Sustainable Population Australia Newsletter

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

A Year of Progress, A Future of Possibilities

Mathisha Wahikala | Newsletter Editor, Sustainable Population Australia

As we approach the end of 2026, we have chosen to dedicate this final edition of the newsletter to celebrating the many contributions and achievements of our SPA members. It is an opportunity to reflect on our collective progress and express our appreciation to those who continue to support the organisation and its purpose.

One of the most encouraging developments this year has been SPA's expanding digital presence. Our communication efforts have progressively extended beyond traditional media, with social media, short videos and digital campaigns creating new opportunities to reach audiences and encourage informed discussion. With seven social media platforms now contributing to our outreach, SPA is finding new ways to make population and sustainability issues more accessible and relevant to everyday conversations.

This progress is particularly important at a time when public discussion about population is often dominated by immediate economic and political concerns. SPA's role remains to bring a broader perspective to these conversations, supported by research and evidence, while recognising the connections between population trends, environmental capacity and long term wellbeing.

While digital communication provides new avenues for advancing SPA's advocacy, it also brings new responsibilities. Reaching more people is only one part of the task. Ensuring that our information remains credible, accessible and constructive is equally important. As communication platforms and audience expectations continue to change, SPA must continue adapting while remaining grounded in its purpose.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment of our contributors, volunteers, branch presidents, representatives, committee members and supporters. Much of SPA's progress is made possible by people who generously contribute their time, expertise and resources.

Looking towards 2027, we look forward to sharing opinion articles from leading voices in the wider population sustainability movement, including academics and our sister organisations, while strengthening our digital engagement and contributing to informed public discussion.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to SPA throughout 2026.
I wish all our members and readers a wonderful festive season and a fulfilling year ahead.

Let's Live Within Limits

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President's Message

In his first speech to the Senate in September 1996, Dr Bob Brown, who was elected as a Greens senator for Tasmania at the March 1996 federal election, made increasingly relevant comments about the impacts flowing from human population growth.

He began, saying "*Here we are, some six billion people, on this finite, fragile living planet*". He went on to chronical ". .. *if we take the most hopeful indications, the projections are that it will proceed to somewhere between eight and 14 billion people crushed together on a planet which is undergoing—as far as this human community is concerned—immense and accelerating change.*"

Sadly, 30 years later, a population of 8.3 billion already exceeds his expectations. In the face of the data, Dr Brown continued " . . *it is a frightening prospect because we have to agree—before we come to grips with the moves that are necessary for us to collectively rein in our excesses and get ourselves back to sustainability—that we are not in control. We only have to look at that population pressure and what it means to this planet to know that.*"

Dr Brown went on to speak with concern about rising numbers of environmental refugees and people living on less than $1 per day, commenting that global temperature was expected to rise by half a degree centigrade by 2025, when India would have a population of 1.3 billion. Thirty years later, we know that these fears have been exceeded, with global temperature already rising nearly 1.5°C, while India's population is over 1.5 billion.

On topic, Dr Brown concluded that *"Anybody who reads natural history will know that, if you flout the environment's carrying capacity, you ultimately are headed yourself towards extinction as a species*."

It's such a pity that the party Dr Brown led for so long seems to have lost its way on a path to living sustainably within limits.

The concerns raised in that speech remain relevant to Australia's population debate today. Beyond environmental sustainability, population growth also raises questions about housing affordability, infrastructure and the capacity of communities to meet growing demand. Western Australia's housing situation offers a contemporary example of these pressures.

Recent figures concerning rental affordability for essential workers, alongside the state's population growth in the year to March 2026, highlight the challenges facing the housing market.

Incredible statistics revealing that less than two per cent of rental properties in Western Australia are affordable for the state's essential workers should be a wake up call for government regulators, both state and federal.

Western Australia ran a nation-leading, 2.1 per cent per annum pace of population expansion in the year to March 2026, adding 64,200 people into a property market that is already struggling to support organic household formation by existing residents.

The solution to this dog-chasing tail situation is clear. It's time for our leaders to listen to the many voices of reason calling for lower immigration into the state so that housing has a chance of catching up to immigration-fuelled population expansion.



Peter Strachan
National President
SPA

SPA Campaign Update



Michael Bayliss
Communications Manager, SPA

As this is the last Newsletter for 2026, I want to take this opportunity to thank YOU, our volunteers, members, supporters and newsletter subscribers. Without your ongoing support - through donations, bequests, volunteering hours and other engagement – SPA's ongoing work would not be possible.

You will have received our end of calendar year letter by the time this Newsletter goes to print. The letter will detail many of our campaign achievements for this year, as well as our plans for 2027. I hope you have a chance to read it, and that this encourages you to continue your support for the only national environmental charity willing to speak up on population.

SPA has been contacted by many members and supporters this year, frustrated by a perceived lack of traction for SPA's messaging in the current immigration debate. Often, we are provided with great, thoughtful ideas for campaign suggestions or messaging, as well as recommendations of areas in which we should place our focus.

Your feedback and suggestions are always highly valued as this is the best way we can improve. Unfortunately, SPA remains a small organisation, spread across a vast continent with a task to unpack one of the critical 'elephant in the room' issues affecting our future. Two main factors set us back from achieving more.

Firstly, a legacy media that appears laser focused on certain aspects of the immigration debate, which encourages polarisation while failing to engage on the impact of numbers on the environment, economy, water and energy security. This has resulted in SPA's media attention trending downward this year, after two very encouraging years. This is despite SPA's best efforts to build relationships with the media, for example my attendance at this year's 'Meet the Media' event. The event made it clear to me that fostering long-term, one-on-one working relationships with journalists is a crucial component that, unfortunately, we don't yet have the staffing hours for.

Secondly, while SPA's number of supporters is at an all-time high (including over 7,000 subscribers to our eNews and Newsletter), the number of active members continues to fall. The reasons for this are multifaceted and complex. For example, younger generations are trending away from formal volunteering across the sector.

Unfortunately, our existing volunteers and staff are faced with real limits, both physical in terms of hours in the day, but also through the psychological pressures that come with the territory of sustained engagement in the population issue. As such, the only ways that SPA can expand our outreach are either through more people putting up their hand to volunteer, or by securing more funds through donations and bequests so SPA can employ more staff to do the things we all want to see this organisation achieve.

That said, SPA has made some milestones and achievements this year. We have included a '2026 year in pictures' graphic in this Newsletter in addition to the end of calendar year letter which you will receive soon. Hopefully, this may help draw awareness to some areas to which SPA has made some good strides. Maybe it may even convince you to help us out with an end of year donation (the best Christmas present you can give to SPA), or getting directly involved at branch or national level.

Herewith is a summary of SPA's main achievements below:

- We finally reached and exceeded 20,000 signatures to the SPA position statement. This demonstrates that the broader Australian community resonates with our aims and objectives, regardless of the continuing silence from mainstream media and politicians.

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SPA Campaign Update

- We did get some encouraging media coverage, especially in the first half of this year, including news.com and Daily Mail, as well as financial journals. Peter and I have been interviewed by both local and international media in response to our media releases and short videos.
- Our short, talking head social media videos are gaining huge traction, receiving tens of thousands of views on Facebook and YouTube.
- Our seven social media accounts are reaching hundreds of thousands of Australians, bypassing mainstream media, and making a difference in public attitude. Our social media coordinators have been refining and consolidating SPA's message, which has strengthened community engagement.
- We released a new discussion paper "Reproductive rights: an unfinished project and an ecological imperative" which I believe to be a critical contribution to the global population debate. For those who want to see more energy placed toward the global population, I highly recommend you give this paper a read.
- The SPA supported Post Growth Australia Podcast reached a new milestone by landing within the top 5% of global podcasts by listenership.
- Last but not least, SPA's incredible SA/NT branch hosted three well-attended speaker events in Adelaide this year.

The end of the year is a time for reflection, and I am proud of SPA's achievements despite the persisting David vs Goliath syndrome.

I also reflect on how much work it takes, behind the scenes, just to achieve the above, and to that end I want to send my appreciation to the National Executive Committee, our Membership and Marketing Committee, our volunteers and our paid staff.

Looking into the new year, SPA needs all hands on deck to be a leader in the population debate.







Australia's Population Outlook: Reassessing Long-Term Assumptions

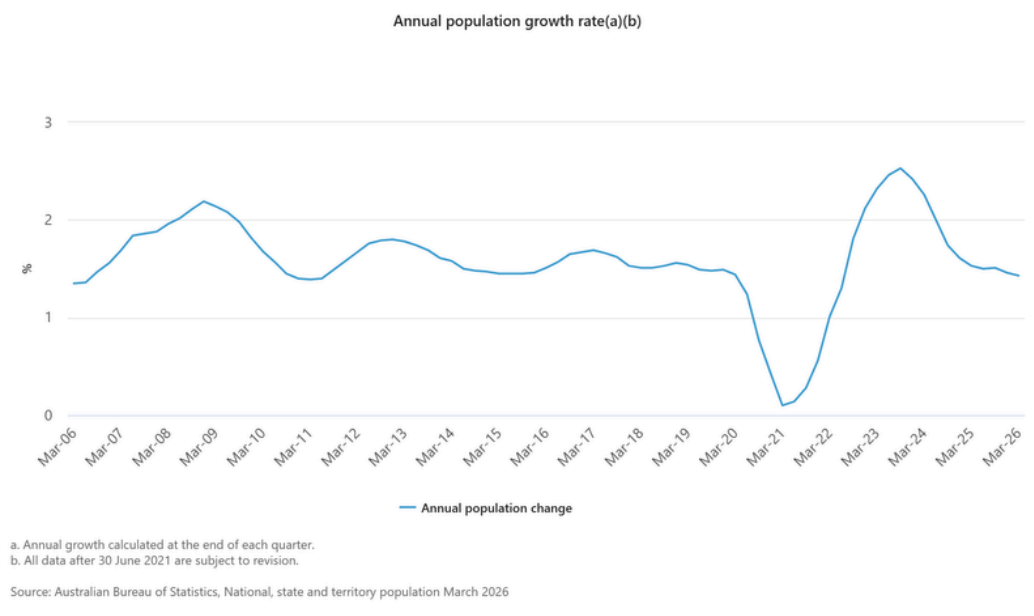
Australia's future population outlook is being reassessed with new findings from the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population, as well as estimates and the Commonwealth Treasury's 2026 Intergenerational Report (IGR). These provide an opportunity to examine how demographic projections inform economic policy and whether these implications continue to fall short of SPA's broader questions of economic and population sustainability.

According to the ABS, Australia's population reached 27.92 million in March 2026, increasing by 392,700 people, or 1.4 per cent, over the preceding year. Net overseas migration accounted for approximately 74 per cent of this increase, with natural increase contributing the remainder. Although the annual growth rate has moderated, as shown in Figure 1, the figures demonstrate that population expansion remains substantial in absolute terms.

The 2026 IGR projects Australia's population will reach 39.3 million by 2065–66, with average annual growth of 0.9 per cent over the next four decades. This represents a downward revision from the 1.1 per cent average projected in the 2023 report, largely reflecting revised fertility assumptions. The projected fertility rate for the final year has fallen from 1.62 to 1.34 births per woman, while the long-term net overseas migration assumption remains unchanged at 235,000 people annually.

These revisions are significant because population projections underpin estimates of economic output, workforce participation and future government expenditure. Treasury's modelling anticipates that deaths will exceed births during the projection period, with net overseas migration becoming the source of population growth from the 2060s.

Figure 1. Australia's annual population growth rate, March 2006 to March 2026



Australia's annual population growth rate has moderated from its recent peak, reaching 1.4 per cent in March 2026. However, the population continues to increase in absolute terms. This distinction is important when assessing long-term demographic projections and their implications for infrastructure, resource demand and environmental sustainability.

However, the distinction between demographic projections and policy objectives warrants closer examination. The IGR assesses the long-term sustainability of government finances and economic settings. Its projections are conditional estimates rather than predetermined population outcomes or an assessment of Australia's ecological carrying capacity. The Parliamentary Budget Office's analysis illustrates this distinction through alternative demographic scenarios. Lower population growth produces a smaller and older population, increasing projected expenditure on pensions, healthcare and aged care relative to the economy. However, many of these negative assumption around an ageing population have been debunked by SPA in our discussion paper 'Silver Tsunami or Silver Lining.

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Policy Watch



Higher growth produces different fiscal outcomes. However, while they often attribute higher growth to higher GDP, they fall short on taking into account GDP per capita, or the negative impacts of population growth on liveability or the environment.

Population growth also has implications for aggregate demand for housing, infrastructure, energy, water and essential services. The scale of these effects depends on consumption patterns, technological change, resource efficiency and planning decisions. Consequently, demographic assumptions should be assessed alongside environmental constraints and the capacity of infrastructure and institutions to respond.

The revised projections therefore present an important policy question: should Australia's long-term population outlook be evaluated primarily through its contribution to economic growth and fiscal sustainability, or through a broader framework incorporating environmental capacity, resource demand and intergenerational wellbeing?

The latest ABS figures establish the present demographic trajectory, while the IGR demonstrates how assumptions about future population change influence national economic planning. Together, they reinforce the importance of transparent demographic modelling and regular reassessment.

For effective long-term policy, the critical task is not simply to forecast how large Australia's population may become, but to examine the consequences of different population pathways and the conditions under which they can be sustained.

Key Takeaways

1. Slower growth does not mean less pressure. Australia's population continues to expand, with implications for infrastructure, resource demand and environmental sustainability.
2. Australia's population is projected to reach 39.3 million by 2065–66. Despite revised growth assumptions, the IGR anticipates substantial population expansion, raising important questions about longterm environmental and infrastructure capacity.
3. Population and economic growth is failing to measure up to many quality of life and environmental measures. These report should account for the negative consequences symptomatic from policies of endless growth on a finite continent.

Sources

1. *Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2026). National, state and territory population, March 2026.*
2. *Australian Government Treasury. (2026). 2026 Intergenerational Report.*
3. *Parliamentary Budget Office. (2026). Guide to the 2026 Intergenerational Report.*



Mathisha Wahikala,
Newsletter Editor,
Digital Marketing Specialist,
National Secretary, SPA



"Rapid population growth increases housing costs, while slowing or reversing population growth reverses this trend. As housing affordability is a key driver of economic inequality and social stratification, a gentle deflation of housing costs should benefit most people."

Dr Jane O'Sullivan
QLD Branch President and Representative
SPA

SPA In Action

Sustainable Population Australia recently signed the Protect Native Forests Principles after an invitation to do so from Wilderness Australia. The Protect Native Forests Principles are a shared roadmap developed by Australian environmental and conservation groups to end native forest destruction and restore ecosystems nationwide. We endorsed these Principles to show solidarity with environment groups with whom we share common concerns for protection of the environment. https://protectnativeforests.com/

The Protect Native Forests Principles call for:

- An immediate end to native forest logging, clearing and conversion.
- Permanent protection of native forests.
- Strong national environment laws that safeguard forests and wildlife.
- An end to carbon and biodiversity offsets generated from public native forests.
- Climate action that protects forests rather than treating them as offsets for new fossil fuel emissions.

Founded in 1968, Wilderness Australia is Australia's longest-running wilderness conservation organisation.
https://www.wildernessaustralia.org.au/
They are one of the few environmental groups to openly acknowledge human population as a driver of damage to our natural world. This includes an official Population Policy which includes the following statements.
https://www.wildernessaustralia.org.au/our_policies
"Overpopulation effects every significant environmental and sustainability problem confronting us today.... Population is a ubiquitous pressure that limits every effort in sustainability and conservation.

Australia is experiencing record levels of population growth, placing pressure on housing, infrastructure and Australia's unique and fragile environment, particularly its biodiversity. While Australian agriculture can feed the current population, fertile land represents a tiny fraction of the continent. Soils are deteriorating, water resources are increasingly unreliable, and native plants and animals remain under threat from land clearing (Australia State of the Environment Report 2021). For environmental advocacy groups, it is time to make a stand on this issue. High population growth means that problems are never resolved, but keep recurring, and at an increasing rate."



Wilderness Australia invited Stephen Morris (Chair SPA SA&NT) to talk at their November board meeting. We welcome this opportunity. Subsequently, we will share information and encourage the 100+ environmental group signatories of the Protect Native Forests Principles to accept the link between high human population growth and forest destruction. In August, many signatories to the Protect Native Forests Principles met in Canberra. The meeting was hosted by The Australia Institute and co-sponsored by Wilderness Australia, Bob Brown Foundation, Australian Conservation Foundation, The Wilderness Society. It was the first such grouping in 25 years aimed at ending native forest logging.

Notably, thirty years ago, Senator Dr Bob Brown gave his first speech in parliament, warning about carrying capacity and threats to the natural environment that flow from overpopulation. Alarmingly, projections he relied on for populations of India and globally, as well as for global warming, have proven optimistic compared with actual outcomes.https://australianpolitics.com/1996/09/10/senator-bob-brown-maiden-speech.html/

Sustainable Population Australia and Wilderness Australia share views on human impact. We must encourage other environmental groups to openly discuss this central issue.



Stephen Morris
SA and NT Branch President and Representative SPA

Reproductive rights: an unfinished project and an ecological imperative



Dr Jane O'Sullivan
QLD Branch President and Representative
SPA



Sandra Kanck
Life Member
SPA

Modern contraceptives are an important tool to strengthen women's bodily autonomy while simultaneously helping lower fertility rates and slow population growth. Yet in recent years, family planning programs have been deprioritised and international aid slashed. A new discussion paper from Sustainable Population Australia explains the reasons behind this policy shift and explores its consequences.

Since the 1960s, modern contraception has brought a revolutionary advance in women's bodily autonomy and their freedom to shape their own lives.

Simultaneously, it was a powerful tool for reducing poverty and enabling economic development in low-income countries, by slowing population growth.

Those countries that embraced this synergy through well-executed voluntary family planning campaigns have experienced steady improvement in their circumstances. Those that did not, and retain high rates of population growth, have floundered.

However, such family planning programs were deprioritised in the 1990s due to a campaign to discredit population stabilisation efforts, spearheaded by the Catholic Church and taken up by Marxist feminists. Family planning was reframed as exclusively serving women's reproductive health and rights, without attempting to influence reproductive choices.

United Nations' institutions have become beholden to a curious mix of conservative religious interests and ideological anti-Malthusians who censure any mention of limiting population growth.

Sadly, women's rights are less motivating to country leaders than economic development. Consequently, both domestic and international support for family planning shrivelled, leaving women's reproductive rights worse off. The goal of ensuring universal access to reproductive health and autonomy remains distant. Some 259 million women globally who want to avoid pregnancy are not currently using safe and effective family planning methods, similar to the number estimated thirty years ago.

While most countries have enjoyed the benefits of lower birth rates and slower population growth underpinning broad-based development, the remaining high-fertility countries suffer deepening poverty, environmental degradation and often instability and violence due to their rapid population growth. In these countries, the fertility transition has occurred much slower than was widely anticipated, leading to world population persistently exceeding the UN projections. Concerns about a 'birth dearth' in rich countries are ignoring the increasingly dominant influence of the rapidly growing, low-income countries. Compared with the progress made in the 1970s, over the past thirty years global fertility decline has slowed to barely a crawl.

The weakened family planning effort has met a hardening of cultural resistance. The remaining high-fertility countries tend to be more conservative, patriarchal and religious than the early adopters of family planning. In these settings, simply providing access to contraception is not enough to achieve behavioural change. Nor has educating girls made much difference.

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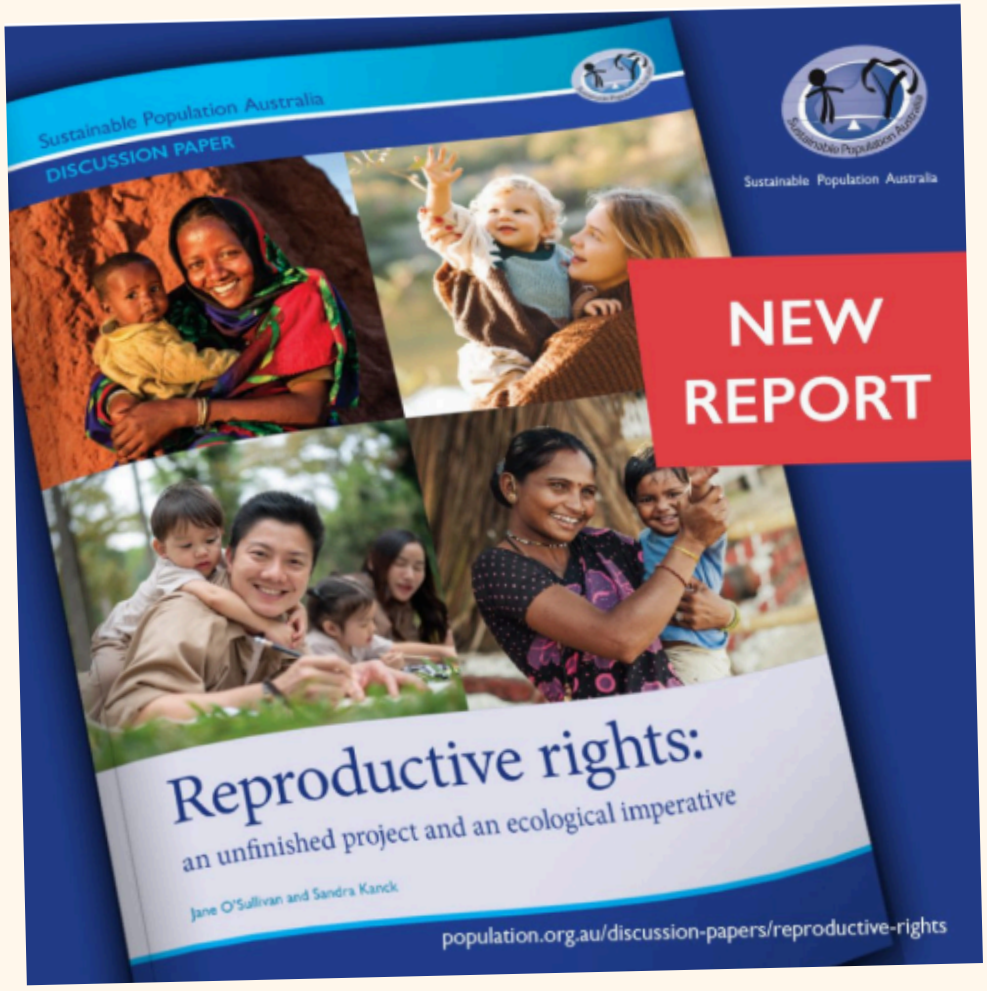
Change requires more active promotion of the benefits of delaying, spacing and limiting childbearing, and of the safety and moral acceptability of modern contraceptive methods.

Many strategies have proven effective in other countries, from radio infotainment series to enlisting religious leaders as champions of contraception. The cost is modest and typically pays for itself three-fold in avoided health expenses for mothers and infants. The alternative is increasing poverty and instability in low-income countries.

The taboo that has developed around discussing and addressing population growth constitutes a missed opportunity for simultaneously advancing reproductive rights, societal wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

Although two-thirds of the world's people now live in countries with below-replacement fertility, it is worth noting that a majority of children are born in countries with higher fertility. This means most children born this century will a) live in poor countries with growing populations, b) require much more resources and energy if they are to be lifted out of poverty, and c) must choose to have, on average, fewer children than their parents for the UN's projection of world population not to be greatly overshot.

Until we can dispel the myths and loosen the social norms anchored in religion and patriarchy, women's lives will remain hostage to unregulated childbearing and the world population will probably exceed current projections, to the detriment of the environment, the poorest nations and the most disadvantaged people, principally women.



Download the full paper below:
Reproductive-Rights-Discussion-Paper-22Sept2026.pdf
Visit: www.https://population.org.au/discussion-papers/

Meet Our Donors



John Burke

SPA's fantastic members come from all walks of life and support the organisation in many ways. While some volunteer on the front lines, others support SPA's work through their generous donations.

SPA had the opportunity to catch up with one of our donors, John Burke, to find out more about our members and what motivates them to support our work.

SPA: John, tell us a little about yourself, including your professional history, your passions and what drives you.
John: I grew up in Mt George on the mid-north coast of NSW, went to a Sydney boarding high school, and obtained a degree in civil engineering from the University of Sydney. During four years working and studying in North America I obtained a Master of Science in management degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York.
Returning to Australia I worked in the precast concrete industry and was managing director and an owner of Rescrete Industries Pty Ltd for 32 years.

SPA: Why are the issues of environmental protection and overpopulation important core concerns for you?
John: My initial environmental interest was the protection of urban bushland in Sydney and that soon led to the realisation that population growth was a major threat to our environment. The further realisation was that there couldn't be infinite growth in a finite world and, indeed, in Australia. It was clear that key drivers of growth were those who profited from it in the medium and short-term. The Business Council of Australia, for example, represented many such firms and were able to fund lobbying for never-ending population growth.

Back before Covid, Australia's population growth was about 1.6%. Most people reckoned that was an acceptably small figure and were often unbelieving that it involved a doubling every 45 years and some 100 million people in another 90 years. Given our huge extinction rate and general disastrous environmental problems, that figure seemed unacceptable.

SPA: What do you see as the existing barriers for Australia to achieve a stable population? How do we overcome these barriers?
John: There were high hopes for the Sustainable Population Strategy Taskforce in 2011 but, while everyone said that the environment was very important, no such strategy emerged. The big end of town had its way. I wrote a paper for the environmental group STEP Inc. that referenced the Taskforce. A great disappointment was the refusal of the major environmental NGOs to campaign for a stable population, or even to talk about population at all. This was despite them often having previously established a reasonable policy. Their fear, apparently, was of being accused of xenophobia, racism and the like. I had expected environmental warriors to go to battle with all means at their disposal. Instead, they have taken the coward's way out and are content to win battles while losing the war. The current furore about immigration should not be confused with seeking a population objective. Our politicians have created a mess that they are not doing such a good job of sorting out. These are, however, short-term problems to do with housing and the like that can be resolved. Such resolution will do nothing for our population objectives. My view is that we need to develop a proper population policy that will deliver a stable population in, say, 40 years. Such a time frame will allow a reallocation of work as industries, such as construction, decline and will allow workers to train instead for health, agriculture and other appropriate areas. We don't need economic shocks caused by too rapid introduction of changes. We need to set a target and then manage towards it.
The argument that we hear often that a stable population will lead to economic catastrophe is, of course, nonsense. The many countries doing well with near stable, stable or declining populations bear witness to that.

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Meet Our Donors

SPA: Around 10 years ago, you supported SPA with a very generous yearly donation to help us to improve our outreach and communications. What first drew you to support us and what have been some of the positive changes you have observed from SPA over the past decade?

John: I came across SPA many years ago and of course supported its objectives. Like so many community groups, SPA was run by a small band of smart, committed individuals. They did not, however, have the funding or staff to build the sort of momentum needed to compete with the big end of town. While I had been donating to SPA since about 2005, I was able to help it establish a permanent staff in 2017 and that has gone so well that I continue to help. It's apparent that SPA has secured more funding over time and my hope is that other donors will continue to contribute.

SPA: For those in a position to support financially, why would you recommend SPA as an organisation worth donating to?

John: It is simply unacceptable that we allow the unthinking, the ignorant and the greedy to dominate the population debate. The impact that the SPA team has been able to make across the community has been very encouraging. It's crucial that SPA continues to be a voice on the right side of history and therefore that it be well supported.

SPA relies almost exclusively on donations and bequests from members and supporters like John. Funding is crucial for us to continue our outreach.

Find out more about how you can SUPPORT US today.

Support SPA

As Australia's only environmental organisation focused primarily on population, SPA depends entirely on its members and donors to continue its advocacy and educational work. By becoming a member or supporter, making a donation, or leaving a bequest, you can help SPA promote informed discussion about population and sustainability and advocate for an Australia that is better, not bigger.

You can also support SPA by subscribing to our free newsletters, sharing our membership brochure with your networks and encouraging others to learn more about our work. Every action helps strengthen SPA's voice and bring this important conversation to more Australians.

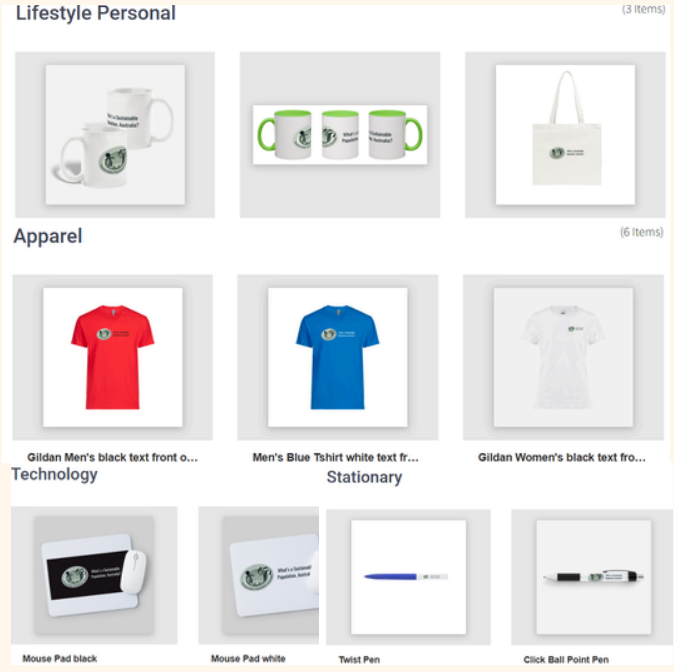
Find out how you can help at population.org.au/support

Discover Sustainable Population Australia Merchandise and Support the Cause

SPA merchandise offers a practical way to raise awareness and encourage informed conversations about population and environmental sustainability.

Explore a range of apparel, accessories and everyday items, with prices starting from under $5. Visit the SPA ProShop to browse the collection and create an account to place an order. Merchandise sales do not directly fund SPA.

Supporters wishing to contribute to SPA's environmental education and advocacy work can make a donation through the SPA website.



Meet The Author



Sheila Newman
Author of the
Tribal Code Revolution



In the last edition of the SPA Newsletter, we shared Jill Quirk's excellent review of a new book written by long-time SPA member Sheila Newman. SPA's Michael Bayliss caught up with Sheila to take a dive into the themes explored in "Tribal Code: Revolution."

Michael: Sheila, tell us a little about yourself, including your professional and research history, and your involvement in advocacy and activism, including SPA.

Sheila: I joined SPA (then AESP) in the late 1980s, as houses and roads expanded into areas I had known for their trees, wildlife, and open space. I started the Victorian branch and participated in Barry Jones' Carrying Capacity inquiry. Parliamentary burial of the report sensitised me to the cui bono of politics. I was National Vice President and Newsletter editor of SPA in 2004. I'm currently on SPA Vic-TAS committee.

Independent research and writing developed me as an Evolutionary Sociologist. I edited and wrote for two scientist-authored editions of The Final Energy Crisis (2005 and 2008). Since 2006, I have written and edited for https://candobetter.net, a site for reform in democracy, environment, population, land-use planning and energy policy. SPA members are welcome to contribute. Relevant Books: Urge to Disperse; Demography Territory Law series: Rules of Animal and Human Populations; Land-tenure and the Origins of Capitalism in Britain; Land Tenure & the Revolution in Democracy & Birth Control in France; and this novel, Tribal Code Revolution. The third book in my non-fiction series uses game theory and Richard Dawkins's overlooked Selfish Gene theory to show how species can limit their own fertility.

Together they gave me the central insight of the novel: the way a population is organised largely determines its politics. Viscous populations can control their numbers unless another class dominates their perception through ideology or law. Dispersed societies are dominated by whoever controls the media that claims to speak for them.

Michael: "Tribal Code: Revolution" is a unique fiction book which introduces many new concepts within a rollicking action thriller/sci-fi setting. What was your inspiration to write this kind of story?

Sheila: The whole thing was kicked off by my horror at Frankston Council giving in to State [read property developer] pressure for Frankston to alienate her CBD to become the first of 200 Metropolitan Activity Centres (MACs) in Victoria, and knowing this is also going on continent-wide. It had been like watching a train gather speed and momentum in the distance over decades finally crashing and exploding right at my door.
I felt I could see how to stop it, but could not communicate this. I wanted to see where my scientific theories would take things if I applied them. I did not have a world-sized or even country-sized laboratory. So, I invented my laboratory. Imaginary characters can say and do anything without fear of being pursued legally or alienating sponsors.

The novel imagined my own situation but empowered the central character (Leanor) to actually carry out her solution. This caused me to look at my own thoughts in detail, and the whole thing carried on almost to sub-cellular vanishing point, all based on the science of genetic algorithms and relationships between species and within species. Chaos was the wild and disorganising card in the form of the addictive engine of profit-seeking behaviour, magnified and speeded up by global electronic money. I imagined Leanor succeeding where I had failed. As I wrote, I imagined readers finally grasping the situation and its solution.

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Michael: Central to the story is the 'Blockchain DNA MAP' to coordinate a sense of shared identity with people who have become isolated and atomised in this globalised society. As much as it is tricky to give this idea justice in a couple of paragraphs (one really needs to read the book) could you give us a taster?

Sheila: To a non-technical person logging on, the interface doesn't look like a complex database; it feels like opening a vast, glowing 3D map of the continent that holds a specific place just for you. When you enter your basic details, the map zooms in, connecting your current physical location to your ancestral roots. Suddenly, you see yourself visualised not as an isolated dot, but as a crucial link in a living, interconnected web of territory, family trees, and shared resources. The map shows the customs, history and practical rules of the group you belong to: how land is held, how resources are protected, and how your group connects with others. You can move back through time to the earliest known ancestors and see the lines that still join you to them and to other communities. It's really an electronically guided relocalisation and re-establishment of ordinary tribes that exist in blood but are geographically dispersed. The wealthy and powerful have always preserved their own tight-knit tribal networks – dynasties - to consolidate resources and power. This platform acts as a structural reset, rescuing individuals from an atomised society where people are uprooted, commodified, and judged on their 'productivity.' Crucially, this is an entirely opt-in ecosystem where everyone owns their own DNA data, but everyone in it can see the entire continental 'family' tree. This is quite unlike family tree sites where you only see a limited selection in exchange for a fee, or data controlled by insitutions or governments. While users lose the anonymity of atomisation, they gain a truer form of privacy—one that completely eliminates the need for a centralised state to spy on and manage their lives.

Michael: As an on-off gamer myself, you introduce 'gaming' in this book to acquaint people with the blockchain DNA map, which I thought was a great innovation. What inspired you to think about 'gaming as a means to get people involved and to think outside the box?

Sheila: Many young people live largely online, with few real entry points into wider society or politics. Work is often precarious and meaningless; AI threatens to narrow the remaining openings still further. Yet a large number of them are already skilled at building and governing complex virtual worlds. They understand rules, algorithms and three-dimensional systems. Most existing games, however, run on thin loops of building, capturing and destroying. Almost none are grounded in real ecology or demography.

My idea was to channel that untapped 'cognitive surplus,' by giving those players tools based on actual DNA maps, real geography and working demographic algorithms. Instead of practising mastery inside hollow rule-sets, they could stress-test and extend a decentralised reflection of the living world. In Australia, for instance, there are probably about half a million young people already literate in digital architecture and systems. The novel treats them as the natural workforce for the tribal code in New Hollandia.

Michael: Across most neo-liberal Western societies there appears to be a yearning need for belonging, which in my opinion may be projecting itself as political tribalism (e.g. left vs right). To me, 'Tribal Code: Revolution' provides the possibility of enabling the expression of cultural or shared identity while providing a deeper appreciation of diversity, not only culturally, but for the interconnected web of life. In other words, it transcends the so-called 'culture wars' and allows us to form groups according to a better set of criteria, compared to the current trend on grouping around political binaries.

Sheila: You have described the intention well. The political system in the novel is rooted in belonging that cannot be taken away by the next election or the next media cycle. People gain a local, organic hierarchy tied to their own group and place, and a sense of continuity that stretches beyond any single lifetime. That belonging sits inside something larger than human society—the living web of which human society is only one part.

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Michael: I was by your past non-fiction work, especially 'Demography, Territory & Law: Rules of Animal & Human Populations.' What are some of the ideas explored here that are re-explored in 'Tribal Code' (e.g. kinship and population).

Sheila: The novel draws on all three Demography Territory Law books. It returns to kinship rules, incest avoidance, marriage rules, fertility, demystifying Easter Island, and the way atomised populations have their need for belonging captured by organised dynasties and corporations. How different tribal marriage and inheritance rules balancing endogamy with exogamy create a predictable arithmetical pattern of fertility in a viscous population. How such populations, knowing one another, sharing the same territory, history and values, have high social trust and greater individual and group political power. How dynasties preserve power and land and how we might all do the same and regain power, but not in the way we normally think of this.

The book takes the notion (also treated by Dawkins in the Selfish Gene) that these rules operate at a cellular level and considers the notion that ancestor-worship conceptually parallels DNA patterning or trajectories. In short, it asks how a land-poor, atomised population of tens of millions might retribalise and relocalise—using people's existing fascination with family trees as the practical starting point.

Michael: Why do you believe 'Tribal Code' is a worthy addition to the reading list of sustainable population advocates? What do you think a SPA supporter will gain from reading this book and if so, how can they get involved?

Sheila: Tribal Code Revolution is a useful addition for sustainable-population advocates because it turns the usual demographic and ecological arguments into a concrete social and political story. Most SPA material explains why continued high population growth collides with biophysical limits. The novel asks what kind of social organisation could actually slow that process and restore local control, then shows characters trying to build one.
A supporter is likely to gain four things.

First, a dramatised account of the mechanisms that keep growth going. The early chapters make the property-finance-immigration complex feel immediate: local councils stripped of power, SLAPP suits against critics, media framing of opposition as selfish or racist, rural communities hollowed out, water and land treated as financial assets. These are familiar complaints; the novel links them to a single underlying process—engineered atomisation that prevents people from organising around place and kinship. That framing helps readers see population growth less as a simple numbers problem and more as the result of institutions that reward disconnection.
Second, an explicit theory of how kinship and land tenure affect fertility and social power. Drawing on my non-fiction work, the book treats "viscosity" (dense, overlapping local and kinship ties) as a practical regulator. Endogamous or tightly networked groups retain more capacity to manage their own numbers, defend territory, and resist external pressure. The DNA-blockchain map is the device that makes those ties visible again. Readers who already accept the ecological case for lower population growth get a social mechanism that could support it, rather than relying only on national policy or individual choice.
Third, a picture of what organised resistance might look like if ordinary political channels were closed. The later chapters show activists, suburban residents, gamers, elders, and technical people coordinating through shared ancestry data, independent media, and local networks. The civil-war sequence is speculative, but it illustrates a recurring SPA concern: when growth is driven by concentrated interests (developers, finance, aligned political parties), standard democratic levers are weak. The novel presents a bottom-up reconnection rather than another top-down plan.
On the practical side, I would like to start conversations around the book, with other SPA writers, and around cooperative platforms for alternative writers and population work—candobetter.net, Countershock Press, and related digital projects. If anyone is interested, contact: sheilanewmancorrespondence@gmail.com

ACT Branch Report by Colin Lyons

Canberra Branch has maintained bi-monthly Committee meetings this year where we have shared views on developments in immigration and population policy more generally and heard feedback from our representative on the National Executive, Mick Thompson. The popularity of One Nation in the polls has prompted debate about its implications for future State and Federal elections.

Discussion was also held on the content and breadth of opinion expressed on the recent ABC television program on the subject of immigration before an invited panel of speakers, which did not include SPA representatives unfortunately.

This Saturday, the 21st of November, we are looking forward to a presentation from Prof Clive Williams on the topic, "Beyond Bigger: Qualitative Sustainment for Australia & Canberra".

VicTas Branch Report by Daniel Webby

- Melbourne at 10 Million Forum – Outreach & Social Gathering

The Age and the University of Melbourne are hosting a public forum discussing Melbourne's projected population growth to 10 million. The branch plans to coordinate local members to flyering at the front of the venue on the last day, where potential politicians and media representatives are expected to be present. Participating members will wear SPA t-shirts to ensure strong visibility, and a social gathering will follow the event.

- Author Event: Sheila Newman Book Launch & Presentation

We are proposing an event featuring Sheila Newman to present on her new novel and explore its core themes. This will serve as a strong platform to promote SPA members and highlight the great work they are doing.

- Victorian Election Scorecard Meeting

On October 2nd, Richard, Sheila, and Daniel are scheduled to meet with Simon Cole and Tim Jackson to discuss the Victorian election scorecard.

SA & NT Branch by Robyn Wood and Stephen Morris,

Our branch gave six talks to various groups during the quarter. Tim and Stephen had a Zoom meeting (30/7) with Nicola Centofanti MLC, Shadow Minister for Environment and Water.

On 10/11, five ACF SA and SPA members attended a Zoom meeting with ACF representatives Ros Hervey (President) and Stephen Lightfoot (Vice President). We proposed that 'population' should be an agenda item for ACF's AGM. The Board refused, citing:

- Lack of interest amongst membership
- Insufficient resources
- Focus on land clearing and the 'growth economy'

Stephen attended the Wilderness Australia AGM (10/11) and presented to the Wilderness Australia Board (11/11), with a discussion on 'Why do other environmental groups not discuss population?'

The Committee met with journalist Bernd Struben (12/10) to discuss a possible role as an SPA article writer. Robyn has written a project proposal for approval.

Stephen participated in a U3A debate (17/11) with a retired economist on 'Costs and Benefits of Immigration'.

Mark and Stephen attended Stage 2 of Conservation Council SA's 'Co Creation Process' (17/11).

Robyn had three population-related letters published in The Advertiser.

Tim asked the Minister if there was periodic reporting on the implementation of the 2023 SA State of the Environment (SoE) recommendations. A response was received after five months. It was suggested that periodic reporting be introduced for the 2028 SoE Report. Tim noted that SPA's desire to join the Environment Protection Authority's Assurance Group for the SA SoE is under consideration.

WA Branch Report by Judith Odgaard

A meet and greet, called Ask me a Question, with SPA Vice President Jane O'Sullivan was held at the Rose and Crown Hotel in Guildford on Wed 30/9. 10 People attended & was apparently well received, unfortunately I was unable to attend. Our Secretary Warwick Boardman has been busy these last couple of months attending the Conservation Council of WA council meetings while sending a missive about SPA being perceived as not being concerned about nature conservation!! He has sent off drafts for pamphlets relating to unions and to conservationists to Michael Bayliss. Warwick also attended the CCWA Annual Conference in Busselton in late October, participating in a workshop on the Back from the Brink document.

A stall site at the Hyde Park Festival in March next year has been booked by Robert Boni.

Early in this month I gave a talk to over 30 members of Duncraig Probus, many seemed quite surprised at the multiple problems over population causes.

About SPA

Sustainable Population Australia (SPA) is an independent, non-partisan not-for-profit organisation founded in 1988 to promote an ecologically sustainable human population in Australia and globally. SPA works to raise awareness of how population size and growth interact with the environment, social wellbeing and economic stability.
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SPA Newsletter
Editor: Mathisha Wahikala
editor@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. Letters to the editor are welcome but limited to 300 words and must be in electronic form.

Webmaster: Alex Geppert
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Membership Officer: Andrew Verlei
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Membership applications and renewals can be made through the SPA website, while all general inquiries should be directed to the national office.

Join the Population Conversation
Join the conversation and keep up with the latest from SPA across our social platforms.

- Facebook
- X (formerly Twitter)
- Instagram
- YouTube
- TikTok
- Bluesky
- LinkedIn

Member PopForum
SPA members can join the Member PopForum, an email-based discussion group for sharing media articles, research and discussion on population sustainability.
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