

Why a shrinking human population is a good thing

30/06/2017

The other day I was asked to do an interview for a South Korean radio station about the declining-population “crisis”.

Therein lies the rub – there is no crisis.

While I think the interview went well (you can listen to it [here](#)), I didn't have ample time to flesh out my arguments; I've decided to put them down in more detail here.



Probably the most important aspect that I didn't even get a chance to cover is that globally, our economic system is essentially broken because we are forced to exist inside a paradigm that erroneously assumes Earth's resources are infinite. They are not, as the global ecological footprint clearly shows.

To slow and perhaps even reverse climate change, as well as mitigate the extinction crisis underway, we are obliged to reduce consumption globally. Shrinking human populations will contribute to that goal (provided we simultaneously reduce per-capita consumption).

But that argument, no matter how defensible, is still not even remotely appreciated by most people. It is the aim of only a minority, most of whom have very little political power to engender change.

The oft-touted 'crisis' of ageing populations is founded on the erroneous notion that it will lead to economic crises for the affected countries. Indeed, countries like South Korea and Japan have declining populations, others like Italy are stable and will be declining soon, and others like Australia are only growing because of net immigration.

The reason for the hyped-up panic generally comes down to the overly simplistic 'dependency ratio', which has several different forms but generally compares the number of people in the labour force against those who have retired from it. The idea here is that once the number of people no longer in the labour force exceeds the number of those in the labour force, the latter can no longer support the entirety of the former.