

# Methane and GWP\*: how the livestock lobby's creative accounting undermines equity & threatens to derail climate action

June 2025

## Key points

- Agribusiness lobby groups are running a coordinated global campaign<sup>1</sup> to cripple efforts to reduce methane emissions and to allow them to continue polluting with the use of the tool GWP\*. Efforts to set methane targets with the goal of “*no additional warming*” and some other related terms with this tool are underway.
- Some governments with comparatively high livestock emissions - including Ireland and New Zealand<sup>2</sup> - are exploring using this tool in policy, in order to justify lower climate ambition. Agribusiness lobby groups are escalating their campaign in New Zealand, where a decision on adjusting the country's methane target is imminent. Ireland is closely following developments in New Zealand.
- Changing methane metrics in this way would undermine equity by allowing large livestock-exporting and producing countries to maintain untenable levels of methane and livestock herds and disadvantage many middle and low-income nations.
- Methane's atmospheric concentration is rising exponentially—CH<sub>4</sub> is now 265% higher than pre- industrial levels. It is presently responsible for about one third of observed global warming. According to IEA's Methane Tracker 2024, 39% of anthropogenic methane comes from agriculture (primarily livestock) and 41% from the energy sector.
- “No additional warming” promotes the flawed idea that current agricultural methane emissions are “acceptable” and should simply be maintained - despite scientific consensus that existing high levels of methane are accelerating global heating and must be reduced.
- If governments adopt this tool, it could derail global climate targets, weaken the Paris Agreement and lead to accelerating global heating.
- The discussions on agriculture in SB62 in Bonn and discussions on 2035 climate targets provide an opportunity for policymakers to push back against the use of GWP\* and *no additional warming* in climate and methane policy.

**In June 2025, 26 scientists wrote an open letter<sup>3</sup> to the New Zealand Prime Minister stating that the adoption of a “no additional warming” target for methane “is inconsistent with commitments under Article 4 of the Paris Agreement on equity and the responsibility of developed nations, including that their Nationally Determined Contributions should reflect their highest possible ambition.”**

<sup>1</sup> Caspar L Donnison and Donal Murphy-Bokern 2024 Are climate neutrality claims in the livestock sector too good to be true? Environ. Res. Lett. 19 011001 DOI 10.1088/1748-9326/ad0f75

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/2ea6a69d-765e-48d5-b2f2-50dce8427862>

<sup>3</sup> biogenicmethane.org

## What does the science say?

There is scientific consensus<sup>3</sup> that rapidly reducing methane this decade could help limit temperature overshoot and keep the Paris goal of 1.5°C alive. And yet, methane emissions are rising faster<sup>4</sup> than at any other time in history and account for 0.5°C of heating since pre-industrial times. Comparatively, CO<sub>2</sub> accounts for 0.8°C of heating. Methane is 80 times more powerful than CO<sub>2</sub> in a 20 year period. Agriculture - livestock in particular - is the single biggest source of human-made methane. CH<sub>4</sub> is now 265% higher than pre- industrial levels.<sup>5</sup> The latest Global Methane Budget<sup>6</sup> assessment shows that livestock related methane increased by 12.5% between 2000-2020.

## What is GWP\* and ‘no additional warming’?

There is a growing push - led by agribusiness lobbyists<sup>7</sup> - to change the way we measure methane emissions from livestock and set targets for cutting it. They are pushing for the principle of “no additional warming”, often associated with a technical tool called GWP\*, which is being misused to argue that biogenic methane (i.e. from animals like cows and sheep) should be treated differently from other greenhouse gases – even in this crucial short term period in which governments must do all they can to limit warming. This accounting trick helps paint a misleading picture, making it seem as though high levels of livestock methane emissions don’t need to fall as much, if at all. The concept is now creeping into government policies in countries like New Zealand<sup>8</sup>, Ireland<sup>9</sup>, and Paraguay<sup>10</sup>. However, each year that we maintain existing and rising levels of methane, we accelerate global warming.

## Who stands to gain - and who loses?

Changing the way biogenic methane is counted would benefit wealthy, industrial livestock producing exporters like New Zealand, Ireland, the U.S., and Australia. It would allow them to maintain their current high levels of production and herd sizes. These countries could claim to be “climate leaders” without significantly doing anything to transform the sector.

Meanwhile, many low and middle-income countries - where livestock herds are far smaller - would be unfairly penalised under the new metrics<sup>11</sup> for even small increases in herd size, while increasing their climate risk due to accelerated warming from unabated methane emissions. This goes against the equity principles of the Paris Agreement, which recognise that wealthier nations with high historical emissions should bear a larger share of the responsibility for climate action.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2024/09/methane-emissions-are-rising-faster-than-ever>

<sup>5</sup> WMO, State of the Global Climate 2024.WMO [https://wmo.int/sites/default/files/2025-03/WMO-1368-2024\\_en.pdf](https://wmo.int/sites/default/files/2025-03/WMO-1368-2024_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Saunois et al. 2025. Global Methane Budget 2000–2020 <https://essd.copernicus.org/articles/17/1873/2025/essd-17-1873-2025.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-10-19/beef-industry-falsely-claims-low-cow-carbon-footprint>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/535493/self-serving-methane-change-could-mix-science-with-political-views-climate-group>

<sup>9</sup> <https://7358484.fsl.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7358484/Programme%20for%20Government.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://consen.so/p/desinformacion-ganaderia-metano>

<sup>11</sup> <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab4928>

Many of the researchers promoting GWP\* are funded by industry<sup>12</sup> - raising serious questions about bias. In June 2025, 26 leading climate scientists wrote to New Zealand's Prime Minister expressing concern about his government's view to adopt GWP\*, in a story featured on the front page of the international edition of the Financial Times.

## Is this already influencing governments?

Yes. Governments where agribusiness has strong political influence are already incorporating these ideas:

- Ireland is pushing to "reclassify" methane at the EU level<sup>13</sup>.
- New Zealand has sidelined its independent Climate Change Commission and set up a separate advisory panel tasked with recommending a methane target based on "no additional warming"<sup>14</sup>.
- Paraguay has already included GWP\* in its climate policy<sup>15</sup>.

Agribusiness lobby groups are escalating their campaign in New Zealand<sup>16</sup>, where a decision on adjusting the country's methane target is imminent. Ireland is closely following developments in New Zealand<sup>17</sup>.

## What needs to be done?

- Methane accounting and reduction targets must be science-based and aligned with Paris Agreement goals to limit warming to 1.5°C and stay well below 2°C.
- National governments must reject "no additional warming" and related concepts that use GWP\* as the basis for national climate targets. Instead they must regulate agricultural greenhouse emissions.
- The IPCC must strongly defend its call in the AR6 Synthesis Report<sup>18</sup> for rapid emissions reductions in all sectors and of all gases, including methane, to stay on a pathway for meeting the long-term 1.5°C goal.
- Corporations must shift away from high polluting agriculture and invest in helping farmers transition to ecological, low-emissions farming and agroecology - not lobby for loopholes. Their emissions must be regulated.
- Policymakers at the SB62 in Bonn and before COP 30 in Brazil, must ensure that ambition in 2035 NDCs means drawing a line in the sand to prevent GWP\* and *no additional warming* being adopted as mechanisms for setting methane targets.

For any questions, contact Amanda Larsson [alarsson@greenpeace.org](mailto:alarsson@greenpeace.org) or Shefali Sharma [ssharma@greenpeace.org](mailto:ssharma@greenpeace.org)

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<https://changingmarkets.org/press-releases/groundbreaking-report-reveals-how-meat-and-dairy-industries-have-derailed-climate-action-globally/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://7358484.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7358484/Programme%20for%20Government.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/535493/self-serving-methane-change-could-mix-science-with-political-views-climate-group>

<sup>15</sup> <https://consen.so/p/desinformacion-ganaderia-metano>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.carbonnews.co.nz/news/34492/fed-farmers-ready-to-go-into-battle-over-methane-target>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.irishexaminer.com/farming/arid-41635366.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>