Persuasive Essay on Impact of Overpopulation

The evolution of humans has introduced so many extraordinary findings into the world. However, all things come at a price. If you could turn back time and view your town, city, or even suburb, one-hundred years ago, I guarantee it would be unrecognisable. The reason for this comes down to one word: overpopulation.

From a global perspective, only 50 years ago when the WWF was first founded, there was just over three billion of us on earth. Now, there is almost eight billion, with every one of us needing space – space for our homes, space for our food and space for the infrastructure that our lives so greatly depend on (Taylor, 2013). But now, our overpopulation is limiting this space, reducing it metre by metre every day until eventually, there simply won't be enough space for us all.

Now, although Australia's population is relatively small compared to its vast land mass we are in a unique position. Our ever-increasing tendency to crowd the coastal fringe has proven to be as equally detrimental as countries who have greater populations than us. And so, overpopulation, especially of our major cities, is undoubtedly serious and very much our reality.

My name is Taya Kesby and I am a Professor of Biological Sciences, specialising in Ecology at the University of Sydney. I welcome you to today's TEDxBrisbane Talk on the theme of Selling Fear and why our collective fear of overpopulation is being downplayed and trivialised by the media and our governments, and how continuing to ignore natures call to address this rational fear will affect us and our families in the future.

This was seen, in early April of 2019, when an article published by Independent Australia highlighted the Morrison government's continued commitment to Big Australia while ignoring all the environmental and urban congestion issues that are associated with this policy.

And so, overpopulation remains the elephant in the room. But as our major cities continue to grow exponentially, we're looking at a national crisis. So now is the time that we come to realise that there is a trade-off between "quality of life" and "quantity of life." There is so much we can do to reduce the suffering caused by our overpopulation, but recognising that this is a perilous problem, constitutes as a critical first step. Hence, I am here today, to break the taboo around overpopulation and to encourage you all to take initiative in this fight for our future. Because truths must be told, and I want you, as current and future leaders of our community to be pragmatic about this problem, and to sign my Change.org online petition.

Now, I want to begin by firstly discussing with you how the impact of our densely populated cities has stretched far beyond our coastlines. And in light of Australia's recent climate disasters, from our droughts to fires to floods, it's not hard to see how vulnerable our food and water resources have become. However, on the front line, it is the spread of our urbanisation that has pushed housing and commercial development further onto, already sparse, high-quality farmland that has had the largest implications on the loss of these resources. And indeed, some may argue that; because Australia is such a large country, that we have such a large landmass to cultivate. But what these people fail to recognise is the distinctive nature of Australia's geography, as only 6% of Australia's available land is arable (Australian Bureau of Statistics,

2018). In addition to this, recent research undergone by the Foodprint Melbourne research team, based in the Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Melbourne, has also discovered that if our major cities, particularly Melbourne, continue to swallow farmland, then by 2050, major city foodbowls will only be able to provide 18% of all food needs (The University of Melbourne, 2020). And so, this is why I'm emphasising the urgency of this issue because it seems that after time and time again the government forget that future famine goes hand in hand with overpopulation. And because of this, I am calling for a comprehensive review of our cities plans and how they intend on feeding our growing populations, and by introducing measures to protect our foodbowls.

Not only has our overpopulation diminished our food resources in recent years, but there are also important economic concerns related to the overpopulation of our cities. One of the most concerning scenarios we currently face here in Australia is the rising risk of unemployment. Put the potent mix of overpopulation and a population eager to work together, and you get an unemployment rate that looks to skyrocket, well above comparable developed countries.

And maybe you've experienced unemployment before, and the struggle to make ends meet, to support your family. Well unfortunately, there is still more than 800,000 Australians, just like this, who are unemployed, with these numbers continuing to rise (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). Emphasising this, Reserve Bank of Australia economist and former editor at Business Spectator, Callam Pickering also voices his concerns in that, "these are not normal times. Australia's overpopulation of cities and rising participation has instead put upward pressure on unemployment, that in turn, will continue to see our unemployment rates surge" (Janda, 2019).

So, whether it is that you have experienced unemployment, or have been lucky enough to dodge this bullet, there is no denying that we all have something at stake here. Because as the population of our cities continues to explode, the government are pushed to divert more of its expenditure to support the unemployed placing additional strain on our national budget. Of course, the flow-on effect of this means that we will continue to see less money being spent in areas such as public facilities like parks and pools for our children, hospitals, childcare centres and education. All that are so essential for our prosperous life here in Australia.

And finally, as we continue to see urbanisation boom at an unprecedented rate, it has more evident that overpopulation in these denser areas, is the main cause of infectious disease outbreaks, and in some cases, epidemics. Take Brazil, for example, a highly dense country of over 211 million people. In 2015, Brazil experienced one of the worst outbreaks of the Zika virus to ever affect mankind, causing an estimated 1.3 million cases and 96 deaths (Heukelbach, Alencar, & de Oliveira, 2016). Being easily spread between individuals, like most infectious diseases, the virus was proven to be a pernicious urban problem, with dense populations providing a ready conduit for its spread.

But why do I raise this with you? Well because, although our population hasn't reached density levels quite like countries such as Brazil, our growing population and increasing density of our cities reflect similar trends to Brazil's population distribution. And as our cities move towards higher densities, the risk of disease is becoming very real. And what's more, is that what I've seen as a Professor of Biological Science, particularly in the last few months, is that our current struggle to maintain vaccine supplies will only worsen with time. (3) It was only 9 months ago that Australian GPs and pharmacies found themselves rapidly running out of the flu vaccine

amid unprecedented numbers getting immunised against the infection (Aubusson & Mannix, 2019).

So, where does this leave us? With Australia's population projected to increase by 60% by 2050 and Melbourne and Sydney's populations expected to boom by 80%, to reach an enormous 8 million per city, it's certainly looking crowded (Parliament of Australia, 2019). So, what can we do? Even more so, what can you do?

Well, there's just one thing I ask. Regardless of whether you think that our overpopulated cities are the defining issue of our time, don't think it's a real problem, or lie somewhere in between, it is so crucial that we have these conversations without further polarising the debate. Because, the sooner our communities unite to decide on fair and just population policies, the closer we will get to a change for the better. And so, I call on you to sign my online petition and by doing so, putting pressure on the government to make changes and rethink our population targets.

So, are you going to allow this crisis to unfold before you? Or are you going to be the one to make the hard decisions, to start these difficult conversations and confront the elephant in the room?