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**BY FACSIMILE
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The Hon. Tony Burke, MP
Minister for Population
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister for Population.

It is submitted that before any strategy for managing population growth can be finalised, a detailed audit of all land use in Australia (or if time is of the essence, at the very least an audit of all the land within say 100-150 kilometres of all major population centres) must be completed.

Such an audit must ascertain present land uses or zones comprising the built environment, open spaces, green belts and national parks, all the various supporting infrastructure uses (roads and tramways, railways, utilities et cetera), agriculture and presently and potential arable land, forestry and sundry commercial uses.

Clearly, for any given area of land there is a finite limit to the uses to which such land can be put. There can only be so much housing, cropping, mining, building, agriculture and so on that can be carried out on that given area of land. Only so much can be put on or extracted from the land.

The present relationships between all the areas set aside for the various land uses must be proportionately determined. For example, for every hectare of residential land, the proportion of other necessary supporting lands for roads, utilities, water infrastructure and so on, must be ascertained.

Having regard to climate, pollution, the present parlous state of our rivers and water catchments, the continuing degradation of the ecology and agricultural lands, rising salinity and aridity, there would appear to be a strong argument to the effect that Australia is already at its maximum human population carrying capacity.

If that is correct, then the present proportionate relationships between all the areas of land use need to be modified to reverse degradations and achieve long-term sustainability.

If we are to make any genuine effort stop and reverse these degradations and aid recovery of the ecological environment and improve or even just maintain an acceptable standard of liveability, a very substantial investment in time and money is required now and into the foreseeable future and population increases must be very carefully controlled. We should be striving to leave the ecological environment in a better condition than at present for future generations.

Present technology and land management techniques are plainly not preserving the ecological environment let alone returning it to a long-term and a productively sustainable condition.

Essential water resources, lands set aside for the growing of food and all the other varying uses need to be carefully monitored and preserved. We cannot allow mining, housing development or forestry and sundry other commercial interests to intrude upon retention and recovery of vital, life-sustaining arable lands, water catchment areas and et cetera.

Everything is connected and a failure to monitor and control or limit one activity or land use will ultimately adversely impact on everything else.

Once an audit has been completed (and thereafter periodically updated) only then can any reasonable and reasoned assessment be made as to the maximum human population carrying capacity in Australia.

The argument that at any given time we have the ability to arrange matters so that higher populations can be accommodated immediately is specious. Higher populations must only be accepted when it is clearly demonstrated that actions have already been taken and sufficiently completed, to carry the planned population increase.

We seem perfectly able to determine that there are for example, too many camels (or kangaroos or cane toads or rabbits) in the outback or that certain species are in danger of extinction or fish stocks dangerously depleted, yet we cannot address the question of serious human over-population on the planet and an ecologically sustainable population in Australia. Why is this?

Our whole economy, government, commercial and business structures will need to be adjusted over time to what essentially is a finite future population, eventually leading to little or no growth.

Further, the royalties the Government derives from the mining and export of mineral resources, forestry and natural resources should be quarantined for the future when such activities are no longer viable and future growth is neutral or minimal.

Australia's mineral resources are our "capital" and are finite. To a degree so are our forestry and other natural resources. There will come a day when the sale and export of these resources is no longer viable and/or we will need them for our own use. Fundamentally we should not spend capital and it must be invested wisely in long-term capital investments for future generations.

Indeed, with regard to natural gas, we should be reserving sufficient of this finite resource for our energy production in substitution for coal-fired electricity generation (there being no viable alternate sources yet developed, let alone online). Long-term contracts to supply LNG off-shore must not jeopardise Australia's future substantial energy requirements.

I have previously written to the Prime Minister briefly touching upon these concerns and I urge you to ensure that a comprehensive national audit of all Australian land use is undertaken and completed and the proportionate relationships between land uses determined.

Only then can future land uses be determined with regard to preserving and improving the ecological environment and supporting sustainable population growth within demonstrated carrying capacity.

To this end a panel of well qualified academics and other individuals with expert knowledge from a variety of disciplines should be established to design and supervise the audit process, evaluate the results and make recommendations to improve the ecological environment over a relatively short time frame, develop a plan to identify and preserve land areas or zones for all essential life-sustaining uses, and with regard to the maximum population carrying capacity consistent with those objectives.

Yours faithfully,



David B Allan
