

## Is the Sustainability Debate Here to Stay?

At the core, sustainability means survival. From an anthropocentric point of view, as we often view the world, this essentially means the survival of the human species. So, how does one ensure the survival of the human species amidst a range of pressures including economic growth, population growth and associated depletive impacts on natural resources? In order to answer this question, one must ask what we as a species would do if there were an unlimited amount of resources, and none of our activities impacted on the environment. The answer is nothing. Consider the reasons for the emergence of the first pollution control and resource management laws. In medieval Europe, the demand for wood grew so much that laws were passed in regions from Venice to England to protect some forests. Air pollution from wood and coal fires was severe enough to force the need for air pollution control regulations. There are even records of royalty moving from one castle to another to escape dense wood smoke from fires, and Edward I forbade coal burning in London when Parliament was in session.

Later, by the second half of the 19th century, over-hunting and habitat destruction are leading to the extinction of passenger pigeon and near extinction of plains bison in North America. Reaction to these impacts brings controls on hunting, and the creation of national parks, particularly in Canada and the United States.

Sustainability in context...

“In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, how to make the economy grow faster was a key question. Over time, it was believed that the economy did better when individuals and companies pursued their own self interest. From about 1850, however, people began to realise that uncontrolled growth was beginning to undermine the capacity for further growth. It was recognised that you also need to maintain the social conditions for growth.

Social welfare came to underpin greater prosperity and better living standards and economic development, not just growth, because the priority. From 1950 onwards, environmental conditions entered as a necessary part of the equation for development. By the end of the 1980s, that argument matured into the notion of sustainable development. The addition of the nineteenth century welfare and twentieth century environmental components has given us the three pillars that help define sustainable development in the twenty first century: economic, social, environmental.”

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