

Title: Confronting the growth paradigm

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Modern industrial culture operates on the premise of perpetual material growth, yet it is abundantly clear to many that there are physical limits to both the Earth's resources and to its capacity to absorb our waste. Unless current growth trends can be curbed, therefore, we will reach crucial limits, with potentially catastrophic consequences for most life on earth. A rapidly degrading environment and severe species loss are two indicators that such limits may be looming.

In 1998, Donella Meadows (a Systems Analyst with MIT) wrote a paper entitled "Leverage Points, places to intervene in a system". Essentially it proposes a generic hierarchy of means by which any system can be altered. The key idea is levers higher on the hierarchy, like belief and mindset, trump those lower down such as constants and numbers.

Our government firmly believes that endless pursuit of maximum economic growth is good for us and sustainable. So, assuming Donella Meadows is right, why not try confronting this delusion at the mindset level, and, if that can be changed, a cascade effect will occur, transforming the entire system? Thus the idea of the Hampden Union Challenge Debate was born.

The idea of the debate is to get the highest government MPs possible to defend their beliefs against an intellectually robust opposition. Publicity from our first debate secured us a second debate with National Party MPs early in 2011.

Our hope is that asking this simple yet immensely important question will encourage more NZers to demand that our leaders confront this crucial contradiction.

Systems approach: Ranked intervention points (Donella Meadows, 1998)

- 1 **Transcending paradigms** (i.e. Stepping outside any paradigm)
- 2 **Mindset of paradigm driving system** (rules, delays, goals, structures, parameters)
- 3 **Goals of system**
- 4 **Power to "self organize"** (add, change, evolve, tech advance etc things lower on this list)
- 5 **Rules of system** (incentives, punishments, constraints)
- 6 **Structure of information flows** (who has access)
- 7 **Gain around driving +ve feedback** ("Success to the successful")
- 8 **Relative strength of -ve feedback** (eg thermostat)
- 9 **Delay relative to system change** (eg speed of information)
- 10 **Structure of stock and flow** (capacity)
- 11 **Sizes of buffers and stocks relative to flow** (storage)
- 12 **Constants, parameters, numbers** (eg how much we open the tap)