

Blue Mountains Gazette - Letters To The Editor

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Sustainable Population

Thinking people are increasingly accepting the truism that sustainable growth is an oxymoron when applied to a finite system like Earth. Our planet has a limited ability to provide the renewable resources on which we depend and a limited ability to absorb waste that we generate.

Our impact on the planet is neatly evaluated in the relationship $I = P * A * T$; impact is a product of population, affluence and technology. At present we far exceed the capacity of the Earth to support us, and this will inevitably be exacerbated as the third world aspires to a western living standard. Regrettably, the likelihood of advanced societies markedly reducing their per capita footprints seems remote.

Our impact is already apparent in depleted groundwater supplies, collapsing fisheries, food supply inequality and the impossibility of meeting emissions targets, but when petroleum depletion really hits over the next few decades, broad acre farming is bound to collapse due a consequent shortage of fuel and fertiliser. The effect on other species is also stark, demonstrated already by the loss of ecosystems and the 6th great extinction of species (the first caused by a single species, us).

Simply put, we need less of us with each using less. If we fail to heed the mounting signs then nature will take action. No negotiation, no political bluster, just nature's inviolate laws in action. The result will not be pretty. If we do not co-operate and achieve a sustainable population level at whatever level of resource consumption and technology provides a comfortable life, other factors will be imposed. Historically, these have been war (from resource conflict), disease or famine. The only growth target should be in quality of life.

On Friday 25 June, the President of the environmental think tank Sustainable Population Australia, Kris Spike, will provide a stimulating address at the Conservation Hut, Fletcher St, Wentworth Falls, starting at 7:30 pm. All are welcome.

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