

Blue Mountains Gazette - Letters To The Editor

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Sustainable Population

Population has emerged from a forced embargo to feature in the federal election, with polling indicating little support for endless growth. This is particularly relevant to the Mountains with the Northwest Regional Sub Strategy designating 7000 additional dwellings here. The inexorable spread of humankind has been paralleled by a loss of wilderness, with ecosystems destruction causing record species extinctions. Since we are part of, and dependent on, such ecosystems, this doesn't bode well for our long term future.

Urban Sydney's problem is to accommodate growth without sprawl; smaller blocks and more high rise. Each generation of less healthy children will have progressively less space to play and develop. When will it stop?

Many myths abound about the supposed benefits of endless growth. Most are espoused by vested interests making money from growth. For example, it has been well documented that (i) continued growth does not resolve the ageing in our society, (ii) about half our infrastructure costs are used to prepare for a higher population (and half for renewal), (iii) we have no hope of meeting carbon reduction targets while we grow, (iv) we are progressively losing quality farmland to urban sprawl and (v) per-capita economic growth does not depend on increasing population. The phrase 'sustainable growth' is an oxymoron in a finite system.

It is absurd to couch the discussion in traditional economic terms, since a stressed environment will soon lead to us being stressed. Economic health depends on environmental health.

Existing studies demonstrate our optimum population to be around 25 million at current footprint. Beyond that it is a trade off, with population growth being paralleled by a commensurate lowering in general living standards. Government policies must be changed to reflect this reality. If sustainability is the goal, growth is not the solution, it is the problem.

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