

Abstract

In the face of significant social and environmental impacts resulting from global overpopulation, Australian governments have consistently pursued policies aimed at increasing the national population. This study informs the work of organisations dedicated to the promotion of population stability by addressing the Australian public through an online survey to reveal prevailing community attitudes regarding the ways in which population issues are discussed, conceptualised and rationalised.

The findings indicate consensus that increasing population size has negative implications for personal quality of life, societal wellbeing and environmental health, but that it may result in economic benefits. Anthropocentric and nationalistic values are shown to dominate perceptions of population optimality, with significant differences detected between the assigned importance of various considerations in determining national and global population levels. Nationalism is shown to promote the manifestation of a 'tragedy of the commons' at the international scale, while the egocentric nature of individual procreation decisions leads to the same result at the community level. More variety was detected among opinions relating to the use of different policies, yet the current federal policies of providing maternity payments and prohibiting euthanasia are shown to be contrary to prevalent community desires. These and further findings are used to make recommendations for policy makers and the work of population stability advocates.