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## Ageing paranoia, its fictional basis and all too real costs

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Over the past decade, demographic ageing has become a preoccupation of governments and social scientists globally. It is presented as a threat to prosperity, requiring bold policy measures to moderate and mitigate its impacts. A common response is to boost population growth, through encouragement of larger families and increased immigration quotas. Even among nations whose populations are still growing strongly, and who currently have a small proportion of people over 65 years of age, the fear of ageing has discouraged action to reduce population growth.

At the same time, concerns relating to planetary limits, including food security, water scarcity, loss of natural environments and biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel dependence, are becoming ever more acute. Population pressure is the acknowledged driver of all these challenges, but the future projected growth is taken as a fact over which we have no influence. Equally accepted is that this growth will be limited. Most reports refer to nine billion as the maximum number to be accommodated, although this estimate is long out of date.

These contrasting agenda reveal a glaring inconsistency. Population growth is readily accepted as a policy choice, when arguments are made for stimulating it. It