

China's green audit put on hold

By Richard Spencer in Beijing

2:00PM BST 23 Jul 2007

China's attempts to [project a new "green" image](#) suffered a serious blow when it was revealed a revolutionary attempt to estimate [the environmental cost of its runaway economic growth](#) had been put on indefinite hold.

In a briefing to local newspapers, the scientist given the enormous task of calculating China's "green GDP" said the project had been effectively killed off by political opposition.

His outspoken denunciation of the barriers put in his way is another challenge to the leadership of President Hu Jintao and prime minister Wen Jiabao, who have staked their local and international reputations on readjusting China's economic model to take more account of its social and environmental consequences.

Earlier this month, it was revealed the Chinese government was trying to stop the World Bank [publishing details of the number of deaths caused by water and air pollution in China](#) every year.

Officials also rejected a study by Dutch scientists suggesting that China's carbon emissions, the key component of global warming, had overtaken America's at the top of the world league table.

Now Wang Jinnan, chief engineer of Chinese Academy for Environmental Planning and team leader of the "green GDP" project, says publication of figures for 2005 has been put off indefinitely.

"Why they have not been published yet is because there is a big disagreement about both the content and how to publish it between environment administration and the statistics bureau," he said, in a rare insight into political infighting in China by one of its participants.

"If such situation goes on, our project team might be dismissed, which is what we want least of all."

Despite the appalling environmental consequences of China's growth, which have seen its cities listed as the most polluted in the world and riots triggered by factories pouring out poisonous fumes and effluent, the government has also won wide praise for its stated determination to tackle the problem.

A study named "The Beijing Consensus" by the New Labour-linked Foreign Policy Centre think-tank three years ago highlighted the move to "green GDP" accounting as a reason why developing countries should prefer a Chinese rather than American economic model.

According to the theory, China would take a more "holistic" approach to growth after publishing a figure for GDP, or gross domestic product, that by deducting the potential costs of pollution gave a more realistic account of how much richer the country was getting.

Figures were published last year for 2004, to great acclaim, though they showed annual pollution costs to be a huge pounds £35bn, or three per cent of the total size of the economy.

But this year published growth figures have continued to omit social elements and have soared to a point which some economists believe could lead to a crash.

Last week's quarterly figures said China's economy was growing by 11.9 per cent a year, almost four points ahead of the government's eight per cent target.

Prof Wang said that as well as opposition from the National Statistics Bureau, local officials, whose promotions are often directly linked to their success in promoting economic growth, had also put pressure on the government to stop publication of the green figures.

"In my view, the shock caused locally by green GDP and the fact it's so sensitive only proves how effective a measure it is," Prof Wang said, adding that he would go on studying the figures even if they were never published.

His admission of defeat was met with hardly concealed delight by the National Statistics Bureau. A spokesman pointed to a speech last week by its director, Xie Fuzhan, in which he said that "green GDP" was not an internationally recognised accounting figure.

Smog clouds reach United States

Smog from China is contributing to bad air quality and possibly even affecting the climate in parts of the western United States, according to researchers.

Vast clouds of dusty, industrial smog filled with carbon, sulphates and nitrates are drifting across the Pacific Ocean and gathering above cities such as Los Angeles and San Francisco.

A team tracking the air at up to 30,000 feet as it moved across the Pacific discovered a new cloud developed every three to four days. Each was up to 300 miles wide and six miles deep, fast-moving and filled with pollutants.

Almost a third of the air over Los Angeles and San Francisco can be traced directly to Asia, the scientists reported in the *Journal of Geophysical Research*.

By Catherine Elsworth

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/greenpolitics/international/3301207/Chinas-green-audit-put-on-hold.html>