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Our impact - Measuring environmental footprints

Providing robust data and methods to inform UK sustainability policy

Project summary

Accurately measuring the UK's environmental impacts is essential for designing policies that meet Net Zero goals and promote sustainable growth. Traditional metrics, such as territorial greenhouse gas emissions, do not account for the global supply chains behind UK consumption.

This ESCoE project developed new approaches to track the full environmental footprint of UK consumption, covering emissions, materials, water, energy, and land use, and exploring indicators for the circular economy.

The work is supporting the development of improved metrics, datasets, and methods for environmental and circular economy accounting.

"No other dataset provides the same completeness or level of detail as CBA produced by Leeds. The improvements made to the data in recent years have given us more confidence in their accuracy and robustness, which is something the Climate Change Committee has called for in their recent Seventh Carbon Budget publication." **Luke Maxfield, Climate Change Committee**

"While the UK's emissions targets are set on a territorial basis, the consumption-based emissions provide helpful insight to supplement these. As they cover emissions associated with the consumption of goods and services by households in the UK, including emissions in imported good, the measure highlights the global considerations necessary when considering the UK's contribution to climate change." **Defra statisticians**

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Impact

- The project provided new methodological insights for extending the UK's environmental accounts beyond traditional boundaries. Work on consumption-based accounting offers policymakers a clearer understanding of the global environmental impacts of UK consumption, including emissions embodied in imports.
- It will create a more accurate MRIO (multi-region input-output) table to produce UK and England carbon footprint for Defra, devolved region footprints for Scotland and Wales, and footprints for Government Office regions and Local Authorities in England.
- We collaborated with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to identify improvements in environmental footprint datasets and approaches for integrating new indicators into UK statistics. The project will allow shared learning between the ONS and other statistical offices and map out a transparent process for developing ONS statistics of material footprint.
- The results will show the direction of travel for the UK's environmental footprint. This will determine whether Net Zero policy is reducing both the impact of imports and other components of the footprint such as material use and water use. It will also provide a model that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of demand side policy.

Project leads and partners



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National Statistics