPA therefore is the group I have chosen to support wholeheartedly.

SPA: Outside of SPA, you are involved with many other causes and you participate in many extracurricular activities. Would you like to share a couple of these with us?

Sandra: I have a habit of picking up difficult issues, often fighting for the underdog, and this is the case with my choice to support the advancement of Palestinian human rights. I have visited the West Bank and Israel to see it for myself, and consequently am involved in the Australian Friends of Palestine Association, particularly as part of the BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) movement.

On the personal front I indulge myself with my choir 'Women With Latitude'. We sing songs from the last one hundred years in four-part harmony, mostly *a capella*. Being in the bass section often leads to me singing important words such as 'do', 'dum' and 'ah'. And for the musical among you, my range is A2-D5.

SPA: Tell us a little more about your upcoming memoirs. What was your experience in the writing process and when do you think we'll be able to read them?

Sandra: It's a memoir of my childhood titled 'Nothing and Everything'. Why? Because, as it begins '... nothing in the first twenty years of my ordinary, Broken Hill, working-class childhood could have foretold I would become a member of the South Australian Parliament in later life. Yet everything that happened in those first twenty years shaped me into becoming that person.' Writing it was a challenge on a number of levels. I had to learn a completely new style of writing after years of preparing media releases, speeches, policies, constitutions, submissions and letters to editors. Telling the truth about one's flaws and recounting painful memories was another challenge, but necessary if I was to be authentic. If all goes to plan, the book will be released in late September.



Sandra Kanck

Branch Reports

Qld: The Queensland Branch has enjoyed two market stalls at environment festivals: the Logan Eco-Action Festival (LEAF) on 2 June and the Peaks-to-Points festival family market day on 21 July. Both events have been great opportunities to engage with the public and raise awareness of SPA. The branch continues to liaise with other community advocacy groups, who are protesting loss of heritage and amenity due to insensitive development, and decrying the power of developers over the way their neighbourhoods are transformed. Our aim is to encourage these organisations to avoid presenting the issue as one of how to best accommodate growth, but to keep the option of lessening future growth present, if not prominent, in the submissions they make to public consultation processes. In the next two months, we look forward to engaging with Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA-Qld) in their debate on whether 'moderating population growth is an important measure in the climate crisis.' The date and venue are yet to be confirmed but will be posted on DEA's website soon.

Jane O'Sullivan

WA: With the National Executive deciding to pay the travel fares of the State Representatives to the AGM in Adelaide, I was fortunate in being able to attend. The presentations by Leith van Onselen and Dr Jane O'Sullivan were insightful while the discussions/conversations were rather depressing, particularly those regarding Canberra's apparently impenetrable 'bubble' (bastille perhaps being a more appropriate term). We have a lot of work to do in getting the message across to those who have the power to implement what needs to be done.

On the following weekend we had our AGM. The Committee members remain the same with Robert Boni relieving Warwick Boardman of the position of Treasurer. Media Communications Manager Michael Bayliss gave a report to the twelve members present on SPA's website and social media presence. The social media presence included/s YouTube videos; videos on SPA's website; discussion papers; a position statement (to sign); Dogooder letters to your MP on housing; the Say NO campaign, advertisements on Facebook, X, Linked-In; active pages on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn; the Post Growth podcast – and discussions on de-growth.

Since then, it has been in some ways all quiet on the western front except for the fantastic number of radio interviews given by our national president Peter Strachan as a result of our 'raised profile' due to the work of the MMC (Michael Bayliss, Martin Tye, Mick Thompson, Sandra Kanck, Peter Cook and Peter Strachan).

Judith Odgaard

VIC/TAS: The VicTas branch hosted a lunch on 23 July featuring Merewyn Foran, Executive Officer of MSI Asia Pacific. Branch members learned about MSI's work in contraception and family planning access, and discussed potential collaboration on lobbying efforts for policy changes that expand access to reproductive healthcare and fundraising initiatives focused on sexual and reproductive health. This strengthens ties between the organisations and supports MSI's vital mission, which aligns with SPA's goals. Dr Graeme Dennerstein intends to follow through with a get together with Merewyn Foran, Dan Webby and Kelvin Thomson within the next couple of months.

Daniel Webby



Victorian branch members meet MSI

SA/NT: We had three letters published in the *Advertiser* on 1 July, by Stephen Morris, Robyn Wood and Peter Martin. Other letters were published earlier on water bills, duopolies, nuclear power and homelessness. At the AGM, we welcomed three new committee members: Kate Whitelock; Tony McIntyre and Mark Cramond. We have organised talks to Friends of Aldinga Scrub; U3A Port Adelaide; West Lakes community group tbc; and Trees for Life, Noarlunga. In June, Stephen Morris attended the Don Dunstan Foundation Housing Symposium where the keynote speech was delivered by Alan Kohler. Robyn Wood will attend the Conservation Council SA Quarterly meeting in August. We have made a number of submissions: to SA State Minister Koutsantonis on poor public transport, urban sprawl and on how GHG emission targets not being met; to Green Adelaide on the draft Urban Green Strategy; and to the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan Discussion. The summary document of the regional plan made no negative link between growth and environmental problems.

Stephen Morris

NSW: We have used beautiful photographs by Alan Jones to produce a 2025 calendar called *Wildlife in my garden* with different quotes for each month on population. It is now advertised on our website www.population.org.au and will cost \$20 each, including postage. The perfect Christmas gift! Meanwhile, Graham Wood is working on getting his book about population and various sustainability issues edited and published. The committee agreed to host the 2025 national AGM in Sydney in March or April next year that will precede a public meeting with great speakers. Stay tuned! Watch out for the major international conference coming to Sydney in October called the [Global Nature Positive Summit](#) – we need to provide input on the relationship between population growth and the decline of nature.

Jenny Goldie

ACT: The Branch has been quiet as far as events are concerned since my last report.

At our last Committee meeting, we received feedback from the successful National Conference in Adelaide from our Branch representative, Michael Thompson. We also discussed the case for having any involvement in the upcoming ACT election by way of producing corflutes. It was agreed that we would support the Sustainable Australia Party by way of corflutes if they decided to stand candidates. They have since decided not to do so.

Furthermore, we felt that it would be more appropriate to get involved at the next Federal Election where the responsibility for immigration resides.

It is hoped that we will be in a position to host another members' presentation within the next two months. Our AGM will also likely be held in the next three months.

Colin Lyons

Long-acting contraception is changing lives in Africa



A health clinic in Ghana. Natalija Gormalova for *The New York Times*

According to the *New York Times* (26 June 2024), women in Africa are increasingly turning to **long-acting contraception**, like hormonal implants and injections. Such methods offer a fast, affordable and discreet boost of reproductive autonomy. Over the past decade, the number of women in the region using modern contraception has nearly doubled to 66 million.

"They like the implants and injections best of all," a community health nurse in Ghana told my colleague Stephanie Nolen. "It frees them from worry, and it is private. They don't have to even discuss it with a husband or a partner."

A few factors are driving the change: More girls and women are learning about contraceptives, often through social media. They want careers and experiences that having children could complicate. There are also more contraceptive options, and improved roads and planning that help these options reach more remote areas.

Note: At its bimonthly meeting on 23 July 2024, the national executive agreed to donate USD15,000 to fund the first year of ECO Uganda's project "Healthy People and Resilient Ecosystems". It also agreed to fund ECO's CEO, Isaac Kabongo, to attend the UN climate conference, COP 29, in Azerbaijan later this year where he will set up exhibits or participate in side events for SPA as required.

SPA loses two ACT stalwarts

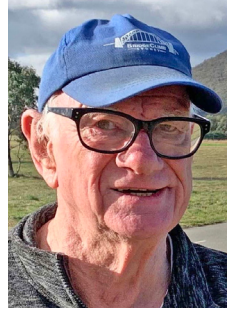


Dr. David Denham AM

21 March 1937 - 22 June 2024

David was a long-term member of SPA whose cheerful face brightened many a meeting. As the *Canberra Times* noted, he was a valued "advocate for the community and earth sciences. Admired and loved for his humour, tireless energy and intelligence." As editor of a professional journal, David had the right to ask questions at National Press Club lunch-

es, which he did, and often they were salient ones on population. David is greatly missed by his family and friends but fondly remembered.



Nick Ware

6 February 1944 - 4 July 2024

Nick was born in Bangor, North Wales. He moved to Australia in 1969 for a job at the Research School of Earth Sciences (RSES) at ANU. His initial work included, as part of a RSES team, performing mineral analyses of lunar rock samples brought back by the Apollo 11 mission. He will also be remembered for his work developing synroc, a means of safely storing radioactive waste. He worked at ANU for nearly 35 years and lived in Canberra for the remainder of his life. Widowed too early, Nick raised his only son Griff on his own from the time his son was 11. Nick took great pride in his family, including two grandsons, and in his Welsh heritage.

Nick was president of the ACT branch of SPA for a number of years in the 2010s. He graciously picked up the tab from the otherwise successful Fenner Conference on the Environment that SPA ran in 2013. Poor health confined him to a nursing home in recent years, but he too is fondly remembered and missed by all in the SPA branch.

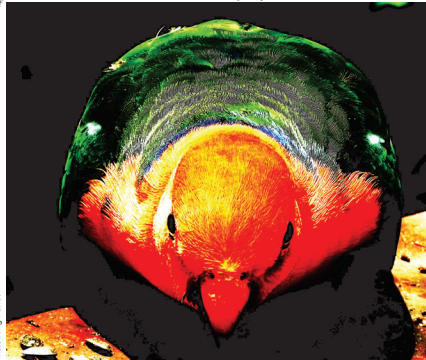
Seeking an editor

Jenny Goldie would like to step down from the job of SPA's newsletter editor sometime in the next year and is seeking a successor. If you have journalistic skills and prepared for a bit of hard work one week every quarter, please contact Jenny at jenny.goldie@optusnet.com.au

A calendar to die for!

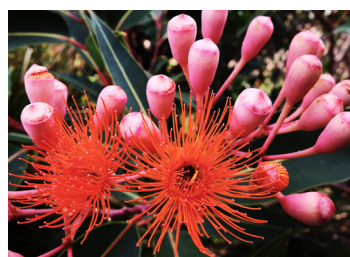


Wildlife in my garden



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NSW branch has produced an outstanding 2025 calendar called *Wildlife in my garden* with superb photographs taken by member of both the NSW committee and the national executive, Alan Jones. \$20 each includes postage and you can order on the SPA website at <https://population.org.au/spa-2025-calendar/> You may have a calendar on your phone but your mother might not, so give her one of these for Christmas!



Red flowering gum



Eastern Water Dragon

Congratulations Mark O'Connor!



photo Canberra Times

Inaugural vice-president of Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population (later renamed SPA), Dr Mark O'Connor, was awarded an OAM in the King's Birthday awards in June. An environmental poet since 1972, he was recognised for his work in advocacy, activism and demystifying Australian poetry for young minds. In 2000 Mark became the first "Olympic poet" of the modern Olympiads, receiving an Australia Council fellowship "to report in poetry upon all aspects of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games". He has also written short stories, literary criticism, and two books on the issue of overpopulation as a danger to environments. These were *This Tired Brown Land* and, with William J Lines, *Overloading Australia: How governments and media dither and deny on population*.

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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