



Farmers Guardian

THE HEART OF AGRICULTURE

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CLIMATE RETHINK

- Methane records 'misleading'
- Pushback on cutting livestock

By Abi Kay

LEADING scientists from across the world have warned the current methodology for recording methane emissions from livestock is distorting our understanding of climate change.

The livestock industry has been touted as one of the leading causes of global warming, but in recent years a number of experts have explained that methane emissions should be treated differently to CO₂ or nitrous oxide emissions.

CO₂ is known as a 'stock' gas, because it accumulates in the atmosphere and takes about 1,000 years to degrade, but methane is a 'flow' gas, which breaks down within 10 years.

Now, a landmark report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has officially recognised it is wrong to assess the impacts of these gases in the same way.

The Sixth Assessment Report, which is the first major review of climate science since 2013, came as wildfires raged through Southern Europe, North Africa and the US.

Chief executive of climate and food security think-tank Farmwel and Government adviser on ruminant methane, ffinlo Costain, said: "This year's IPCC report has made it clear that the current carbon metric, GWPI100, is unfit for purpose for assessing the impact of short-lived greenhouse gases, such as enteric methane.

"In fact, net zero warming from



As wildfires raged across the world this week, farm leaders have welcomed a reassessment of the impact of methane from livestock (inset).

PICTURE: GETTY IMAGES

enteric methane can be achieved through a 0.3 per cent emissions reduction, year-on-year, in existing flocks and herds."

Focus

Mr Costain added the current focus on methane emissions was misleading and should be replaced by a focus on the warming linked to those emissions, which would re-emphasise the importance of reducing carbon emissions from energy use, feed production, transport and synthetic nitrogen fertilisers.

The report also noted that global

methane emissions from the oil, gas and coal industries are higher than previously reported, matching those from livestock, and called for further research on methane emissions from trees.

National Sheep Association chief executive Phil Stocker said reducing the national flock was not the right solution to tackling climate change, noting cuts in grazing livestock numbers in Britain, coupled with efficiency gains, were already considered to have contributed to 'atmospheric cooling'.

He said: "My strong belief is that

British sheep farming is already at a general point of harmony which brings climate, social and biodiversity benefits."

Targets

Ian Davis, a livestock farmer from Hatfield, Hertfordshire, said: "The report has the potential to change national and global policy targets and alter the priority of actions.

"The truth remains that the biggest single thing any first world citizen can do to cut their climate and biodiversity impact is have one fewer child, not reduce their red meat consumption."