

Review of 1st Liveable Futures Report: Food of Mass destruction by Jaime del Val

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Introduction to the global crisis: An existential risk

The environmental crisis is recognized as an unprecedented existential threat, supported by countless reports from experts and international institutions (Ripple et al., 2017). The IPCC reports from the United Nations, the statements presented at successive COPs, and the resolutions approved at the United Nations Assembly identify the environmental crisis as a risk to humanity.

Echoing these multilateral initiatives and reflecting this concern based on the consensus of the parties and scientific evidence, the *1st Liveable Futures Report: Food of Mass Destruction: How Exploiting Animals Drives Us to Extinction* (del Val, 2023)² indicates that the food industry “and particularly that of animal-based food is the major force behind biodiversity loss and climate change currently threatening the earth system and the possibility of a liveable future, a crisis widely considered as an imminent existential and extinction threat” (del Val, 2023, 8). Thus, the report does nothing more than recognize what the FAO had already pointed out, that is, if we want to reduce carbon emissions to combat the climate crisis, we must change our eating habits, especially the consumption of meat and dairy products.

The changes that humans are bringing about on the planet—using aggressive technologies and destructive economic activities and processes—have given rise to the Anthropocene. Scientific studies often speak of climate change as a threat to the integrity of the biosphere, which could jeopardize the human food system due to the disruption of water, nitrogen and phosphate cycles, and changes in the biodynamics of flora and fauna. However, this report turns the tables and points to the food system as the *major cause* of bioclimatic disorders, placing the threat in its own structure.

Therefore, this report considers that, if we want to avoid going down the slope of this abyss, “the global reduction of animal products in food is a primordial measure” (del Val, 2023, 8) thereby avoiding, as a result, a whole chain of negative phenomena that bring us closer to collapse. This measure is the guarantee of “avoiding a climate catastrophe, for regenerating the Earth’s ecosystems, whose functions are core to life, for avoiding millions of human deaths, for ensuring food security and for undoing the major historical source of systemic animal abuse and its central role in the crisis” (del Val, 2023, 8).

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² See <https://metabody.eu/1st-liveable-futures-report/>



Global warming is part of a broader set of interconnected problems. Therefore, the report points out five key factors of this environmental and existential crisis: Climate change, the sixth mass extinction, threats to human health, animal suffering, and the depletion and pollution of land, sea and air. These factors have a main cause, the human food system, “the major driver of mass extinctions, animal abuse, climate change, pollution, pandemics, depletion of water, food insecurity, poverty, mass migrations, and social conflict, and other multiple threats to humans themselves” (del Val, 2023, 6). This report breaks down the consequences of these thematic units, providing a multitude of reports and scientific studies. Specifically, the report gathers “existing scientific evidence from over 100 studies from the past 20 years about the core role that the Animal Exploitation Food Industries (AEFI) have in the historical and present development of the Planetary Extinction Crisis (PEC)” (del Val, 2023, 9). However, this scientific evidence overlooks the keys to the problem, in particular, the exploitation of sentient beings. In this sense, a fundamental contribution of the report is to add the keys that allow all elements to be interconnected in an integral and systemic way, exposing the already recognised fact that ecosystem health, animal health and well-being, and human health, life and freedom are inseparable. United Nations already recognises the right to a clean healthy environment as fundamental human right. The missing piece of the puzzle is thus the recognition of animal rights as fundamental human right, hindered mainly by the food industry.

The report synthesises over 100 previous reports by United Nations, governmental commissions and high-profile scientific commissions that state that animal-based food is the major source of climate change, biodiversity loss, human health problems, human inequality and of course, animal suffering. The report coins the mentioned acronym “AEFI” for highlighting the central, present and historical role of this industry in the crisis, and pushes for a renewal of global legal frameworks that recognise the rights of all life forms as condition of possibility for a liveable future for humans themselves, while exposing the interconnection of the core role of shifting diets away from animal products with a voluntary reduction of overconsumption and overpopulation.

Despite the well-founded evidence of this systemic crisis, the reality of state actions in the face of this unprecedented challenge starkly contradicts the facts, as only cosmetic partial measures are being applied without any significant change in any of the factors causing the crisis. Far from decreasing, all the factors of the crisis continue to grow. It can be asserted that all states, to a greater or lesser extent, neglect their duty to act reliably against what is recognized as the greatest challenge in history. A duty that should focus on an immediate shift to plant-based diets, the main priority “to prevent catastrophic climate change and avert an unliveable planet by 2050 besides numerous other immense benefits for animal welfare, biodiversity, human health, equality or food security” (del Val, 2023, 6). Consequently, the report states “that states are committing crimes against humanity and life on Earth at large, and violation of fundamental and human rights by actively promoting, concealing and not taking any effective measures against the most destructive industries, which currently threaten a liveable future on earth” (del Val, 2023, 8). This connection between scientific consensus, existential risk and political inaction is the main novelty highlighted by the report, and it represents a call to action that connects dots that other reports fail to land.

Indeed, the report is presented a result of the research done for the Lawsuit against 46 states presented in August 2023 at the European Court of Human Rights for promoting AEFI as most devastating industries, following climate lawsuits like the “Duarte-Agostinho” case, where six Portuguese children sue 33 states for climate inaction at the same court.



AEFI as Anthropocene vectors

The environmental crisis facing our planet is the result of a series of anthropogenic processes that have significantly altered natural processes. This report highlights the key role of the use of animals as a trigger for the Anthropocene. But, regardless of the reflection on the temporal mark that initiates this new epoch, the report brings to light the history of silence and joins those who raise their voice in recognition of food as a determining problem, both for its ethical justifications and for its consequences for life and its flourishing on Earth:

The problem has been known since the 1960s and 70s and governments in the international community are 50 years late in addressing this issue, which was silenced by climate activists in the past (such as Al Gore). But since 2006 (the year of the famous FAO report on livestock) there has been an avalanche of scientific and institutional reports on the taboo subject, and more and more voices are joining in to denounce it, such as Greta Thunberg or even Bill Gates who recently stated that rich countries should urgently move to 100% vegetable or synthetic meat. Meanwhile, activist voices focused on the problem are growing, such as George Monbiot in the United Kingdom, the ReBoot Food campaign of the international wePlanet movement, or Vegetable Future in Spain (del Val, 2023, 11).

Main impacts of AEFI

We can highlight the main ideas of the report around five key impacts —that can be reduced or mitigated through coordinated action at different levels. These levels, which we will point out later, would be the supra-state multilateral level, regulatory processes applied to concrete realities, the educational level for cultural transformation and communicative processes —following models applied to other complex realities, but successfully overcome. But returning to the key impacts, we point out climate change, mass extinction and destruction of ecosystems, human and non-human health, water, and the value of sentient beings, with their corresponding moral obligations.

1. **Climate Change:** According to the report, AEFI is responsible for generating more greenhouse gas emissions than all global transportation, “with food systems representing 34% of GHG emissions” (del Val, 2023, 19). In addition, the animal-based food industry is the main source of destruction of carbon absorption reserves due to deforestation and dead zones in the oceans.
2. **Mass Extinctions and Destruction of the Terrestrial Ecosystem:** Livestock farming is the main driver of mass extinctions and the loss of ecosystems by using a considerable percentage of the planet's lands:
3. “Food systems are the major driver of transgression of Earth System Boundaries that define liveable conditions for humans on Earth [...], with over a million species and 25% of life threatened with extinction, and around 50% of decline of natural ecosystems [...], a Planetary Health crisis [...] that is defined by experts as major existential threat to a liveable future of humans on Earth” (del Val, 2023, 18).
4. **Human diseases:** The consumption of animal products, especially red meat, is the largest source of human diseases. It is estimated that the consumption of red meat causes more deaths than traffic accidents, with one million deaths per year worldwide. Unhealthy diets related to the animal exploitation industry cause 11.5 million deaths a year, almost twice

as many as tobacco. Additionally, the industry is the major source of pandemics and antimicrobial resistance (del Val, 2023, 20).

5. Water depletion and pollution: The animal exploitation industry is the largest source of water depletion and pollution. It requires large amounts of water to produce food for livestock. Additionally, pollution generated by animal waste and chemicals used in industry negatively affects water quality (del Val, 2023, 21).
6. Planetary Holocaust: with this robust term the report puts at the very centre of the discussion the massive exploitation and killing of animals, overlooked by many other reports that focus on effects of the industry for climate, biodiversity or human health and equality.

I will make a brief reference to the progressive recognition of sentient beings as valuable realities due to their ability to have experiences, preferences and states of well-being and suffering that result in moral duties and obligations towards them. The axiological, normative, scientific reflection makes us recognize the AEFI as an industrially unjustified procedure triggering the Zoocide “of 80 BILLION animals slaughtered per year on land and 10 times more in aquaculture estimated as 40 trillion over the past 100 years (100 trillion including fishing), 70% to 99% of them in factory farms” (del Val, 2023, 20). Most of these animals are raised in industrial farms under conditions of suffering, unhealthy confinement, mutilations, and extreme exploitation, ignoring how science has shown that animals are sentient beings, capable of experiencing pain and suffering.

Measures proposed by the report for a food system transition.

From this institutional reference framework, the report synthesises a set of specific regulatory measures. These include advancing in the reduction of consumption of animal products, setting important milestones in 2030 and 2040, and consequently, eliminating cages, animal mutilation, and ultimately, any center of animal production and exploitation in the form of a farm or macro-farm. To carry out these measures, it is necessary to stop subsidising AEFI and instead subsidise a transition towards a new food industry that produces proteins based on plants, algae, and alternative processes such as fermentation or the use of stem cells. These new proteins would replace ultra-processed products of animal origin, which would receive a new pricing policy to discourage their production and consumption. The legal elimination of the use and exploitation of sentient beings would also lead to the end of the breeding of wild animals, their trade, and hunting. In terms of foreign trade, it would mean progressively regulating the import of products that involve adverse impacts, such as deforestation. In terms of communication and lobbying, it would involve publicly informing about the conditions of animals in all farms, pursuing marketing and advertising that falsifies the real impacts of the industry. The global pact on food matters involves investigating the lobby of agri-food industries that are blocking legal advances and, therefore, hindering the sustainable food transition. To make these general measures real, it will be necessary to promote local agriculture and the consumption of seasonal products, self-production, moderate and disperse gathering, and the fight against food loss and waste.

The measures to be adopted for the global food transition would have beneficial consequences in terms of environmental impact, which would allow the implementation of restoration or rewilding strategies for land used for livestock feeding, regenerating deforested soils. New lands would appear and wildlife and biodiversity would increase. The report mentions ecocide as the fifth international crime, that is, “the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory,



whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished” (Higgins, Short & South, 2013, 257). It would therefore follow the demands of Stop Ecocide International (2022) which seek to introduce ecocide as the fifth crime incorporated into the Rome Statute of the ICC, along with war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression. These progressive transformations involve recognizing, defending, and cooperating with indigenous communities, learning from their food systems and triggering a profound change in lifestyles. This implies recognizing that our lifestyle must be transformed, moving away from practices that have generated disconnection with the environment and ourselves, “recovering lost bodily capacities” (del Val, 2023, 65).

This also implies radical degrowth strategies as well as an open debate around the need to voluntarily address the overpopulation problem. Given the five decades of delay due to what the report claims as criminal inaction of states, and that the decade 2020-2030 is signalled by the IPCC as last window of action to avoid catastrophic scenarios, the more we advance, year by year, the more drastic the global emergency should be, yet the measures proposed are also valid for a long term systemic change and adaptation to the catastrophe, towards of renewal of gatherer cultures, undoing the devastating occupation of the earth ensuing since the Neolithic.

The transition towards a social economy based on cooperation and participation, respecting human and environmental rights, is necessary, but it cannot be achieved without a true food transition. Degrowth advocates living with less: With less energy consumption, with fewer goods that require the extraction of finite resources from nature. But these measures cannot have a real impact without a transition towards a diet free of animal suffering and exploitation. Diet shift is also the measure with quicker and more far-reaching impact. However, it seems to be even more difficult to deal with than fossil fuels because it touches on the foundations of *human supremacism*, as the report persistently denounces, leading to the astonishing fact that this most massive of problems is the elephant in the room that is continually silenced.

The report further proposes working towards a Declaration of the Universal Rights of the Earth and its forms of life and ecosystems, defining a terrestrial justice at the service of all life in the biosphere, and not, like current laws, of ownership and exploitation of an ecocidal species, and defining a Non-anthropocentric Planetary Health where the so-called “Planetary Limits” of habitability are not evaluated only based on human civilization but on the 9 million species and their ecosystems, going from the problematic concept of sustainability.

Conclusion

This report has five major contributions to the existing literature on the subject: (1) the bringing together, synthesising and doing a comparative analysis of a very large amount of existing high-profile reports and studies covering a very wide range of aspects. (2) the development of an integrated frame bringing together all aspects, usually treated separately, for the understanding of, and replies to, the key role of AEFI in the global crises. (3) The outlining of the interrelations between all the interrelated factors and the synthesis of key solutions based on this interrelated vision. (4) The definition of criminal responsibilities of states without palliatives, based on the data presented. (5) The integration of all the above in a philosophical-critical framework which is at the same time transdisciplinary, historical and scientific, as well as legal and activist.

The report itself has aspects more focused on a philosophical and historical analysis, as well as sections more focused on synthesising scientific data and reports, along with a clearly political and

legal dimension that is closely linked to the framework giving rise to the report: an actual Lawsuit against states for their criminal responsibility.

The report is meant as a tool to give consistency to existing and future social movements and actions, legal included, proposing an urgently needed shift in strategy and focus across all areas of activism, as well as for bringing this core issue to public knowledge and to central focus of multiple academic circles where it is largely absent, including in posthuman studies and post-anthropocentrism, but not only.

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