EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



THE METHANE SCAM

How agribusiness lobby groups hope to swindle global climate efforts with novel methane metrics

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BACKGROUND

The world is racing towards a global heating scenario far beyond 1.5°C.[1] All levers must be pulled to avoid the worst, including action on methane, the most important greenhouse gas for tackling global warming in the short term and limiting temperature overshoot. Because of its short lifetime, cutting methane now is our emergency brake in the climate crisis - our lifeline for a liveable future.

The world's single largest source of methane emissions is animal farming.[2] ***Yet, agribusiness lobbyists are working hard to try to escape their share of accountability.*** One of their key strategies is to push policymakers to adopt alternative greenhouse gas accounting methods that downplay the impact of biogenic methane emissions. This includes the tool known as GWP*.[3] If agribusinesses use this loophole to shirk their duty, we face a grim choice: either we suffer accelerated global warming, or the rest of us - taxpayers, other industries, and developing nations - have to work twice as hard to pick up the slack.

NEITHER OF THOSE OPTIONS IS ACCEPTABLE.

WHAT IS GWP*?

In contrast to the standard accounting method that is endorsed by the UNFCCC, this alternative accounting method assesses ***changes*** in emission rates, rather than ***absolute*** reductions in emissions.[4] The problem is that this bakes in climate privilege: ***it gives current high-methane emitting countries a clean slate for past emissions because the metric only looks at whether pollution is going up compared to a recent baseline, rather than how high methane emissions already are.*** Using GWP*, countries with high levels of methane emissions need only maintain more or less current levels of emissions, or cause "no additional warming", to be considered making progress.[5]

[1] UNEP(2025). ***Emissions Gap Report***: Off target, United Nations Environment Programme, November 2025
[2] UNEP(2022). ***An Eye on Methane: International Methane Emissions Observatory***, United Nations Environment Programme, 2022. Citing Saunois et al (2020)
[3] Changing Markets Foundation (2023), Seeing Stars: ***The New Metric That Could Allow The Meat And Dairy Industry To Avoid Climate Action***, Changing Markets Foundation, Nov 2023
[4] Ferreira, F., McCabe, D., (2024), ***Focus on reducing methane pollution from all sources, not distractions over metrics***. Clean Air Task Force, 20 May 2024. Accessed 5 October 2026
[5] Daly, H. (2025), ***Why "no additional warming" is a dangerous climate loophole***. The Irish Times, 4 September 2025. Accessed 1 October 2026

This is a departure from global climate commitments: wiping decades of heating impact from the global record and failing to adopt the most ambitious climate targets directly contradicts international climate obligations—as reaffirmed by the landmark 2025 ICJ ruling—that require wealthy, developed nations to account for their past pollution and lead the fight to limit warming to 1.5°C.[6] It is against the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, which international courts and tribunals, as well as national courts have affirmed lies at the cornerstone of States' obligations to act on climate.[7]

MODELLING THE IMPACT OF HIGH EMITTERS ADOPTING GWP*

Beyond the issue of climate justice and equity, GWP* also raises serious accountability issues. ***Greenpeace International commissioned think-tank Cerulogy to calculate the hypothetical impact of the 10 largest exporters of ruminant meat & dairy products [8] adopting GWP* for their national emissions accounting and reporting.[9]***

Because GWP* makes very minor reductions in absolute methane emissions look like rapid progress for countries with historically high livestock emissions, ***it completely distorts perceived sense of progress.*** Cerulogy's calculations found that if these 10 countries reported their emissions based on GWP*, ***a mere 0.6% reduction in absolute methane emissions between 2020 and 2030 would allow them to claim a 30% reduction in CO_2ew.[10]*** The difference is staggering. Our current trajectory could be re-packaged as massive progress.

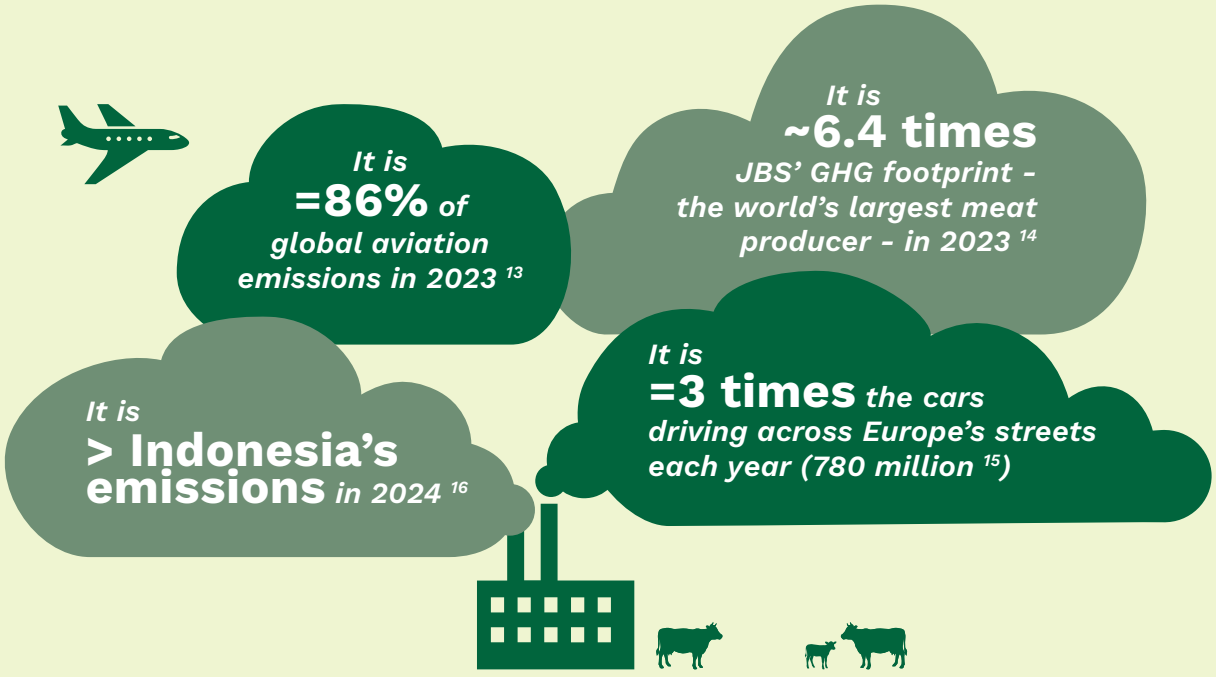
What's even more alarming is that, with GWP* accounting, any high historical emitter that reduces even by a little bit its methane emissions could report negative emissions. ***Cerulogy's calculations found that if the 10 countries were actually to achieve a 30% reduction in absolute biogenic methane emissions, using GWP*, they could claim 898 MtCO2ew of "negative emissions", while in reality still emitting methane equivalent to 640 MtCO_2e. That's a difference of 1,538 MtCO_2e that could be reported as "savings" in the year 2030.[11]***

Critically, swapping metrics doesn't remove a single molecule of methane from the atmosphere. It is an accounting trick that turns high, ongoing pollution into "phantom reductions" on paper, completely detached from atmospheric reality.

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[6] International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion, 25 July 2025, Obligations of States in respect of climate change, https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/187/187-20250723-adv-01-00-en.pdf
[7] European Court of Human Rights, CASE OF VEREIN KLIMASENIORINNEN SCHWEIZ AND OTHERS v. SWITZERLAND (***Application no. 53600/20***), paras 550 and 569; Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), Climate Emergency and Human Rights. ***Advisory Opinion AO-32/25*** of May29, 2025. Series A No. 32., paras 327-330
[8] Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand and the USA
[9] Greenpeace International (2026), The Methane Scam: How agribusiness lobby groups swindle global climate efforts with novel methane metrics Greenpeace International, October 2026
[10] Ibid
[11] Ibid

Using GWP* could effectively wipe massive emissions off the global balance sheet "on paper", without achieving any climate change mitigation effect in the real world, jeopardizing our joint understanding of progress towards global climate targets. The claimed 1,538 $MtCO_2e$ in "paper savings" achieved by those 10 countries in 2030 would actually be in the atmosphere, but no one could account for them and that creates problems for us all. For example, it represents a significant proportion of the remaining global carbon budget that must be met in order to achieve a 50% likelihood of limiting warming below 1.5°C: 1% of the remaining budget we had in 2025 (170 $GtCO_2$) - just vanishing.[12] And that's over just one year. If GWP* were to be applied systemically in reporting over the course of 11 years (2020-2030), it would lead to a cumulative emission reduction "gap" of 9.95 $GtCO_2e$ - equivalent to nearly a fifth of the world's current total annual global greenhouse gas emissions. This means that real emissions obscured by this accounting method will increasingly eat up our remaining carbon budget - although there would be no way to account for them.



Infographic: **WHAT IS THE ANNUAL EMISSIONS ACCOUNTING GAP OF 1,538 $MTCO_2E$ EQUIVALENT TO?**

[12] Friedlingstein et al (2026), ***Global Carbon Budget 2025***. Earth System Science Data, Volume 18, issue 5, pp. 3211-3288, doi: 10.5194/essd-18-3211-2026
[13] According to the IEA, combustion emissions from aviation were 950 MtCO2e in 2023. Assuming a 53:10:37 split for combustion:supply:non-CO_2, this multiplies up to about 1,792 $MtCO_2e$
[14] JBS' total GHG emissions have been estimated to be 240,660 $ktCO_2e$ in the report Greenpeace Nordic (2025), ***Roasting the Planet: Big Meat and Dairy's Big Emissions***, October 2025
[15] EUROSTAT(2026), ***Passenger cars in the EU***. Statistics explained, July 2026
[16] Total greenhouse gas emission estimates for Indonesia in 2024 are 1328.78 $MtCO_2e$. See EDGAR (2025), ***GHG emissions of all world countries***. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025. Accessed 17 July 2026

The five European countries included in this hypothetical scenario (Ireland, France, Germany, Netherlands and Belgium) could report "paper savings" of 201 $MtCO_2e$ - emissions that would remain in the atmosphere but could theoretically be wiped off the global balance sheet, even though they represent more than the total GHG emissions of all Nordic countries combined in 2024.[17]

To make matters worse, ***because GWP* can result in large polluters reporting artificial "negative emissions" for slight drops in absolute methane emissions, countries could use these "paper savings" in the livestock sector as a justification to continue emitting greenhouse gases in other heavy-polluting industries.*** Australia for example, a country where livestock lobbyists are actively pushing for GWP*,[18] would be able to report 76 $MtCO_2ew$ of negative emissions in 2030 from a 30% cut in absolute methane emissions. As the country would still emit 39$MtCO_2e$ in methane, this would lead to an accounting gap of 113 $MtCO_2e$ under the GWP100. This difference could be used to justify lower cuts in other sectors - such as coal. 113 $MtCO_2e$ is equivalent to the emissions of 20 coal power stations operating for a year.[19]

WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE THE REST OF US?

These figures demonstrate that GWP* is nothing more than an accounting trick. It allows big polluters to keep pumping out massive amounts of greenhouse gases - and even giving them a free pass to continue polluting in other sectors.

The metric is a dangerous departure from the foundations of global climate commitments which were built with absolute volumes as the baseline for emissions. Introducing alternative methane metrics like GWP* fundamentally transforms the meaning and ambition of these commitments.[20] ***Only a handful of high-methane emitters adopting the GWP* approach risks shifting the burden of climate action massively onto other countries and other industries or quietly dismantling global climate ambition, with devastating consequences.***

Advocating for an alternative metric - in the midst of a climate emergency - is, at best, a distraction and, at worst, a deliberate tactic to derail global climate action.[21] Reducing methane emissions in real terms offers the world a unique opportunity to slow the current rate of warming which needs to be seized.

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[17] Total greenhouse gas emission estimates for 2024 are 4.28 MtCO2e, 38.26 MtCO2e, 52.57 MtCO2e, 53.76 MtCO2e and 48.68 MtCO2e for Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland respectively. See EDGAR (2025), ***GHG emissions of all world countries***. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025. Accessed 17 July 2026

[18] Beef Central (2026), ***We're counting cattle emissions wrong (and why it matters to every Australian)***. Beef Central, 10 July 2026. Accessed 6 October 2026

[19] Median 2018 IPCC value for coal power station emissions are 820 gCO_2e/kWh on a lifecycle basis, and 760 gCO_2e/kWh for combustion only. A 1 GW power station with 80% capacity utilisation would emit 5,750 ktCO2e/year on a lifecycle basis

[20] Dwyer, O. (2025), ***Q&A: What the "controversial" GWP* methane metric means for farming emissions***. CarbonBrief, 3 October 2025. Accessed 5 October 2026

[21] Ferreira, F., McCabe, D., (2024), ***Focus on reducing methane pollution from all sources, not distractions over metrics***. Clean Air Task Force, 20 May 2024. Accessed 5 October 2026

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

REJECT the inappropriate application of GWP*, including using “temperature neutrality” or “no additional warming” as a basis for national targets or reporting.

ADOPT methane targets aligned with the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C target, setting binding agriculture emissions targets through just transition policies to ecological farming (or agroecology).

OPPOSE and call out other Governments’ unilateral adoption of GWP* based targets and accounting methods.

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