

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, temperature neutrality, 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.
- The New Zealand Government has already decided to rewrite the law to adopt methane targets in line with 'no additional warming' and embed this concept into climate legislation, despite [widespread criticism](#) from scientists and its own expert advisors.
- Other governments of large meat and dairy export nations - including Ireland and Paraguay - are exploring using this tool in policy as well.
- The tool is built on the flawed idea that current agricultural methane emissions are "acceptable" - despite scientific consensus that methane is already 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, disadvantaging many middle and low-income nations.
- Methane from livestock needs to be reduced, not maintained by creative accounting.

What are the issues with 'no additional warming'/GWP*?

There is [a growing push - led by agribusiness lobbyists](#)¹ - to change the way we measure methane emissions from livestock and set targets for reducing them. They are most prominently pushing 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 paints 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 [spread virally by farming lobbies on social media](#)² and is now creeping into government policies in countries like [New Zealand](#)³, [Ireland](#)⁴, and [Paraguay](#)⁵.

¹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-10-19/beef-industry-falsely-claims-low-cow-carbon-footprint>

² <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22504139/>

³ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/535493/self-serving-methane-change-could-mix-science-with-political-views-climate-group>

⁴ <https://7358484.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/7358484/Programme%20for%20Government.pdf>

⁵ <https://consen.so/p/desinformacion-ganaderia-metano>

However, given its strong short term warming potential, each year that we maintain existing levels of methane, we accelerate global warming.

Changing the way biogenic methane is counted would benefit wealthy, industrial livestock producing exporters like New Zealand, Ireland, the U.S., Australia, Brazil and others. It would allow them to maintain their current high levels of production and herd sizes, and 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](#)⁶ 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.

Who is behind this?

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)

Many of the researchers promoting no additional warming are [funded by industry](#)⁷ - 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.

What do we need to do about methane?

There is [scientific consensus](#)⁸ that rapidly reducing methane this decade could help limit temperature overshoot and keep the Paris goal of 1.5°C alive. Yet methane emissions are [rising faster](#)⁹ than any other time in history, accounting for 0.5°C of heating since pre-industrial times. Comparatively, CO₂ accounts for 0.8°C of heating.

- 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 seek to maintain current high methane emissions. Instead they must regulate agricultural greenhouse emissions.
- 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.

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. The world cannot afford to let creative accounting delay urgent climate action - especially from one of the most polluting industries on the planet.

⁶ <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab4928>

⁷ <https://changingmarkets.org/press-releases/groundbreaking-report-reveals-how-meat-and-dairy-industries-have-derailed-climate-action-globally/>

⁸ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/>

⁹ <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2024/09/methane-emissions-are-rising-faster-than-ever>

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.”