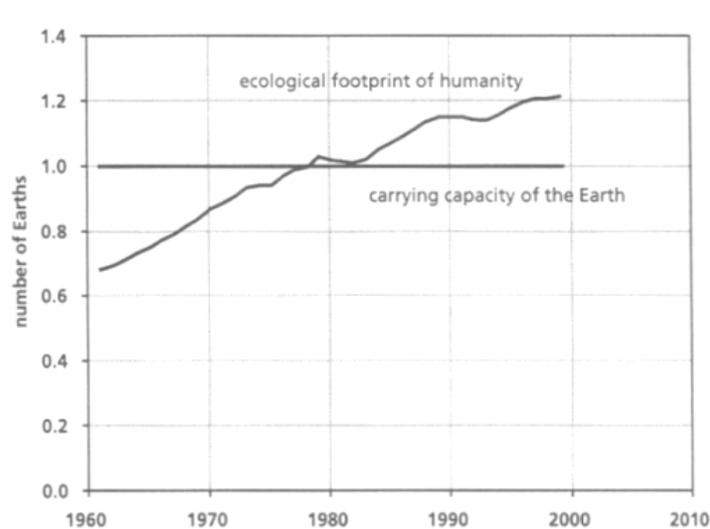


Call to Establish a Coalition on Resource Use

1. The Issue - Growing Resource Use

The incredible rate of economic growth which the developed world has seen in the last 60 years has been based on the continuously growing use of different resources: energy, materials, land, biological resources etc. This undoubtedly seemed to be a success story at the beginning, and we are still tempted to follow the same track. However, in a finite system like the Earth, such exponential growth cannot continue forever - not even in a linear form. This is a very simple natural law; what makes it most relevant is that humanity has already exceeded sustainable levels of consumptionⁱ, beginning in the late seventies. Since that time we have been in a state of overshootⁱⁱ, with our production and consumption steadily growing.



Earth's carrying capacity was first exceeded in the seventies (Meadows et al, 2004)

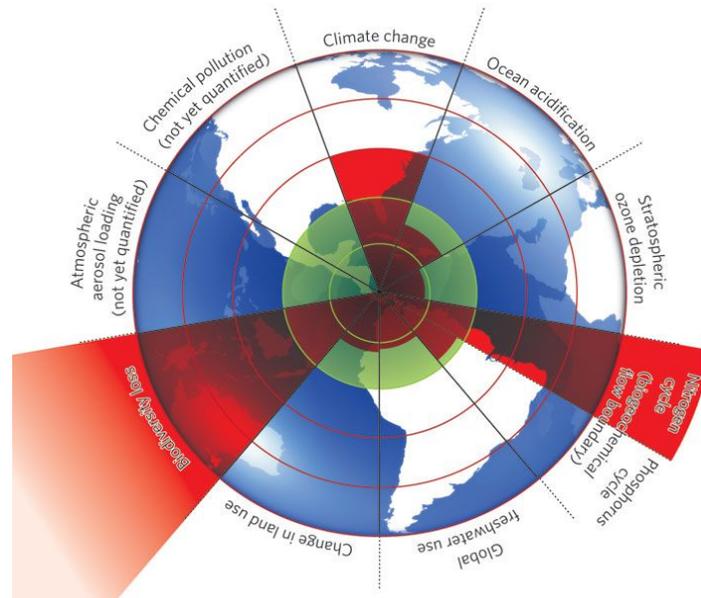
2. Consequences

Generally, there are three main types of environmental impacts: the use of natural resources; the destruction of the spatial structure; and pollution (including the release of invasive alien species, and GMOs). The overuse of natural resources contributes to a range of environmental problems including climate change and biodiversity lossⁱⁱⁱ, but also indirectly leads to health problems (e.g. through the growing use of chemicals) or economic tensions because of unequal access to scarce resources.

The resource problem and its consequences are well described in a range of literature.¹ We wouldn't like to repeat what has already been said, but point out that the consequences equally threaten the

¹ For example *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972, Universe Books) and its following updates (for example: *Limits to Growth, The 30-Year Update*, Meadows et al, 2004, Chelsea Green) or Nef's latest *Happy Planet report* (*The Unhappy Planet Index 2.0*, 2009, nef) give a good overview of the issues connected to resource use as well as the initiatives and actions undertaken globally.

economy, society and the environment. Countless scientists, researchers, politicians, and NGOs have called the attention of world leaders to the problem. Nevertheless, little political action has been taken and the overuse of resources continues.²



Humanity has transgressed safe operating limits for a range of essential Earth-system processes (Rockström et al., 2009)³

3. Solutions so Far and Why They Have Failed

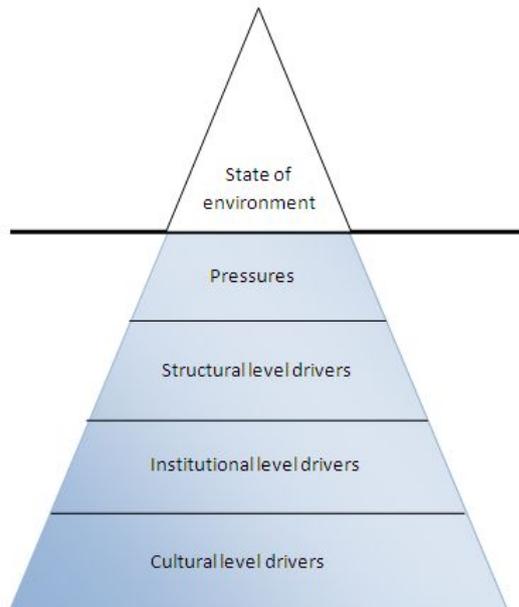
In our sectoral world, we tend to handle problems within our own frameworks: economic actors work out strategies to aid resource depletion; environmentalists designate pieces of land as protected areas to save the valuable resource biodiversity; and transport and industrial pollution limits are set to protect people's health and the planet's climate. Overconsumption itself is often handled as a separate problem, as well⁴. We are often unaware of numerous links and interconnections between these seemingly disconnected issues. The result is sectoral problem solving and end-of-pipe solutions. While we tend to go for these rather short-sighted solutions there is no time left for tackling the drivers of growing resource use: unsustainable consumption and production, cheap and unlimited access to fossil fuels, and more underlying drivers like inequality, belief in material values and in continuous GDP growth, etc.

² EU documents confirming the trend: EU SDS

³ Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the safe operating space for humanity in the Anthropocene (*Nature*, 461 : 472 – 475, Sept 24 - 2009)

⁴ See corresponding EU legislation: Commission of the European Communities, Thematic Strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources, COM (2005) 670 Final (December, 2005) [hereinafter Thematic Strategy]

4. Tackling the root of the problem



Effective and long-term solutions to today's environmental problems are only possible if we are able to see the root of the problem and ready to tackle it. As this simplified iceberg model shows, we are mostly confronted with the environmental problem itself, which is the tip of the iceberg. Solutions are mostly formulated on the level of Pressures, which are the factors directly leading to environmental change (e.g. overexploitation, pollution, habitat loss etc.). Looking beyond Pressures we will see they are a result of a pyramid of drivers, among them Structural ones (such as production and consumption patterns, the urban and spatial structures, etc); Institutional ones (e.g. legislative and economic regulatory framework) and Cultural ones (societal values, approaches, knowledge etc.). As long as these root drivers are not tackled they will keep regenerating pressures resulting in continued environmental degradation. Capping

resource use would mean a change at the level of socio-economic drivers^{iv} and would thus have a positive cascade effect upwards towards the "tip". For this, a radical paradigm change in environmental policy making is necessary: from tackling the direct effects to tackling the causes.

Although resource efficiency – which is already on the political agenda - could provide significant benefits, the Jevsons paradox^v shows that more efficient use of a resource normally leads to increased use of the same resource. There is therefore a risk that savings achieved by increased efficiency will be eaten up by increasing demand. We believe that enhancing efficiency only make sense if it contributes to overall reduction targets.

5. Why a coalition?

We are convinced that in order to tackle environmental problems, such as halting biodiversity loss, climate change or pollution we must cap our resource use along with other measures. By 2012, we would like decision makers to realise that capping resource use is necessary and by 2014 see relevant measures are taken.

NGOs could be key players in the process of achieving this. Therefore we aim to initiate a coalition of European NGOs interested in the capping of resource use. We aim to build common understanding and agree in a few main principles/goals which are shared by everyone and look for ways through which these could be realised. The cooperation would enable participants to lobby more effectively and to make better use of the ongoing processes at both the European and the global level (e.g. the Resource Efficiency Initiative under the EU 2020 Strategy).



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One of the reasons why we failed to tackle this problem in the past is that the links and interconnections between different agendas are not clearly seen. To aid this situation, more discussion is needed on the linkages between seemingly disconnected issues, such as poverty, climate change, biodiversity loss, rural depopulation or health problems. Therefore the coalition is open to a wide range of actors working in different environmental, social and economic fields.

As one Hungarian scientist put it recently: "Without a comprehensive assessment of world energy supply and demand, as well as public discussion of limits to growth, it seems certain the near future will be filled with political rhetoric

and international conflict rather than honest dialog and transparent governance".⁵ Uniting forces to counteract this should be a common objective of the coalition.

6. Next steps

The CEEweb Annual Meeting (3-6th November 2010, Budapest, Hungary) will kick-off the coalition. The first day of the meeting will be devoted to gathering interested NGOs, listening to different presentations and approaches, as well as to brainstorming about the possibilities of cooperation.

This initial meeting will be crucial in planning the next steps and activities of the coalition. Among the further possible joint activities is a public European campaign for reduced resource use as well as a high level event for decision makers to mainstream the idea of resource capping (both in 2011).

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⁵ Cúcz, Bálint et al. : The Impending Peak and Decline of Petroleum Production: an underestimated challenge for Conservation of Ecological Integrity" in Conservation Biology Volume? No. ?



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ⁱ **Sustainable consumption and production:** “Patterns of consumption and production that reduce environmental stress and will meet the basic needs of humanity.” (*Agenda 21*, para 4.7, 1992)

Sustainability: “a system providing for human needs, improving social and economic security and quality of life for all people, including future generations, while protecting the ecosystems upon which human life depends.”

ⁱⁱ **Overshoot:** Global overshoot occurs when humanity's demand on nature exceeds the biosphere's supply, or regenerative capacity. Such overshoot leads to a depletion of Earth's life supporting natural capital and a build up of waste. At the global level, ecological deficit and overshoot are the same, since there is no net-import of resources to the planet. Local overshoot occurs when a local ecosystem is exploited more rapidly than it can renew itself. (Global Footprint Network)

ⁱⁱⁱ **Biodiversity** means the diversity of life on Earth. It means having many types of species (e.g. fox, deer, lynx), many types within species (*Brassica oleracea* is a plant species that has many cultivated versions: Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, collard greens, Chinese broccoli and kohlrabi are all its varieties), many types between species like different plants, animals, fungi or bacteria and many types of ecosystems.

^{iv} **Socio-economic drivers:** CEEweb identifies three types of drivers causing biodiversity loss, but these drivers are the root causes of social inequity and poverty too. The structural drivers are consumption and production patterns, infrastructures, urban structures; the institutional drivers are economic and legal regulations, sectoralisation in institutions, the education system; the cultural drivers are knowledge, approach, and the values of the people. Socio-economic drivers touch upon the most fundamental characteristics of the functioning of the society and economy.

^v **'The Jevons Paradox'**, which was first expressed in 1865 by William Stanley Jevons in relation to use of coal, states that an increase in efficiency in using a resource leads to increased use of that resource rather than to a reduction. This has subsequently been demonstrated to apply not just to fossil fuels, but other resource use scenarios. For example, doubling the efficiency of food production per hectare over the last 50 years (due to the Green Revolution) did not solve the problem of hunger. The increase in efficiency increased production and worsened hunger because of the resulting increase in population. The implications of this in today's world are substantial. Many scientists and policymakers argue that future technological innovations will reduce consumption of resources; the Jevons Paradox explains why this may be a false hope.