

QUAKER CONCERN OVER POPULATION

NEWSLETTER 5

AUTUMN 2019

[QCOP at Yearly Meeting – May 2019](#)



QCOP stall at the Groups' Fair at Britain Yearly Meeting in London with our new roller banner

QCOP had a table at the Groups Fair, presenting materials giving Friends a chance to discuss population issues. By the end of the day, 19 new members had enrolled. We also invited Dr Simon Beard, a member of Jesus

Lane Meeting to give a talk to our Special Interest meeting. A summary of the talk, which was attended by 29 Friends with 8-10 turned away for lack of space, is given below.

'Quakers, Population and the Future of Humanity' a talk by Simon Beard

Simon's department at Cambridge University does research into human survival in extreme circumstances, such as now. Would there be no humans left, in 2100 or very, very few? Over-population and demography are very important factors in this situation. Simon was pleased to talk to us, as being a scientist in a secular University it is hard to factor in Quaker approaches. He explained that you cannot have a religious answer to how many children you should have. But Quakers celebrate life. They are a diverse group and very tolerant.

With the use of graphs Simon illustrated that there had been an 8-fold increase in population in the space of three life spans. (200 years), to nearly 8 billion. Other startling facts included:

8-9% of ALL human beings who have ever lived are alive today! We are at the peak of our species, co-existing, having to share and assimilate such a lot of human experience. 1-2% of all the time humans have been alive has been spent watching TV! 90% of our scientific understanding is happening NOW. This is partly why there are so many converging risks!

A logarithmic graph using the same figures showed that population expansion over the last 100 years was fastest between 1950 and 1990. The 1990 line is interesting, because people live longer now than previously. In another 1-2 life spans it will flatten off. Population matters because it drives so much in our lives. We must get fertility right.

To show the impact of population on the environment, Simon used a Royal Society of Arts chart looking at ecosystems: deserts, Mediterranean, rainforests, mountains, swamps, and cold areas etc. This revealed that human population has been a problem for a very long time, having wiped out some

ecosystems in prehistoric times. Before agriculture hunter gatherers killed every megafauna they could, using very ineffective methods of killing, such as making a fire and capturing what they could. The graph showed that the loss of ecosystems will be very fast up to 2050.

Another graph showed that of the total CO2 emissions, over half have been in Simon's lifetime (he is 34). It's a very recent issue, because of soaring population growth. **We cannot go on like this.** Population has increased a lot even since the 1997 Kyoto agreement.

Carbon fact points: How many earths do we need? We are using the resources of 1.7 at present. Anything above one earth is a problem. Carbon and population growth are why we are getting it wrong.

There are three features of today's world:-

1. Inequality of the global income distribution: Population growth is greatest amongst the poorest, in Asia, China, and Africa

2. Urbanisation: It is easiest to share heat, light and re-cycling in towns and cities. This is good for the planet. But cities kill people, by pollution and disease. Rural areas breed stronger people.

3. Technology: Having more, while doing less allows us to be more efficient getting food and creating energy. The Green revolution really benefitted India, enabling it to feed itself.

There are three important lessons for Quakers:

1. We need to talk about population because it matters and it is a difficult subject.

2. We need to have the humanity to view the demographic transition as more than just an end in itself. It can be very painful personally

3. We need the courage to accept that our own society will alter radically and that it may be better if it changes more, than if it changes less.

Change is very hard, and it alters people. Being a sole child is difficult. Britain is going to go on changing. We shall continue to diversify and increase in number because of migration. There might be more immigration to come. We should courageously seek more change.

This enthusiastic talk was very well received and can be seen on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FE5zmNc4Tv0&t=462s>.

Cherry Foster (QCOP Steering Group)

QCOP AGM at Oxford



"It is not much use reducing our carbon footprint if we keep on increasing the number of feet." Roger Martin. Population Matters. Friends relaxing at our AGM at Oxford

The AGM was held at Oxford Meeting and as the Minutes of the AGM (which is a necessary formality) have been circulated they will not be included in the newsletter. The AGM was followed by a presentation and discussion as is our custom which we hope Friends present found useful.

Facebook

Please have a look at our new Facebook site: 'Quaker Concern over Population'. This gives us a chance to spread our message to a wider and possibly different audience - if you feel able to respond to posts or add posts of your own that would be really helpful - thank you.

New Zealand – an under-populated country?

New Zealand is a spacious country with a small population - the UK and New Zealand have a similar land area but the populations are very different – 64.4 million people live in the UK while New Zealand's population comes in at just under 5 million with just under 2 million of these living in Auckland. More than 1 in 3 New Zealanders now call Auckland their home!

The population density in New Zealand is 18 per Km² compared with the UK's 671 per Km²!

New Zealand has had a low population density because, for most of its history, it was on the very fringes of the world. However, recently the archipelago's population has been growing at a substantial pace and statistics suggest the population will grow by another third to six million by 2061. Much of this, though, is driven by immigration, and is already born: the increase coming as a surplus from elsewhere! This is a deliberate strategy to encourage growth which is never measured in per capita terms, only overall!

However, population challenges are seen in all the major cities with Auckland experiencing many severe problems; traffic is deadlocked, housing is at a premium and urban sprawl is worse than London. Air quality is relatively good: traffic is the major source of pollution in summer and wood fires in winter, but NZ is a windy country and is said to have its own 'ventilation system'.



Water quality is an issue caused by intensive agriculture, particularly dairy farming, which has resulted in greater levels of nitrogen in soil, surface and groundwater. The dairy sector exports vast quantities to China and other countries to feed their growing populations and is a major source of foreign currency for the country.

Population increase is not a subject which worries many Kiwis. The country has vast open spaces: it is possible to drive for hours with only the occasional car or logging lorry on the roads – indeed driving is reminiscent of driving in the UK 50 years ago.

When researching this article, contact was made with Greenpeace NZ and the New Zealand Green Party to ask about their policies on population. The former failed to respond and the latter advised a look at their web site where it was possible to find policies, amongst others, on climate protection, women's pay, clean groundwater and cannabis but no mention of population!

In 2014, the Quaker Lecture in Aotearoa: 'Enough – the challenges of a post growth economy', was given by the then leader of the Green Party and much respected MP Jeanette Fitzsimons. She argued continued growth in a finite world was an illusion and the current use of resources and energy was impossible i.e. our current way of life was not sustainable. However, she believed that life could still be good if planning was made for a post-growth economy.

But there was no mention in her talk of population growth, so that later, over coffee, I asked Jeanette why this omission? Her reply was simple: she had to consider public opinion and whether the issue could be taken successfully through the policy process.

Five years later have times changed? Is there a greater realisation that population increase is the 'starter' for so many of our current concerns and needs its profile raising? I, therefore, made contact with the, now retired, Jeanette to raise this question. Her reply gave me hope:

'Thanks for writing. You are right that population growth lies behind all our environmental and social problems - though one must add over consumption, which has grown since the seventies many times faster than population. I think it is important to speak of the two together, as an extra child in the West has an environmental and climate change impact about fifty times that of one poor Indian or African. The social politics of this are fraught - in some countries more children are a route to survival - from quite an early age they produce more for the family than they consume. Any attempts by Western nations to persuade them to limit their families is seen as neo-colonialism and attempting to preserve our own position in the world against growing numbers of the disadvantaged.'

I think the best route for policy and action is to work for education of girls - not just in family planning but everything - and for social valuing of girls and women so that they have a recognised value in life beyond just child bearing and rearing. Paul Hawken's Drawdown ranks this and access to family planning services, if you take them together, as

the most important single thing that could be done to slow climate change. It is encouraging that there is something of a revival of the Growth issue and people are asking for copies of Enough! So I have ordered a reprint if you want some. Slowly it is becoming more acceptable to question GDP growth as the ultimate goal of economics and I am keen to foster this.'

It was good to see from the above a recognition of the population challenge. David Attenborough asks why it has for so long been swept under the carpet so that when governments raise concern about global warming, pollution, overcrowding, lack of housing, inadequate water supplies etc., the major contributor, population increase, is never mentioned.

It has been too controversial to speak of in the past – perhaps this attitude is now changing and it can be discussed more openly!

Jeanette's talk 'Enough' is at <http://quaker.org.nz/sites/quaker.org.nz/files/Enough%21%20for%20web.pdf>

David Tinsley and his wife Louise are currently acting as Resident Friends at Wellington Meeting.

Difficult Questions?

Whenever we address groups there are always certain questions that we get asked. So we have decided to look at some of these in the next few newsletters as space allows. Here is the first.

Hans Rosling says that there isn't a population problem. Do you think you know more than he does?

Yes. It isn't a matter of me versus Rosling: it's a matter of a large number of demographers

versus Rosling. The current thinking is that the planet could only sustainably support about two billion if we all lived at the present rate of the developed world: conversely, if we cut consumption by three quarters the world could support the present population. But since population is growing by a billion every twelve years, we would soon have to cut consumption even further.

Roger Plenty - Nailsworth Meeting

New ideas and energy needed!

Members of the QCOP Steering Group are now in their second term of service and although we are feeling encouraged we are also a little frayed at the edges! We need help with fresh ideas, minutes writing, grant applications, organising events, speaking (training will be given), poster designing, cartoon drawing.

If you have any of these skills, please contact the convenor, Jonathan Riddell on JMRR57@outlook.com. We'd love you to join the Steering Group, which holds its meeting by Skype, but you could help without that.

Culture Change the modern way

All nations need to change their way of thinking about family size, and we now realise that one of the greenest things we can do is to have one less child. This requires serious culture change, but such shifts in our mindset have been achieved before in the UK, for example on smoking, plastic carrier bags, and recycling.

On population, David Attenborough says, "Talk about it. Just keep talking about it." But lately, it has become clear that the modern generation tools of social media are another place to talk, and to an immensely wider audience.

My opinion of social media has until recently been very negative, equated with rumour



spreading, fake news, exploitation of vulnerable people, time wasting and gossip. However, I have seen the support given to new parents by mumsnet.com, and was recently sent a piece by my

daughter-in-law who was interviewed for a more in-depth new website wearechildfree.com

She writes about her journey from assuming she would be a mother towards deciding that she didn't want to have children. Her reasons are that she realises that she and her husband are very happy with their lives, running their own business, and they don't wish to go down the parenthood route. They both relate very well to the children in the wider family and are content to give them back at the end of the day!

It must take courage to ignore the biological clock, and other writers on the same website recognise this but convey their absolute comfort with their decision. My daughter-in-law does not mention the morality angle at all, but some contributors do. One said, "The world gets worse every day. Every time I turn on the TV, I think: why would I bring a baby here?"

Several women from this very international group talk about the social pressure to have children, for example in Sweden and Germany. Others mention the difficulty of combining children and a successful career, and of the promotion inequality that mothers often suffer. Several mention having good support from their parents. These factors are possibly more real to them than the vague hope of influencing population numbers, but they do indicate a growing acceptance that a normal

family can be, not so much childless, as childfree.

Cherry Foster, Nailsworth Meeting.

[Fundraising – an appeal to Friends](#)

Friends are you able to help QCOP raise funds?

As a small group we have been running on a shoestring. The Steering Group meets mainly via Skype to save, time, money and carbon emissions. But, when we do meet the steering group does not usually claim any travel or other expenses. And, although we have offered our speakers their expenses at Yearly Meeting Gatherings so far none have claimed. This has meant that we have managed to operate the group very economically, just paying for producing and posting newsletters, posters and the occasional leaflet. Not everyone is on email. We would like to do more but feel constrained by our lack of funds. This is, therefore, an appeal to our members to ask them if they could perhaps raise some money for the group. We do not want to insist on a membership fee as it may prevent some Friends from joining us so rely instead on voluntary donations. However, we hope Friends might have ideas on how to raise additional funds. Do you know a source of funds or could you hold a collection at your local meeting?

David Tinsley – Resident Friend, Wellington Meeting, NZ

[It feels like tweaking the bible!](#)

Recognising the lack of mention in Quaker writings of global population issues, the QCOP Writers Group has recently been revising our attempts over the last six years to write some Advices and Queries on the subject. The resultant draft of three texts was sent to all QCOP members, and 22 members responded. All comments were useful, and enabled the Writer Group to re-edit the draft to be crisper

and shorter. We hope they now sound not just timely, but more timeless.

1. We seek to live in a sustainable world. Consider the implications of continued population growth for resources and for the environment. What can you do to reduce these pressures, both in your life and in the world at large?

2. We seek to live in a sustainable world. Women are central to reducing the pressure of population growth on world resources. With equality and education they are more able to make their own decisions about family size. How can you support this internationally and encourage it locally?"

3. We seek to live in a sustainable world and we face the necessity for radical changes in mind-set to achieve this. Some of the changes are very personal, such as family size. Be courageous but sensitive in discussing these issues.

September 2019

We shall suggest to the revision group that they might like to select just one of the three.

This experience has encouraged us in our next effort, to find or write longer Quaker writings for the revised Christian Faith and Practice, which has just been initiated by Michael Booth at Friends House. If you are able to suggest any Quaker writings, or your own, on the subject of global population, please send them to Cherry Foster at (the_fosters@btinternet.com) The criteria before included many writings from personal experience. The new revision hopes to be, "Prayerful, joyful, creative and bold." We understand also that it should be in everyday simple language. If any QCOP Members wish to join the QCOP Writers Group in sifting through material, please contact Cherry as above.

New Membership / supporter's category

Until recently all our members/supporters have been individual Friends. However, we have now received a request from an Area Meeting to join. Our Steering Group have decided that we should have such a category so that Meetings can join and support the Group. This could either be a request to subscribe to the Group in order to receive newsletters and notices, or it could be a more formal wish to join QCOP following a minute from the Local or Area Meeting. If anyone thinks their meeting would benefit from joining QCOP we would hope they would encourage their meeting to do so. To contact us, or for further information, go to our wide-ranging website, www.qcop.org.uk

New display materials and logo

We now have a pop-up or roller banner which can be seen in the photo on the front page of this newsletter. If you are able to display it at your local meeting or would like further copies of this newsletter or other material please contact Jonathan Riddell (details at bottom of newsletter).

We also have a new logo



Upcoming Events

QCOP are planning several events for late 2019 and 2020. Events under consideration include possible meetings in London and Yorkshire in early 2020 followed by another session elsewhere possibly in the spring. If you think you would be interested in either attending any of these events or are a local Friend who could help with the organisation or would like an event in your area please let Cherry Foster know.

We are also in the process of arranging for a highly respected and well known speaker to speak at our session at YMG in 2020. Further details will be sent out once everything is confirmed.

Want to hold an event?

We are very keen to help you and can offer planning ideas, materials, PowerPoint presentations and even a speaker. Please contact Cherry Foster on the_fosters@btinternet.com

QCOP – Who are we?

QCOP grew out of the Canterbury Commitment and was established after the successful lecture that we held at Yearly Meeting in Bath in 2014. We have over 100 supporters, mainly from Friends in Britain but also a few from around the world.

Why become a member?

The value of having members is that it shows that many Quakers feel that population issues are an area of concern not to be dismissed by Friends. The value to members is in being kept in touch with worldwide news through email briefings and newsletters. If you know of any concerned Friends please tell them that membership is free and also mention the website, which is full of facts, and has the membership form and contact details. www.qcop.org.uk. We encourage members to contact us with queries, and suggestions.

It would also be useful if all Quaker members of a household who supports us would join individually. This will give us a better idea of the support we have in the Society.

We have no membership fee so ask for an annual voluntary donation of £5-£20 per supporter. Cheques payable to **QCOP** to: **Roger Plenty, Ashleigh, Rodborough Hill, Stroud, Gloucs, GL5 3RT**

Cherry Foster, Membership Secretary

Newsletters – date of publication

It is hoped to produce two newsletters each year one in the spring and the other in the autumn. Contributions to the Editor, Jonathan Riddell; jmrr57@outlook.com.

The opinions expressed in this letter are the views of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or QCOP.

Committee and contact details

Jonathan Riddell - Convenor (Alton Meeting)
Email: jmrr57@outlook.com Tel: 01252 712628
www.qcop.org.uk

Cherry Foster - Membership (Nailsworth Meeting)
Email: the_fosters@btinternet.com

Roger Plenty - Treasurer (Nailsworth Meeting)
Nick Chetwood - (Brigflatts Meeting - Cumbria)
June New - (Jesus Lane Meeting - Cambridge)
David Tinsley - (Wellington Meeting, New Zealand)

