

Conserve Or Consume

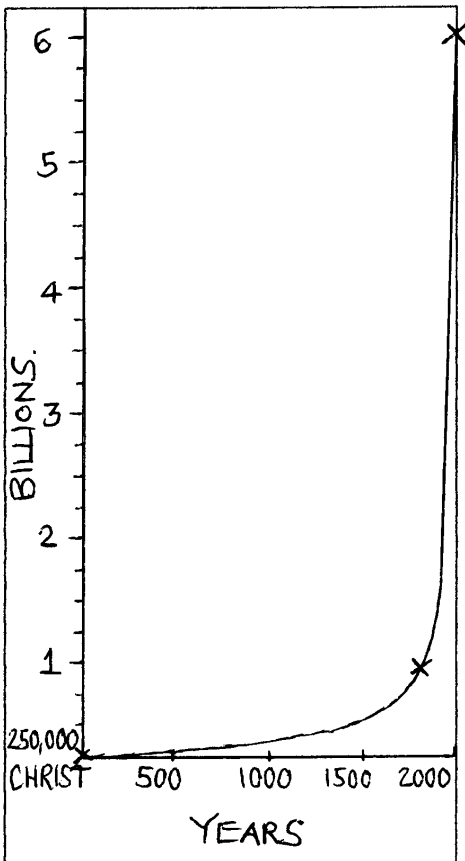
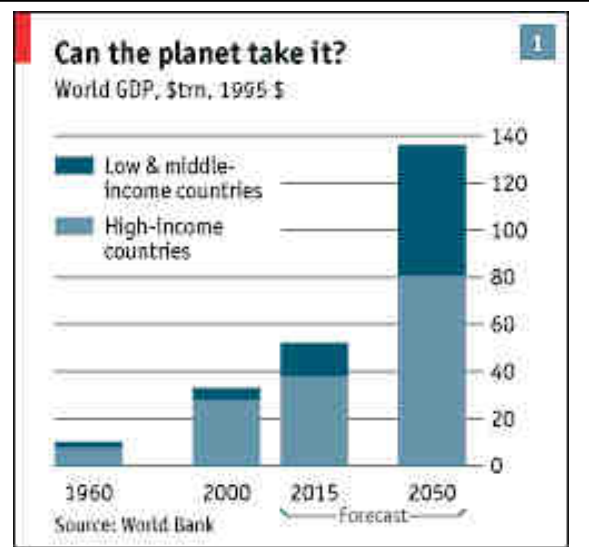
Introduction

The resources of our natural world are depleting because our demands on them are beyond what they can supply. The devastation and destruction that we impose on the world around us has been endless and now we are starting to wake up to the fact that the resources are running out. Many scientists have picked up on such a trend and written many warnings in regards to the depletion of resources and the ever increasing demand on a world environment which is diminishing daily. Sustainable development is at the forefront of international agenda because the problems of population, increasing consumption and resource depletion are becoming glaringly obvious and can no longer be ignored! (Lloyd, 2000)

<http://www.colorado.edu/peacestudies/roper/sustainable-economics/resource-productivity/index.html>

Resource productivity (eco-efficiency) must be radically improved in the decades to come in order to avoid, that the ongoing growth in global consumption will lead to environmental disaster. Improving resource productivity means using fewer natural resources per unit of consumption - to do more with less. This reduces the impact on the environment from consumption

The purpose of this web site is to explain the background for this necessity and the role of science and technology in securing sustainability as well as the need for a tax shift to eco-taxes to further this development.



The Issue

The Population Problem

Previously the phrase 'populate or perish' was used to stress the fact that nations needed more people to achieve necessary economic development. This was particularly true for Australia in its development who needed more laborers to keep up with the social and economic demand due to national growth. The problem today though is that social and economic growth has got to the point now where it can be said 'populate and perish'. The continual increase in population is a pattern that is looking particularly ominous. The wikipedia world population graph shows the population of the world has more than doubled in the last fifty years. Beazley points out that at the time of Christ world population was around 250 million, by the middle of the nineteenth century it was 1000 million. This figure has drastically escalated over the last 100 years to the point now where it is seven billion. (Beazley, 1990; Sant, 1992).

Habitat Destruction

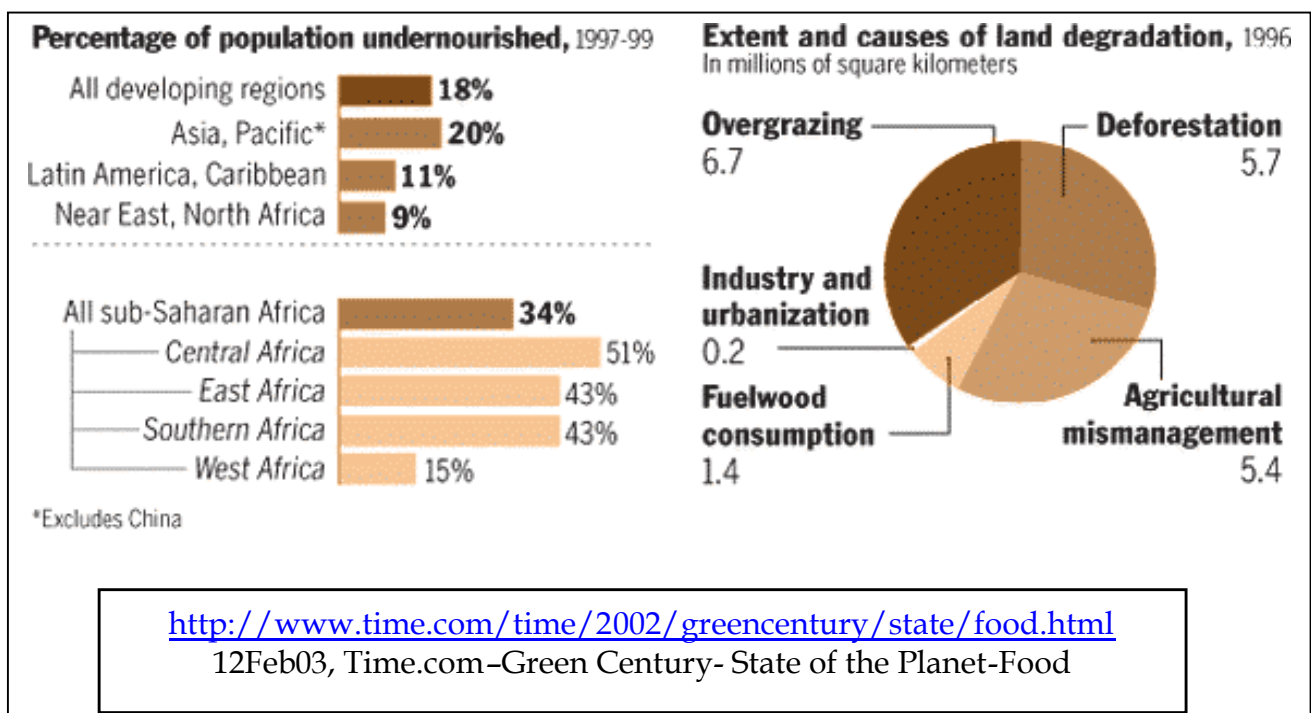
One of the most prevalent environmental problems is that of habitat destruction due to land clearing for social, agricultural and industrial purposes. When land is cleared the life that exists with that environment is significantly destroyed or impacted upon. The plants and microorganisms which provide the food for larger animal species are affected and subsequently effect food chains for all forms of life. The intricate webs which form biodiversity are severed and links are lost which contribute to species extinction and numerous other environmental implications that are ultimately effecting man at the end of the chain. Circles of life are cut off and many never recover. The implications of such losses are multiplying as natural cycles continually get interrupted through man and his incessant need for more development. (Attenborough, 2003a; Attenborough, 2003b)

Cycles of Pollution & Depletion

Water cycles are a good example of how excessive pollutants and wastes effect all forms of life. Water cycles are able to purify normal levels of impurities but when these cycles are burdened with excessive pollution they breakdown. Plants and small organisms are infected, and as other larger organisms and fish ingest these impurities poisons are fed along the food chain. These poisons contribute to the death of all forms of life including ourselves. Disease and health problems can stem from our food and water which ultimately stems back to the waste that we originally dumped into the systems that give us our life. (Attenborough, 2003b; Beazley, 1980)

Degrading Land

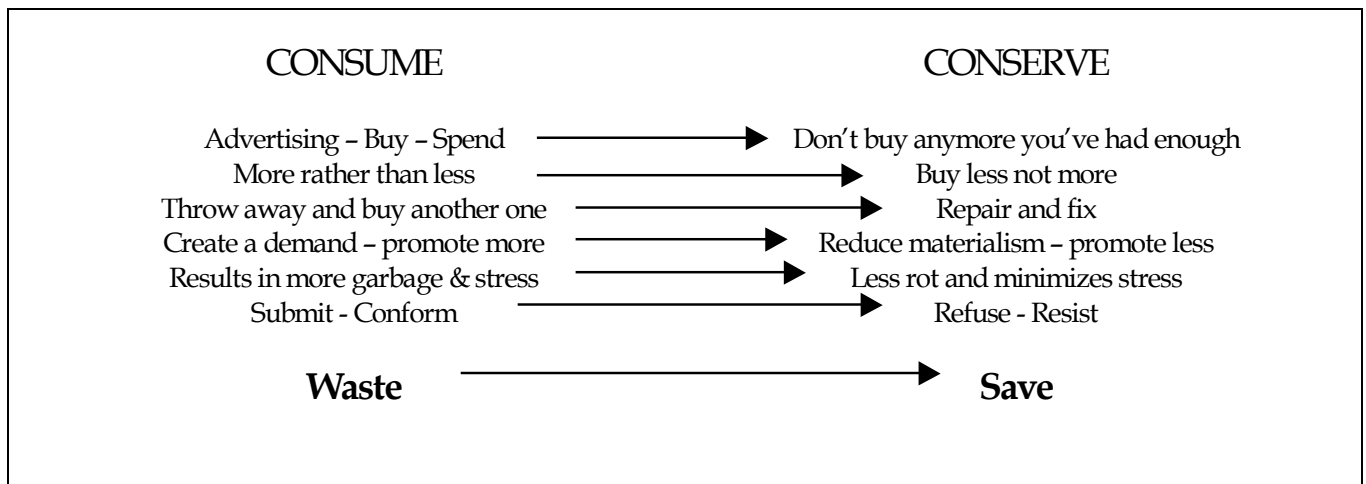
Another example of a resource that is depleting is the deterioration of land. Previously we haven't understood the importance of biodiversity and its need to replenish and maintain fertility to soil. Deforestation has been severe in the past which has contributed to whole environments being destroyed. The removal of trees eliminates the matter and species that provide the decomposed material that makes soil fertile. The soil is also exposed to the elements which contribute to its degradation. Wind brings about the erosion of the fine top soil, rain drags fertile matter along its path when it is not able to sufficiently seep into the ground and be used by trees and plants. Essentially soil needs trees and plants to sustain itself and when these are removed it is left to a slow death. Modern man feeds this dying land with chemical fertilizers and pesticides but eventually the land has no more to give and it becomes barren. This is the process that leads to Desertification which is also a growing problem worldwide. Over-grazing and over cultivation doesn't give the land sufficient time to recover, which in turn ruins the land over time. According to the book Understanding Environmental Economics the Sahara Desert moved 100km south between 1958 and 1975 because of the above misuse of land. (Sant,1992; Allen, 1990)



Suggested Solutions

Save rather than Waste

Perhaps the most effective way to reduce our waste is to consume less in the first place. This may sound simple enough but the whole of society is based on consumption and is continually pressuring you to buy more. Business & Industry doesn't want you to fix things, to go without or make do with what you have got. They want you to throw things out and buy another one because their aim is to sell at all costs – even at the cost of the environment! They may carry out all sorts of environmental make up but the bottom line is they don't want you to conserve and save. They need you to consume and waste in order to sell more of their goods and services. They do not promote a simple and practical lifestyle but rather one of more possessions, comforts and luxury. Materialism has complicated our lives and brought about more stress on us and our environment. A lot of people don't realise that our own waste is what is contributing to the world wasting away. We think that the problem is out there somewhere, something to do with the government and businesses. It hasn't really dawned on us that the lifestyle of each and every individual is what compounds the waste problems throughout the world. It doesn't really occur to us that 'we' create the demand for goods and services which in turn diminishes the world's resources and in turn contributes to the world's depleting resources.



Penalties in accordance with personal consumption

The goods and services tax is a system that penalizes consumers directly rather than all of us being taxed indirectly. Likewise proposed user pays systems that require payment prior to services provided are designed to deal with people who delay or avoid payment until they are forced to pay which rises the costs for all of us. Unfortunately a number of people need to be made aware of the impact of their own actions before they will change them. If people are forced to pay for their services before they receive them they will have no other choice but to change their ways. Systems such as this that directly penalize individuals in accordance with their own casual consuming ways is a method of making people more directly accountable for the lifestyle that they live.

People who live a life of high consumption need to be challenged by those who live a conservative lifestyle, because why should conservationists continually make personal sacrifices for the sake of excessive consumers who don't even care about their wasteful ways. They need to be made aware that if they waste they will pay for it, and not those who are already 'paying' by living a life of self-denial. The unfortunate fact is others often pay for the sins of a someone else but there does need to come a time when the others say enough is enough – it is time for 'you' to start paying! (Hockley, 2002)

Role of governments

The role of governments in minimizing resource depletion has mainly been in the area of promoting sustainable development. This has been done largely through the development of a number of environmental Acts and Regulations. Environmental standards and associated legislation is very much a part of international laws throughout the world today. There are various Clean Water and Air Acts,¹ The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer 1987 and The United Nations Global Environmental Monitoring System. In Sydney there is a State Pollution Control Commission along with the Environmental Protection Act 1974. In regards to development there is the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and the requirement of Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for development. This is only some of the legislation that exists in regards to environmental protection and sustainable development. (Sant, 1992; Allen, 1990)

Governments also regulate how public and private land can be used through zoning regulations and cost benefit analysis in regards to environmental, economic and social costs. There have been a couple of waste development facilities that highlight these development requirements within the Playford area lately. The proposed Greenwaste plant at Buckland Park by Jefferies has been strongly opposed after the Public Environmental Report had been submitted (Edwards(a), 2003, Phillips, 2003). Yet the ultimate decision is made by the Department of Planning in their final report (Kelly, 2002). The \$22 million waste handling centre at Dry Creek is also a sensitive issue because of its proximity to Port River estuaries (Dare, 2002).

Another role of the Government is to create incentives for both public and businesses to recycle and minimize their waste. Tax deductions and rebates based on consideration and allowances for the environment have started to increase. Subsidies are provided to firms who undertake measures to reduce pollution. There is also the method of using deterrents such as fines for businesses but this can be difficult to prove at this stage (Sant, 1992; Eccles, 2003).

Governments also publish reports and publications on the environment which make the public aware of the need for sustainable development. Advertising is obviously significantly influential along with the promotion of the environment through education and other public systems.

Personal Opinions

I believe we need to live a simpler lifestyle, To Refuse, Reduce, Re-Use and Recycle as I have previously mentioned. We also need to minimize our waste in the first place. The most effective way that this can be done is to separate waste so it becomes primary reusable material once again. Simply sorting unwanted material enables it to be recycled rather than mixing it all together so it is good for nothing but throwing away. The most effective way that this can be done personally is at your own household sink by separating your waste in three bins, compost, recycle and rubbish. We also need to practice conservation in all that we do by using less water, only driving when we have to and buying second hand whenever we can. (Daily Changes - An Environmental Citizen...Who Me? - Yes you can make a difference, 2001)

Sustainable development is also important to minimise further environmental destruction. Businesses need to look at designing products that can be easily recycled and repaired to reduce the impact on our limited resources (Manufacturing & Recycling, 2001). Systems such as wetlands which capture wasted storm water and naturally purify it through swales and carefully designed vegetation is a must for all future social development. Other alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, hydroelectric and geothermal power needs to be pursued and perfected. (Allen, 1990, Beazley, 1980)

A conservative alternative intermediate technology based on utilising limited skills that dismantle and save rather than demolish and waste needs to be promoted. Recycling in particular is often dirty work that requires limited skill but much labour to sort and organise components & materials to make them reusable once again. There are a number of advantages of recycling and utilising what would otherwise be waste material. Firstly it eliminates the cost of dumping fees and diminishes the ever increasing problem of landfill. Dumping costs are displaced through the extra work required to sort and store mixed up waste and discarded material. Such action is creating an avenue of employment whilst eliminating an environmental problem. Resources that would otherwise be wasted are now utilised and prevent further resources from depleting (Edwards (b), 2003).

¹ UEE, pg.54,55

Conclusion

Population figures are multiplying over shorter periods of time in spite of two world wars and many other natural disasters. The trend doesn't seem to be changing nor slowing down in spite of international population strategies to reduce population growth. Industrial and technological man in his madness for more has developed and grown beyond what a finite world can provide. His excessive desire for unrestrained economic and social development has critically started to put out of balance the rest of the natural world around him. Our mineral resources cannot possibly sustain our ever increasing energy and resource requirements. Increases in population and technology require greater amounts of these and this trend is not likely to change unless we personally change. Its up to you, what do you want to do, Conserve or Consume? The resources are running out and we are running out of time.

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Resource Productivity - eco-efficiency	Why Resource Productivity must be improved	http://www.colorado.edu/peacestudies/roper/sustainable-economics/resource-productivity/summary.html	10Feb03
Resource Productivity - eco-efficiency	Resource Productivity	http://www.colorado.edu/peacestudies/roper/sustainable-economics/resource-productivity/index.html	12Feb03
	21 practical ways to help the environment	http://www.practicalenvironmentalist.com/21-practical-ways-to-help-the-environment	11Sep01
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