

Commentary

A case for renaming humans - *Homo sapiens* (“wise person”) to *Homo stultus* (“unwise person”)

Michael P. Belanger^{1,*}

¹Oceanographic Environmental Research Society, Barrie, Ontario, Canada

“Human intelligence can be broadly defined as the capacity to understand complex ideas, adapt effectively to the environment and engage in complex reasoning”(3). So does this definition of human intelligence make us the smartest species on the planet? For the purpose of this commentary I would like to focus on the “... adapt effectively to the environment...” aspect of the definition of human intelligence. I would argue that humans are in fact not adapting effectively to the environment. They have been dramatically changing it, which by definition then makes them the most unintelligent or “unwise” species on this planet. Lets look at our planet’s marine environments (oceans, rivers, lakes, coastal habitats, etc) and see how humans have changed these various ecologies over time and whether or not we have been intelligent enough to adapt to these changes.

Waste disposal

The marine environments have been used as a waste disposal system since humans have gathered together into villages of a few hundred individuals which over time have grown into major cities comprised of millions of people. Realizing that it was not intelligent to dump waste material into waterways, waste management control/treatment systems were established. However, the various waste management systems presently being used are often incapable of handling the capacity placed upon them. This results in millions of liters of untreated waste being discharged into the environment. Over time you would think that the waste systems would be built or upgraded to handle the new stresses placed upon them (5, 9). In fact, the opposite continues to happen today where the voluntary dumping of millions of liters of untreated human waste into waterways is still ongoing with the consent of the various government agencies (7).

Pollution

Thousands upon thousands of chemicals are continuously dumped into the marine environment

despite these chemicals causing harm to not only the wildlife but to humans as well. In fact, there have been cases where a government agency has purposely switched the source of a town’s drinking water for a new source that was severely polluted with lead that it caused serious and potentially fatal medical conditions (6).



Microplastics have been found in numerous fish and crustacean, some of which are eaten by humans, leading to some of it now being reported in humans themselves. Humans are filling the planet’s oceans with tons of plastic which is deadly to the various species some of which are found dead, their stomachs filled with this type of material. Although there are numerous grass roots measures to stop plastic from being used/disposed of, it is calculated that plastic will be in the environment for hundreds of years (8).

Millions of gallons of oil is constantly being spilled into our oceans, lakes, and rivers despite assurances from government agencies and companies that the risk of this happening is negligible. Pipe lines break, contaminating rivers which are a source of drinking water for wildlife and humans. Oil is released from ships or drilling rigs and companies and government agencies try to cover up the spill, minimize the amount spilled, or



the damage caused. Oil spills cause not only immediate damage to the environment and humans but it has been shown that it may take decades for the environment to recover from this type of toxic damage (4).

Climate Change

Climate change is now finally being recognized as a deadly human factor that will cause environmental changes and the extinction of possibly up to 50 percent of the world’s species. In fact it has been targeted as the cause of the sixth major extinction event. For decades it was ignored or even denied by various levels of government and



industry. Despite numerous attempts to internationally control the release of carbon dioxide gases, countries are either changing their limits of CO₂ gases or abandoning them completely which leads to higher than permitted emission limits (1).

Resource Sustainability

Overfishing/sustainability of marine species has slowly been addressed and in some cases there has been recovery of some fish stocks. However, some species (ie cod) still have not recovered despite strong measures to allow them to do which might be due to influence of climate change. Meanwhile, other species are now being over fished and in the case of elasmobranchs (sharks/rays/skates), are facing strong challenges towards their survival. It is curious that before Europeans came across the ocean to fish off coast of North America that the ocean was teeming with fish. Within the course of a few hundred years, the fish stocks started showing signs of dwindling numbers which have been blamed on seals and not humans overfishing (2).

So are we the most intelligent species on the planet? We send all types of vehicles into space searching for viable planets and yet here on earth we are destroying the environment to the point of endangering our own existence. We search for life among the stars looking for planets that contain water as it is critical for life yet here on earth we pollute our waters everywhere with plastics, chemicals, and oil. We cherish nature and want to enjoy its benefits yet we are destroying thousands of acres of forests and species per year. We pretend to be compassionate and caring but we savagely cut the fins off of live sharks and throw them back into the ocean.

Have we as humans adapted to our environment or have we abused, changed, destroyed whatever we come across? Politicians spend millions upon millions of dollars on meetings around the world to discuss and propose measures to save our planet and still thousands of species go endangered or threatened every year and our environment continues to be destroyed.



"AS THE CAROLINAS RECOVER FROM HURRICANE FLORENCE, HURRICANE DONALD CONTINUES TO WREAK HAVOC!"

Politicians promise to protect our planet and species living within it yet, once in power, they approve projects that increase the carbon emissions or give permission to industry to exploit protected areas. Governments hand out paltry amounts of money for grants to save the environment that are given out in a highly competitive manner yet millions upon millions in grants or tax benefits are given to companies that continue to produce carbon dioxide or spill oil into our oceans.

I see no adaptation to a changing environment that would show evidence of human intelligence much less some small amount of common sense. In fact our insatiable desire for



another technological gadget to take a better picture with outstrips any desire to protect our ever dwindling environment or resources. Could it be that humans are quite simply the most stupid species to have ever existed? I truly believe that *Homo sapiens* should be re-classified as *Homo stultus*. Our desire to keep on destroying our environment will inevitably result in our extinction. Once *Homo stultus* is gone, maybe then our planet will heal itself from unwise decisions.

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