

Drink less rather than shower less to save water

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If you are trying to do your bit for sustainability and save water by taking shorter showers, then a new report on sustainability reveals for the first time that there are more effective ways that our everyday choices can have a positive impact on the environment.

For example, the glass of juice you have for breakfast might have used the same amount of water in its production as the amount you have just saved by cutting your shower from 10 to 5 minutes. The milk on your cereal might have used even more.

Balancing Act, a world first that has been developed for the Australia economy by scientists from CSIRO and the University of Sydney, looks across 135 industry sectors of the Australian economy and quantifies the impacts and contributions across ten social, environmental, and financial indicators.

Report co-author CSIRO scientist, Barney Foran, says that sustainability for Australia is a balancing act as we try to make decisions and trade offs in the face of often-competing economic, social and environmental attributes.

"We still need to eat and shower - and it is still worth taking shorter showers to save our stressed urban water supplies - but now consumers have a new tool to help us make more informed choices about different types of products based on a new sustainability rating," says Foran.

This work will help government, industries, and even individual

consumers to look at the resource impact of different goods and services in a whole new light. Different to other studies because of its detailed scrutiny of the full production chain, this report is able to show the full effects - both direct and indirect - of the production of an individual commodity or service, cappuccinos or haircuts.

Balancing Act uses ten social, environmental and financial indicators. The social indicators are employment, income and government revenue. The environmental indicators are water use, land disturbance, greenhouse gas emission and energy use. The financial indicators are profits, exports and imports.

This report is significant because it highlights sustainability challenges for different industries and pinpoints areas in the production chain where a focussed effort would make a significant difference.

All effects are referenced back to a consumption dollar - roughly the dollar spent by a consumer in everyday life. It also shows that each consumption dollar is quite different - some dollars are positive and create employment, or suck in imports or generate government revenue. Other consumption dollars are less positive through their high use of water or production of greenhouse gas emissions.

This relatively simply presentation of highly complex issues make this a powerful tool for people in industry, government and the community who are interested in sustainability to move beyond decisions based on dollars and cents and enable them to make decisions based on a contribution to society, environment, and economy.

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