

# Dawn of the Age of Man

HUMANITY'S exploitation of the Earth's resources has resulted in huge changes to the planet's biochemistry and climate — and has cut short the 11 700-year geological epoch known as the Holocene.

The Anthropocene, or “age of man”, will be deemed to have started in the middle of the 20th century if a recommendation by scientists, submitted yesterday to the International Geological Congress, meeting in Cape Town, is adopted.

That approval process is likely to take at least two years and will require ratification by three other academic bodies.

But after seven years of deliberations, the 35-strong working group has unanimously recognised the Anthropocene as a reality and voted 30 to three, with two abstentions, for the transition to be recognised.

Scientists refer to the period that began in 1950 as the “great acceleration” and graphs tracking

a number of chemical and socio-economic changes make it obvious why.

Rising concentrations in the air of carbon dioxide, methane and stratospheric ozone; rising surface temperatures, ocean acidification, marine fish harvesting; and tropical forest loss, population growth, construction of large dams and international tourism take off from about mid-century.

One of the main culprits is global warming, driven by the burning of fossil fuels. A telltale surge in the spread of invasive plant and animal species is also a legacy of our species.

Among the “array of signals” providing evidence of man's effects on the planet were micro-plastic remnants, man-made substances that “are now components of sediments around the world, on land and in the sea, said Jan Zalasiewicz, a geologist at the University of Leicester, UK. — *AFP*