

**Open letter on the need to reduce agricultural methane pollution
as part of a just transition in the agri-food sector**

March 2026

Cc: Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth Wopke Hoekstra

Dear Minister O'Brien

Farmers continue to face the front-line impacts of the climate crisis and action must be taken to protect them and our food systems. To have any chance of doing so, we must see deep and sustained cuts in agricultural methane pollution alongside the phasing out of fossil fuels.ⁱ Failure to collectively take action in food systems could add nearly 1°C of warming by the end of this century, putting the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature limit out of reach.ⁱⁱ

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to urge you to follow the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate, Environment and Energyⁱⁱⁱ and **reject a 'temperature neutrality' approach to setting Ireland's next carbon budgets.**

We are a diverse group of civil society organizations from Ireland and across the rest of Europe who support the transition to sustainable and agroecological food systems.

The Irish Climate Change Advisory Council's interpretation^{iv} of Ireland's climate obligations as only needing to stabilize Ireland's contribution to global warming is inconsistent with EU law.

Under the European Climate Law, the EU and its Member States have committed to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) emissions by 2050 at the latest and net negative GHG emissions thereafter.^v The Council concedes that its approach is inconsistent with achieving those objectives.^{vi}

Adopting this 'no additional warming' approach to assessing methane's contribution to global warming rests on the flawed assumption that current methane levels are acceptable. They are not.^{vii}

Europe is the fastest warming continent and farmers throughout the bloc are already facing the rising costs of dealing with climate extremes, including in Ireland.^{viii} Methane

pollution is responsible for about 0.5°C of present day warming, with agriculture (mostly livestock production) responsible for about 0.2°C.^{ix}

Cutting methane emissions is one of the fastest ways to slow the speed at which Earth heats up and to limit the maximum temperature the planet will reach.^x It is incumbent upon all Member States to limit future warming as much as possible and pull this climate emergency brake, rather than ‘grandfather’ in current pollution levels. The notion that Irish production levels are needed to ensure global food security does not hold up under scrutiny.^{xi}

Ireland will hold the EU Presidency in the second half of this year and is seeking membership on the UN Human Rights Council for 2027-2029 – with the right to food as a pillar of its platform. Leadership in either fora requires taking strong action to protect our climate.

Reducing agricultural methane pollution as part of “a transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy”^{xii} will entail significant changes to meat and dairy production, and for the farmers, agri-food system workers, and rural communities involved in that work.

Ireland has experience in working towards a just transition through its Just Transition Taskforce and Commission.^{xiii} We encourage you to build on those strengths during your Presidency and champion the need for agri-food just transition financing and programming as part of the post-2027 CAP and EU budget negotiations to ensure that farmers, farm workers, and rural communities are supported during this transition and no one is left behind.

Setting carbon budgets in line with a clear trajectory towards net zero GHG emissions, and being transparent about residual emissions in agriculture,^{xiv} will help guide farmers in making the appropriate investment choices and reduce the risk of stranded assets from regulatory or consumer shifts.^{xv}

With robust target setting and supportive policies, ambitious climate action in the agri-food sector and sustainable farm livelihoods and rural communities can go hand-in-hand.

Kind regards,



Signatories

1. Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) Europe
2. Zero Waste Alliance Ireland
3. European Environmental Bureau
4. Changing Markets Foundation
5. Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V.
6. Compassion in World Farming
7. ProVeg International
8. EHNE BIZKAIA
9. Green REV Institute
10. Safe Food Federation
11. The European Institute for Animal Law & Policy
12. Environmental Justice Network Ireland
13. Eurogroup for Animals
14. Friends of the Earth Ireland
15. Foodrise
16. Opportunity Green
17. Environmental Investigation Agency
18. Talamhbeo
19. Environmental Pillar
20. Centre for Environmental Living & Training (CELT)
21. Green Transition Denmark
22. Sonairte
23. The Environmental Forum
24. Friends of the Earth Europe
25. BirdLife Europe and Central Asia
26. Greenpeace International
27. Animal Advocacy & Food Transition
28. Stop Climate Chaos
29. Green Sod Ireland
30. CAN Europe
31. Agroecology Europe
32. An Taisce Climate Committee
33. Community Law and Mediation
34. Mighty Earth

ⁱ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-023-01168-8>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-023-01605-8>

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https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/34/joint_committee_on_climate_environment_and_energy/reports/2025/2025-10-06_report-on-the-proposed-carbon-budgets_en.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.climatecouncil.ie/media/CCAC%20Carbon-Budget%20Proposal%202024-final.pdf>

^v European Climate Law Art. 2, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021R1119>; Paris Agreement Rulebook Decision 18/CMA.1, annex, paragraph 37, <https://unfccc.int/resource/tet/0/00mpg.pdf>

^{vi} Page 4: “none of the scenarios modelled by the [Carbon Budgets Working Group] achieve net zero GHG emissions by 2050, on the basis of GWP100”, <https://www.climatecouncil.ie/media/CCAC%20Carbon-Budget%20Proposal%202024-final.pdf>

^{vii} <https://biogenicmethane.org/>

^{viii} <https://climate.copernicus.eu/why-are-europe-and-arctic-heating-faster-rest-world>; <https://www.fi-compass.eu/library/market-analysis/insurance-and-risk-management-tools-agriculture-eu>; <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/national-climate-change-risk-assessment-technical-report.php>

^{ix} https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf; <https://pce.parliament.nz/media/mkjpbjsn/reisinger-contribution-of-historical-methane-emissions-to-present-day-warming.pdf>

^x <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abf9c8>; <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-023-00898-z>

^{xi} <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/adf12d>

^{xii} <https://revisedacts.lawreform.ie/eli/2015/act/46/revised/en/html#SEC3>

^{xiii} <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-climate-energy-and-the-environment/publications/just-transition-taskforce/>; <https://justtransitioncommission.ie/>

^{xiv} <https://ieep.eu/publications/residual-emissions-from-agriculture-analysis-of-emission-reduction-scenarios/>

^{xv} <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-025-01283-z>