

# The Resources are Running Out

Resource Depletion is the general term used for the overall reduction and damage occurring to the resources of the earth. In the context of world resource depletion, the word resource is a widely used expression that can be associated with all our available natural supplies and support systems<sup>1</sup>. Our most valuable resources are those which keep us alive, namely: air, water and the land. The resources which are our very support systems in life are the most critical, for without them we will cease to exist to even enjoy the benefits that the other resources bring to our life.

The most important resource we have is the very air that we breathe. We often take this life supporting resource for granted but society is starting to become aware of just how critical it is to keep this resource clean. Clearly identifiable smog that resides over most cities in developed countries is making visible the problem of atmospheric pollution. Generally the contamination to our air is a result of excessive amounts of carbon dioxide which gets released into the atmosphere when fossil fuels are burned.

Reasonable amounts of carbon dioxide isn't a problem because it creates a healthy greenhouse effect which is necessary for photosynthesis. Trees also absorb carbon dioxide as they mature<sup>2</sup>. Like most dilemma's associated with human nature the problem is 'excess'. Extreme amounts of carbon dioxide cannot be neutralized by the natural balances within the environment. Landfill gases also effect air quality; not only do they create a volatile methane gas build up which can cause explosions, but also compound air pollution in general (see Appendix 1). Consequently the air that we breathe will become considerably more contaminated as we continue to put more strains on this precious resource. Obviously carbon dioxide along with many other greenhouse gases are all contributing towards global warming. (See Appendix 2). The demands our very lifestyle's make are making demands beyond what our environment can sustain.

Another critical resource necessary for our survival is water. Our needs for water are wide and varied; the most evident being for drinking. The problem with our water sources is that they are not isolated from the rest of the propounding polluting problems of the environment. When air is contaminated it ultimately effects water; acid rain and other water impurity can be directly related to the poisons that are starting to saturate our atmosphere.

Likewise the influencing factors contributing to land degradation also effect waterways and then subsequently our water supplies. A significant pollutant to water is the indirect effect of fertilizers. After farmers have irrigated their property the excess water runs off, or seeps into nearby watercourses. The water carries with it phosphate's and nitrates from the fertilizer used on crops, other pollutants like animal faeces is also mixed into the unwanted water (see Appendix 3). The build up of such impure water over time starts to significantly effect the quality of water by the time it reaches drinking water supplies. As air and water become more polluted it increases the possibility of disease and illness. The healthy functioning of our body requires that our air and water is kept clean.

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxford Popular Dictionary states resource as "something to which one can turn for help; ingenuity; (pl.) available assets" The Macquarie Study Dictionary gives the meaning "a source of supply, support, or aid," along with the meaning in relation to business studies as "land, labour, capital and enterprise used to generate production" (obviously for the ultimate purpose of profit)

<sup>2</sup> People, Power and Place, pp.32

Land is another resource; from the land we produce food, which is necessary for survival. Just as air and water can be depleted likewise land has its limitations. The practices of large scale pastoralists and farmers are generally not self sustaining (See Appendix 4, pp.4,5) . Often land is used until it has nothing left to give; at this point it is generally good for nothing. Sometimes land used for grazing isn't given appropriate time to recover from the ravishing of livestock and is subsequently left barren. A similar predicament occurs when excessive cropping drains all the minerals and nutrients out of the soil. Arid land is then subject to significant soil erosion as the top soil gets blown away in the wind.

Excessive land clearing also has detrimental effects because the lack of vegetation basically leaves the land to fall apart. Vegetation and other organisms hold the soil together, promoting the growth of more plant and animal life. This is good for the soil and promotes ecosystems in general (see Appendix 4, pg.6). Native vegetation in particular is very important to absorb any excessive amounts of surface water (see Appendix 5). Cleared land with little vegetation allows extra water to seep down to the water table, thus ultimately causing the salt effected water below to raise to a height where it effects surface vegetation and then the surface of the ground. This is called salinity and it is not only a major problem to farmers but also to waterways as it transforms fresh water into salt water (see Appendix 6&7). Land abuse rather than conservative land utilisation, is a significant factor in why so much land is being degraded.

Not only are our life supporting resources depleting but also those resources which have been formed naturally. These are generally classified as non-renewable, because once they have been used it is unlikely that they can be replaced, since their formation has occurred over a long period of time. These are our mineral and fossil fuel resources which are continually depleting. Ironically, it has predominantly been through the use of these resources, that has brought about the deterioration of our life giving resources. Non-renewable resources work well but their biggest problem is that they don't mix to well with the rest of our environment. The processes to transform these primary resources into secondary materials demand more resources; which in turn creates a demand, but also makes demands on the overall depletion of resources in general. It could be said that they are merely supporting our wants until we can no longer hang onto them. It is at this point in time that renewable resources will supersede a non-renewable exhausted supply.

Renewable resources are those that are naturally supplied, their supply is ongoing. Such resources are the sun, wind, water and to a lesser extent wood, provided we don't exhaust beyond what we can replenish. Renewable resources offer a solution to a depleting non-renewable supply but not without a cost. The price to be paid is a considerable reduction in the excesses of our current consuming lifestyle's. Renewable resources offer a passive alternative in comparison to the power, muscle and impact of mineral and fossil fuel resources. Energy output's on renewable energy at this stage are considerably lower, and will demand limits and a reduction on the energy that we currently consume. An alternative conservative approach will need to be adopted into social thinking and patterns of life.

The current principles of economic development are based on the consumption of the earth and its environment. The significant depletion of the resources of the earth are a direct result of a society which makes demands on these resources. Alternatively the conservative lifestyle's of the native cultures of the earth offer some food for thought in regards to the rapidly declining state of our resources mixed with the ever increasing problem of population<sup>3</sup>. We need to ask ourselves the very logical question of "Is the current lifestyle trend of ever increasing technological and industrial development actually bettering our lifestyle. Do our multiplying gadgets and big boy toys actually give us a more abundant life; or more abundant problems and the inevitable of self destruction if we continue on our current course of profit and progress?"<sup>4</sup> Perhaps we need to consider an alternative lifestyle of self sustaining ecology based on living in harmony with the earth and each other by denying our "so called" needs and ever apparent greed's. This may be a fanciful ideal but will only ever be something we imagine unless our current world view and social philosophy of economics based on consumption is restructured. An alternative self sustaining solution, of an economical economy based on conservation is the only logical answer to our current "consuming" economy. We all have the ever pressing obligation and responsibility to ourselves and our children not to live a lifestyle of excessive consumption which is based on land abuse rather than land use (see Appendix 8).

The problem of resource depletion has been socially evident for over a quarter of a century. In the book *People and Resources* (1975) and *This Endangered Planet, Prospects and Proposals for Human Survival* (1972) the authors make an urgent plea to the reader to consider the inevitable problems and to make necessary lifestyle changes. Now is the time for each of us personally to make a stand to Refuse, Reduce, Re-Use and Recycle<sup>5</sup> in our own lives before all of our God given resources run out! Recycling has become a world movement but we have failed to fully embrace the four facets of recycling which will make this truly a revolution of restoration. The ever increasing industrialization of society coupled with the ever diminishing natural world and the multiplying problem of population can only spell one thing - "DANGER!!" Are we not developing towards the destruction of our own world - madly rushing towards our own demise? Ultimately the future is in our own hands, right now we are confronted with choices everyday that will influence the outcome of our future. The resources are running out and we are running out of time.

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<sup>3</sup> In their farming and in their faith, indigenous peoples exercise vital stewardship over the Earth's resources and environment. Their traditional agricultural methods promote land conservation and biological diversity. Their religious practices often involve setting aside forests and other lands as sacred preserves for wildlife, spirits and deities. Where most of humankind tends to seek dominion over the natural world, indigenous people generally favor a holistic approach that is the very essence of sustainable development - development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. With crisis such as global warming, deforestation, desertification and depletion of the ozone layer surging to the top of the international agenda, indigenous people find themselves in an ironic position. Once dismissed as too "primitive" to cope with modernization, and for centuries the victims of discrimination, land seizures and worse, indigenous people have begun to be recognized for their prowess at environmental management, and acknowledged as key players in the global effort to chart a more hopeful course of development for the future of humanity. (*United Nations Information Centre* (1993), *'Who are the World's Indigenous People?'* Issues No.24 *Indigenous People*, pg.8)

<sup>4</sup> *The Need for Limits*. The rise of the industrial state, and with it, science and technology, has led us to overlook these conditions of finite and fragility. We have come to accept theories of progress and of inevitable development that look toward an indefinite improvement of the human condition by continuous economic growth made possible by an endless sequence of technological improvements. We have identified growth and expansion with progress, and we have not acknowledged the existence of any limitations on progress. (Falk, Richard. A (1972) *This Endangered Planet, Prospects and Proposals for Human Survival*, pg.1)

<sup>5</sup> What do you, as an individual, do to:

- refuse . . . unnecessary packaging, refuse to listen to advertising that tells you to buy rather than save.
- reduce . . . (first and foremost your consumption), secondly - the amount of rubbish you create?
- reuse . . . whenever possible?
- recycle . . . all your rubbish?

(Towards a New Dreaming . . . future directions for land management in Australia - Teachers' Guide, pg.6)

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