

Heading off a global resources crisis

NEW YORK, USA, November 21, 2016 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Emerging resource scarcities threaten to destabilise the world in coming decades, raising the risk of wars, migration and economic crises to levels never before seen.

That's the blunt warning of "[Surviving the 21st Century](#)", a powerful new book released recently by global science publisher Springer International.

"Humanity's use of resources now amounts to 75 billion tonnes a year, about ten tonnes for each one of us," says author Julian Cribb. "Few people are aware how much it takes to support the modern citizen. It is vastly more than it was 50 or 100 years ago, maybe ten times as much."

"Over our lifetime, each of us now:

- Uses 99,720 tonnes of fresh water (mostly as food)
- Causes the loss of 750 tonnes of topsoil
- Uses 5,400,000 BTUs of (mostly fossil) energy
- Wastes 13.5 tonnes of food and
- Causes the emission of 320 kilos of toxic industrial chemicals
- Causes the emission of 288 tonnes of climate-changing CO2.

"This is a colossal personal impact which, collectively, is now running way beyond the Earth's capacity to restore and renew itself, as many scientists are warning.

"Of course, there is a simple, feasible answer to all this – but the world is not yet ready to take it, because most people still don't grasp the risks."

Mr Cribb says [water crises](#) are likely to strike the world first, before the 2030s. "Already four billion people face acute water scarcity one month a year – and the number is bound to grow. Globally, rivers and lakes are dying and drying up, mountain glaciers melting, groundwater reserves running out in many countries. The obvious answer – recycling – is hardly being adopted anywhere."

The world's forests are still falling at a cumulative net rate of 6.6 million hectares, and deserts are spreading across 12 million ha of fertile farmland, every year.

In the oceans, 470 polluted 'dead zones' now cover an area of 245,000 square kilometres, and 90 per cent of the world's fisheries are either maxed out or overfished. Acidification (from burning fossil fuels) threatens the entire ocean food chain.

The world currently mines about 10 billion tonnes of metal ores a year, causing widespread contamination of landscapes, water and harming the health of human populations. By mid-century the world's reserves of cheap phosphorus, essential to the global food supply, will begin to run down.

"Resource overuse endangers humanity at several levels," Cribb says. "Through contamination and poisoning of people and wildlife, and through the destruction of the natural systems that support us – air, water, soil and biodiversity especially."

“The good news is that we have solutions to all of these problems. The challenge is to implement them at global scale – as well as by individuals.”

The International Resources Panel of UNEP has urged the world to ‘[dematerialise](#)’ the global economy. This means generating economic growth using far fewer raw materials – and transitioning the economy to ‘things of the mind’ rather than material goods.

“By the 2060s it is possible the human population will begin to contract – provided the world’s women continue to lower their fertility,” Cribb says. “This means that everything we will ever need for a prosperous life will be available by recycling the waste stream. Mining and extraction of new materials will become unnecessary. Miners will become waste re-processors.

Cradle-to-cradle manufacturing, zero waste, soilless food production, renewable energy, renewable cities, water and nutrient recycling are all examples of the emerging technologies of the 21st Century that will convert ours into a truly sustainable society, Cribb says.

“It’s totally do-able, it’s profitable, it creates new jobs and a cleaner environment for us to live in, it is the way of the future. All we have to do is support the change – as consumers, as investors and as voters.”

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Reviews:

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