

SNAPSHOT

Travel responsibly

Has the time come for researchers to take the lead and accept responsibility for emissions generated in the course of their research? Today's climate change researchers travel the world to attend conferences, while calling for society to cut emissions. It represents a large carbon footprint, which is at odds with the research and policy message they are trying to deliver. Corinne Le Quéré, of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change, emphasizes "if we want to maintain [society's] trust and credibility, the science community has to align the way we do research with what we think society has to do to have a sustainable planet." International flights and the associated emissions continue to increase, despite the knowledge that a reduction is needed if warming is to be limited to the much discussed 2 °C policy target.

A working paper 'Towards a culture of low-carbon research for the 21st Century' released by the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (<http://go.nature.com/sBj9f>) outlines a plan to move towards a low-carbon research culture and details their online travel tracker, which allow users to calculate and monitor individual travel emissions. The travel tracker is currently in testing phase and only available to Tyndall Centre members, who have been asked to provide travel information back to the start of this year; however, the aim is for the tracker to be made available globally and encourage organizations such as the Future Earth community to use it. Data will be made publicly available and the Tyndall Centre aims to set guidelines, to be adopted at their Assembly in September this year, for travel emissions reductions that they hope will be implemented by its members. The emissions are calculated by considering mode of transport and the number of hours travelled, so users will be able to consider if the travel is needed and the best mode to minimize emissions with consideration to time constraints.

This initiative to monitor carbon emissions is in line with the reporting that many universities are required to do. Although institutes may (or may not) have implemented travel policies with regard to emissions, many are looking



© ELLY WALTON / ALAMY

at sustainability and UK universities are awarded a ranking for their sustainability — something this travel tracker could be used for is effectively monitoring emissions to achieve a higher rank.

Simply tracking emissions is not enough, and while encouraging individuals to reduce their emissions is important, it will be difficult to see widespread action if there is not a shift in the way that the research community interacts and meets. Any changes could lead to a more inclusive community, as there are many reasons researchers are unable to travel, ranging from financial to personal. We are now in the digital age, where social media and internet connectivity can facilitate a shift in forms of interaction. The discussion of the impact of research travel is wider than just the climate change community, information should be shared across communities and lessons can be learnt from successes and failures. "I was really surprised to see how many people think like this and would like it to become more acceptable for developing different forms of communication and not having so much pressure to fly", commented Le Quéré.

Another consideration is how researchers at different career levels have

different objectives and needs for travel — more established researchers may be less likely to need to travel to present their own research at science conferences and might target policy discussions instead. Le Quéré has reached an agreement to present a virtual plenary talk in the United States next year to reduce her travel. Many larger conferences are now livestreaming some sessions to facilitate greater engagement and participation. This opens up so many possibilities — "you can invite a high-level policymaker who might be able to spare an hour to speak to the community but would not attend a conference for three days".

Technology has advanced to allow communication and networking without the need for face-to-face interaction. Many researchers have taken individual steps towards minimizing their footprint but having a wider discussion on the topic and a swell of interest should further drive discussion of inclusive communication and networking. Acceptance of non-traditional methods of participation is needed for a low-carbon research community to thrive.

BRONWYN WAKE