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A comparison of *The Limits to Growth* with 30 years of reality

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Abstract

In 1972, the Club of Rome's infamous report *“The Limits to Growth”* [Meadows, D.H., Meadows, D.L., Randers, J., Behrens_III, W. W. (1972). *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. Universe Books, New York] presented some challenging scenarios for global sustainability, based on a system dynamics computer model to simulate the interactions of five global economic subsystems, namely: population, food production, industrial production, pollution, and consumption of non-renewable natural resources. Contrary to popular belief, *The Limits to Growth* scenarios by the team of analysts from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology did not predict world collapse by the end of the 20th century. This paper focuses on a comparison of recently collated historical data for 1970–2000 with scenarios presented in the *Limits to Growth*. The analysis shows that 30 years of historical data compare favorably with key features of a business-as-usual scenario called the *“standard run”* scenario, which results in collapse of the global system midway

through the 21st century. The data do not compare well with other scenarios involving comprehensive use of technology or stabilizing behaviour and policies. The results indicate the particular importance of understanding and controlling global pollution.



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Keywords

Integrated global model; Limits to Growth; Scenarios; Data comparison; Model validation; Collapse; Pollution

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