

WINE NEWS

OPINION

Human survival cannot be left to politicians. We're losing our life support systems

By David Shearman

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PHOTO: Jonas Salk warned: "If all insects on Earth disappeared, within 50 years all life on Earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the Earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish." (ABC Open contributor _joaodecarvalho_)

When medical researcher Jonas Salk discovered the Salk Vaccine for polio, it prevented hundreds of thousands of deaths throughout the world.

His work on viruses gave him a deep understanding of the natural world.

He warned "if all insects on Earth disappeared, within 50 years all life on Earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the Earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish".

Eighty years later, scientists understand these words, but governments do not.

Insects play a vital role to recycle nutrients by decomposing plant litter and dung, by providing a food source for birds, mammals and amphibians. Many flying insects are important pollinators.

The current pollinator crisis and its impact on food production first came to notice in many countries because of a fall in bee numbers.

Insecticides have played a part, but the numbers of insects in West German nature reserves distanced from farm spraying fell by more than 76 per cent in 27 years, a finding repeated in other regions.

The increasing extinction of species

Scientists and environmentalists recognise that many species are disappearing from the Earth and 26,000 are threatened.

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Climate change is WWII, and we are leaderless



The Western world is bereft of leaders and now the US and Australia have deserted the trenches by trading ideology for human lives and health, writes David Shearman.

Extinctions in Australia are subject of a current Senate inquiry.

These extinctions are the tip of the iceberg which will affect food production and therefore the economy, and the pillars of human health and survival, water, air, biological resources and soil.

Biodiversity loss and climate change augment each other and are set to transform us to an alien world.



PHOTO: The grassland earless dragon is one of the species under threat. (Supplied: ACT Government)

An increase in the number and intensity of heatwaves is the main cause of biodiversity loss on land and sea, for example the Great Barrier Reef.

The loss of forest biodiversity from land clearing, logging and forest fires enhances climate change and increases atmospheric instability.

Population growth and the economic system

Like climate change, the key facilitators of biodiversity loss are population growth and the economic system, which ignore the finite nature of planetary resources.

August 1 this year was the date by which humanity used its 2018 world resources (defined as carbon, food, water, fibre, land and timber).

Each year the world eats its future earlier than the previous year.

This year Australia had used its share by March 31. as the eighth-most profligate nation on Earth.

This year Australia's population reached 25 million and was celebrated. Is this sustainable? We don't know.

There is no policy based on facts and projections, but Australia's food production is likely to contract with climate change and decrease in water resources, degrading of soil due to the loss of its life forms, demise of pollinators and the increase in pests.





PHOTO: Each year the world eats its future earlier than the previous year. (ABC News: Gian De Poloni)

Current environmental laws

The Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act is totally inadequate to prevent loss of biodiversity.

The individual states and territories' Planning Laws and Environmental Impact Assessments often approve land clearing, prodigious water usage, and pollution under the guise of essential development of resources and economic growth and are a significant cause of loss of biodiversity.

A case in point is the almost tripling of clearing of forest and woodland in NSW in the year to 2017.

This devastation of habitat for some 247 native species may see the iconic koala extinct in NSW by 2050.



PHOTO: Koalas could be extinct in NSW by 2050. (Supplied: WWF Australia/Doug Gimesy)

"The World Commons", as explained by the scientist Garrett Hardin in 1968, is the stability of resources of land, sea, air and fresh water, all necessary for the health and wellbeing of humanity.

Hardin predicted a confluence, this century, of population growth, depletion of resources and the ravages of climate change bringing ruin to humanity this century.

Some actions of state governments can be seen as a transgression of collective human rights for the Commons facilitated by the current economic system.

The new environmental laws

These must give primacy to sustainability as a security issue.

They must be national, statutory and based on expert scientific advice.





PHOTO: Can we afford to lose the Murray Darling under incompetent collective management? (ABC News: Sarah Clarke)

Should the states be able to meddle in the defence of the nation?

Can we afford to lose the Murray Darling under incompetent collective management where each jurisdiction fights for its share regardless of consequence? We need national leadership.

New laws have been proposed by a national alliance of over 50 environmental groups, laws based on sustainability and protection.

In a world of increasingly complex issues, survival cannot be left to political opinion — it has to be guided by our best scientific and technological minds encompassed in a Commonwealth Sustainability Commission and delivered by a National Environmental Protection Agency.

Doctors support the new laws because human health and a healthy environment are indivisible.

Together hundreds of thousands of species provide humanity with free ecological service to filter, purify and conserve our water, provide temperature, climate, and rainfall control, stabilisation of soils, carbon storage and air purification.

Not only that, they continue to provide humanity with the biological secrets of many medical cures and treatments.

Dr David Shearman is the honorary secretary of Doctors for the Environment Australia and Emeritus Professor of Medicine at Adelaide University.

Topics: environmental-policy, environmental-management, environmental-impact, environment, human-interest, australia