

## Overview of Key Population Policy Papers

The three papers under this heading are called *key* because they outline some of the main concerns of the members of the Population Institute Canada (PIC) regarding human overpopulation and consumption and set out some preliminary policy directions to mitigate some of the severe environmental consequences of human excess. In brief, they reflect what PIC stands for. The three papers are: "Overshoot, Narcissus, and the Sirens' Song," "Why Canada Needs a Population Policy," and "A Strategy for a National and International Population Policy for Canada."

"Overshoot, Narcissus, and the Sirens' Song" describes the predicament facing humankind, touches on how we got into this mess, and calls for some broad and profound shifts in attitudes and directions. The members of the Population Institute Canada believe that the human populations of the Earth and of Canada are in a state of overshoot which means that we humans are drawing down finite and renewable natural resources too rapidly, in many cases faster than new sources of finite resources can be found and renewable resources can be replaced. For the past two hundred years, the development of science and of industrial machinery has accelerated the exploitation of finite and renewable resources making possible a sevenfold increase of the human population. Scientists warn that supplies of many of the resources needed to sustain surging human needs and demands are becoming harder to find and will lead to falling production which could be catastrophic for humankind. Meanwhile the sum of human activities is laying waste to much of the land and oceans and heating the biosphere. We humans cannot continue with business-as-usual. The risks are huge. Meanwhile, most governments act as if they are in a trance, calling for more of the tired old palliative of economic growth without acknowledging that economic growth cannot continue much longer on a finite planet without risking calamitous damage to the living Earth that sustains us all. We humans need to chart a wise course of reason through a sea of wants.

The potential threat of overshoot motivated the members of PIC to prepare "Why Canada Needs a Population Policy", which suggests some reasonable policy steps to begin to address the looming problem of overshoot. We are a Canadian organization and need to start the process of change at home. In the spring of 2001, the Population Institute of Canada submitted this paper to the Standing Committee of Citizenship and Immigration of the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada which was holding hearings and receiving papers relating to future immigration policy. While the receipt of the paper was acknowledged, there was no reply that addressed its substance. This was not surprising since most members of the Standing Committee and the mass of Canadians are in the thrall of an irrational concept tied to their national pride. Since Canada is the second largest country in the world by land area, many conclude that Canada should have a much larger population without considering the negatives, such as, that any expansion of human activities takes space from other living organisms, many of which are essential for human survival, that the growth of urban areas in Canada is covering over much of the best agricultural land in the country, that Canadian prosperity is based substantially on the extraction and sale of finite natural resources some of which are becoming scarce, and that most of the Canadian land mass cannot support a large human population. Since 1900, the population of Canada has increased six fold, while the global population has grown about four times. The members of PIC believe that in the interest of good governance,

all levels of government need much better information to guide their policies to ensure that human numbers and demands in Canada stay well within what the land can sustain in the medium to long-term.

The paper "A Strategy for a National and International Population Policy for Canada" develops the ideas contained in "Why Canada Needs a Population Policy" and expands the concepts to include the international dimension. Although the strategy is directed to Canada, the approach can be applied by other countries. The contents were honed over a six months period from the autumn 2004 to April 2005 by an open and participatory Web-based process called Wiki set up by the Green Party of Canada as an experiment in democratic and broad-based policy development. A member of PIC, Tony Cassils, acted as Team Leader to create a population plank for the Green Party of Canada. The Strategy sets out five areas for policy change and the fifth point was the most contentious since it calls for a slowing of population growth in Canada pending the development of better information on the carrying capacity of the land — on its ability to sustain the current population in modest comfort over the medium to long-term. Point 5 also advocates a substantial increase in Canadian international aid to poorer overpopulated countries that have or are willing to have policies to lower fertility but need assistance to develop and implement such policies. All five points received 56% support but 65% was needed for the plank to be considered for inclusion in the Green Party platform. Subsequently, Tony Cassils reworked these concepts for inclusion in this paper which was published in the January 2006 edition of "Proceedings", a periodical of the Canadian Association for the Club of Rome.