

# Room for us all and then some

Human population growth will not destroy the planet, says **Brendan Roberts**

**A**RE humans cancerous to the earth? Do we really pose a mortal threat? Are we sucking the very life from this planet? Should we stop reproducing?

This month in these pages, Gregory Dicum reported the belief of Les Knight, founder of the Voluntary Human Extinction movement, that humans should stop bearing more children.

In fact he claimed that only 1-2 billion people could live happily on earth. But what qualifies happiness?

Do not reports of poor children continually playing with the most basic toys or games for weeks, months or years leave us in the West ashamed when we see children bored with sophisticated games?

If we were to quantify happiness with the amount of food available for our world population, we are led to another scenario than that to which Dicum alludes.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation reveals that significantly higher crop yields have resulted in feeding twice as many people than in the 1950s with the same land area.

And food supply initiatives in developing countries have been so effective that the proportion of the population in chronic undernourishment has been cut in half.

The World Food Outlook document produced by two World Bank senior economists states that crop yields are continuing to increase faster than population.

Paul Waggoner of the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station revealed in 1994 that 10 billion people could be fed using less crop land and producing less silt and pesticide runoff, thus resulting in nature having more land.

Is the world population projection of nine billion people really so stark as claimed?

The people of the earth could fit into a super city in the land mass of Texas, and this super city would have the same population density as inner London.

We should not discount the fact outlined by the UN Population Division that 44 per cent of the world's people live in nations below the replacement level (excluding immigration) for population growth.

To drastically reduce or control our populations would result in widescale economic problems with higher taxes and less prosperity, and even more nations would be impoverished.

The facts surrounding population decline facing Europe and Japan are startling. If current trends continue (excluding immigration), the UN Population Division expects 100 million people fewer people in Europe and 21 million fewer in Japan within 50 years.

Les Knight claims that "the intentional creation of another human being by anyone anywhere can't be justified today". While this extreme view is absurd, we must be more responsible caretakers of our planet.

We must put more resources into finding ways of reducing the harmful emissions that

are polluting it. Sustainable logging should be practised.

While we may be cancerous on some of the earth's resources because of mismanagement, we are not overpopulated or sucking the life out of our planet.

There are ways we can seek to be passionately and efficiently caring for our planet, but we should not stop reproducing. Human life should not be stopped; we should seek to heal the cancer, not destroy the host.

Reducing the population of the world and thus having a major proportion of elderly would be cancerous in itself.

Let's continue to seek ways of providing for more mouths and sharing the resources of our wonderful planet so that the hungry are fed. We in the West cannot ignore the plight of the hungry.

■ New Zealand author **Brendan Roberts'** next book, *Does God Really Care?*, will examine whether the population explosion is a myth.

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