

FOR WHALES' SAKE

By Jackie Hilderling



The dust has settled after the "Live Earth" concert but debate brews on about whether it indeed helped the environment. The truth will lie ultimately in whether the concert catalyzed a net reduction in the use of the Earth's resources and how many

people were inspired to reduce their ecological footprints by a size or two. This is where the environmental truth always lies; for countries, for communities, and for you as an individual – what's your ecological footprint? How much of the Earth's resources are you using for food, clothing, play, energy, shelter, waste, etc?

Don't get nervous! The beauty of the ecological footprint (EF) concept is that it acknowledges you don't have to be perfect. You will use the Earth's resources; however, you can shape your personal formula for creating positive environmental change and there are so many ways of doing so. You may need to drive a big truck but can opt to avoid

disposable goods, use biodegradable products and/or conserve water. This is not hypocritical. It's measurable!

Calculation of your EF provides an estimate of how much of the planet you use. The concept is simple. There is only one Earth and there are therefore



a finite amount of resources that we have to share. Around 12.5 billion hectares of Earth is productive land and water and the estimated human population is currently 6.6 billion people. Therefore, in a fair world, we would each get about 2 hectares. That's about 6 football fields for all

Your Ecological Footprint

our needs, from food to recreation. Note that this calculation does not account for the +/- 10 million other species we also share this planet with.

Of course, we humans don't currently share equally among ourselves, let alone consider other organisms. Canadians have particularly big ecological feet at 8.56 ha/person while countries like Ethiopia get 0.67 ha/person (2004 data). No surprise there. We are the opulent, the big feet. Our society has been programmed to take lots because it will bring increased happiness. Will it really?

Thankfully, to have a big footprint also means that we are the empowered with a broad menu of choices to make a positive difference. Decreasing your global shoe size is in fact easier than losing weight with more options to increase your and the planet's health. To calculate your ecological footprint, go to www.econauts.org and link to "For Whales' Sake".

Jackie Hilderling is biologist, avid scuba diver and marine educator who works out of Telegraph Cove.