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PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

WWF's Living Planet Report 2012 – Assessing the planet's health

May 2012

On 15th May, WWF launches its Living Planet Report, a bi-annual health check of our planet. The Living Planet Report charts the *Living Planet Index* – a measure of the health of the world's biodiversity – against the *Ecological Footprint* – measures of humanity's demands on the Earth's natural resources. 20 years on from the Rio Summit, WWF's Living Planet Report assessment asks important questions about the state of our planet and our consumption of its natural resources.

Key findings

- Biodiversity continues to decline: Populations of global species continue to decline, with *tropical* and *freshwater* species experiencing the biggest declines. This is worrying, given many areas of high biodiversity provide valuable ecosystem services such as carbon storage, fuel wood, freshwater flow and fish stocks, upon which our health, wealth and well-being depend.
- Planet Earth is still in the red: The world's Ecological Footprint exceeds the Earth's natural biocapacity by 50 per cent - and this has doubled since 1966. It would take the Earth 1.5 years to produce the goods and services and absorb the CO₂ emissions that we use and produce in a single year.
- Carbon is crippling the planet's life support system: Our current overshoot is largely due to carbon emissions, which accounts for over half of humanity's Ecological Footprint.
- Higher incomes, high consumption patterns and bigger footprints: High income countries have a disproportionately high Ecological Footprint. Rising consumption trends in high-income groups around the world and in BRIICS countries, combined with growing population numbers, provide warning signs of the potential for even larger footprints in the future. The largest per capita footprint increases between 1961 and 2008 were in the European Union and the Middle East/Central Asia.





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Figure 1: Global Living Planet Index
(WWF / ZSL, 2012)

Key

-  Global Living Planet Index
-  Confidence limits

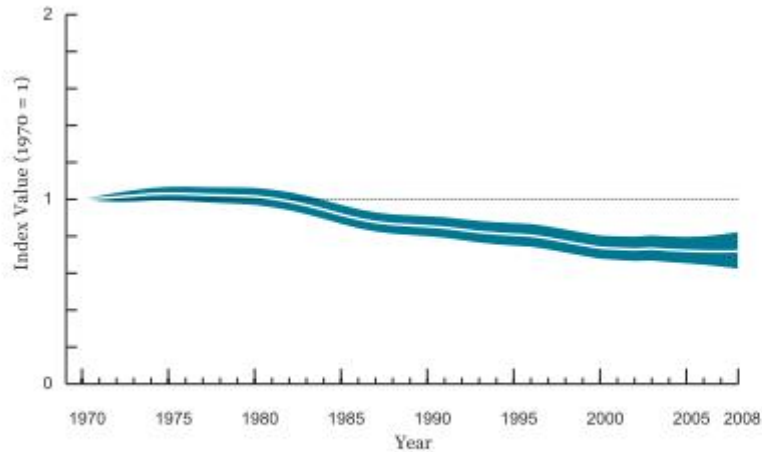
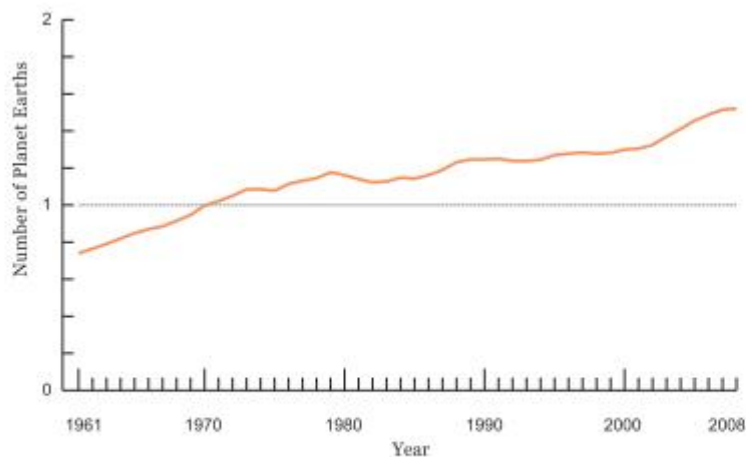


Figure 2: Global Ecological Footprint
(Global Footprint Network, 2011)



Solutions – and opportunities for Scotland

WWF's Living Planet Report throws in sharp relief the challenges that lie ahead. The declining Living Planet Index and rising Ecological Footprint emphasize the need for greater cross-departmental action by governments around the world to tackle environmental degradation and its drivers. Scotland's First Minister began 2012 with a commitment 'to set our own house in order, to be part of the solution not the problem, but also to lead by example'.¹ WWF Scotland is calling for strong political leadership from the Scottish Government to meet these challenges.

1 Transition to a green economy

A rapid transition to a green economy needs to do three things;

- Improve of human wellbeing and social equity;
- Reduce the impact of human activity to keep within the environmental limits of the planet; and
- Manage and enhance natural capital, biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The Scottish Government must identify and support low carbon activity across *all* key sectors of the economy – not just renewable energy, for example. It must also ensure that the green economy is not just about sustainable economic growth measured by an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (NPF) already goes some way to measuring well-being, with its aspiration to create 'opportunities for all to flourish', but still relies heavily on GDP as a measure of progress. The Government needs to shift its emphasis away from 'economic growth' as the goal and GDP as the measure of success. It should report on wellbeing, equality and environmental quality as part of the NPF, with adequate time set aside for Parliamentary scrutiny.

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Speeches/china-cp>

2 Step up efforts on climate change

While the Scottish Climate Change Act is an excellent example of climate leadership, Scottish Ministers must now take action to ensure that real measures are taken at home to reduce emissions across the Scottish economy – particularly in homes and transport. The Scottish Government must commit to implementing the Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP) in full to meet our climate targets. The Scottish Government also needs to align its Budget with its climate ambitions, for example, supporting sustainable transport, walking and cycling, home energy efficiency.

3 Better consumption

Living within the Earth's ecological limits requires global consumption patterns to be in balance with the Earth's environmental limits. The Scottish Climate Act includes targets for emissions produced within Scotland. However, these are not the total emissions Scotland is responsible for; our consumption of goods and resources generates emissions that are not counted under a production-based reporting system. We must ensure that in our efforts to meet our climate change targets, we do not 'offshore' our emissions, and that our efforts at home actually reduce global emissions.

The Scottish Climate Change Act contains a duty for Scottish Ministers to produce an annual report on emissions related to Scottish consumption – with the first report due in 2013. Although the Government's National Performance Framework includes a commitment to reduce Scotland's overall carbon footprint, there are currently no specific targets set. WWF Scotland believes that Scottish Ministers should set targets to cut emissions from consumption and that data on consumption-based emissions should be incorporated into climate policy making alongside data on production emissions. Considering both sets of data together will give a more complete picture of Scotland's impact on the climate.

4 Sustainable management of our natural resources – resource efficiency

Biodiversity, ecosystems and ecosystem services must be preserved and restored as the foundation of human societies and economies. The global challenge is to ensure access to food, water and energy for all, while addressing the long-term challenges of climate change and ecosystem management. This requires effective use of our natural resources and minimisation of waste. The Scottish Government must lead the way in better management of our natural resources, from sustainable fisheries management, food procurement, waste prevention to energy generation and energy efficiency – ensuring we live within environmental limits.

Conclusion

There is increasing urgency about the need for humanity to reduce its Ecological Footprint while conserving the planet's biodiversity. The planet needs genuine leadership, partnership and action to confront these challenges. Better choices need to be encouraged to bring our individual and collective footprints to "One Planet", sustainable levels. Scotland must play its part.

Contact

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