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Action needed to expose 'hidden' emissions, expert warns

Globally around a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions are being exported through trade and are not being captured within global climate policy. This is the warning of leading sustainability expert Professor John Barrett from the University of Leeds.

Professor Barrett will present the findings of his latest research which is funded by the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC), alongside Tim Yeo MP, at the All Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group on the 22nd October 2013.

Professor Barrett says: "Emissions embodied in trade are rapidly increasing and there is a growing gap between production emissions and those associated with consumption."

The rise of 'consumption-based' emissions is a growing concern due to the absence of a global cap, as well as fragmented polices and significant variation in country-level mitigation ambitions.

Evaluations of the policy options, political responses, and institutional and governance issues associated with consumption-based emissions are still in their infancy.

However, Professor Barrett believes that robust measurements of consumption-based emissions are possible and could provide new insights into policy options for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

This he says could include trade-related policy, such as border carbon adjustments, as well as domestic policies, like resource efficiency strategies.

"As climate policy targets deepen, we need a broad range of policy options in addition to production and technological solutions. There is a pressing need to understand the policy instruments available to implement consumption-side measures, beyond voluntary and information-sharing approaches, if we are to take the decisive action needed to curb emissions," says Professor Barrett.

Consumption-based emissions are complementary to production-based emissions inventories, which are still our most accurate estimate for aggregated emissions at the global level.

However, without consumption-based measures, we will have an incomplete picture of how quickly we are reducing regional and national carbon emissions, warns Professor Barrett.



Consumption-based emissions act as an important reminder of the global challenge of climate change and demonstrate the need for cooperation, innovative mitigation strategies, and the inherent link between consumption, the economy, and emissions.

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