

# Preface

In 1972, a startling book was published called *Limits to Growth*. This book became hugely influential in the environmental movement, and while it alerted us to the fragility of our future on planet Earth, it also, inadvertently, helped to eventually undermine the credibility of environmentalism. The book predicted when certain nonrenewables, including fossil fuels and metals, would become exhausted. The predictions were based on the best available knowledge at that time, but what it never envisaged in the early 1970's, was that within a decade humans would be extracting oil, gas, and minerals in some of the remotest, extreme, and fragile places on Earth ... a process that has continued and expanded to the present day. So the predictions proved incorrect in practice, but it reinforced the idea that all resources are limited and are slowly being exhausted.

This book became a driving force for many environmental scientists who realized that we have to act both collectively and individually to preserve our home, planet Earth, with its unique biosphere and which is home to millions of different living organisms of which we are just one species. For me personally, being an environmental scientist has been a long and often disappointing journey and at various times I have been shocked, scared, and often depressed by the unfolding of the current crisis which is so intertwined with global warming. But, to my surprise, in recent years I have begun to feel more hopeful that perhaps we can deal with our climate and resource problems to create a sustainable planet. So in this book, I have attempted to explain what the problems are and suggest some solutions. However, the book comes with a warning. During the 15 chapters that follow, I am going to make a lot of you really annoyed and possibly upset, I apologize in advance. I am not trying to shock; I am simply putting the facts before you so that you can make up your own mind. Neither am I telling anyone that their lifestyle is wrong, or alternatively, that they are better than the next person because they have invested in green energy or a hybrid car. The book is an overview; it is not a text on the theory of sustainability or population dynamics; it simply looks at what the individual should know and addresses some of the issues closest to our everyday lives. There are hundreds of academic and specialist texts on sustainability, but they fail to link sustainability to tackling global warming, especially at the individual level. Adopting

any form of sustainable actions in your life will cause significant effects both direct and indirect. Such actions will lead to changes that will influence economic and social norms ... so sustainability if properly applied will mean socioeconomic change. I begin the text by giving a brief overview of the problems of climate change and the real difficulties that having such a rapidly growing population is placing on the idea of a sustainable and equitable planet. Discussions on population is always a very emotive issue and so I have simply given some basic facts, and shown that as population grows our ability to live sustainably on planet Earth becomes more challenging. So this is not a comfortable book.

Is the text political? I have tried not to be, but if you advocate changing people's lifestyles, then it will appear to be political. Then, we have the concept that everyone on the planet matters and that the concept of global justice and human rights is important when assessing the sustainability of our own lifestyles. So trying to avert these climate-mediated crises by ensuring that everyone has enough for their needs without being wasteful is a good starting point. However, that starting point has to be an acknowledgment that all people are equal, and that we should all have the right to pursue happiness and well-being. Is this naïve? Of course it is, but what else are we to strive for in a truly global and fair society. Global warming raises serious social as well as economic questions and many of these are going to be very difficult to deal with in practice, and my aim is to try and make you think about these issues from a personal perspective. Can we have finite economic growth? Can we have finite consumerism? Unfortunately, the answer has to be no to both of these questions, which means that both economists and social geographers or planners have a lot of work to do and that we are going to have to eventually reinvent our economy and social environment to achieve these goals.

There are also many other important environmental issues that we also need to consider and many of these are also linked to global warming such as deforestation, exploitation of new fossil fuel reserves, intensification of agriculture, and overexploitation of water resources. However, many of these issues such as pollution, are less important in the context of global warming, as we now have them largely under control. We have made huge strides in dealing with air, water, and land pollution over the past 40 years, and there are scientists and regulatory bodies all dealing with these issues on an ongoing basis. Such issues are predominately local or at worst regional, but rarely global, and what is important is that we have the technology and infrastructure to deal with them. But controlling carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions must now be everyone's priority. If we have to reduce carbon emissions by 80 % by 2050 to avert a global crisis, this will mean using significantly less energy in the developed world than we currently use, and while this does not necessarily mean an immediate and huge change in our everyday lives, it does mean changes to our current lifestyles. This is not going to be easy and the burden has to be shared by everyone. However, the fact is that people feel very threatened by the idea of altering their lifestyle, even when change can be for the better.

We also need to understand that some sectors of society are using more than their fair share of global resources, but that in the context of global warming everyone

must act responsibly if we are to succeed in mitigating climate change. Those in developing countries also desire the technology, food, travel, etc. we enjoy, and to break this cycle we in the developed world need to begin to pull back from our current high-energy lifestyle while allowing the poorer nations to develop and become sustainable.

This book will never be welcomed by those who are pretty happy with the status quo and who have not become genuinely concerned, possibly scared, by the possibility of what global warming may do to our home, planet Earth. This is a very general text that looks at different aspects of our lives which we, as individuals, have control over. It is simple things like travel, food, recycling, using resources ... all those things which we are all involved in on a daily basis; and how our actions affect the future of planet Earth and our ability to sustain that ever growing human population. I hope that this book will help you think and act from a position of knowledge and reassurance.

I hope that the majority of you will be reassured that we are beginning to successfully tackle global warming, but in order to succeed in stabilizing our new climate, and I believe we can, we need your help through direct action. You really can make a difference. This book is a personal journey and during it I will be asking you to do various things. Some are critical others will be just things that I hope you will try, but to work I need a commitment from you. The journey is not free, it comes at a cost, and you have to decide just how much you are willing to pay for your planet. This is about your future.

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