

# **The Human Race: Extinction or a sustainable future?**

**Bob Douglas  
Board Chair Australia 21**

# Jared Diamond “Collapse”

- Societies which have historically survived serious environmental challenge are those which have been able to adjust their cultural norms to the new reality.
- In Australia the race is on between environmental degradation and an adequate societal response

# My question and my answer

- **Q. Can we modify Australian culture in a way that will address the complex intertwined social and environmental threats that now confront us before they overwhelm us ?**
- **A. We are not moving fast enough yet**
- **A. We must now engineer a cultural revolution in the values that currently dominate Australian society, and for that matter, much of the human world**

# **Six large interlinked global threats**

- **Climate change**
- **The current economic model**
- **Ecosystem destruction**
- **Global inequity**
- **Peak oil**
- **Risk of nuclear conflagration.**

# **Need for adjustment in the economic model**

- **Free market consumerism is a central contributor to our current predicament**
- **Neo-liberal economics have served their purpose but like all economic fashions will pass**
- **Australia should be leading the way to an economy that addresses wellbeing and sustainability**

# **A better world is achievable**

- **The “Great Transition” described by the Global Scenarios Group**
- **A new version of globalisation centred on**
  - **Quality of life**
  - **Human solidarity**
  - **Environmental resilience**
  - **An informed and engaged citizenry**

# The Great Transition

- “Policy world”, “Fortress world” and “Market world” scenarios produced deeply undesirable outcomes
- **Great Transition Characterised by**
  - Population stabilization
  - Redistribution of resources
  - Modified agricultural technology
  - Changed human relation to environment

# Effecting the Great Transition

- **Drastic changes needed in**
  - Conventional values
  - Economic arrangements
  - Social arrangements
- **Four agents for change**
  - Intergovernmental organisations
  - Trans-national organisations
  - Spiritual communities
  - **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT**

# Need for change in values and beliefs in Australia

- **SEEPS**
  - **Stewardship**
  - **Economy**
  - **Empowerment**
  - **Purpose**
  - **Solidarity**

# Stewardship

From

- “My home and my land are my castle and I can do what I like with them”

To

- “I am steward for this small part of the planet and I need to care for it in such a way that my descendents will have a life”

# Economy

From

- “It’s the economy stupid!”

To

- “It’s Nature’s economy stupid!”

# Empowerment

- **Margaret Mead: It is small thoughtful committed groups of individuals who change the world.**
- **Paul Ehrlich: Pre-occupation with “here and now” ; few think about the future or the “over there”**
- **Australians currently cynical and disempowered; Need to restore our self belief that we can control our destiny**
- **We can change the world, and we must, if our kids are to have a future**

# Purpose

- Advertisers, and shopping malls are defining the purpose of our lives.
- Human wellbeing depends not on what we own
- But on having meaning, purpose and fulfilment in our lives.
- The vital importance of relationships, community and infrastructure.

# Solidarity

- **“This is our country and.....”**
- **But it is also a large part of the planet**
- **And our affluence is accidental.**
- **And we are now part of a globalised inter-dependent world**
- **No viable option but to develop solidarity with humans everywhere and Australians could be leaders in this endeavour**
- **Beginning with indigenous Australians**

# Hastening the essential values transition

- **Engineering values change is essential**
- **The need for an epidemiology of values**
- **New community structures to enable people to explore the future in a supportive and non adversarial environment?**

# **An Australian “life centre” movement? (Stephen Boyden)**

- **New community focus on future**
- **“Healthy people on a healthy planet”**
- **Based in school buildings in every community**
- **Networked across the nation**
- **Links across the generations**
- **Discussing the national agenda for sustainability and wellbeing**
- **Experimentation with the idea in Canberra**

# A culture of sustainability

- **Urgently needed**
- **Without it our grandchildren won't survive.**
- **New processes and frameworks needed to hasten the essential rapid cultural change.**
- **Life centres: would they work?**

