

A swelling global population, changing diets and mankind's expanding "water footprint" could be bringing an end to the era of cheap water.

The warnings, in an annual report by the Pacific Institute in California, come as ecologists have begun adopting the term "peak ecological water" — the point where, like the concept of "peak oil", the world has to confront a natural limit on something once considered virtually infinite.

The world is in danger of running out of "sustainably managed water", according to Peter Gleick, the president of the Pacific Institute and a leading authority on global freshwater resources.

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