

Contribution to Marlborough Airport focus group interview from Budyong Hill representing local activist group Climate Karanga Marlborough (CKM).

To quote from your information document - *“In the context of this interview, we’ll refer to business/corporate sustainability that considers **Environmental, Social and Cultural, and Economic drivers**. One way of looking at it is as a three-legged stool with each leg representing a driver held together by governance, which is the seat. The interview is set up as an open conversation to address these drivers and explore what is going well, what requires improvement and what the future might hold.”*

I believe that exercises like this can often be of little use if there is not a realistic and honest view of “*what the future may hold*”, so that is the area that I wish to focus on. I am a firm believer that without a viable, healthy and sustainable environment there is no future for the other two drivers. In fact I would go so far as to say the three legs of the stool have to be Environment, Environment and Environment. Simply put without a healthy environment there is no economy. I also see little point in limiting our view to Marlborough or even to NZ, when it comes to discussing what the future may hold. In the modern world we are inextricably connected to the global environment and must make our assessments and decisions with this fact foremost in our minds.

Taking this into account I therefore wish to share some basic facts and information.

1) The dominant economic system in the developed world has, as a primary goal, the growth of GDP. Our economic system relies on this perpetual growth to continue functioning. To maintain a growth rate of 2 – 3% the throughput of materials and energy needs to double approximately every 25 years. (*If your country's GDP grows at 3% a year, the economy doubles in 72/3 or 24 years. If your growth slips to 2%, it will double in 36 years.*) This is an exponential increase. It means doubling and then doubling the new amount every 25 years. Basic maths tells us this will end badly.

2) There are a range of ways of assessing what humanity’s impact on the biosphere is but there is general agreement that we are currently using about 1.8 times more than the planet can regenerate. This is known as overshoot which we have been in since the 1970’s. ([More info](#)) Again this can only end badly if we continue with our heads in the sand thinking we are so smart that our technology will solve these existential problems.

3) Scientists have identified [9 critical boundaries](#) that our human civilisation needs to stay within if we wish to retain a liveable planet. At this point in time we have exceeded 6 of the 9 boundaries. Three of them cover what we take from the ecological system. They are loss of biodiversity (extinction of species), loss of fresh water (pumping too much water from rivers and aquifers) and land use (deforestation).

The remaining six boundaries concern the waste our activity adds, to what would have occurred naturally. They are: greenhouse gases which cause climate change; ocean acidification (carbon absorbed by the sea); emission of chemicals that deplete the Earth’s ozone layer; “novel entities” (synthetic chemicals such as plastics, DDT and concrete); aerosols; and nutrient overload (nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilisers that wash into rivers and the sea, causing algae blooms, killing fish and coral).

Crossing any of these boundaries doesn’t trigger immediate disaster. But it does mean we’ve moved from the safe zone into dangerous territory. And the nine boundaries are interrelated and interacting, in ways we don’t yet fully understand. In 2009, the scientists found we’d already crossed three boundaries: biodiversity, climate change and nutrient overload. By the 2015 update, a fourth boundary had been crossed: land use. And by this year’s update, only three boundaries hadn’t been crossed: ocean acidification (but only just), aerosol pollution, and stratospheric ozone depletion – where an international agreement banning CFCs is slowly reducing the ozone hole we created.

4) If NZer's want to reduce their consumption of resources and energy to a sustainable level we need to reduce our use to at least 50% of current levels. This is of course what we should do if we believe in fairly sharing the resources provided by Papatuanuku that we take for granted every day. Think energy, minerals, fresh water, food, a life supporting atmosphere, living oceans, topsoil, forests, etc etc. We are using far more than our fair share per capita. There are billions of people whose consumption needs to rise simply to meet their basic food, shelter, health etc requirements. We need to consume much less so their living standards can rise to a basic level.

5) Taking into account this basic information we would suggest it is wise to reassess our future direction and confront the realities of a post carbon society now. In the context of this exchange that means all airport companies and airlines will have to do everything they can to discourage people from flying. Tourism should not be encouraged because it has a high carbon impact. We need to reassess our priorities and only fly when absolutely necessary.

6) None of the required changes essential to our collective survival are likely to happen if our decisions continue to be driven by the profit motive.

7) We would like to highlight the current increase in litigation in your industry globally. *"A wave of [anti-“greenwashing” litigation](#) is seeking to hold major players in the aviation industry to account for sensational claims of being sustainable, low-carbon or contributing to net zero. While the industry has faced legal backlash in the past, the dramatic proliferation of these cases may spell disaster for major airlines."*

[Airlines are being hit by anti-greenwashing litigation – here's what makes them perfect targets.](#)

8) There are also a range of concerns we would like to add regarding the risks of future global warming and climate mitigation action to the air travel industry:

- Increasingly inclement and unpredictable weather will make air travel trickier. People will increasingly look for more reliable modes of travel.
- Air travel is destined to become more expensive due to the increased cost of SAF (sustainable aviation fuel – probably mostly from biofuel) relative to fossil fuels. International travel has gotten a “pass” so far, but this can't last. [A recent analysis](#) suggested that SAF is about twice the price of fossil kerosene.
- There will be growing political pressure not to devote farmland to growing crops for SAF. With much of the world already suffering from hunger, crop failures due to accelerating global warming will make this worse. Where there is a trade-off between feeding people and bringing in tourists, the tourist industry will lose.
- Even with SAF, nearly half the warming due to long to medium distance air travel is due to changes to the stratosphere, where these planes fly, and not from exhaust CO₂. Water is rare in the stratosphere and aircraft contrails add a lot. And, water is an intense greenhouse gas. At the same time, stratospheric clouds tend to bottle more heat into the atmosphere than reflect incoming solar radiation back to space. Burning anything to keep airplanes flying in the stratosphere is essentially unsustainable in a warming world.

9) Bill McEwan is a CKM member who wrote to the Marlborough Airport company on more than one occasion in an attempt to highlight the issues we are again raising in our contribution to this focus group. Other than one brief acknowledgement to his first letter dated July 14th, 2021 he received no response to his correspondence. It may well be that MAL management deemed his correspondence

represented an extreme view and that they therefore had no need to take it seriously? We think it would have been quite reasonable for MAL to show basic etiquette towards the concerns of a local ratepayer (and a representative of our local climate action group), by responding to his very pertinent questions.

Conclusion -

We realise that it is unlikely MAL will seriously address the matters Bill raised and that are included in this document. The economic imperative drives us all onwards towards disaster. It appears that facing the true reality of our predicament requires more than we can collectively give. To be honest with ourselves is just too daunting. How much worse will things get before this mindset changes? Therefore we don't make this contribution wanting to denigrate MAL but rather to highlight the very difficult challenges facing all of humanity. The issues that MAL must confront are the same issues we all must confront. Together we have kicked the can down the road for too long now.

We believe the time for incremental changes to our existing economic system and trying to incentivise businesses to change their business models are well past. Is there some way we can greatly reduce our consumption so we can retain a viable biosphere and at the same time maintain a functioning economic and social structure? We don't know the answer to this question. There are theories and ideas for alternative ways of organising our world that if executed may indeed help by prioritising our collective and planetary wellbeing over profit.

For instance a steady-state economy follows two key principles in order to stay in balance with the living world:

- 1) Never extract more than ecosystems can regenerate.
- 2) Never waste or pollute more than ecosystems can safely absorb.

What we are convinced of is the certainty that continuing business as usual will result in the ever increasing frequency and magnitude of disruptions to our lives and to the lives of every other species on our amazing planet.

We wish to finish with some quotes that we hope will stress the seriousness of what we all face.

Antonio Guterres -

“The era of global warming has ended. The era of global boiling has arrived.” This statement was made after **July 2023 had become the hottest month in the past 120,000 years.**

He also said that ***“humanity has opened the gates of hell”*** by unleashing worsening heatwaves, floods and wildfires seen around the world and that a ***“dangerous and unstable”*** future of 2.8C global heating, compared with the pre-industrial era, was awaiting without radical action.

At the COP27 climate change summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, he said ***“We are in the fight of our lives, and we are losing. Greenhouse gas emissions keep growing, global temperatures keep rising, and our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible. We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.”***

Pope Francis -

“The idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology ... is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry at every limit.”

“Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start.”