



## ENVIRONMENT

# Kiwis' 'eco bling' not fooling the planet

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New Zealanders are using more than their fair share of the earth's resources and "eco bling" such as rainwater tanks and solar heating will not fix the problem, researchers say.

Professors Robert and Brenda Vale, of Victoria University's School of Architecture, are researching environmental impacts using The Ecological Footprint, a technique which measures the area of productive land and water a population needs to maintain its activities and absorb waste in a sustainable way.

At current population levels, each person in the world needs 1.8 hectares - New Zealanders use about five hectares each, Americans use between eight and nine and the Chinese use about two.

Brenda Vale said a study by masters student Carmeny Field showed a high level of mobility was taxing resources.

"Back in the 50s, people didn't travel much. They didn't fly, only used their car at the weekends and mostly walked, cycled and used public transport," she said.

"And the interesting thing is that most of those interviewed (for the study) thought life was pretty good back then. Having more doesn't necessarily make us better off."

New Zealanders needed to think beyond "eco bling", she said.

"People think they can put a rainwater tank on their roof or install solar heating and then carry on their lifestyle as normal, but the changes required are much more far reaching than that."

Robert Vale said countries such as China were "further ahead than us", with high speed electric trains systems which reduced the need to fly.

"It is more difficult for New Zealand because we are small and geographically isolated, but there is plenty we could do such as feeding ourselves, generating our own power and growing bio fuels. People aren't thinking long term and they need to be," he said.

The Vales are using a ration book concept to get study participants thinking about resource use.

"We're trying to get the idea across that there are limits and people will have to make choices in the future. We're not saying you can't drive or fly, but if you choose those activities, you'll need to reduce your footprint in other ways."

- NZPA

36 comments

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**Mike** #36 2:10pm

Don't worry, when oil reaches \$200 in the next 2 years, along with the crashing of the US\$ and the world economy, little isolated NZ will be forced to wake up and pull its head out of the sand.

**duh** #35 2:01pm

That's great thinking but John Key is in charge and is too busy ripping off the hard workers and spending on giant tupperwaks (probably doesn't have the recycleable triangle) to help the environment right now. You'll have to wait for the next dictator.

**andrew** #34 01:34 pm Apr 07 2011

The worst Eco-bling offender. The Heat pump. Lots of plastic, uses nothing renewable apart from electricity made from damned rivers. Bring back the log fire. Modern log fires made from re-usable steel burn clean, use renewable wood and when used in a modern well-insulated house, are very eco friendly, heat the water, and last longer than the 5 years they give a heat pump close to the sea.

**schyler** #33 01:19 pm Apr 07 2011

Finally an eco-scare story that stuff will let comments on! This is typical alarmist nonsense, with a more than a slightly veiled attempt at socialist dogma. Change your ways, change your habits!! WE are all doomed otherwise. I think I saw a cartoon with a similar story line once - Chicken Little I think it was called. While I commend the authors for trying to do something about real environmental issues, like waste and actual pollution - I object to the suggestion that that our lives need to be drastically changes because of our Carbon footprint. And additionally - it should not be called Carbon footprint. It should be called what it is - Carbon Dioxide Footprint. Carbon Dioxide (queue shock and horror from global warming alarmists...) is NOT a pollutant. It is one of the very essential essences of life on this planet. Total CO2 in the atmosphere makes up only (generously estimated) 4% of all greenhouse gases. the rest is all water vapour - look it up if you don't believe me. Do you know of that 4% how much is human contributed throughout the whole world? less than 1%. DO you know of that 1% of 4% is actually contributed by NZers? 0.5%. You get the picture. Calling China forward thinking, regarding carbon dioxide emissions is naive. There is a new coal powered power station going up every week in China. They will still take a cut of global carbon taxes, ala "wealth re-distribution" as western countries pay for their "guilt"

Just silly really, and especially amusing since the weather is just not playing nice with all those very clever (funded) scientists computer model predictions. I know computers - garbage in, garbage out.

**tim** #32 01:17 pm Apr 07 2011

A good reminder of how distant some academics are from the reality of the real world.

**womprat** #31 01:15 pm Apr 07 2011

Reducing resource consumption isn't a realistic way of solving these problems. It's just not going to happen. If you reduce your footprint as a individual, at best your just getting out of the way of someone who cares less and at worst removing your spending power as a consumer. Doing your bit for the environment often amounts to doing nothing either way. You're reducing the demand therefore reducing the price for those who don't care and are ultimately cost-constrained - they'll consume whatever they can and make whatever profit they can. What you should do as a consumer is keep using paper towels, plastic bags, and run your heater all winter while your out driving your SUV on a trip that you could have walked. But you only do so where you patronise the companies that offer recycled materials, carbon neutral and fill up that gas guzzler on biofuel. Your consumer dollar is worth a lot more than your vote these days - you'll notice nothing seems to radically change no matter who's in power, the politicians are the ones that win - but your dollar spent right can radically change things. Capitalism got us into this mess, how about we use it to get out of it? Everybody would have to curtail their resource consumption at once and fairly, which is not going to happen without draconian measures, which won't happen while there are billions to be made in the status quo. Fixing the price of oil and other resources is the only way to go, OPEC can effectively shut down competition to fossil fuel but glutting the market and bringing the price down again, as happened in previous oil crises. A fixed and sensible price means we don't go through cycles of having multinationals clean out our wallets. It's right to want to do something about the environment, but wrong to not think it through. No wonder greenies get so much flak.

**Tim** #30 01:11 pm Apr 07 2011

When has 'Ecological Footprint' been any part of an architect's job description?

**Frabj** #29 01:09 pm Apr 07 2011

Sad but so true. We are years behind the rest of the developed world and while ignore climate change might give us short term benefits now it is going to cost us dearly in the long run.

The move to sustainability should be embraced by us and seen as an business opportunity.

**Trish** #28 01:08 pm Apr 07 2011

The idea of growing bio fuels sounds good until you realise that doing it takes up land that is needed for growing food. It also requires a lot of fertiliser and therefore pushes up the price of fertiliser making food growing more expensive. Every solution seems to have side effects which also have to be taken into account.

**JeffM** #27 01:00 pm Apr 07 2011

Researchers at Vic Uni aye? Do some of my taxpayer dollars go here? Carbon footprints? Eco footprints? Did you

know that Al Gore uses 22 times more electricity to power his mansion than the average U.S. home? He has a zero "carbon footprint" because he has purchased carbon credit offsets. What a hypocrite. All this carbon footprint, eco friendly, save the planet BS is hogwash.

**k1w1Kev** #26 12:59 pm Apr 07 2011

Quote: "Back in the 50s, people didn't travel much. They didn't fly, only used their car at the weekends and mostly walked, cycled and used public transport," she said.

That is the key statement. These eco-nuts won't be happy until our lifestyles return to something similar to the stone ages. Can you feel the guilt?

**Tony** #25 12:54 pm Apr 07 2011

I fly a lot so bought a solar powered watch to offset my carbon footprint. Also I always walk between the domestic and international terminals in Auckland so count me out.

**Geoffrey** #24 12:51 pm Apr 07 2011

Why doesn't the government make a simple step in the right direction that doesn't cost anything, and this is make all new appliances a minimum of three star efficiency? In the future this could be raised to 4 star.

**PaulT** #23 12:49 pm Apr 07 2011

Blah, blah, blah.... And not one single mention of the IPCCs recommendation that people can significantly reduce their "ecological footprint" by.... giving up meat eating. All this talk, the taxes (ETS), the recent unfortunate announcement that drilling for oil and coal are top of the Govt's agenda and what do we get? Some whimpy article telling us not to waste our time using our intelligence. No, you have a Govt to do that for you. They know what's best, so just shut up and keep paying your taxes and life draining petrol prices. We'll fix everything. Eventually. Like bloody hell they will.

**Brown** #22 12:46 pm Apr 07 2011

Why dont more people carpool? If each person just found one other person travelling the same way as them, it would halve the number of cars on the road and halve fuel consumption.

**Lewis** #21 12:46 pm Apr 07 2011

The sad fact of the matter is, average Joe doesn't really care about the environment, he might pretend he does, but at the end of the day hes far more concerned about his own ambitions and problems (maximizing his income, having more luxuries, being able to pay the bills on time, getting from A to B as fast and efficiently as possible, improving his quality of life). If we are too change the way we live, then it needs to start with the government. There needs to be better public awareness, better access to recycling and green energy/travel subsidies, and more investment in renewable technologies that are practical to NZ such as fuel cell research.

**jonno** #20 12:45 pm Apr 07 2011

Judging from your survey, the 47.1% of readers who don't believe the science are truly stupid. I would love to see their peer reviewed scientific evidence (many wont even understand what this means) from real scientific journals to have the counter point of view. The media, including stuff is responsible for this lack of understanding of the science.

**derrenjohn** #19 12:44 pm Apr 07 2011

Well, if Americans use nearly double the resources as we do, why dont the Vales take it up with Obama? Its their system which encourages mindless consumption afterall,and its us who have their crappy capitalist schematic forced on us. Also, where does Australia rank in the scheme of things? This all just sounds like a bunch of wannabe guilt inducing BS.

**Roger Kettle** #18 12:43 pm Apr 07 2011

Weren't the Vales the fanatics who were suggesting we either farm all the cats and dogs etc. or prefably gid rid of them or such like. Gives a measure of the Eco fascist I think.

**Patrick Morgan** #17 12:41 pm Apr 07 2011

Agree: "People think they can put a rainwater tank on their roof or install solar heating and then carry on their lifestyle as normal, but the changes required are much more far reaching than that."

It's time we had a serious conversation about this.

This doesn't mean our lives need to be austere. They could be much richer if we ditch the hypermobility and incessant consumption.

Slowing down. More time for quality of life: time with friends and family, gardening, cooking, working together, building strong communities.

**DanM** #16 12:40 pm Apr 07 2011

Points out absolutely conclusively that the globe is overpopulated, doesn't it. But hush, don't mention that, that's taboo. Even if everyone lived as the Chinese do, and you've got two shows of getting most of the West to do that, we still wouldn't be under the cap.

**ed** #15 12:38 pm Apr 07 2011

Haha I love this term 'eco bling'. It is so true. There is a whole industry of so called eco-products and almost every single one is a victory of marketing over substance if you actually think about it.

**Rad** #14 12:38 pm Apr 07 2011

This is a good example of how stats can be misleading. If we double our population the ratio of used hectares will drop and if we have a billion living here, naturally many will use less and the average will look better. The truth is that China as a country is the worst in the world in gas emission and many other environmental aspects. So give us a break please and let's have a positive approach to the issue instead of the feel-guilt style.

**Lana** #13 12:33 pm Apr 07 2011

Professors of Architecture and they don't have anything useful to say?

Biofuels have been widely discredited as a viable alternative to petroleum. It would take more land than this country even has to grow enough biofuels to keep everything running. Most arable land in NZ has been taken up by forestry, dairy farming, livestock, or crops, all of which are extremely important.

High speed electric train systems? What would they run on in NZ? Oh yeah, coal - replacing one fossil fuel for another at a large expense is hardly 'green'.

If I wrote a research report stating the obvious and then failed to provide an original alternative, I would get a big fat 'D' from my lecturer.

My annual emissions: 1.992 tonnes

**Kiz** #12 12:31 pm Apr 07 2011

we are not the environmental champions that we like to think we are and some of us have known for quite sometime just how much kiwi's abuse of the planet is covered up by our apparent 'green image'..

**Fitzy** #11 12:30 pm Apr 07 2011

So who really decides what a fair share is? Academics? UN policy wonks? shouldn't we all decide, as a species, without deferring to so called experts? Why in every scenario wrought by modern commentators, is the future consistently bleak? Is that not a symptom of a peculiar zeitgeist, and not a genuine insight into the century to come. With language already bent towards a mindset of 'Reduced Footprints', 'Eco-Bling' and 'Carbon Offset', one might assume the media simply goes along with the notions put forward by the good professors. Where is the unbiased challenge, or counter discussion? Shoddy article people.

**nick** #10 12:28 pm Apr 07 2011

So me installing solar heating is now just "eco bling" - but I'm still supposed to generate my own power. It seems that I just can't win really.

**Lewis** #9 12:21 pm Apr 07 2011

So what is the "foot-print" of a pencil? (Hint, it is considerable bigger than you think!)

**Honki** #8 12:19 pm Apr 07 2011

Biofuels ARE one of the major problems of the planet. They displace useful crops in areas they are most often needed. Result is that people go hungry in the poor countries so the West can run their guzzlers. Crazy to us but good thinking according to the greenies.

**Peter** #7 12:12 pm Apr 07 2011

The missing point is that resources are not spread evenly throughout the world. Last time this cropped up it was estimated the NZ land mass had an average of 15 hectares per current population, of which we were only using about 40%. This is not an excuse to be profligate. But any unused local resource is not exportable and therefore not available to anyone else. of course if we got rid of national borders this issue might be valid. But we do have national borders and one of the reasons why we use more is simply because we have more in the first place. I see no reason to feel guilty because other nations are overpopulated.

**Thomas** #6 12:08 pm Apr 07 2011

When China and India stop growing and pumping increasing amounts of pollution into the air i'll stop driving the 15 mins to work and back each day.

Nothing, I repeat: NOTHING we do in NZ will impact the world at large.

Of course we can reduce the amount of local waste going into streams and waterways etc, but nothing we do in terms of reducing energy usaged etc will have any effect on the global climate problem.

The best thing we can do now is build seawalls, and improve infrastructure so our cities don't shut down when it rains a little more than usual.

**d-j** #5 12:00 pm Apr 07 2011

Can the professors please explain how paying the National government's ETS tax helps (cause it beats me!)?

**Richard Clark** #4 11:59 am Apr 07 2011

I so agree, we have been living a lie for decades. I have always had an aversion for traveling long distances to work, however my flying miles have really screwed with my footprint, these days I live in a small community, walk everywhere, work from home and use the internet big time. All I would like is HiSpeed internet and a Rail service that works for me, not for the Governments coffers. We grow our own veg, I grew and made my own wine that will last the next decade :) Every kiwi home needs a garden, every child a hug, today, that is my mantra!

**1** #3 11:59 am Apr 07 2011

I didn't realise that eco-friendly measures such as a rainwater tank or solar heating were so ineffective. Thanks for the heads up, I'll just go back to burning firewood for heat. Much cheaper and as this article has pointed out, there aren't any effective alternatives.

**ian of tawa** #2 11:56 am Apr 07 2011

I have to significantly disagree. NZ has an EEZ of ~4M km squared, or 400M ha, so for our population, ~ 4M people, we can use up to 100 ha/person, using only 5 each shows considerable restraint. if ou only consider land, 268K km squared is 26.8M ha, or 6.7 ha/person. still we are using less than our limit.

A countries ability to polute should be measured off their land area and their population, not some global average to make the rich densely populated countries feel good about themselves.

**Kiwi** #1 11:52 am Apr 07 2011

the more the greenies save the more I can BURN BURN BURN

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