

Ben Mayhew <Ben.Mayhew@mfe.govt.nz> 12/6/2024 2:22 AM

## Posts by Matthew

### Feed post



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Yesterday the New Zealand Government released the report from its independent biogenic methane panel. The panel looked at both the science of biogenic methane and estimates of the reductions in this gas needed to achieve 'no additional warming'.

The conclusions of this panel offer yet another example of how many of the most challenging aspects of target-setting are questions of equity, for which science can only play a supporting role. The results also highlight the important role that terms of reference play for panel reviews.

The panel concluded that in a scenario where:

- the world meets a 1.5°C goal, then reducing NZ's biogenic methane emissions by 24% by 2050 would achieve no additional warming
- global emissions do not reduce rapidly, a reduction of biogenic methane emission levels of around 14-15% by 2050 would achieve no additional warming


Fascinatingly, the differentiation between scenarios is not the result of any considerations of fairness or equity, but a conclusion reached solely from climate modelling. This is because each extra unit of atmospheric methane would have a lower "additional warming" impact when global emissions are higher.

A comparison between the panel conclusions released this week, and the advice given on biogenic methane by the Climate Change Commission (CCC) in 2021 offers some useful perspectives on the importance that terms of reference play in determining the conclusions reached. The CCC had terms of reference to "consider New Zealand's potential contribution to global efforts to limit biogenic methane emissions, reflecting its national circumstance". Whereas the terms of reference set for the methane panel in 2024 were tightly focussed on the science. Specifically, the terms of reference for the panel said "out of scope was making any conclusions or recommendations that go beyond performing the scientific review".

The CCC assessed that global agricultural methane emissions would likely need to reduce by at least 37% in 2100 as part of efforts to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The CCC then said that because of NZ's national circumstances that, on balance, the reduction from NZ should be higher than this global average. They suggested a reduction of between 49% and 60% below 2017 levels by 2100 would be appropriate for NZ in the context of a global 1.5°C target.

In summary, we can see that science provides an important starting point for our discussions about targets, but it can't provide all of the answers we need. In addition, if we ask independent panels to look at NZ's contribution to global warming on the basis of science alone, without giving them any direction to consider equity in their response, then we are likely to come out with numbers that would need to be raised to meet the expectations of our peer countries and trading counterparties. Target setting is messy, complicated and imperfect but it still a critical part of the work that we need to do.

Out of scope



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Methane

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