



No. 158, February 2025

Sustainable Population Australia -- Newsletter

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

SPA releases critical water discussion paper



In late 2024, SPA released its latest discussion paper called “Big thirsty Australia: how population growth threatens our water security and sustainability”. It was written by geographer Dr Jonathan Sobels and three SPA stalwarts: national vice-president Dr Peter Cook; national secretary Hon. Sandra Kanck; and Dr Jane O’Sullivan whose many hats include being a co-convenor of [The Overpopulation Project](#).

Here is the conclusion to the discussion paper.

The grandfather of modern economics, John Stuart Mill, observed 175 years ago:

If the earth must lose that great portion of its pleasantness which it owes to things that the unlimited increase of wealth and population would extirpate from it, for the mere purpose of enabling it to support a larger, but not a happier or a better population, I sincerely hope, for the sake of posterity, that they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it.

Since then, world population has increased roughly six-fold, and Mill’s dystopia has largely come to pass. We have exceeded prudent natural limits as our growing population overwhelms our life giving environments. In terms of greenhouse gases, biodiversity loss and soil degradation, we have been permitted to hurtle well beyond safe limits due to the built-in delay between the changes we have made and their impacts on our lives. It is as if we are enjoying the sense of weightlessness in a plane run out of fuel and falling from the sky, while refusing to look out the window at the ground rushing toward us. Water supply is a more immediate need, and

water scarcity could be the factor that finally compels us to change course.

So far, however, the proponents of ‘Big Australia’ – including most politicians – remain wedded to an ideology of perpetual population and economic growth that denies ecological limits, and a naïve faith that technological change can always come to the rescue to save us from ecological crises.

It should be clear that, whatever technologies and management mechanisms are deployed, water security will become increasingly precarious as Australia’s population increases. Weasel words like ‘increasing challenges from population growth and climate change’ should not be used to imply that such challenges are always surmountable, when they are clearly not. A perpetually growing population is simply incompatible with water security.

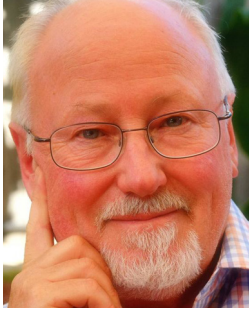
Trade-offs between environmental flows, urban use, industry and agriculture will increasingly threaten the viability of annual irrigated cropping – a major income-earner for Australia, but by necessity the lowest priority when water is scarce. Growth of towns within the Murray-Darling Basin will inevitably divert water from agriculture. Elsewhere, energy intensive ‘solutions’ such as desalination expose future communities to increased vulnerability through their dependence on costly, complex, high-input systems to deliver water. These are not solutions as much as symptoms of failure. We have failed to heed the warning signs from the natural environment to end population growth before its costs outweigh its benefits.

Official projections anticipate adding another 13 million people to Australia’s population over the next forty years, exceeding 40 million by 2063. For some Big Australia advocates, that is just a staging point on the way to much larger numbers, aiming for 50, 60 or 70 million by 2075. Some are even aiming for a higher target of around 150 million by some unspecified date. It is surely incumbent upon these advocates, and Australian governments specifically, to explain how adequate quantities of water will be supplied for human and environmental use under these scenarios. Their failure to do so is irresponsible.

Continued on page 12

2024 – a dire year for Human Survival

by Julian Cribb



Julian Cribb
Photo The Wheeler Centre

In 2024, humanity – as a whole – took a purposeful stride towards engineering the collapse of modern civilisation.

While climate, politics, wars and celebrities vied for the headlines, the hard indicators of human management of Planet Earth and our own future were all pointing south. Here is a selection of catastrophic risks for 2024, based on trusted information:

Forest loss: 488 mha tree cover lost since 2000. Current loss is around 25mha/ year to all causes, including agriculture, development, wildfires and climate.

Water: 4.1 billion people experienced severe water scarcity for at least part of 2024. This is expected to worsen in 2025.

Soil loss: 40% of the world's topsoil is lost or degraded, damaging food and nutrition for three billion people.

Fish: 38% of world capture fisheries are now rated unsustainable.

War: the Doomsday Clock stands at 90 seconds to midnight, the highest threat level since WW2 and the 1980s.

Climate: 2024 is the hottest year ever recorded at +1.54 degrees C above preindustrial levels. Humans emitted 41.6 bn tonnes of CO₂ in 2024. Atmospheric carbon levels were 425ppm in December and rising at record rates.

Pandemics: Covid: 770m cases and 7m deaths since 2020 and still spreading. HIV: 88m cases and 44m deaths and still spreading. New pandemic risks include Avian Flu, Marburg, Zika and Nipah.

Food scarcity: Food prices remain high, globally. 770 million people face hunger and 343 million, acute food scarcity. Climate, soil loss, water scarcity and eco-decline are major drivers.

Extinction: 73% decline in global wildlife populations in past 50 years, driven by habitat loss and degradation due to agriculture and development, overharvesting and spread of toxic chemicals.

Pollution: 14 million deaths (24%) are linked to a polluted environment, soil, water, food, homes and cities.

Technology threats: several advanced technologies pose catastrophic risks, driven by industry competition and political manipulation. These include AI, robotic killing machines, nanotechnology, cyber theft, gain-of-function biotechnology and universal surveillance.

Population: The Earth's human population reached 8.2 billion in 2024. It is currently growing at 70m a year and is forecast to peak at 10.3bn in the mid-2080s.

Misinformation: Misinformation, anti-science and lies reached a new peak in 2024, affecting national elections, the climate debate, conflict, social media, mainstream me-

dia, advertising, public trust in medicine, and conspiracy theories.

This brief summary of current threat levels of the main catastrophic risks menacing the human population overall show that the problem is far more complex than many people seem to think. It is not just about climate. Or even the threat of nuclear war. It is the whole railway-smash of multiple factors coming together at one time.

If you scrape away the politics, the propaganda and other forms of misleading information, you are left with the undeniable truth: the root cause of the problem lies in human overpopulation, overconsumption and over-pollution.

Humanity is now exploding past the finite boundaries of Planet Earth, as [the Stockholm Resilience Centre](#) has been warning us for fifteen years now.

Any farmer can tell you what happens if you try to graze 1000 cattle in a field large enough to support only 250. They die horribly as food and water run out. There are countless examples of this in both nature and human affairs.

According to a growing number of scientists, humans have currently overpopulated the planet by a factor of three or four – and the decline in natural resources, climate crisis, food crisis, pandemics, spreading poisons, extinction rates, soaring migration and resulting social pressures are the direct and self-evident consequences.

No country on earth has a solution to this problem, for the simple reason that countries and their blind self-interest, are the main cause of it. By uniting ourselves into ever-larger territorial units and then vying over the Earth's dwindling resources we are perfecting an engine for our own extermination – a engine decorated with flags, anthems, symbols, 'national pride' and other chauvinistic rubbish.

It is a brutal truth of modern politics that countries are never going to agree with one another to save humanity, or how to do it, before it is far too late to do so. Indeed, many now seem bent on installing crude, autocratic regimes that will accelerate their ruin. 2024 marked an ominous milestone in that grim regression.



If humans are to have any chance of avoiding the collapse that is now so powerfully indicated, then it is only by the individual citizens of the Earth, led by women, joining hands to do so – despite the corruption of rulers, the ignorance of oligarchs and the self-interest of corporations, ethnicities and beliefs.

If we humans are to survive, on a planet fit to be inhabited by our grandchildren, then first of all we must agree to survive. There is no other choice.

And excellent starting point would be to forge a world agreement to survive, which pledges us to addressing each of the catastrophic threats we face. That is what the [Earth System Treaty](#) proposes. Let 2025 be the Year of the Treaty – first first-ever democratic agreement among the people of the Earth about their own future.

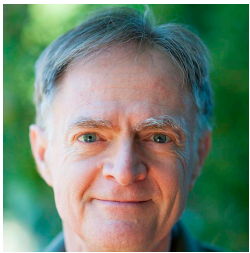
Also, such is the torrent of lies and misinformation that has now engulfed our present systems of government and social discourse we also need something else – a news and information site where the true, validated facts about the human plight are presented for all to understand and heed, undistorted by politics or commercial interest. A site where science can speak its truth so all can understand it.

For that, we encourage readers of Pearls and Irritations to watch this space...

This article was first published in Pearls and Irritations on 30 December. <https://johnmenadue.com/2024-a-dire-year-for-human-survival/>

Environmental-Political Collapse Accelerates

by Richard Heinberg



Richard Heinberg Photo
Post Carbon Institute

The stench of failure emanating from the recently completed COP29 international climate negotiations in gas-rich Azerbaijan is deepening the gloom already enveloping the western world's managerial class since the (re-)election of Donald Trump.

According to [Berkeley Earth](#), 2023 was the first full year in which the planet's average surface temperature exceeded 1.5 degrees Celsius above its pre-industrial level. This year's global temperature has remained above the 1.5 °C marker, and 2024 has been the hottest year on record. Even if next year's temperatures dip somewhat, they will almost certainly rebound even higher, since global greenhouse gas emissions are at record levels and still climbing. During recent years, the rate of warming has [accelerated](#). Further, recent research led by [James Hansen](#) concludes that warming already "in the pipeline" (that is, requiring no further human forcing) will eventually result in global temperatures roughly 10 degrees C. above the pre-industrial average. Long before warming reaches that hellish endpoint, our planet will have shifted to a new climate regime in which humans and innumerable other species will find survival difficult or impossible.

The simultaneous collapse of environmental and political systems (the latter are failing both to prevent catastrophic climate change and also to halt a widespread drift of democratic governments toward authoritarianism) will be immensely consequential.

Systemic Failure

The inability of national governments to forestall climate change could easily have been predicted decades ago. That's because stopping global warming is fundamentally at odds with the underlying growthist agenda of the modern world

The goal of the COP process was, in effect, to minimise the unintended environmental consequences of fossil-fu-

elled industrialism while somehow maintaining industrial growth by other means. It turns out that those other means are slow, costly, and come with their own environmental harms. With rare exceptions, negotiators ignored the links between population and consumption, on one hand, and environmental damage on the other. Climate change was portrayed as a technical problem amenable to technical solutions—rather than as a symptom of ecological [overshoot](#). From a systems viewpoint, abundant energy from fossil fuels has enabled humanity to increase its numbers and per capita resource usage to levels that cannot be maintained in the face of environmental limits. Technology alone cannot solve overshoot; in addition to alternative energy and machinery, managed reductions in population and consumption are required—with the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions cuts needing to come from wealthy nations, and the wealthiest households among them.

A basic understanding of overshoot reveals that our modern industrial way of life is unsustainable at anything like its current scale and intensity. Whether as a result of pollution or resource depletion, human population and per-capita consumption will peak and start to decline, most likely during the next decade or two. But it gets worse: during our brief binge of industrialism, we humans have found strategies to maximise consumption in the short term; when these strategies inevitably falter, the result will likely be an even faster decline in population and consumption than might be expected on the basis of ecological factors alone.

As we reach the end of the period of industrial expansion, social and environmental systems are showing greater instability. In the social realm, this instability shows up in national and global politics. Due to resource and pollution limits, the rising expectations of a still-growing (though not for long) populace can't be met as easily as was once the case. As a result, there is a tendency for elites to fragment: some hope to maintain the status quo by shoring up existing bureaucracies, while others decry those same bureaucracies and propose to raze them and start over.

Where from Here?

Opinion

Impacts from climate change will continue to worsen; Kim Stanley Robinson helpfully provided a science-fiction foretaste in his book *The Ministry for the Future*. It's unlikely that governmental efforts will succeed in limiting either emissions or warming. So, whatever efforts actually can minimise impacts on people and nature are likely to be small-scale, local, and ground-up.

Some useful thinking along these lines is contained in Douglas Tallamy's book *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*. Destruction of habitat is driving native species to the brink. Simply planting trees, if they're non-native, may not help much and can even make the situation worse. In contrast, native trees and shrubs provide a food forest for birds and insects that would otherwise go hungry. It seems like a small gesture in the face of the cataclysmic trends converging on us, but at least it's a push in the right direction: it restores ecosystems and makes them more resilient. That way, when civilization goes, it might possibly leave something behind other than a wasteland.

For the time being, local action is probably the best arena for political engagement as well. Barrett Cole, a former intelligence officer who worked in conflict zones, offers some helpful practical advice in his book *Resist: Surviving the Slide toward Autocracy*. Know your neighbours and develop a reputation as someone who helps out and doesn't try to ram opinions down other people's throats. In addition to resistance, resilience and regeneration must be our watchwords. Resilience should include both the ecological kind, and also personal and emotional resilience and efforts that build mutual aid.

A metaphorical hurricane is coming. Cover the windows and make sure your family, friends, and neighbours are safe.

This is an edited version of the essay first published in Museletter #381 in December 2024. The full article can be found at <https://richardheinberg.com/museletter-381-environmental-political-collapse-accelerates>

Book Review

Declaration of Peace for Indigenous Australians and Nature – a Legal pluralist approach to First Laws and Earth Laws

by Anne Poelina, Donna Bagnall, Mary Graham et al

Published by Springer, 2024. 135pp. RRP \$265.91
Reviewed by Jenny Goldie

Fifty years ago, a radical civil rights movement was forming in Redfern, Sydney, intent on ridding Indigenous people of generations of disadvantage. As a sympathetic onlooker, I was frustrated there were few, if any, articulate spokespeople, that is, articulate in English who could communicate their frustrations to a wide audience. (No doubt there were many who could communicate perfectly well in their own language.)

How different the situation is now with a host of Indigenous men and women who are excellent communicators in English and, more than that, a growing body of academics, some of whom are authors of this very scholarly book. The lead author is our latest and highly esteemed Patron, Professor Anne Poelina, a Nyikina Warrwa woman from the Kimberley region. Her second (!) Doctor of Philosophy thesis focussed on the 'interdependence of multi-species' and the wellbeing of 'Land, Living Waters, and Indigenous Australian People'.

This book reflects her PhD thesis to a large extent in that it too seeks the well-being of Nature and Indigenous people. The authors argue the means to do so is by transforming the

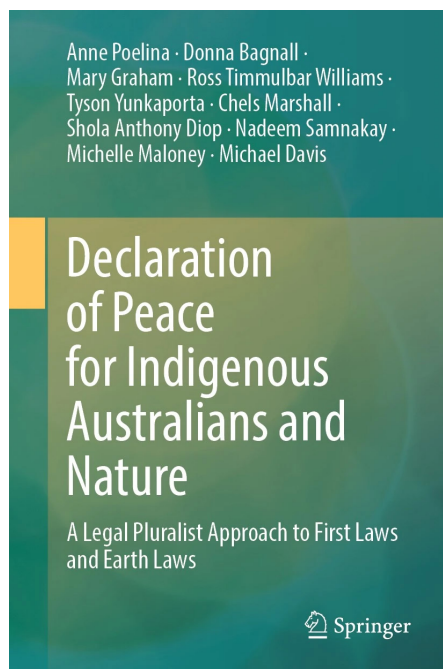
current legal system. They blame the extractivist and exploitative Western legal system for the multiple environmental and social crises we face today: climate change, biodiversity loss,

ecosystem decline and the escalating gap between rich and poor communities. They believe the Western colonial legal system is no longer fit for purpose and we must look to different laws and governance. What is needed now, they say, are the legal systems – the First Laws – created millennia ago by the First Nations Peoples of the continent. Thus the purpose of the book is to "make the case for a more just, interconnected, and healthier planet, linking Indigenous peoples' deep knowledges, histories and Laws, and ecologies, to those of others, and with other, non-human species."

How do we reconcile First Law, which is the 'Law of the Land', and Western Law which is the 'law of humankind'? And, as Professor Poelina has observed, Western law is about the 'me' (individuals), whereas First Law is about the 'we' (the collective).

How do we provide an alternative system for protecting cultural and environmental heritage? How can we incorporate Aboriginal governance? The Martuwarra Fitzroy

River Council's Conservation and Management Plan for the National Heritage Listed Fitzroy River Catchment Estate (July 2020) is an example of what can be done. The Plan says that 'Under



Book Review

First Law, Traditional Owners maintain and share sophisticated cultural knowledge and practices, and are empowered as guardians to be the voice of the Living Waters of the Martuwarra and its inalienable right to live and flow'. That is, under First Law, the Martuwarra/Fitzroy River is regarded as a living entity.

The authors argue this holistic perspective on heritage and environment is also critical in the context of the Anthropocene, "the urgency of the human-induced climate crisis calling for a re-attachment of the broken connections between humans and non-humans, between the natural and the human worlds."

But how to reconfigure the prevailing legal system, to 'decolonise' it? How do we recognise, protect and enforce First Law in the Australian legal system? As already noted, First Law is the 'Law of the Land', not the 'law of humankind'. First Law is about the collective, not the individual. If the two systems are to be not just side by side, but also headed in the same broad direction philosophically, then First Law perspectives (Indigenous ethics) need to be embedded within the Australian law and policy-making framework. This includes fiscal and budget-

ary laws and policies that influence the economic system. A focus on greater equity will be needed if the world's biggest industrialised economies are to lose 8.5% of GDP each year within the next 30 years from climate change impacts if temperatures rise by 2.6 °C. (Australia will be hit significantly harder and will suffer a loss of 12.5% of GDP per year by 2050.)



Prof Anne Poelina

Perhaps the answers to reconciling Western and First Laws can best be found in the personal stories of seven of the authors: Mary Graham, Anne Poelina, Ross (Timmulba) Williams, Chels Marshall, Tyson Yunkaporta, Shola Diop (providing some South Pacific perspectives, particularly on Blackbirding and forced migration) and Donna Bagnall.

This is a book of great depth and importance. It is a critical step along the path to genuine reconciliation in Australia.

The way things are. Science, people and the natural world

by Melvin Bolton

Second edition. Ribbonwood Publications, Yeppoon, Qld. 2004, 2014. 296pp. \$22 through Amazon Australia. Reviewed by Jenny Goldie

Many decades ago when I was a science high school teacher, I would have loved a book like this that explained in clear English the interconnections between Energy, Evolution, Populations and Conservation. It is much needed today, not just for late high school students, but for decision-makers who lack a science education. Indeed, it should be mandatory reading for the vast majority of Parliamentarians who have no tertiary training in science, since they will be making critical decisions about climate change, conservation and population/immigration.

Melvin Bolton is a long-term member of SPA and a former science teacher himself. He also worked as a wildlife biologist in remote parts of Ethiopia and then for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in other parts of Africa, Asia and the South Pacific. Who better to write such a book, particularly the final section on wildlife conservation?

The book contains a lot of factual information about population but avoids being polemical. He stresses, however, that the effects of the human population on the natural world are profound. As for ageing, he calmly notes that it can be *delayed* if the population keeps growing, but it cannot be *prevented* by encouraging bigger families or importing younger migrants. "Nobody can stay young so eventually there will simply be a bigger ageing population."

Bolton addresses the population dynamics of non-human animals with a useful graph showing how the numbers of animals

living in erratic climates (e.g. kangaroos in Australia, antelopes in Africa) will grow while food is plentiful but drop below average carrying capacity in the event of a drought. Numbers will then recover gradually as grass returns with rainy weather and eventually exceed carrying capacity until the next drought occurs when numbers will drop back again. Some small mammals, such as lemmings and voles, in the tundra will have regular four-year cycles of peaking and crashing. Other animals such as deer in less variable climates will have more stable numbers though, in some species, increasing density will cause populations to migrate. Here, of course, we have a definite human parallel.

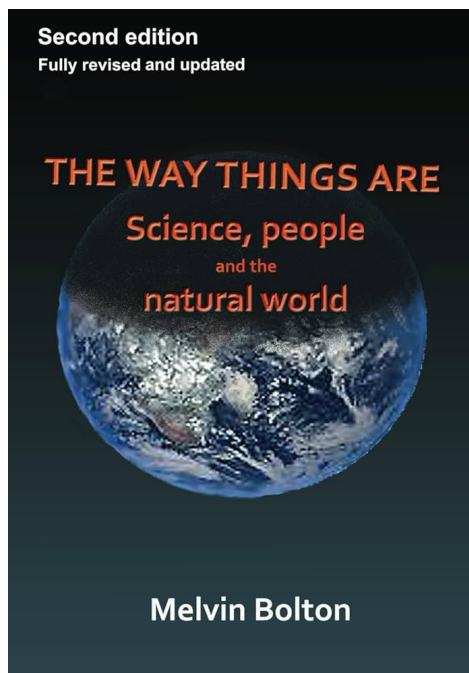
Even for those of us who do have science training, the book is well-worth reading for the section on conserving wildlife. The proximity to humans, and how many, can be critical. Lions, for instance, can be a threat to people, livestock and crops and will be killed. They do not survive if human population density is more than 25 people per square kilometre.

Meanwhile, in the region surrounding the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in southwest Uganda, home of the mountain gorillas, the average human population density is an alarming 300-400 people per square kilometre. Uganda's entire population is now over 50 million, growing at 2.76 per cent in

2024. Fortunately, though belatedly, the Ugandan government adopted a 'voluntary family planning policy in 2020.

Clearly, the lesson is that if wildlife is to survive, human population numbers must be kept in check.

If you need to brush-up on your basic science, read this book, then pass on to anyone who is scientifically challenged.



Meet the Members

Stephen Morris



For this edition of 'meet our members' we caught up with **Stephen Morris**. Having joined SPA only a few years ago, he is already president of the South Australia and Northern Territory branch and a representative on the National Executive Committee. SPA caught up with Stephen to discuss his meteoric rise.

SPA: Stephen, tell us a little about yourself, including work history, passions and what first got you thinking about overpopulation.

My family background is working class Glaswegian. I had great teachers at school who helped me believe that I could succeed at university in Scotland and Canada. International work and travel with multinational companies followed. Travel opened my eyes to poverty in Asia and humanity's overconsumption and waste globally. Until retirement, the main focus was work, family, and friends. Unfortunately, my interests in the natural world usually took a back seat.

I met my Aussie wife in Montreal. We live in Adelaide's southern suburbs.

I have always enjoyed meeting new people and finding common ground, so networking is easy. SPA's evidence-based information gives important messages to share with these new contacts. I had puzzled for decades over how humans fit into the big picture and why all the evidence on a worsening environment was not stopping it taking place. In 2020, I discovered Sustainable Population Australia, and the penny dropped.

SPA: What would you say are the unique population-related issues impacting Adelaide and South Australia?

South Australia is the driest state in the driest inhabited continent, so water is a concern. As an 'insurance policy' after the Millennium drought, the State opened a \$1.8 billion, 100GL desalination plant. The current 10% operating capacity costs \$130 million annually. At full capacity, salinity will increase to dangerous levels in Gulf St Vincent. Notably, no one mentioned that halting population growth could have saved these costs. Many Australians do not acknowledge the link between high population growth rates and environmental degradation, since they are: (a) unaware or dismiss the links; (b) afraid to raise the link between 'population' and environmental problems. Politicians have a growth obsession verging on evangelical. Our elected representatives' lack of science background and kowtowing to the business lobby contribute to our predicament. A favourite one-liner is "GDP growth is good for us." Major infrastructure projects affecting SA's finance and environment include: North South Corridor - \$15 billion; Mt Barker Growth - 15,000 people (1990) to 42,000 (2023); Seaford to Sellicks Duplication - \$880 million. Our '20 minute' city is long gone.

SPA: When and how did you first hear about SPA? What made you decide to join?

At the start of COVID I was working and living at home and was unhappy with work life. Over many weeks, I searched environmental groups in the hope of finding one of interest with evidenced-based information, analysis, and log-

ic. I could see that the good work of many well-meaning environmentalists might be destroyed by a housing development, or a new highway approved by government. When I finally met the local SPA committee at an information evening, they appeared solid, dependable characters who had a good grip on reality. I wanted to learn from them and try to help them if I could. Could I better understand? In 2020, I joined SPA.

SPA: Since joining SPA in 2020, your involvement with our organisation has quickly evolved, with you now the President of the SA/NT branch. What have been some recent SPA related highlights (or activities/projects) for you in recent years?

Our local committee worked hard on preparations for the 2024 'SPA AGM, Public Forum, and Face-to-Face Meeting'. This weekend taught me a lot about SPA and the hard-working Executive and members. The presentations by Leith van Onselen and Jane O'Sullivan were great. There were a few technical problems due to my poor IT skills, but we made it through. Another highlight was a meeting in Lyon in August with Didier Barthes, spokesperson for the French organisation 'La Demographie Responsable'. Networks give us strength and I was delighted that, as a representative of SPA, I could meet with this French group. The SA/NT branch had a stand at the Nature Forum (Nature Festival SA) in Victoria Park, Adelaide (October 2024). Assisted by Robyn Wood, this day was my first attempt at representing SPA on a stand. I was happy to meet the seasoned campaigner, Bob Brown, thanks to Peter Martin and Stewart Martin (unrelated).

SPA: You are a shining example that it is never too soon to get more involved in SPA. Why do you think SPA is an organisation worth supporting, being a member of, or donating to? What encouragement would you give to members who may be considering taking up branch office positions?

As a person active in environmental issues, I am a 'late developer.' In the past, I supported various environmental groups, but usually by membership or donations. My work life was as a cog in the wheel of the 'growth machine.' I now recognise that many of us live and work, by default. We are encouraged to act in a certain way by family, friends, colleagues, or popular culture. It made sense to give my time to SPA when I saw an on-line protest poster saying, "The greatest threat to the planet is that someone else will save it." We welcome new members and supporters of any kind. Every one of us has different useful skills. SPA is just one of many thousands of 'not-for-profit' groups that needs committee members. However, we are one of the few groups that understand and talks about the root cause of environmental degradation. Within the SPA Branch, we should try our best to enjoy, socialise and learn from each other, while spreading the message of respect for all species on Earth. The world is an amazing place - let's not destroy what we love through indifference.

SPA welcomes new and returning members. Find out more about joining today at our website:

<https://population.org.au/membership/>

Sister Organisation



Isaac Kabongo

SPA actively collaborates with our international allies in addressing global overpopulation issues. Isaac Kabongo is the CEO of 'Ecological Christian Organisation', which provides grass-roots family planning education to communities in Uganda. Furthermore, Isaac has represented SPA at several COP talks. We caught up with Isaac to find out more.

SPA: Isaac, tell us a little about yourself, your background, and passions.

I am a son of a smallholder farmer from Eastern Uganda in a region called Busoga. I was born during the regime of Idi Amin Dada. Our country was going through serious economic breakdown and civil conflict, so access to education and healthcare services was difficult. I was lucky to enrol for my formal education but it was under very challenging environment. With God's grace I was able to attain a Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences from Makerere University in 2002. I am a social scientist with a passion and vision of working towards a thriving and resilient planet where humans live in harmony with nature and biodiversity. This passion and vision led to the registration of Ecological Christian Organisation (ECO) in Uganda in 2005 with operations in the Greatlakes and the Horn of Africa regions. It's our work on the African continent and beyond that led us the celebrated partnership between ECO and Sustainable Population Australia (SPA).

SPA: What can you tell us about population growth in Uganda and its impacts on people, communities and the environment? Is conversation on overpopulation a taboo topic?

From 2.5 million people in 1911 to 45.9 million people in 2024, Uganda's fertility rates are at 4.3 (children per woman) with high teenage pregnancies and child marriages. The unmet need for family planning services is very evident in the country. It's estimated that three in every 10 women who want to voluntarily use family planning services do not have access. Because of overpopulation, school dropout is high, especially for girls. In Uganda, overpopulation has led to high degradation of fragile and critical ecosystems such as wetlands and forests.

Conversations about overpopulation can bring mixed reactions depending on who you talk to in Africa, including in Uganda. Religious and political leaders tend to defend rapid population growth because of their own interests. However, from the ecological and economic perspective, overpopulation contributes to increased degradation of our fragile ecosystems and biodiversity while exacerbating inequality. It deepens poverty and conflicts in many cases. Promoting voluntary family planning and access to information is one way of addressing this challenge. As ECO, we are ready to continue working with SPA on these issues.

SPA: Tell us about ECO, including how it started, its main organisational cores and objectives and how it incorporates family planning and reproductive health into its work.

In 2003, we started coming together in a Christian Fellowship in Bukoto, a suburb within Kampala city. While reading the Bible, we realised that nature is God's beautiful creation. Through nature, God is able to teach us, speak to us and provide for us. In 2004, our serious discussions about the linkage between Christianity and conservation inspired us to form ECO, receiving our registration certificate in 2005. We are happy that this year in April, we shall be celebrating 20 years of existence.

ECO's vision is "working towards a thriving and resilient planet where humans live in harmony with nature and biodiversity". Our overall objective is "to inspire, share, and empower individuals, communities, companies and organisations to take action in protecting and preserving nature and biodiversity while transforming society through sustainable development". Our core values include; Ecological and Social Justice, Scientific Integrity, Transparency and Accountability, Diversity & Inclusivity, Innovation and Creativity. Through ECO's program focusing on Population, Health and Environment (PHE), we have integrated family planning and reproductive health into our work.



Isaac Kabongo and friends at COP, representing SPA.

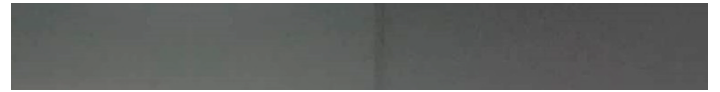
Sister Organisation

SPA: Recently, SPA committed funding to support new initiative run by ECO, titled “Healthy People and Resilient Ecosystems”. Tell us a little more about how this project will educate people and communities around the positives of family planning and smaller families.

We have worked with SPA on a number of projects. “Healthy People and Resilient Ecosystems” is quite unique. The overall objective of the project is to “promote sustainable natural resource management and increase community access to reproductive health and family planning services” in Bugweri district, Makuutu sub-county, Eastern Uganda. This project area was selected on the basis of high ecosystems degradation, and it has the highest distribution of adolescent/ teenage pregnancies aged less than 15 years. It's located within the Lake Victoria Basin which is facing serious deforestation, overfishing and pollution. In recent years, the discovery of Rare Earth Elements in the region has created anxiety and excitement among the local population. The extractive sector development has its challenges and ECO is empowering communities as a mitigation measure. The specific objectives of the project are: a) to enhance natural resources management in a sustainable and profitable way and; b) to increase community access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and family planning services.

SPA: You have also collaborated with SPA in other ways. Many SPA supporters may not know that you have represented SPA at several COP conferences. Tell us how these opportunities came about and some of your reflections of your involvement at the COP talks.

For many years, SPA has supported ECO to participate in the UNFCCC COPs with the aim of advancing health issues on the climate change negotiation agenda by sharing our Population, Health and Environment (PHE) approach. We participate in side events and exhibitions on different topics such as access to sexual and reproductive health services or exploring how climate change impacts health delivery, including access to family planning services. Over the years, we have worked together with other stakeholders in solidarity to bring the issue of climate change and health on the UNFCCC agenda. This means broadening strategies for action by parties but also increasing access to public and private climate finance. We have had the opportunity to share our work at the global level there by influencing policy formulation and planning processes at international, regional and national levels. Our participation in COPs has enabled us to learn from others while building strategic partnerships that enables us to work together on agreed upon issues such as health and climate change.



Isaac Kabongo speaking at a COP meeting

SPA: Why do you believe it is important that we take a global approach toward addressing overpopulation and why it is important for organisations such as SPA to support overseas projects?

Ecosystem services play a transboundary role, not only in climate change mitigation and adaptation, but can also enhance the protection of biodiversity in different places. Overpopulation in one region may lead to overproduction in another and hence unsustainable utilisation of natural resources on our mother earth. These are unsustainable practices regardless of where they take place; they affect communities across the continents. There is evidence that emissions in Europe and China are causing prolonged and severe droughts in Sub-Saharan Africa, causing hunger and death. SPA should support projects aimed at overpopulation because if we don't confront the causes collaboratively, impacts such as forced migration, biodiversity loss, food insecurity and conflicts will increase. By taking the global approach, we facilitate debate to generate ideas for possible solutions. Without our voice and aspirations, we let the status quo remain. Overpopulation will not be put on the global agenda if we shy away from insisting this issue is put to the table. That is why support from SPA to ECO and other organisations is not only critical but also very relevant.

You can find out more about ECO at their website: <https://ecouganda.org/>

Campaign Report

by Michael Bayliss, Communications Manager



Michael Bayliss

As we enter the New Year, I reflect back on the last months of 2024 as a busy time of mixed blessings and challenges for SPA.

On a (very) positive note, our discussion paper '[Big thirsty Australia](#)' was launched in November to a very enthusiastic reception from the media. Two of the authors, Peter Cook and Sandra Kanck, as well as our National President Peter Strachan, were interviewed on many radio programs, including the ABC and 2GB. Furthermore, our report received great coverage by Frank Chung from [news.com](#).

On a less positive note, we had a rough end to the year, with two SPA community stalls receiving hostile responses from a vocal minority of the public, forcing our volunteers to leave early on both occasions. I would like to thank - *profusely* - our volunteers from Perth and Melbourne who put on a brave show in the face of such antagonism. With regard to the Melbourne stall, SPA delegates were invited to a debrief meeting with the event organisers, including myself, in what was a challenging but constructive conversation. Discussions are ongoing, however I appreciate the rare opportunity for a deeper debate on the issue with people who are not yet outside with SPA's perspectives but who are willing to listen. We are holding discussions around how we can better support stalls and volunteers in future.

Our political lobbying efforts gathered momentum in 2024. As our public profile improved, politicians were more willing to take notice and listen to our message. So far we had meetings with the offices of Clare O'Neil (Labor), Dan Tehan (Liberal) and Kate Chaney (Teal). We had positive correspondence from the office of David Pocock (Independent) whose staff were keen to read our water report. One common challenge encountered in the meetings was the misconception that a stable or declining population is invariably ruinous for the economy. This appears to be a deeply entrenched assumption among our political leaders which remains stubbornly resistant to our attempt to debunk. I was disappointed to hear that since meeting with the senior advisor of Dan Tehan, the Shadow Minister for Immigration, the LNP have since back flipped on their immigration policies.

In contrast, we have enjoyed greater success in strengthening our relationship with journalists and the media. I am particularly pleased with the support from 2GB host Clinton Maynard, who is enthusiastically on board with our message and who has invited our National President to the show on numerous occasions. We have also strengthened our relationship with our international colleagues, including [La Démographie Responsable](#), [European Alliance for a Sustainable Population](#), and Uganda's Ecological Christian Organisation (ECO). I have been delighted to interview their CEO Isaac Kabongo for this edition of our Newsletter, who has represented SPA internationally at COP talks. I am hopeful that these collaborations will reinforce the fact that SPA remains globally active, even though we are currently predominately focused on national concerns.

I had the delightful honour to interview our newest Patron, Prof. Anne Poelina, for a short video available to [watch on YouTube](#) as part of SPA's 'meet our patron' series. Prof. Poelina is SPA's first Indigenous patron - a Nyikina Warrwa Traditional Owner living in The Kimberley region of Western Australia. I personally believe that First Nations' perspectives are a very important part of the population debate, and Poelina's appointment places SPA in a better position to enter into this conversation. I am pleased that our Newsletter Editor, Jenny Goldie, reviewed a book co-written by Anne, "Declaration of Peace for Indigenous Australians and Nature".

Anne's interview may also be listened to on the SPA-supported [Post-Growth Australia Podcast](#), co-hosted by Mark Allen and yours truly. PGAP looks forward to interviewing Isaac Kabongo as well as a host of other amazing game-changers in the sustainable population and/or degrowth movements, as we continue on with our seventh season.

I will liaise closely with the National Executive Committee and the Membership and Marketing Committee to focus SPA's strategic direction for 2025 in light of the upcoming federal election.

In the meantime, I would love to hear from you, our members and supporters. Let me know if you have any ideas, particularly if you think there is a messaging slogan or theme that will resonate with the broader public, or if you have campaign ideas or like-minded organisation that you think SPA could liaise with. You can contact me at media@population.org.au anytime.

You can support SPA in many ways to make population policy a key issue in the upcoming election:

[Sign our position statement](#), if you haven't done so already, or send a letter to your MP informing them of the housing crisis, which we have made easy for you through our [email campaign](#).

While our number of supporters continue to climb, our memberships are starting to slow down. Our membership numbers are the one instance in which we DON'T want numbers to stabilise or slowly decline! If you are currently a supporter, please consider taking 'the plunge' and [become a member](#). If you are a current member, I encourage you to renew when the time comes.

[Donate to our campaigns](#). In 2024, our online awareness campaigns reached hundreds of thousands of Australians. This exposure contributed toward our 17,500 position statement signatures, 6,000 new supporters and a new milestone of 5,000 Twitter followers. Each awareness campaigns is expensive but considering these results, totally worth every cent. SPA is entirely supported by membership donations and bequests. Know that your contribution goes toward the most worthy of social and environmental causes. We are addressing the cause and not just the symptoms!

Check out our page '[How You Can Make A Difference](#)' for more ideas.

Here's to a productive and less populated 2025!

Branch Reports

WA. Like many things in this State, the WA Branch has gone into a state of aestivation for some weeks but Robert, Michael and Peter still kept up their good work. Greg has again got on air after another really good letter. At our next meeting in several weeks we will be making arrangements for our AGM while Warwick continues to make submissions and write to 'offending' institutions.

Judith Odgaard

NSW. Our calendar with beautiful wildlife photographs by Alan Jones (our Alan; not the high profile one) sold fairly well and we have posted the remaining 130 to environmental organisations around the state. Graham Wood is hard at work finishing off reviewing his book *Their future is in our hands*. Organisation of the national AGM and public meeting "Water and Energy: constraints on further population growth?" on Saturday 26 April in Glebe, Sydney, is currently underway and we urge all Sydney residents to consider attending both, as well as the dinner in a nearby restaurant in the evening. Please [contact me](#) if you are able to billet members of the national executive from interstate.

Jenny Goldie

QLD: On 20 January, the Queensland committee met with members of Brisbane Residents United (BRU) to discuss potential collaboration. BRU mainly focuses on engagement in planning governance in South East Queensland (where almost all of the state's population resides, and almost all of the population growth is occurring). We share goals for sustainable development, and see the value in exposing the insincerity of planning processes that incrementally erode residents' living standards and remove residents' avenues for influencing development outcomes in favour of smoothing the path for developers to generate more housing. We look forward to benefiting from BRU's expertise on the technical and political aspects of the planning regime.

Jane O'Sullivan

SA/NT: Stephen Morris has written to the CSIRO / COSMOS Magazine on *Big Thirsty Australia*; to the ABC on GDP; to the Conservation Council SA with our submissions; to the SA Auditor General asking that State Planning be investigated re. Greater Adelaide Regional Plan; and to Amanda Rishworth (Federal Minister), Nat Cook (State Minister) and Maiy Azize (Everybody's Home).

Mark Cramond has written to Green Adelaide, Dan Teahan MP, the Australian Marine Conservation Society, Climate Council, Everybody's Home, and many article authors from *The Conversation* and *InDaily*.

Stephen gave a talk at Brighton North Rotary Club.

We have bought a 3m x 3m gazebo for stalls and our SA/NT AGM is planned for late March.

We met with Steve Georganas, Federal MP for Adelaide, and Rex Patrick, Federal Senate candidate with the Jacqui Lambie Network.

We are currently working on a submission to SA's Biodiversity Plan.

Robyn Wood

ACT: It has been a very quiet period for our Branch and we have not met or held any functions since our AGM late last year.

Our first committee meeting for 2025 will be held shortly at which we will discuss possible events and guest speakers for the year.

Colin Lyons

VIC/TAS: Degrowth Network Australia Festival: The VicTas branch hosted a stall at the degrowth network festival. Unfortunately the reception to our stances and social media posts was challenging. With a significant far left presence, many expressed disagreement and hostility. That said, many agreed.

Monique Ryan Forum: Several members, including myself, attended a forum held by Independent MP Monique Ryan. I inquired about her stance on population and willingness to support David Pocock's Senate inquiry. Her answer was disappointing, expressing support for migrant labor to fill perceived gaps in sectors like childcare and aged care. Branch flyers were distributed afterwards with some positive interaction with attendees.

End of Year Social Lunch: A successful lunch was held before Christmas.

Dan Webby

Obituary

Dr Christabel Young

19 July 1939 – 2 January 2025



In 1988, ten of us gathered in Canberra to found Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population (AESP), an organisation that morphed into Sustainable Population Australia (SPA) a few years later. Amongst our committee were scientists from various fields, writers and even an acclaimed luthier. The scientists prevailed in insisting that we be science-based, but we lacked a demographer to help us frame policy.

Working at the Australian National University (ANU) at the time was Fellow in Demography at the Research School of Social Sciences, Dr Christabel Young whose fields of interest included

population projections and population policy. A large component of her research was focused on quantitative analysis, reflecting her background in mathematics. In 1961, she was one of the first two women at the University of Adelaide to gain an Honours Maths degree as part of a B.Sc. And then in 1970, she was the first woman to achieve a Ph.D. in Demography at ANU.

Christabel taught us some basic demography, notably that the most effective means of achieving stable population numbers was to have near replacement fertility and low migration. That

gave rise to our third objective, embedded in the constitution: "To promote policies that will lead to the stabilisation of Australia's population by encouraging low fertility and low migration." A few years later we added the words "and then to reduction" after the word stabilisation", though we never did ask Christabel how she felt about that change. She had left ANU in 1998 to care for her beloved mathematician husband Dr Reg Turton whose health was declining badly from Parkinsons Disease.

I'm not sure Christabel would have minded slow reduction in size of the population, however, as she was not unduly fazed by an ageing population. This is where the ratio of dependents per workers in a population may rise. She never advocated a bigger population to offset ageing as some of her colleagues did. Indeed, in a paper 'The future population and the future labour force' published in *People and Place* in 1994, she wrote "Official population projections ... highlight the fact that the combination of annual zero net migration and 10 per cent below replacement fertility ... suggests that the dependency situation in Australia in 2041 will be no worse than it was in the early 1980s."

That same year, Christabel made a significant submission (no.177) to the Inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies, chaired by Barry Jones, into Australia's carrying capacity. She was invited as a witness before the committee in Sydney. She was very much on-side with AESP/SPA's view.

Christabel was an accomplished gardener, skier and pianist and took great pride in her two sons, Clive and Hal ("my greatest accomplishments"), and her two grandsons. AESP/SPA was lucky to have had such a distinguished friend and mentor in its early days.

Jenny Goldie

Letter to Editor

Dear Editor

I can't get my head around our latest 2023-24 population growth of 552,000.

That's 1512 new beds each day.

1512 new mattresses each day.

1512 new mattress covers each day.

1512 sheets and blankets each day.

1512 pillows and pillowcases each day.

Each day, every day, including Sunday, for a year.

David Z Hughes

South Melbourne VIC.

Notice of AGM

The Annual General Meeting of Sustainable Population Australia Inc will be held at **Benledi House, 186 Glebe Point Road, Glebe** (in Sydney) at **11am, Saturday 26 April 2025**

to be followed by a Public Meeting from 1pm to 4.30pm

"Water and Energy: Constraints on further population growth?"

A dinner will follow at a nearby restaurant (tba).

The 2025-26 National Executive of Sustainable Population Australia will be elected at the AGM. Any financial member of SPA may stand for a position (or a number of positions), or nominate or second another member. A nomination form accompanies this newsletter. Nominations close COB **Friday 28 February 2025**. A ballot will ensue if there are more nominations than positions available, otherwise, the nominees will be deemed elected. The national executive meets for two hours by zoom on the fourth Tuesday of every uneven month and the day after the AGM. There is also a great deal of discussion and a number of out-of-session motions between the bi-monthly meetings through the executive's group email.



Benledi House

SPA News

Continued from page 1

For twenty years Australia's accelerated population growth has caused a substantial loss in the quality of life for a majority of Australians. The concurrent environmental deterioration has been documented in six *State of the Environment* reports since 1996. Politicians have embellished and perpetuated the narratives about skills shortages and an ageing population requiring high immigration levels. The government asserts that rapidly rising population is compatible with 'net zero' emissions, when clearly it is not.

These are ill-founded excuses for an ideology of perpetual growth to benefit a few powerful sectoral interests. High immigration has been pursued despite repeated polling showing the majority of Australians do not want further population growth. Our water management regime should frame future population growth as a policy choice, not an inevitability. The fatalistic acceptance of official population projections has meant there is a population blind spot in Australia's water planning.

Moderating and indeed ending population growth must become part of the 'diverse portfolio' of options for water demand and risk management.

By ignoring our biophysical and geographical reality in their ongoing commitment to rapid population growth, Australian governments are making a Faustian bargain, sacrificing long-term economic and environmental well-being of all Australians for short-term interests of an elite few. Ultimately, further population growth will not be feasible. The question is, how much worse must the situation get before our political leaders concede that the Ponzi scheme of immigration-fuelled population growth has run its course? With water, as with other limited resources, we can choose to grow toward calamity or shrink toward abundance.

The full report can be found on the SPA website at <https://population.org.au/discussion-papers/water/>

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.

SPA national office

phone: 0434 962 305

email: info@population.org.au

SPA national office bearers

President: Peter Strachan | president@population.org.au

Vice-president: Peter Cook | vp@population.org.au

Secretary: Sandra Kanck | (08) 8336 4114
secretary@population.org.au

Treasurer: Tony Matta | treasurer@population.org.au

Committee: Jane O'Sullivan | Alan Jones | Graham Clews
Stephen Saunders | Robyn Wood

Webmaster: Alex Geppert

webmaster@population.org.au

Membership officer: Andrew Verlei

membership@population.org.au

Trustees of the Population Fund

Sandra Kanck | Tony Matta | Jenny Goldie

Regional branches

NSW President: Jenny Goldie

nsw@population.org.au

WA President: Judith Odgaard | 0477 002 821

wa@population.org.au

VIC/TAS President:

Daniel Webby

vic@population.org.au

ACT President: Colin Lyons

act@population.org.au

QLD President: Jane O'Sullivan

qld@population.org.au

SA/NT President: Stephen Morris

sa@population.org.au

Disclaimer

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