

Brett Taylor


PUBLIC SUBMISSION

For the first 12 years of my career, I was a journalist and researcher in the sports industry. Last year I quit that path to study economics full time at the University of Melbourne. The reason is that I see urgent, existential problems facing our species this century. Our current trajectory of growth is simply incompatible with the finite capacity of the planet. It is only logical that we can not continue to use more space, more energy and more resources indefinitely, yet questioning this paradigm is not yet a mainstream idea; we are sleepwalking towards a cliff.

There are several leading indicators that we are reaching a breaking point, including biodiversity loss, but also global warming, ocean acidification, soil degradation, and water and food shortages. We - this current generation, us, me, you, right now - are the only ones in history's long arc who have the opportunity and responsibility to make changes which have implications for timescales beyond our comprehension. Biodiversity which has developed over millions of years is being lost right now, forever.

That task is as humbling as it is challenging. We need to balance the real human needs of our kin with the impacts that the current way of life is having on nature. No one questions that. But ultimately, without changing course, we will make the planet unliveable for ourselves. I doubt any experts who contribute to this inquiry will suggest the problem will go away by itself. So if the choice is to act now and proactively transition towards something more sustainable, or react later when our capacity will be hobbled by the damage we have done to nature and ourselves, the choice is clear, even if there's hard work ahead.

In my opinion, we need a two-pronged strategy. We need to pluck the 'low-hanging fruit' through instant, high-impact policy such as preserving what natural resources we have now, for example, by locking away more forest from logging, and more rapidly transitioning to renewable energy. At the same time, we need to approach the problem from a deep values perspective to secure a truly viable, sustainable and prosperous future. Our current societal norms and values, built on growth, competition, consumption, and dominion over nature, can only lead to destruction, even though the individuals within this system should be considered largely innocent. We are raised to pursue the 'Australian Dream' of working hard, owning a big home, a couple of cars and raising a few kids. But when everyone pursues this life, the externalities create collective suffering. The inquiry should note that we need a new economic and social paradigm if we are to ultimately thrive within the planet's boundaries.

Around the world, leading thinkers are converging on the need to rebuild the human project with sustainability, rather than growth, as the guiding principle to ensure collective wellbeing. For example:

Paper by 22 international economists and earth scientists which finds that economic growth is empirically linked to biodiversity destruction

Otero, I, Farrell, KN, Pueyo, S, et al. (2020). Biodiversity policy beyond economic growth. Conservation Letters, e12713. doi:10.1111/conl.12713

Thought-leaders led by former Liberal leader John Hewson cites continued human growth as a 'catastrophic risk'
Commission for the Human Future (2020). Surviving and Thriving in the 21st Century: A discussion and Call to Action on Global Catastrophic Risks. Retrieved from:

http://humansforsurvival.org/sites/default/files/CHF_Roundtable_Report_March_2020.pdf

A manifesto signed by 170 Dutch academic earth and social scientists say humanity must pivot from a model of growth to redistribution for wellbeing

Spierenburg, M. et al. (2020). Planning for Post-Corona: Five proposals to craft a radically more sustainable and equal world. Retrieved from: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2020/04/170-scientists-sign-manifesto>