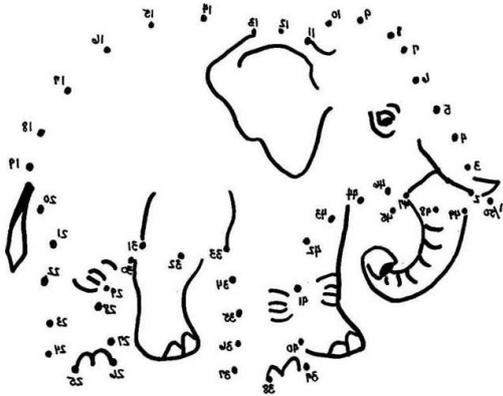


## Joining the Dots

© Glenn Wilson - May 2012



When some people view a dot picture puzzle the hidden image is fairly obvious. For others, it is a jumble of dots with numbers, and the only way they can get to see the hidden image is to go through the process of joining the dots. A few can't be bothered at all and just turn the page.

Joining the dots therefore in the puzzle that is modern civilization, the earth, the ecosystem, the oceans, the natural resources, the atmosphere and our future is easy for some, difficult for others and completely ignored by people who should perhaps know better.

Basically, joining these dots is easy and fairly obvious. They are all directly linked. Yes, there is a direct link between each of those components, and more. The reality is that we are all connected to everything and everyone on this planet.

If I were a scientist (I'm not) and my field of study was in atmospheric, or oceans, or energy, or geology, social science, or health, I would be very keen for the policy and decision makers to develop a greater understanding of joining the global dots.

If the process of joining the global dots can be understood by me and many other 'untrained' but interested and concerned inhabitants on the earth, why do our governments and our policy makers appear to be not getting it?

In simple rural terms; if we overstock the paddock, very soon the paddock is ruined and unable to support even a sustainable population. If we fish out a favourite fishing spot, beyond its natural ability to replenish what stocks we have taken, the fisher loses interest, the tackle shop loses a customer and the fisher's family goes hungry. If we create a desert where farming land once existed, we either have to find or clear more farmland or people go hungry or die through starvation. If we use something that cannot be replaced, it is gone forever, never to be replaced in its original form (think fossil fuels, oil, coal, gas). And if we over allocate the fresh water supplies that run in our rivers and we experience a period of below average rainfall, not only does the environment suffer at the hands of humans but those whose livelihoods depend on a guaranteed supply of water suffer. Who remembers the recent decade of drought?

If a farmer uses up all the easily available fossil fuels in the manufacture and operation of his machinery and the sowing, harvesting and transport of the 'fruits of his labours' to markets all around the world, what does he/she do when the supply runs out or becomes prohibitively expensive? What do the consumers do? If the supply of artificial fertilizer is restricted or Peak Phosphorus becomes a reality, how are the agricultural productivity levels going to meet the growing demand for food by an increasing global population?

And when we shift our focus to urban areas, seemingly similar challenges without easy solutions can be envisaged.

If the production of energy to drive the metropolis increases the level of gasses in the atmosphere that affects our weather which also has an effect on our oceans, both in

their ability to sustain life and maintain their levels, what then happens to the inhabitants' desire or need to eat ocean produce? For those who live quite close to the ocean and not much above the current high tide mark, how will they adapt? Remember too that the vast majority of cities around the globe are increasing in population and spreading out into the surrounding country and coastal areas.

Already the astute reader will see an emerging picture as the obvious dots connect.

The paddock earth is currently overstocked. The caretaker (us) in this case has no plan to limit or destock to a level that is truly sustainable. Population is the elephant in the room. Consumption is the hippopotamus. Very few people acknowledge this, nor are there real plans to deal with population control. It is business as usual because our economic, social, political and financial systems are based largely on continued growth.

If the dots that are greenhouse gasses are linked to the dots that are humans and the stated aims of several governments around the world are to reduce greenhouse gasses by a percentage of an arbitrarily chosen year levels by an arbitrarily chosen year in the future, how will this be achieved if over the same period the population is forecast to grow? Meanwhile our many governments continue to subsidise fossil fuel industries, not by millions of taxpayer dollars, but by billions of taxpayers' dollars? Your taxpayer dollars!

Is this wise?

Could it be that either the decision makers in our elected governments don't get the 'dot thing', or are they beholden to corporations for political donations and support, or worse still, they are simply not telling the truth and are acting for their short term interest or even worse, they just don't care or don't want to know?

What then goes on in the minds of those who cannot easily see how all things are, in one way or another, related?

In a paradoxical sort of way, the answer might just be in joining a few more dots. For many of us life has not been better. We live in an era of unprecedented wealth, comfort, abundance and opportunity. Technological advances have given us greater life expectancy, communication and information possibilities never seen before, unlimited travel opportunities, leisure and entertainment and choice. We have so much that it is easy to take it all for granted. We have worked hard, collectively and individually, to get this far, and from our air-conditioned, woollen carpeted, surround sound equipped entertainment rooms (with a fully stocked bar in the corner) we can immerse ourselves in fantasy, reality or anything in between.

All of this comes at a cost though. Apart from the capital cost there is an environmental cost to everything we do, buy, travel to or consume. And it is that environmental cost which is usually put on the global credit card. The longer it takes for humanity to pay off this environmental credit card account, the greater the interest debt and the greater the ultimate cost will be. Much like those bits of plastic most of us carry in our wallets and purses.

Around the globe there are millions, maybe even billions who do not have a credit card and who would probably stare at you in disbelief if you tried to tell them of credit cards' existence and their prolific nature and use in other countries and societies. Many of these people have way less "stuff" compared to what the average westerner in our affluent society has, and many live a week on less than the average worker in our country earns in an hour. Their individual impact on the environment is often much less as well. They eat less, they live shorter lives, they don't travel around as much, nor do they have investment properties.

Are we, in our comfortable, well supplied homes and lives, about to relinquish some of this wealth and abundance to balance the global impact of our lives with the lives of the less fortunate? Do we resent and resist the efforts made by the millions and billions who aspire to a 'better life' made possible by the consumption of the earth's natural wealth? Do we connect the dots and realise that the remote controlled entertainment system, as well as our shoes, clothes, coffee machines, Ipads, Ipods, processed foods and other creature comforts we enjoy are created by the labours of these aspiring 21st century wannabes? Do we really believe in a "fair go"?

Many humans it seems are preoccupied with individual survival. For some this may be interpreted as finding a place to shelter from the elements, finding and preparing enough food to keep oneself alive or expanding one's empire of corporations and operations to exploit the rich mineral resources they have, by whatever means, gained the rights to. It has been reported that a wealthy Australian woman earns around \$600 a minute! Okay....That equates to \$36,000 an hour. Just click on the calculator and figure out what that equates to per annum!

Why?

Because she, and others in a similar situation, can, does it mean they should? Are they exploiting abundant but finite natural resources that will leave a huge mess which needs cleaning up? What do the dots on her picture puzzle represent when joined?

This type of universal behaviour, exemplified by the wealthy and the mega wealthy, leads me to question whether many just haven't got the environmental global dot thing; or believe if they have great wealth and assets (the more the better), they will be able to protect themselves and their loved ones from the ultimate consequences of bankrupting the earth's environmental account.

History consistently shows that all parties, including the big, excessive ones, end. After every big party all that is left are hangovers and a huge cleanup. Someone has to do it and someone has to pay for it. History is also littered with collapses, bankruptcies, failures and lessons ignored.

If you, like me, have been able to join a few dots, then you may be left wondering what our future brings.