

BRIEFING PAPER

Subject: Achieving the Climate Goals of the Australian Beef Industry
Date: 15th July 2022
Purpose: Industry climate goals, the Global Methane Pledge, and ways government can assist.

Australia's beef cattle industry

1. Employing around 90,000 people across 51,000 beef cattle farming businesses, the beef cattle industry is the largest agricultural industry in Australia. In 2020, beef cattle farming had a turnover of \$21,315 million.
2. Our beef producers are custodians to almost 80 percent of the agricultural land in Australia which equates to around 50 percent of the total landmass. This means that the beef industry is uniquely positioned to be part of the greater solution to Australia's climate challenges. Industry in a unique position to be part of the solution to climate change.
3. The beef industry's contribution to food security both within Australia and in importing countries cannot be overstated. Over the past 20 years, total global consumption of meat has been steadily increasing at an average annual rate of 1 percent for beef. In 2020, Australian beef exports totalled 1 million tonnes shipped weight, valued at \$9.6 billion, making Australia the second largest beef exporter behind Brazil.
4. With about 75% of Australian beef production exported, our industry policy, and national policy must keep pace with that of our global competitors, and the expectations of our customers.
5. **Cattle Council of Australia (CCA)** is the peak industry organisation representing Australian grass-fed cattle producers. Cattle Council is working closely with Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) to make sure the beef industry has a sustainable, low carbon future that is profitable, productive and rewards producers for the environmental work they undertake on their properties.

Beef industry climate goals

6. The need for all sectors of the economy to take action to reduce their impact on the environment is real and will be in the spotlight again following the release of the 2021 State of the Environment Report and as we lead up to COP27 in November 2022.
7. CCA supports the Australian Government setting a strong, **economy wide net zero target** to encourage all sectors to play their part as Australia transitions towards a lower emissions economy.
8. The red meat industry was one of the first to set an industry target in 2017 when MLA announced a goal for the industry to be **carbon neutral by 2030**. The Australian beef industry has committed to this target known as CN30 which will mean that by 2030, production and processing of Australian beef will make no net release of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions into the atmosphere.
9. CN30 progress is measured using figures from the National GHG Inventory (NGHGI) combined with other data and is reported annually in the Australian beef sustainability framework (ABSF). The ABSF Annual Update for 2022 shows the beef industry has reduced its net **CO₂e emissions** since 2005, by **58.21% using the most recent NGHGI figures for 2019**.
10. MLA has developed the **CN30 Roadmap**, which is a science-based plan to get the red meat industry to CN30 without compromising on productivity or livestock numbers.
11. MLA has invested \$200 million since 2017 to progress towards CN30 and has plans to invest another \$150 million over the next few years, focusing on the development and adoption of new technology.
12. Strong partnerships between the industry and government will be critical to ensuring that technology and resources are available to producers to ensure they can understand their emissions account and make the practice changes necessary to achieve CN30.
13. The industry will also reach a **"Climate Neutral" milestone on the pathway to CN30**. Climate neutral is the point at which the industry is causing no additional warming impact on the climate due to the short-lived nature of methane.

14. The Australian beef industry actively participates in the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (GRSB) and both CCA and MLA are Board Directors. **GRSB aims to globally reduce by 30% the net global warming impact of each unit of beef by 2030**, on a pathway to climate neutrality.

About methane

1. Australian red meat industries contribute roughly 10 percent of Australia's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and about two-thirds of these emissions come from cattle. Methane stemming from cattle's natural digestion process is the beef industry's main contribution to GHG emissions.
2. Methane is a short-lived GHG with an atmospheric lifetime of around 12 years, whereas CO₂ from burning fossil fuels continues to build up over centuries. Momentum is growing globally around the concept that methane emissions from livestock are different to CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels. Scientists agree that emissions from grazing livestock are part of a natural carbon cycle that emits little more carbon than is taken in by the plants that the cattle graze on.
3. Livestock industries in Australia can sequester carbon on the vast areas of land they manage to reduce their net CO₂e emissions substantially. This makes the Australian Beef Industry one of the few industries that has the potential to offset its own emissions entirely to achieve a net zero production system.
4. While people tend to point the finger at livestock when it comes to methane emissions, Agriculture is the source of only about half of the methane recorded in Australia's NGHGI.

Global Methane Pledge

1. The 'Global Methane Pledge, was an agreement formally launched at the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) which took place in November 2021. It is a global pledge to reduce methane emissions by 30 percent on 2020 levels by 2030. Australia did not sign the pledge at COP26, but there is likely to be some pressure for more countries to sign as we approach COP27.
2. This 30 percent reduction in methane is ambitious but achievable for the beef industry, if additional investment is made in research, development, extension. Incentives to fast-track commercialisation and adoption of technology such as novel feed supplements and improved livestock genetics will be needed as well as support for producers to undertake on farm carbon accounting and then to plan and execute necessary practice changes.
3. Current stretch targets in the CN30 Roadmap aim for about a 25 percent methane reduction across the red meat and livestock industry by 2030. Most of the industry's reductions to date have been via carbon storage in vegetation. On 2020 numbers most of the remaining reductions that get us to CN30 are likely to be methane reductions.
4. It is expected that much of the remaining net reductions will be made by reducing livestock emissions through the adoption of innovative feed additives such as red Asparagopsis which can reduce livestock methane emissions by up to 80 percent.
5. Another thing worth noting is that Australia doesn't have 2020 NGHGI data available yet and would need to look at ways to expediate the process of correlating our NGHGI accounts to make data available to industries sooner so that they can track their progress.
6. It is also important to remember that the Methane pledge does not mean that every sector or even every country must reduce methane by 30 % on 2020 levels by 2030. It is an overall global goal designed to encourage collective action across all industries and across the globe. The Australian beef industry is in a very good position to be able to be a leading contributor to the Methane Pledge if the government was to sign it, however, the pros and cons for other sectors will need to be considered also, as we can not achieve this on our own.

How Government can help

7. Ensure that Australia's climate change strategies encourage all sectors to take action to reduce their GHG emissions and their impact on the climate.

8. Expand and fund practical on farm extension programs like the Victorian Government's [On-Farm Action Plan Pilot](#), which aims to empower producers to understand, measure and reduce on-farm emissions and provides grants for implementation of the recommended actions.
9. Prioritise development of an Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF) Methodologies that encourage adoption of methane reducing livestock feed technologies as soon as they are available.
10. Ensure that the Climate Active certification system is able to keep pace with technology developments coming from industry and ensure that the system rewards the work that producers have already done to make their land a valuable carbon sink.
11. Partner with industry to deliver public education initiatives that combat misinformation about livestock production and help people understand the most impactful ways they can reduce their impact on the climate.

Further Information

Michelle Randall,
Policy Manager, Environment and Sustainability
CCA, environment@cattlecouncil.com.au

Margaret Jewell,
Carbon Neutral 2030 (CN30) Manager
MLA mjewell@mla.com.au

Rob Herrick,
Media, and Communications Manager, CCA
commsmanager@cattlecouncil.com.au