

News release

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Australians worst greenhouse polluters: New figures

A new analysis by the Australia Institute of greenhouse gas emissions shows that Australia has the highest emissions per person in the industrialised world.

Based on official data submitted to the United Nations, the new report shows that Australians emit on average 27.9 tonnes of greenhouse gases each year, more than double the average of 12.8 tonnes for all industrial countries.

Australia's emissions per person are 35 per cent higher than the world's largest polluter, the USA.

The new report for the first time shows changes in per capita emissions for each year since 1990. While the average for industrialised countries has been consistently falling, Australia's has increased each year since 1994.

"Land clearing in Queensland has a major impact on Australia's emissions", said Institute Executive Director Dr Clive Hamilton.

"But if land clearing stopped completely Australia's emissions per person would be 24.1 tonnes, still the highest per capita in the industrialised world."

The report says that it is often argued that while Australia has high per capita emissions, in absolute terms it is not a major greenhouse polluter. This is not the case. For example, Australia's total emissions exceed those of Italy and France, nations with three times Australia's population.

Australia's total emissions are the seventh highest among industrial countries, exceeded only by the USA, Japan, Russia, Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada.

The new analysis applies to emissions data for 1999, the latest year available. The Federal Government is expected to release the greenhouse gas inventory for the year 2000 soon. It is expected to show that the growth rate of Australia's emissions has returned to 'normal' levels after a large boost to energy emissions following the introduction of competition policy in the electricity market in 1997.

"Normal emissions growth in Australia is well above international levels and reflects the failure of the Federal Government to implement effective policies", said Dr Hamilton. "Australia is in danger of becoming the last polluters' paradise."

The report may be read under 'What's New' at www.tai.org.au