

Cap our natural resource use!

Due to global population growth and overconsumption, human demand for products and services is increasing. This depends on the exploitation of natural resources and causes damage which can be irreversible. In response to this threat, European stakeholders have established a coalition on capping resource use to decrease the pressure caused by humans and achieve sustainability within the EU. In 2011, the Coalition will carry out surveys and organize events in order to substantiate and mainstream the idea of resource capping and thereby make real changes happen.

During the past 60 years, people have impacted the environment more extensively than in any other period in human history. Increasing natural resource exploitation is encouraged by a continuous need for growth which is determined by the current economic system. This phenomenon cannot continue forever within a finite system like the Earth, which already exceeded its carrying capacity in the seventies¹. Since that time humanity has been living in a state of overshoot, in which people are consuming natural resources faster than they can be regenerated. In other words, we are using up resources which were meant to serve future generations. As a consequence of this overconsumption, the scarcity of fossil resources such as oil, on which our present society is heavily based, is already becoming a reality.² Moreover, the impacts of unsustainable resource use are already being felt through a growing number of economic, environmental and social issues such as: economic tension because of resource depletion and unequal access to scarce resources; climate change and biodiversity loss; and health problems due to pollution. Unless there are increased efforts to move humanity towards a sustainable framework; economic, environmental and social problems will continue.

Solutions so far - grabbing the end of the pipe

Currently stakeholders focus on problems within the established sectoral framework and apply 'end-of pipe' solutions, for example: economic actors work out strategies to aid resource supply; environmentalists designate pieces of land as protected areas to save valuable biodiversity; and transport and industrial pollution limits are set to protect people's health and the planet's climate. Decision-makers with different backgrounds and interests are often unaware of the numerous interactions and connections between seemingly disconnected issues and tend not to explore the deeper relationships between them. This leads to a focus on short-term solutions within the existing sectoral framework instead of looking ahead and developing holistic long-term solutions.

¹ Limits to Growth - The 30-Year Update (Meadows et al, 2004)

² The International Energy Agency recently recognized that the peak oil was reached in 2006

The best way to tackle the problem – cap our resource use

Members of the Resource Cap Coalition are convinced that effective and long-term solutions to today's many inter-related issues are only possible if we look at the root of the problem and are prepared to tackle it. Bearing in mind the importance of applying holistic approaches instead of sectoral ones, it is crucial to look beyond the pressures and consider the driving forces behind them. These driving forces are threefold:

- Structural drivers include production and consumption patterns as well as urban and spatial structures leading to environmental pressures such as pollution, habitat degradation or the exploitation of natural resources. Besides creating environmental pressures, resource intensive production processes also require less human labour and thus increase unemployment.
- Institutional drivers determine the structural ones. These are, *inter alia*, the current legislative and economic regulatory frameworks, which enable energy intensive products and services to flourish due to unlimited access to cheap natural resources. Consequently, the loss of natural heritage is able to continue without any compensation.
- Cultural drivers provide the basis for the two above. These include our history, common beliefs, customs, behaviour, etc. All of them are determined by societal values, of which by far the most dominant is the value placed on material wealth and the continuous growth of GDP. This is often at the expense of other values such as a healthy environment, strong family, community relationships or security. According to recent indices the more balanced people's values are (i.e. when values are taken into account equally), the happier they are³. Societies with more balanced values would contribute to achieving a fair distribution of resources, which in turn would lead to greater global environmental and social equity. Ecological justice would also have a positive effect by cutting the ecological debt from the "north" to the "south", caused by centuries of social and economic exploitation.

Analyzing this complex structure of drivers, it becomes clear that introducing resource use cap would change their course. As a result of legally set limits, fewer natural resources would be used across Europe, which would lead to an increase in products and services with low energy and natural resource demand. At the same time human labour would become more competitive and more jobs would be created in different sectors such as agriculture, forestry or fishery. Moreover, people would start consuming less, appreciate more ecosystems, which deliver indispensable services for them, and thus material wealth would become relatively less important in their set of values.

The time is ripe to kick off the coalition on capping resource use

Firstly, resource efficiency is currently high on the EU political agenda in the framework of the 'Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative' under the EU 2020 Strategy. Using this momentum,

³ <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>

Members of the Resource Cap Coalition want to emphasize that this Initiative should also contribute to overall reduction limits in order to avoid Jevons' Paradox. This paradox shows that the more efficient use of a resource could lead to the increased use of the same resource rather than to its reduction. That is why efforts to become resource efficient have to be carefully designed so that they are not negated by parallel growing demand in other regions.

Secondly, we are aware of the importance of integrating different views and specialized knowledge in the various environmental, social and economic fields in this process. That is why we have established a coalition of European stakeholders committed to resource use capping. One reason why current measures have failed to tackle the problem is because of the sectoral approach to the problems and the insufficient collaboration between different organizations. In our opinion, more discussion is needed especially concerning issues which at first glance may seem to be disconnected. Our goal is to share our experiences, speak with a common voice and take a more holistic approach. This would enable us to more effectively influence all the ongoing processes both at European and global levels.

Members of the Resource Cap Coalition strongly believe that in order to tackle the overuse of resources, strict regulations should be put in place and indicators should be developed to measure their success. Therefore, the Parties to the Coalition would like to aim to achieve the following:

- By 2012, all decision-makers realize that limiting the natural resource use⁴ of the EU is essential
- By 2014, relevant measures are taken to realize EU wide natural resource use limitation
- By 2016, an independent and transparent EU-wide accounting system is elaborated to assess Member States' direct and indirect consumption of energy and materials.

In order to make these changes happen and to substantiate and mainstream the idea of resource capping, in 2011 we will complete:

- a study on the interconnection between resource use and biodiversity loss
- an essay on the role of resource use limitation in implementing the EU's post-2010 Biodiversity Strategy
- three core group meetings in order to identify the main directions of the Coalition
- a side event during the Brussels Green Week
- a science based workshop
- a high level event for decision makers

⁴ The SERI indicators cover four different resource-use categories appropriated for production or product use: materials - both biotic and abiotic, such as: fossil fuels, water, land use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2009/seri_foee_measuring_eu_resource_use_final.pdf

Members of the Resource Cap Coalition:

By 3rd June 2011

- Association "Fauna"
- Butterfly Conservation Europe
- Campaign for the Reform of the World Bank
- CEEweb for Biodiversity
- Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy (CASSE)
- Center for Socio-Ecological Research and Documentation
- Comité Confederal CGT
- Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development
- Ecological Movement of Macedonia
- Ecologistas en Acción
- Engineering Without Borders (Engyneria Sense Fronteres)
- Environmental Organization Rhodope
- Environmental Society "ECO-MISSION"
- European Partners for the Environment (EPE)
- FIAN Internat
- Global Change Research Centre
- Green Liberty
- International Scientific Forum "Danube - River of Cooperation"
- Latvian Fund for Nature
- NGO Eco-Protection
- Nimfea Nature Conservation Association
- Observatory of the Debt in Globalisation
- Open Garden Foundation
- Quercus
- Regional Association for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development (BROZ)
- SOSNA - Center for Sustainable Alternatives
- Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI)
- The Academic Section of the Polish Country-Lovers' Association in Krakow (PTTK)
- The Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED)
- The Society for Sustainable Living in the Slovak Republic (STUZ)
- Weltwirtschaft, Ökologie & Entwicklung (WEED)
- Young Researchers of Serbia (YRS)
- Youth and Environment Europe (YEE)