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The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Sir / Madam,

I will assume that the committee has received enough submissions detailing “peak oil” theory that I need not go into depth with it here. However, I will urge you to take this concept seriously. As a 23 year old (and representing other young professionals), I must say I am *not* comforted by so-called “optimistic” claims that a global oil production peak will not occur until 2020 or even 2030. By that time, my age group will be well advanced in our personal careers and family lives, and disruption associated with peak oil will be even less welcome than if it occurs tomorrow!

Gone are the days when we can dismiss such problems as “not in my lifetime”.

Our society is addicted to growth. If we are not growing we are perceived to be falling behind. This outlook is so popular that any concept – however sound – that proposes limits to growth is shunned as left-wing propaganda and essentially ignored.

I urge this committee to take seriously the idea that there is a limit to growth. If we are genuine about the sustainability of our country, then we need to be serious about the long-term expectations we are placing on our resources. Finite resources cannot support infinite growth.

We must also accept that even renewable energy is a finite resource, in the sense that ultimately, there is a maximum amount of solar energy that can be harvested each year. New technology (eg fuel cells) may help us to realise that maximum energy production level, however technology will not allow us to grow beyond it.

In long-term strategic planning for sustainability, we *must* calculate the maximum sustainable level at which we can expect to harvest renewable energy. If we find that there is less renewable energy available than our current energy demand, then – far from planning for more growth – the best-case outcome would be planning for *no further growth* and striving for an increase in efficiency within the current system. The outcome may well be more radical than this. But because it is as yet unknown, I urge this committee to rigorously and realistically investigate the possibility of a “100% renewable energy” scenario as an integral part of strategic planning.

A few ideas to reduce the energy demand of our society:

- Promotion of organic produce (eg via government-sponsored business loans to assist farmers in changing over to organic methods, government-led advertising campaigns etc), especially cereal crops
 - o Reduces the input of energy-intensive (and often petroleum-based) chemicals
 - o Reduces the impact of agriculture on the land
 - o If locally sourced, then this reduces energy-intensive transport
- Assistance for city-based businesses to decentralise and set up offices in the suburbs
 - o Reduces the number of commuters into the CBD and will allow employees to more easily seek accommodation within walking/cycling distance from their workplace
 - o Takes advantage of modern IT, which can connect remote offices via a common computer network
 - o If planned appropriately, boosting suburban business centres may go hand-in-hand with increasing suburban access to public transport
- Increased support (especially safe tracks) for cyclists, mopeds, etc. and promotion of these modes of transport from an environmental and health perspective
- Promotion of and assistance for decentralised (eg community scale) biodiesel, ethanol, methanol, and cineole production initiatives, and any associated vehicle conversion facilities
- Widespread, in-depth public education programmes regarding concepts like “limits to growth”
 - o May inspire community-level action as well as personal contemplation about luxuries versus necessities

I am sure you will receive submissions with many more detailed ideas than these, so I will spare you from further detail in this letter. Suffice to say, I am of the conviction that some formal government recognition of limits to growth is well overdue, and given the current instability of oil production, now seems like an appropriate time to begin the process. We can adjust smoothly to a situation of lower absolute energy use *if and only if* we accept the need to do so!

I thank you for your time, and I will observe the progress of the inquiry with great interest.

Yours sincerely,

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