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Humanity's environmental footprint must be "assessed holistically and capped" for us to live sustainably

New article 'Humanity's unsustainable environmental footprint', published in Science

London: In an article published in *Science* today (1), founder of the Water Footprint Network, Prof. Arjen Y. Hoekstra, and co-author Thomas O. Wiedmann, assert that humanity's footprint on Earth's natural resources should be assessed holistically and call for footprint 'caps' to be set on global, national and local scales.

"The foundations for a sustainable future, in which we live within Earth's resource limits, lies in creating a complete picture of our environmental footprint and ensuring that land, water, carbon and other footprints remain below their maximum sustainable levels. Our different footprints must be assessed holistically and capped," said Hoekstra.

Footprints indicate human pressure on the environment and show us the changes and impacts we have on land, water, air and other resources. 'Humanity's unsustainable environmental footprint' emphasises the importance of understanding the interdependence of the different types of footprints and the role that businesses, consumers and governments play in creating our overall footprint. It reviews current footprints and suggests that major transformative changes in the global economy are necessary to reduce humanity's environmental footprint to sustainable levels.

It highlights that:

- Between 1961 and 2008, the ecological footprint of humanity more than doubled.
- The ecological footprint currently exceeds available biocapacity by 50%
- The climate footprint should be reduced by 60% between 2010 and 2050 to achieve the target of a maximum of 2°C of global warming.
- Our blue water footprint (consumption of surface and groundwater) exceeds the maximum sustainable level in half of the world's river basins at certain times each year.
- Our grey water footprint (water pollution) exceeds the maximum sustainable level in about two thirds of the world's river basins.

The article stresses that all footprints are expected to further increase during the coming few decades unless action is taken.

“In our global economy, the water footprint links producers, consumers, investors, suppliers and regulators through supply chains spanning the globe. This article underscores the urgent need to pull together and take unified action to tackle one of the biggest challenges we face in the 21st century; fair and smart use of our natural resources,” said Ruth Mathews, Executive Director, Water Footprint Network.

The Water Footprint Network is an international, non-profit foundation that promotes and inspires strategic action towards sustainable, efficient and equitable water use worldwide.

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Notes to Editors:

(1) <http://www.waterfootprint.org/Reports/Hoekstra-Wiedmann-2014-EnvironmentalFootprint.pdf>