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# Media Briefing

# GWP\*: how the livestock lobby's creative

# accounting threatens to derail climate action

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# **Key points**

- Agribusiness lobby groups are running a coordinated global campaign to cripple efforts to reduce agricultural emissions and allow them to continue polluting. This is referred to as GWP\*, *no additional warming* and some other related terms.
- If governments adopt this tool, it could derail global climate targets, weaken the Paris Agreement and lead to accelerating global heating.
- Some governments with comparatively high livestock emissions including <u>Ireland</u>, <u>New</u> <u>Zealand</u> and Paraguay - are exploring using this tool in policy, in order to justify lower climate ambition.
- The tool is built on 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.
- Changing methane metrics in this way would allow large livestock-producing and exporting countries to maintain untenable levels of methane and disadvantage many middle and low-income nations.
- Methane from livestock needs to be reduced, not maintained by creative accounting.
- The upcoming Berlin NDC conference in June<sup>1</sup> and the SB62 in Bonn which follows it provide an opportunity for policymakers to commit to reducing agricultural emissions, and push back against the use of GWP\* and *no additional warming* in policy.

## What does the science say?

There is <u>scientific consensus</u><sup>2</sup> that rapidly reducing methane this decade could help us limit temperature overshoot and keep the Paris goal of 1.5°C alive. And yet, methane emissions are <u>rising faster</u><sup>3</sup> than at any other time in history and account for 0.5°C of heating since pre-industrial times. Comparatively,  $CO_2$  accounts for 0.8°C of heating.

<sup>1</sup> https://globalndcconference.org/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2024/09/methane-emissions-are-rising-faster-than-ever

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. In fact, the latest <u>Global</u> <u>Methane Budget</u><sup>4</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>5</sup> - to change the way we measure methane emissions from livestock and set targets for cutting it. They are most prominently pushing for the principle of "no additional warming", often associated with a technical metric called GWP\*. This metric is being misused to argue that biogenic methane (methane 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.

The result? This accounting trick helps paint a misleading picture, making it seem as though livestock methane emissions don't need to fall as much, if at all. The concept has been <u>spread</u> <u>virally by farming lobbies on social media</u><sup>6</sup> and is now creeping into government policies in countries like <u>New Zealand</u><sup>7</sup>, <u>Ireland</u><sup>8</sup>, and <u>Paraguay</u><sup>9</sup>. However, given its strong short term warming potential, 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 <u>unfairly penalised under the new metrics</u><sup>10</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.

Behind the push for change are powerful agricultural lobby groups such as:

- Beef + Lamb NZ (New Zealand)
- National Cattlemen's Beef Association (U.S.)
- National Farmers Union (UK)

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> https://consen.so/p/desinformacion-ganaderia-metano
<sup>10</sup> https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab4928



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> https://essd.copernicus.org/articles/17/1873/2025/essd-17-1873-2025.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-10-19/beef-industry-falsely-claims-low-cow-carbon-footprint

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22504139/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/535493/self-serving-methane-change-could-mix-science-with-political-views-climate-group

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> https://7358484.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7358484/Programme%20for%20Government.pdf

Many of the researchers promoting GWP\* are <u>funded by industry</u><sup>11</sup> - raising serious questions about bias. This is agricultural exceptionalism in action: a profitable, high-emitting industry trying to dodge accountability, while shifting the burden of climate action onto other sectors - and the public.

In June 2025, 26 leading climate scientists wrote to New Zealand's Prime Minister <u>condemning</u> his government's view to adopt GWP\*, in a story <u>featured</u> 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 <u>"reclassify" methane at the EU level</u><sup>12</sup>.
- New Zealand has sidelined its independent Climate Change Commission and set up a separate advisory panel tasked with <u>recommending a methane target based on "no</u> <u>additional warming</u>"<sup>13</sup>.
- Paraguay has already included GWP\* in its climate policy<sup>14</sup>.

Agribusiness lobby groups are <u>escalating their campaign in New Zealand</u><sup>15</sup>, where a decision on adjusting the country's methane target is imminent. <u>Ireland is closely following</u> <u>developments in New Zealand</u><sup>16</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 <u>AR6 Synthesis Report</u><sup>17</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 upcoming Berlin NDC conference and the SB62 in Bonn, before COP 30 in Brazil, must ensure that ambition in 2035 NDCs includes a time bound plan for reducing agricultural emissions. They must draw a line in the sand to prevent GWP\* and *no additional warming* being adopted as mechanisms for setting methane targets.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/



<sup>11</sup> 

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

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> https://7358484.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7358484/Programme%20for%20Government.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/535493/self-serving-methane-change-could-mix-science-with-political-views-climate-group

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> https://consen.so/p/desinformacion-ganaderia-metano

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> https://www.carbonnews.co.nz/news/34492/fed-farmers-ready-to-go-into-battle-over-methane-target

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> https://www.irishexaminer.com/farming/arid-41635366.html

It is possible to reduce methane now - by ending livestock expansion, supporting ecological farming and smaller herds, shifting towards more plant-based foods and eliminating food waste.

This transition would benefit not only the climate, but also biodiversity, animal welfare, water health and air quality. It would align with consumer expectations. The world cannot afford to let creative accounting delay urgent climate action - especially from one of the most polluting industries on the planet.

#### **Responses to common industry arguments**

**Claims about biogenic methane being "natural" or different to fossil methane** "Physically, <u>a ton of methane warms the climate almost precisely the same whether it comes</u> <u>from sheep, a landfill, or an oil well</u><sup>18</sup> and it doesn't matter whether that source is new or has been emitting for decades."

Furthermore, meat and dairy companies have significantly increased methane emissions by substantially expanding herd sizes over the last decades. <u>Atmospheric methane levels are now</u> more than 2.5 times higher than pre-industrial levels<sup>19</sup>. In the last 20 years, <u>livestock related</u> methane in particular has increased<sup>20</sup> by 12.5% due to more production and consumption of livestock. This rise has far outpaced the ability of natural systems, technology, or sustainable farming practices to absorb it.

#### Methane has a shorter time in the atmosphere compared to CO<sub>2</sub>

There is <u>strong scientific consensus</u><sup>21</sup> that cutting methane emissions in the short term is key to slowing down global heating, due to its powerful warming effect and short atmospheric lifetime. Though methane has a halflife in the atmosphere of about 12 years, it is around <u>80</u> times more powerful than CO<sub>2</sub> over 20 years<sup>22</sup> and is linked to roughly <u>30% of the global</u> warming the world is experiencing today<sup>23</sup>.

Urgent action on methane is critical with global temperatures nearing 1.5°C, as it will reduce the risk of temperature overshoot. Described as an "emergency brake" in the climate crisis, methane must be addressed boldly. Undermining ambition through concepts like "no additional warming" will lead to global heating going well beyond the 1.5°C threshold.

#### GWP\* is a robust mathematical tool

According to UNEP and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, methane emissions <u>must come</u> <u>down by 45% by 2030</u><sup>24</sup> compared to 2020 levels to stay within the Paris agreement. GWP\* is <u>a</u> <u>model</u><sup>25</sup> that can <u>help track changes in methane emissions over time</u><sup>26</sup> and evaluate the climate impact of methane today relative to methane levels at some point in the past. If

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> https://www.catf.us/resource/focus-reducing-methane-pollution-all-sources-not-distractions-over-metrics/



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> https://www.catf.us/resource/focus-reducing-methane-pollution-all-sources-not-distractions-over-metrics/#31

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> https://wmo.int/sites/default/files/2025-03/WMO-1368-2024\_en.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> https://essd.copernicus.org/articles/17/1873/2025/essd-17-1873-2025.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> https://www.ccacoalition.org/en/slcps/methane

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> https://www.iea.org/reports/global-methane-tracker-2022/ methane-and-climate-change

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> https://www.ccacoalition.org/sites/default/files/resources//2022\_Methane-baseline-summary\_0.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ac5930

methane emissions are constant over a time period, <u>using GWP\* to calculate</u><sup>27</sup> these emissions would suggest that little or no additional warming has occurred.

If past levels were high, then GWP\* is not a useful model for mitigation. In fact, it can be misleading in evaluating the impact on global warming from current high levels of methane. This is why it is particularly problematic - and unsurprising - that countries with high historical methane emissions are the ones at the forefront of exploring this tool in policy.

The IPCC uses GWP as a metric for greenhouse gas inventories because its <u>baseline is set to</u> <u>zero (as if no pollution has taken place</u>)<sup>28</sup>to evaluate the climate impact of different gases. It assumes that all emissions within a year contribute to warming compared to the zero baseline. It thereby allows policymakers and the public to understand by how much these emissions need to come down to limit climate chaos.

As such, <u>scientists caution</u><sup>29</sup> that GWP\* should not be used to shape climate policies or set emission reduction targets, as it can easily misrepresent the enormous impact methane has on near term warming, sending dangerously wrong signals to policymakers and the private sector. Despite this, agribusiness lobbyists are advocating for the tool to be adopted and are pushing for its use in policymaking and target-setting.

#### Agriculture emissions need to be treated differently due to food security reasons

The EAT-Lancet report (2019) established that feeding a growing global population a healthy diet within planetary boundaries is possible, but it requires a major transformation of the global food system. A recent Greenpeace Nordic <u>study found that 37% of the FAO's projected</u> <u>2050 food system emissions</u><sup>30</sup> (under a business as usual scenario) could be cut if high and middle income countries reduced production and consumption of livestock in line with a planetary health diet.

Contrary to industry narratives about "feeding the world", livestock products are key ingredients in many unhealthy foods. As an example, the New Zealand dairy industry's largest customers include <u>Nestle</u>, <u>Mars</u> and <u>Starbucks</u> with milk powder used in the production of Kitkats, Snickers bars, M&Ms and other confectionery.

#### **Further reading**

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- Hayek, M. N., Samuel, J. and McClelland, S. C. (2023) <u>Methane metrics: the political stakes.</u> Nature, 620(7972): 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> https://www.greenpeace.org/aotearoa/publication/report-turning-down-the-heat/



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> https://www.catf.us/resource/focus-reducing-methane-pollution-all-sources-not-distractions-over-metrics/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> https://www.catf.us/resource/focus-reducing-methane-pollution-all-sources-not-distractions-over-metrics/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab56e7

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### **Comments from spokespeople**

#### Global Agriculture Campaigner, Shefali Sharma (Greenpeace Germany)

"If lobbyists from Big Agriculture can so easily convince major methane emitters like New Zealand and Ireland into adopting anti-science climate targets like 'no additional warming', then we might as well kiss the Paris agreement goodbye. Methane emissions are responsible for almost a third of the current rise in global temperature and maintaining current levels so that the livestock industry can keep raking in profits will lock in catastrophic climate change for millions of the most vulnerable communities around the world.

"It's clear that prominent scientists are condemning this approach. Now, policy makers must soundly reject the adoption of such targets as well."

#### Greenpeace Aotearoa (New Zealand) spokesperson, Amanda Larsson

"The New Zealand dairy industry is the country's worst climate polluter. Yet rather than responding to the climate crisis with action, the New Zealand Government is looking to sweep the problem under the rug with creative accounting. Most New Zealanders are deeply concerned about climate change and the risk to their kids and grandkids,"

"They expect the Government to be using the best evidence from its appointed experts, not fudging the numbers to let the country's worst polluters off the hook. This is what happens when you let polluters write the policy."

