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SUBMISSION: FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

Population and Consumption

Overpopulation, consumption, rapid growth, and enormous waste are causing the decline and the extinction of species. As Schumacher stated, the Western civilisation is like an express train racing towards an abyss. Andrew Beattie and Paul Ehrlich (*Wildsolutions* 2001, p225) warn us that "Right now the human race is recklessly squandering its savings. All over the world forests, soils, and fisheries are in decline. ... We are even changing the climate for the worse". - Lester Brown (*State of the World 2000* p8) notes that during the 1990s "the environmental trends were disastrous" due to our outdated economic system stimulating growth.

Scientists are arrogant if they believe that they can significantly reduce growth and consumption without controlling population. Brown (p5) points out that "Between 1950 and 2000, world population increased from 2.5 billion to 6.1 billion, a gain of 3.6 billion." Western Australia's population is increasing rapidly with devastating effects. New houses, highways and rail systems are also a costly burden on the community.

Precious bushland is being rapidly destroyed causing a loss of flora and fauna, and a loss of biodiversity. Land clearing is hastening climate change. The more people, the more pollution as instanced by the Bellvue fire. Although population is mainly a federal government issue, we need to speak out about restricting immigration and urging families to have fewer children. At the same time, we need to urge the Australian Government to increase overseas aid to 1.01 per cent of GDP to match Denmark's contribution to reduce population growth and poverty (Australia 0.25, USA 0.01 per cent).

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the key indicator for sustainability. The first step is to introduce a total ban on clearing with heavy penalties for flouting the law, and a Biodiversity Act (proposed more than 10 years ago) needs to be enacted. Action is needed to implement the State Weed Plan to control weeds to maintain biodiversity. This would reduce fire hazards. The disregard for bushland by many fire fighters is disgraceful as instanced at Forrestdale Lake Underwood Avenue, Trigg, and Brixton Street bushlands. In some cases they made little effort to put out the bushfires in the early stages. To make matters worse, tree loppers came along and felled a number of mature jarrah trees which were not burning and were not dangerous. Birds and other fauna are significantly reduced by this loss of habitat. These acts of vandalism leads to a loss of biodiversity.

Wasting Water and Energy

Water is being mined unsustainably in Perth. Water is being overdrawn by 20 percent with bores and this will increase to 40 percent resulting in deaths of tree and other vegetation in Banksia woodlands. What is even more outrageous is that Water Corporation still advocates forest management to increase run off for metropolitan dams. Their idea of forest management is to thin out the trees which would drastically alter the ecosystem. The community would not tolerate this action. John Brennan from the Water Corporation (UNAA Water Seminar, 16 March, 2000) said that the demand for water by 2030 will increase by 80 percent while the rainfall was expected to drop by 20 percent. The Water Corporation has a vested interest in selling more water so therefore is not really interested in reducing water use.

A stroll around almost any suburb shows the “cultural baggage” (a term adopted by Penny Hussey, CALM) of lawns and roses we have inherited from our colonial ancestors. Native gardens and the absence of lawns are rarely seen. It is no wonder that nearly half our precious water goes on lawns. Furthermore, environmentally friendly toilets, shower heads and washing machines are being introduced slowly.

While walking the streets in new suburbs, we see a predominance of large houses with black or dark coloured tiles on roofs, no eaves and very few houses with solar design features. And when houses are being built there is always a large pile of surplus bricks and timber which go to the rubbish dump.

Taxation

Taxation needs to be totally changes. For example, a carbon tax on fossil fuels and other energy taxes need to be introduced.

Land tax needs to be increased substantially to pay for Perth's Bushplan sites.

Royalties on timber need to be increased 5 fold, especially on our slow growing jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginala*). This would tend to discourage the enormous waste that occurs in the timber industry.

Land

With a third of the agricultural land of Western Australia likely to become saline, it is obvious that farming practices are unsustainable. The then Premier, Sir James Mitchell, (often referred to as "Moo-cow" Mitchell because of his failed settlement scheme which destroyed valuable karri forests) was warned by scientists 75 years ago that clearing would cause salinity and farmers still continue practices which are destroying the land. And, many field officers in the Department of Agriculture lack an environmental ethic and regard those that do as being "odd". The ignorance of most of the community in regard to issues such as salinity is alarming. This was clearly illustrated in a chapter on Katanning in a recent book on salinity where trees were cut down to make way for a rose garden and lawns while the water table is rising to the surface bringing up salt which is causing buildings to crumble. Land can no longer be built on.

Education

Although the sustainability lectures organised by the Government Sustainability Policy Unit through Professor Peter Newman were well attended (and the Government deserves praise for this initiative), the lectures were overly optimistic and tended to ignore the major problem of a burgeoning population. There is a long way to go to get people to change their ways. They may change their views but they are reluctant to change their practices. To help change the "growth" mentality of the community and politicians, time needs to be set aside each night on ABC television to inform people on sustainability issues (say 10 minutes). The public needs to be made aware of the concept of "development" (improving efficiency, using energy smarter) instead of "growth" which is more of the same (Ken Robertson, UWA).

Environmental Education in schools leaves a lot to be desired. Generally, teachers lack knowledge about environmental issues, apart from recycling, and do not wish to display their ignorance to their students. With a few notable exceptions, there is a lack of recognition of the importance of environmental education especially among principals. Often teachers feel intimidated.

Climate Change

The lack of commitment to environmental issues by governments is clearly demonstrated by the disregard for climate change. Another coal fired power station is still being considered, a steel mill is planned for Kwinana, bushland is being cleared for enormous freeways, and illegal land clearing is continuing because our laws are so weak. We don't seem to care what happens to people living on islands in the Pacific or our own future well being, as polar ice melts and temperatures are rising, causing serious climate change.

The Future

Twenty five years ago (July, 1997), Fritz Schumacher, said in an address in Winthrop Hall, that

“The Western economies are like an express train, hurtling at ever increasing speed towards an abyss.”

We have not changed. The rate of change has increased and we are polluting and destroying our environment. The Government has a “growth” mentality with wide freeways being constructed while we are running out of oil. The environment is seen as an issue which is important for the future, but not now.

The lack of interest in taking actions to reduce climate change is a disgrace. It is immoral. Rising temperatures are causing sea levels to rise and flooding lowlands will make millions of people homeless.

The vast majority of people have become overwhelmed with a feeling of helplessness and have allowed wealthy corporations, assisted by governments, to rule their lives. They suffer from the “boiled frog” syndrome:

“Frogs placed in a pan of water that is slowly heated will be unable to detect the gradual but deadly trend; they will sit still until they die. Like the frogs, many people seem unable to detect the gradual but lethal trend in which population and

economic growth threaten to boil civilisation. They keep working to turn up the heat, because they cant detect its rise.”

But, each one of us can make a big difference. And, we must make a difference to reduce climate change. If we don't, we will be obliged to take in unwanted people made homeless by flooding through rising temperatures. The environmental harm and loss of biodiversity would be catastrophic.

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