

# HOW GREEN IS HEINEKEN?

## Sustainability vs. Greenwashing

Katleho Marake

MRKKAT010

### Introduction

The concept of "greenwashing," where companies overstate their environmental credentials, is a growing concern. This research investigates brewing giant Heineken's sustainability claims by comparing their self-reported data on water, emissions, and waste with independent findings to determine if their environmental actions match their green reputation.



### Objectives

- This study aimed to describe and critically assess Heineken's environmental sustainability claims from 2015 to 2024. Key objectives included:
- Comparing Heineken's reported environmental impact data (e.g., carbon emissions, water use) against its stated commitments.
- Identifying discrepancies, exaggerations, or misleading information in their sustainability marketing.
- Determining whether Heineken's green initiatives represent genuine environmental responsibility or a form of corporate greenwashing.

### Methodology

This study analysed Heineken's sustainability efforts using a thematic approach:

- 01 Reviewed corporate sustainability reports and marketing materials.
- 02 Extracted data on four themes: carbon emissions, water usage, renewable energy, and waste management.
- 03 Compared stated commitments against measurable outcomes.
- 04 Considered external sources, including NGO and regulatory reports, for validation.

### Results

The analysis revealed significant inconsistencies. While Heineken reported improvements in relative efficiency—such as reduced water and carbon emissions per unit of beer—the company's absolute environmental footprint often grew due to increased production volumes. Furthermore, Heineken's reporting strategically excludes major sources of environmental impact, including upstream agricultural water use (which accounts for ~90% of its water footprint) and downstream consumer waste. Field evidence from external sources contradicted corporate claims, citing instances of untreated wastewater discharge at a brewery in Ethiopia, directly polluting a local river.

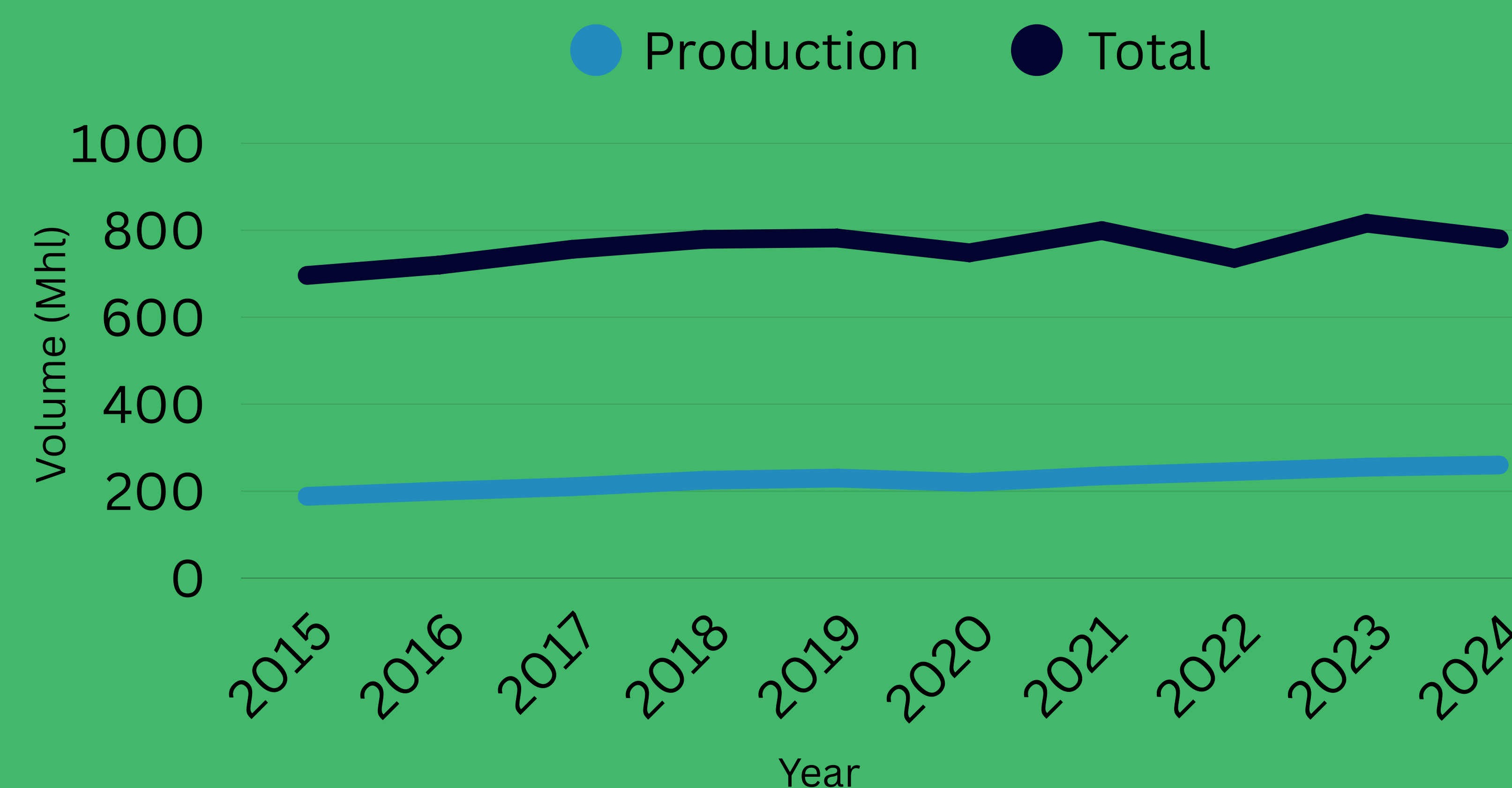
### Analysis

A qualitative research design was employed, using thematic analysis of secondary data. The analysis compared information from three main sources:

1. **Heineken's official sustainability reports** (2015–2024) to establish their public claims and self-reported data on water use, carbon emissions, and waste.
2. **Reports from non-governmental organizations** (NGOs) such as Big Alcohol Exposed and Movendi International to provide external critique and identify discrepancies.
3. **Peer-reviewed academic literature** to contextualize the findings within the broader discourse on corporate social responsibility and greenwashing.

### Conclusion

While Heineken has made measurable efficiency gains at the brewery level, the findings indicate a pattern of strategic greenwashing. The company's sustainability narrative is built on selective data that omits the full lifecycle of its products, creating a misleadingly positive public image. To foster genuine accountability, Heineken should adopt comprehensive, third-party verification for all environmental data and expand reporting to include its entire value chain, from "cradle-to-grave."



**Figure 1: Heineken's water consumption in beer production vs total water consumption (all processes)**

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