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| By

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Counting carbs — how to comply with Australia's new environmental reporting laws

As the green movement takes full hold and the Labor government fulfils its election promise and ratifies Kyoto, environmental efforts are no longer a matter of all talk and no action. Australia has committed to meeting its Kyoto Protocol target with tough targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60% on 2000 levels by 2050.

In order to achieve this goal, we must first be able to accurately identify the amount of greenhouse gases Australia emits and from where they are originating. To do this we currently rely on large organisations to report their greenhouse gas emissions to the government. In fact, many large companies have been reporting for some time, but as the need to meet our Kyoto targets becomes more pressing, experts are predicting that mandatory environmental reporting will expand rapidly in the next few years, in both regularity and reach. Reporting will move from annual reports on a per company basis, to continuous reporting at the level of the individual product or process. Carbon credit trading will also be used inside organisations, with business units trading credits in an endeavour to make the overall organisation more energy efficient.

We are already seeing these predictions come to fruition with the Garnaut report calling for an emissions trading scheme by 2010. This scheme is to be built on the data collected from Australian companies over the next two years with the new NGER laws (National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act). Effective from the 1 July 2008, the NGER law makes it mandatory for companies that consume over 500 terajoules of energy per year to begin to collect emissions data and report it to the government. This year, the reporting laws are estimated to affect up to 700 companies, 300 of which will be reporting for the first time. With the scope for reporting increasing year on year, it is expected that by 2015 almost all companies in Australia will be providing detailed information about their emissions alongside their financial reports.

There is currently no easy way for organisations to adequately capture the information associated with their greenhouse gas emissions. There are also currently no mechanisms in place to enable them to monitor emissions regularly, or react quickly if consumption in a particular area surges. The detail required for these reports is a daunting thought for many companies. Research shows that a key issue facing Australian organisations is the lack of suitable monitoring and reporting systems that provide auditable data regarding energy, waste and water usage. So how do you collect and measure greenhouse gas emissions and what does this mean for your organisation?

Technology will be the key to measuring (and therefore intelligently containing and improving) corporate carbon footprints. Due to the current squeeze on IT budgets and spending, it also means IT managers will need to find a way of meeting the challenges of environmental reporting using existing organisational software. Companies cannot afford to be too reactive in an environment where innovative solutions can enable them to proactively put the necessary mechanisms in place to monitor emissions regularly and react quickly if consumption in a

particular area experiences a spike.

Importantly, these solutions do not have to be complex or require a move from existing organisational software, the key is to enable businesses to track their greenhouse gas emissions through their existing enterprise software systems. This way, captured emissions data is treated in the same way as financial data, which allows emissions to be auditable, just as a financial report would be. For example, organisations using software can implement a modification of their existing software to specifically enable greenhouse gas emissions reporting to be incorporated into financial reporting systems (based around the billing and inventory issue process) so that it accurately reflects consumption.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is about more than making organisations aware of their energy consumption and other contributing factors, it is about knowing how to respond to the results. With the right software, emissions reporting is updated by the minute, meaning corporations are able to respond swiftly to spikes in emissions output. More importantly, it allows them to generate long-term records enabling forecasting and reduction targets to be put in place and managed intelligently so that emissions reduction can be achieved.

The push for organisations to be more environmentally friendly is only going to increase in vigour with the first round of legislation already coming into effect. Organisations that fail to begin incorporating greenhouse gas emissions monitoring systems into their IT infrastructure now will soon find themselves struggling to keep their heads above water as regulations become more stringent. The tools necessary to capture emissions information easily and accurately are available and implementing them will have a huge impact not only on the ease of compliance with the new laws, but also dramatically increase the sustainability of a long-term emissions reduction plan and result in a healthier corporate carbon footprint.

**Maureen Clifford is CEO of [Ndevr](#).*

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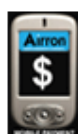
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