

Carbon accounting madness makes a mockery of the UK's Net Zero plans, says academic

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Ian Thomson says "“Some of the carbon accounting systems and evaluation processes in the UK are farcical and inadequate.” Credit: University of Birmingham

Government targets to make the UK carbon neutral by 2050 could be worthless if current carbon accounting systems aren't radically reformed, warns a leading academic.

New research shows a worrying mismatch between the most commonly used measures of [carbon](#) and their true impacts, risking bogus net-zero claims, missed opportunities and false positives when it comes to identifying truly effective ways of decarbonising the country.

Under the current international carbon accounting standards used to calculate carbon neutrality, emissions from supply chains, after-sale product use and waste aren't included for businesses and nature-based solutions are often ignored altogether. As a result:

- Supermarkets selling food from UK farms risk having higher reported [carbon emissions](#) than those that import all their products from abroad.
- Schemes that encourage staff to walk and cycle to work may add to a UK business' reported carbon emissions.
- An initiative to save [peat bogs](#) that will absorb and lock in carbon for millennia is deemed LESS carbon efficient than low-energy light bulbs.
- Projects to recycle and reuse won't register as carbon-saving at all.

Professor Ian Thomson, who co-led the research and is an international expert on environmental accounting and expert reviewer for the next IPCC report, is Director of the Lloyds Banking Group Centre for Responsible Business at the University of Birmingham and says:

"Some of the carbon accounting systems and evaluation processes in the UK are farcical and inadequate, lagging well behind net zero thinking and creating a structural barrier to implementing effective solutions. Without robust, reliable and trusted carbon accounting evidence, it's likely that the UK's net-zero carbon transition will be inhibited by poorly-informed decisions based on inappropriate evidence."

The research project is currently working on a program of suggested reforms to carbon accounting protocols that are essential to ensuring any outcome from United Nations' COP26 climate talks, taking place in Glasgow in November, are effectively implemented. He is also working with the Centre for Social and Environmental Accounting Research (CSEAR) on a global survey of accountants to discover how carbon literate they are and evaluate how much climate [accounting](#) is being taught worldwide. Ian is also the lead of the Green Economy which is a strand of the Forum for Global Challenges, organized by the University of Birmingham in May 2022.

His new book, "Urgent Business: Five Myths Business Needs to Overcome to Save Itself and the Planet," will be published by Bristol University Press in February 2022.

More information: Why current carbon accounting methods threaten to undo UK plans for net zero and a Green Industrial Revolution.

www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/...rial-revolution.aspx

Provided by University of Birmingham

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