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Briefing: Scottish Climate Change Bill - April 2009

Reporting Scotland's Consumption

Scotland has responsibility for more greenhouse gas emissions than are produced within our borders. By buying goods produced or processed overseas, we require other countries to emit climate-changing gases on our behalf. WWF Scotland argues that while it is most effective to set statutory targets on our domestic *production-based* emissions, as the Bill currently does, we should at least be aware of our *consumption-based* climate impact too.

The Climate Change (Scotland) Bill should therefore be amended to require that Ministers measure and report annually on Scotland's consumption-based emissions.

In 2004, Scotland's territorial emissions from production were equivalent to 11.2 tonnes of CO_2 per person[1]. Our consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions totalled 16.5 tonnes per person[2]. Consumption-based emissions are higher because although we consume more goods and products than we have done in the past, we have outsourced the production of those in the transition to a service economy.

New research by the Stockholm Environment Institute found that while production emissions from Scotland fell by 13% between 1995 and 2004, Scotland's consumption emissions rose by 11%[3]

Consumption based reporting allows us to see whether we are actually driving down all those emissions for which we are responsible or simply exporting them outside of Scotland. As the consultation document on the Bill said; '*Scottish policies should be designed to impact on the global emissions Scotland causes, not just those we produce*'.

Inclusion of a consumption based reporting requirement within the Scottish Climate Change Bill would strengthen the Bill in the following ways:

1. Global Responsibility:

Fair treatment of other countries, particularly the developing economies to which we have outsourced a great deal of Scotland's production, requires that we recognise the extent to which their production emissions are at our behest.

[1] Greenhouse Gas Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: 1990 – 2006.
http://www.airquality.co.uk/archive/reports/cat07/0809291432_DA_GHGI_report_2006_main_text_Issue_1r.pdf
[2] Calculated by Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) using their Resource Energy Analysis Programme (REAP).
http://resource-accounting.org.uk/downloads/scotland/scotland
[3] Stockholm Environment Institute policy brief: The Need for Sound Carbon Accounting in Scotland (2009).
http://www.sei.se/mediamanager/documents/Publications/Future/scotland_policybrief_emissions.pdf

For instance, the growth in emissions from China is in part fuelled by the export of goods for consumption in the west. A Tyndall Centre study showed that in 2004 net exports from China accounted for 23% of its total CO_2 emissions[4]. This figure is more than double the UK's total emissions.

One objection raised to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions is that China and India's are increasing; by measuring the contribution to those increases that is due to our own consumption, we can rebut this argument against action.

This bigger picture of our impact on global greenhouse gas emissions is necessary if we are to take an internationalist rather than parochial view of our climate impact.

2. Protecting Scottish jobs:

Focussing solely on one indicator carries a real risk of perverse policy outcomes. In greenhouse gas management, fixation on production emissions without any regard for consumption emissions could have a deleterious effect on Scottish jobs, if work is outsourced in order to remove the associated emissions from the Scottish account.

A reliable measure of consumption-based emissions would safeguard against this perverse outcome. Consumption emissions reporting allowing Parliament and the public to identify when emissions have merely been 'hidden' offshore, so incentivising the greening of work at home rather than outsourcing.

3. Improved information for policy makers:

The Resource Energy Analysis Programme (REAP), used by the Stockholm Environment Institute to measure consumption-based emissions, delivers a Carbon Footprint, a Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Footprint, and an Ecological Footprint. REAP breaks down these figures so that, for example, private travel, transport services and construction of vehicles are all measured separately within transport emissions. This level of sophistication allows policy makers to better understand the drivers behind changes in Scotland's emissions.

As Ecological Footprint is already a National Indicator, decision-makers are familiar with the concept and government have access to the raw data required to produce a full GHG Footprint.

4. Individual empowerment:

The Footprint is a powerful communication and visualisation tool, allowing for an immediate appreciation of our impact, and demands, upon the global environment. Additionally, it builds public confidence by not excluding 'offshored' emissions, as discussed above.

Secondly, consumption-based emissions relate very much more closely to what the individual experiences and can change. People do not feel empowered directly to alter the way in which their goods are produced or transported, but they can change the way they consume.

Tackling Climate Change. As a nation Scotland could lead the way.

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[4] Tyndall Centre Briefing Note: Who Owns China's Carbon Emissions?
http://tyndall.webapp1.uea.ac.uk/publications/briefing_notes/bn23.pdf