

## **WEA TALK 28 July 2008, Anvil House, 3<sup>rd</sup> fl. Wakefield St.**

*Is NZ's disproportionately large ecological footprint and its connection with human rights an election issue? Will the 21<sup>st</sup> century become the century of the environment?*

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**New Zealand's total ecological footprint Living Planet report: 5.9 in 2006; Australia 6.6 ; USA 9.6 ; Canada 7.6. – third world countries such as India, China around .5 – 7 times less than NZ's footprint.**

Inter-related crises: food, energy, climate

Most people today in Aotearoa/New Zealand and worldwide are very concerned about rising costs of food, energy and petrol, and the related financial crisis. Many are also concerned about climate change, which affects food production too. These basic issues are easily election issues and relate directly to the environment, the earth and its marvellous ecosystems which evolved over millennia, without which humans would not have emerged and which our modern societies are intricately dependent upon.

Humanity's current huge dependence on finite fossil fuels which drive the global economy, our food systems, our cars, etc are fast vanishing, after decades of exponential growth in use, and no unified concerted international plan is being made to reduce fossil fuel use and the pollution, causing potentially disastrous climate change. As Richard Heinberg, author of books on Peak Oil and recently of *Peak Everything*: "All that's required for the worst scenario to materialize is for world leaders to continue with current policies."

A major obstacle to rational action to resolve our problems lies in the theory of economic growth to which our societies secular priests, the economists are devoted. This concept which all governments also sadly believe in, is a major obstacle, blinding rational evaluation of the increasingly dire situation we are heading into and preventing rational action. NZ, like most countries feels it must keep up with growth, must not fall out of step with the international community, as it heads over the cliff. At the same time, NZ espouses hopes of becoming carbon neutral, but has not yet managed to reduce its continuing rising emissions, caught in the growth habit as it is. Alistair Morrison of Dept of Conservation reported at their AGM this year, NZ's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are now 45.2 million tonnes over the Kyoto target, about 24% over our Kyoto reduction target, and of course continue to rise...

What is NZ's ecological footprint? An ecological foot print is an estimate of the amount of ecologically productive land required on a continuous basis to maintain current levels of resource consumption and pollution for a given population. The Ecological Footprint clarifies the relationship of resource use to equity by tying countries and groups' activities to ecological demands. It can help us equitably shape policy in support of social and environmental justice, or human rights.

- NZ's ecological footprint - 5.9 - is in the top 10 heavyweights (which includes the United States - 9.6, Canada 7.6 and Australia 6.6) out of 150 nations surveyed in the 'Living Planet Report 2006. The ecological footprint of an average New Zealand resident is about 7 times greater than that of an average person living in India and other similar third world countries. New Zealand's per person ecological footprint is also larger than that of Japan and many European Nations.

In a recent update of the eco-footprint, The UN Human Development report put it another way. In 2007/08 it said, **NINE** planets would be needed for rich country development worldwide. That is, if China, India and other third world countries had the per capita use of cars and other items as NZ and a similar lifestyle and resource consumption and pollution, then we would need 9 earths. I'm making a change here from the word "planet" used in the UN report, to word earth, as there's a world of difference. Because as far as we know, after hunting through space as scientists have, there is no other planet we know of which has the same life-supporting properties our Earth has. The fact our planet Earth is unique, is one of many very good reasons why the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the century of the environment. There is no other planet which has the ecosystems humanity depends on for life, which we take so much for granted. .

Today, humanity's total Ecological Footprint is over 23% larger than the planet can naturally regenerate. It now takes more than one year and two months for the Earth to regenerate what we use in a single year. We maintain this overshoot by liquidating the planet's ecological resources. This is a hugely underestimated threat, inadequately addressed, and increasing yearly as the growth concept dictates. In a comprehensive analysis covered in *Pacific Ecologist*, issue 16, Dr Geoffrey Glasby, estimates the consequences of continuing with high growth rates for the rest of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and concludes the natural environment on which we depend for our sustenance, will be destroyed. In such circumstances, a sharp decline in population by the end of the century seems inevitable" if such growth continues, he says.

### **Human Rights and Eco-footprint**

NZ's heavy ecological footprint and its human rights consequences may not now be high on the list of politicians' or voters' concerns. The national and personal interest prevails in elections in most countries. **Yet whether something is acknowledged or not by many is not the not the measure of what's a real or prime concern. Centuries ago, slavery was considered normal, and those opposing it were a small minority. If the small minority had not persisted, slavery would still exist today. Today we are appalled at the thought of slavery.**

### **Human rights, Kiribati, climate change**

A clear illustration of the human rights aspect of global warming was given to NZers present at a public meeting at Victoria University, or reading about World Environment Day on June 5, hosted in NZ, in Wellington. President Tong of Kiribati, told us it may already be too late for Kiribati and its people. Emissions from global warming already in the atmosphere are enough to submerge his country's low-lying islands, at their highest, no more than 2 metres above sea level. Parts of Kiribati are already under water and President Tong is urging countries to allow some of his 94,000 people living among 33 coral atolls, to settle in their countries. NZ is taking 75 people yearly, better than other countries in this regard. But it's shocking! What could be more heart-rending than to lose your entire country, where your people have lived for many hundreds of years? To have to beg other countries, those who have caused the problem to take your people is a terrible thing to have to do. Kiribati contributes little per capita to global warming.

According to the UN Human Rights International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, of 1976: "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Article 25 reads: "Nothing in the present Covenant shall be interpreted as impairing the inherent right of all peoples to enjoy and utilize fully and freely their natural wealth and resources."

Yet, rich countries like the US, EU, NZ, Australia, with our affluence, high consumption and pollution rates, our cars, and continued pursuit of growth at all costs, are destroying the very countries of our close neighbours on Pacific Islands: Kiribati, Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, parts of Papua New Guinea, so they are not free to "enjoy and fully use their natural wealth and resources. [Africans also are starving due to extended drought, likely to be related to global warming]. ....Is it enough that we agree to take some people yearly.? What say a high tide comes through and drowns some islands before we get around to taking the people? It's outrageous we allow this to happen, as if it's nothing to do with us, when we are directly responsible through continued inaction over climate change for depriving thousands of people of their very countries. Most people would much prefer to live out their lives in their own country, rather than being strangers in other lands. Yet, I did not hear any apology or commitment or commitment from our government on world environment Day to President Tong?

What do YOU think is the proper course of action to this shocking phenomenon? Should we immediately plan to cut our emissions, get out of our cars, walk if necessary, accept a carbon tax; an emissions trading scheme, restructure the economy replacing growth with non affluent life-styles, and perhaps live much happier lives.?

### **The Food crisis - comparison**

In NZ, food prices rose 8.2pc in the year to June 2008, according to Statistics NZ, making problems for many. But in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries, the situation is far worse, bringing poverty and suffering to millions. In 2005, in Latin American countries it cost \$250 for every tonne of imported rice; in 2008 it cost \$1050, 4 times as much. A ton of wheat cost \$132, now in 2008 they pay \$330 - 2 and a half times more. A ton of corn was \$82, is now \$230, nearly 3 times more [Vice President of Cuba, Esteban Lazo Hernandez, speech in Nicaragua, May 2008 at Presidential summit on Sovereignty & food security]

This pattern is repeated in countries in Latin America , Africa and other poor countries, the Philippines etc, where the poorest are really suffering hunger. Decades ago countries grew their own rice and corn but with development policies imposed by IMF policies and today's unfair predatory economic order, domestic production was destroyed by imports of cheap heavily subsidised grains from the US and EU, which enriched rich countries as it impoverished and made poor countries dependent on rich ones.

Now with the energy crisis and the climate crisis, it's the poor countries which are exposed most to food price rises. It's to this background where food has been used by rich countries as a "political weapon," in third world countries, an old historic technique, weakening communities self-reliance and independent food production, where there is now yet another threat to the food security of people in poorer countries.

### **BIOFUELS**

**Biofuels are another big new human rights issue - i.e. -** using the land of other countries in the developing world to grow crops to fuel the cars of people in rich countries, the EU, US, Japan, etc. Using biofuels is supposed to be a Green option, reducing global warming emissions from petrol- driven cars. Yet, Jean Ziegler, U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food, in June 2007, said Biofuels could lead to mass hunger deaths and accused the EU, Japan and the United States of "total hypocrisy" for promoting biofuels to cut their dependency on imported oil.

### **NZ & biofuels from other countries**

NZ - with its high car ownership rate and passion for cars - unless we change our ways, will not be able to source all the fuel it will need for the private cars of millions of New Zealanders via sustainable renewable sources within NZ, such as from waste products produced and processed here in our country. If the NZ government resorts to importing biofuels, we believe it will be reverting to the plantation era. Unfortunately, giving credence to this, NZ's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, EECA, in an article in a recent newspaper in *The Dominion Post*, 15 July 2008, suggests Brazil has an enormous amount of "unused" land which it infers can be used without infringing the food rights of Brazilians. Author Elizabeth Yeoman, says NZ is using "only sustainable biofuels," and has commissioned independent studies showing the sustainability of Brazilian ethanol and comments it will achieve "74% reductions in greenhouse gas emissions." .... Brazil, she says: "is the largest producer and exporter of sugar and the industry is "the fastest growing industry in the country."

But has EECA done a study of Brazilian society and history? I doubt it. Anyone who knows a little about Latin American countries, like Brazil, realises it's a country of huge inequities where a relatively few rich landowners with vast tracts of land, and millions of impoverished untitled, landless people try to eke out a living growing crops where they can. The same is true of other countries like, Colombia, the Philippines, Indonesia etc. How the landless people of Brazil would like to be given title to some of the vast tracts of "unused" land, owned by a few very wealthy grandees, which rich countries, with heads in the sand, would now like to grow food for their cars, not food for the people of Brazil or whatever country's land is used for fuelling cars in other countries.

Brazil is a country which has shoved its indigenous Indian tribes off their ancestral lands, in the Amazon, for cattle ranches, again, to be used to feed rich people in rich countries. It's also used vast tracts of land for soya production, again to be exported, often to feed pigs in The Netherlands or elsewhere and so to feed people in rich countries once again.

To illustrate the problem, I quote here from a book published in 1992, called *The Politics of Industrial Agriculture*:*[(authors Tracey Clunies-Ross & Nicholas Hildyard):* "The emergence of Brazil as a major exporter of soybeans has involved tremendous social dislocation within that country. With soya being grown on 100,000 hectare farms, small farmers have been pushed off the land and are left trying to cultivate the strips between the big farms and the roads. This process has resulted in landless peasants colonising the Amazon regions, thus contributing to deforestation. 90 percent of the Brazilian govt's funds for research are directed to export crops and all loans from Europe and the US are to support the development of export crop production. In the 1990s, Bolivia received \$12 million from the World Bank to cut down rainforests and expand soybean production for the same international markets."

With that history, you know biofuels is just the latest rapine deal to turn up, in Latin America and elsewhere at the expense of millions of poverty stricken people.

**Is NZ going to continue with millions of wasteful private cars? If we do we should be made fully aware of the human rights issues.** To use cars fuelled in this way, means it's at the expense of those seeking to scrape a subsistence livelihood in third world countries. It means inevitably it will be causing hunger, starvation, suffering. Can we live with this? There will be no honour in anyone driving a car in NZ, if it's through using land in other countries, like Brazil.

The biofuel scheme is a phony means to salve the conscience of high polluting/consuming rich countries intent on continuing with their consumption, despite the cost to others, through a sort of biofuel import guilt transfer mechanism. This will simply enrich local elites in Brazil, Indonesia, Colombia, the Philippines and fuel the growth mentality in rich countries, while

adding to the misery of landless, subsistence farmers in poor countries whose livelihoods are being ripped from under their feet to make way for biofuel plantations. It's the modern version of the enclosures that saw small holders emigrate to the new world, only now there is no such escape possible. Using the land of third world countries to feed our cars is a monstrous misuse of the land of others, of people disenfranchised in these countries. It's a human rights issue and should be everyone's concern.

### **Footprint a survival issue**

In conclusion, NZ's disproportionately large ecological footprint and its connection with human rights is an election issue but it's much more than this. It's a matter of survival and of finding a much better way to live than the current cruel world we live in, where we must sacrifice people in other countries to continue our extravagant lifestyle.

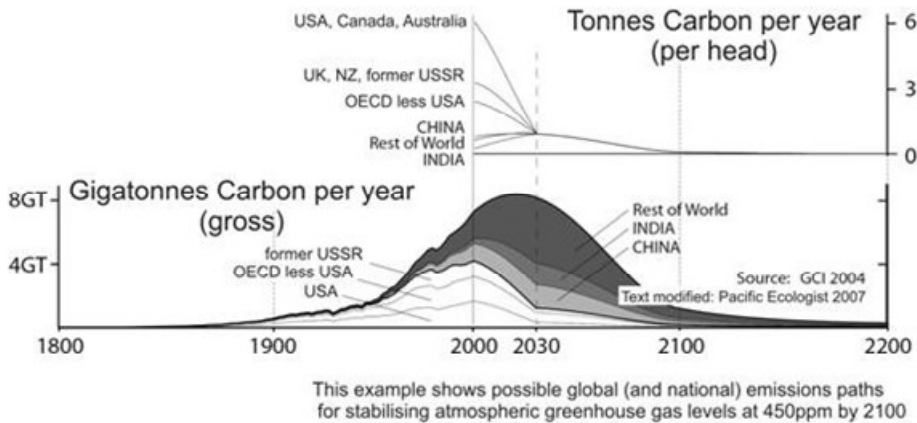
Kiribati's President Tong, a graduate of the London School of Economics on World Environment Day said climate change "is not an issue of economic development but an issue of survival." Our current default policy of inaction over global warming is really a default policy of genocide, destroying our humanity, as it destroys people and other countries. Having wasted a decade and more doing nothing there is little time now to rectify the situation.

According to the authoritative 2007 IPCC report, 80 - 90 % cuts in global warming emissions are now needed by 2050, to avoid the most terrible consequences - (although it's already too late for Kiribati), and others like Tuvalu). Australia's Interim Garnaut Report commendably supports these cuts, and says it can be done without marked economic cost. Yet, as veteran climate commentator Ted Trainer, notes, how will it be possible to cut dependence on fossil fuels by 80-90% while the economy, under current imperatives, becomes four times as big by 2050? How can it be done in NZ or any consumer society, without considerable change?

### **Contraction & Convergence**

We can solve the climate crisis with an overarching plan like Contraction & Convergence. Fortunately this global plan, is gaining much support internationally, has been worked on since 1990 by the Global Commons Institute in the UK, directed by Aubrey Meyer. It has been the official position of the African Group of Nations at climate conference negotiations for over a decade To meet the threat of global warming adequately will require an unprecedented degree of global cooperation, commitment and a transparent, just, equitable framework. The Contraction and Convergence concept is such a plan and allows a transition period of 20 to 30 years for developed countries to contract their emissions from the status quo of inequity to one of equity. It allows a fair share in a constitutional method for allocating emission entitlements on a per capita basis. The figure in the diagram shows how Contraction and Convergence would operate.

## CONTRACTION AND CONVERGENCE: HOW IT COULD WORK



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The emissions pathway leading to a sustainable CO<sub>2</sub> level is defined by the area under the whole curve. This sets constraints on the climate negotiations over time and rates for each country. In this example a ceiling of 450 parts per million atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent is set, giving rise to a future global emissions “budget,” that contracts yearly to near zero by 2080, keeping concentrations within the “safe” ppm ceiling.. The equity principle requires all of humanity to have equal access to the atmospheric commons. As developed countries have contributed excessively to the greenhouse gas burden as a consequence of historical emissions, and have grown rich while being unaccountable for their emissions impacts, rich countries have an ethical obligation to make proportionately greater reductions in emissions, sufficient to allow those in developing nations to increase emissions to a population-based allowance, consistent with sustainable total global emissions.

Global warming is a great opportunity for humanity to create a much better world order, than the cruel, iniquitous system based on competition and exploitation which currently exists, causing not only the ruination of nature but gross and growing inequity between rich and poor, both within and between countries. We have a chance to create a civilisation worthy of the meaning of the word, based on cooperation and principles of justice, equity and compassion, treasured by all civilised peoples and to create a world which better reflects the great beauty of our marvellous earth. Whatever happens, count on it, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is the century of the environment where we must come to terms with the excesses of short-lived industrial society and learn to live within the reality of our geological, biological world.