

INTERNATIONAL



The Future of Methane Governance

Discussion Paper

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Methane is one of the most important opportunities for slowing global warming in the near term. Since methane is responsible for roughly one-third of observed warming since the industrial revolution, emissions reductions can deliver rapid climate benefits while also improving air quality, energy security, public health, food systems, and economic outcomes. Significant mitigation opportunities exist across the agriculture, waste, and fossil fuel sectors, including many low-cost measures.

Methane has become an increasingly prominent feature of international climate cooperation. The Global Methane Pledge, the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action on Methane, the Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA) and its COP31 priorities, and growing attention from the Group of 20 (G20) have helped create a rapidly expanding ecosystem of voluntary initiatives, partnerships, finance mechanisms, and implementation programs.

Despite this momentum, **methane emissions continue to rise.** While existing voluntary initiatives have successfully mobilized political attention and technical cooperation, they have not yet demonstrated emissions reductions at the scale required by climate science. Many methane initiatives rely on voluntary commitments that vary in ambition, implementation, transparency, and accountability, creating a fragmented governance landscape that makes collective progress difficult to assess.

As methane governance matures, the focus is increasingly shifting from commitment-making to implementation and accountability. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC's) 31st Conference of Parties (COP31) provides an opportunity to strengthen transparency across methane initiatives by improving reporting on implementation progress, emissions outcomes, and barriers to delivery. The GCAA could also elevate methane action by companies, financial institutions, cities, and other non-state actors while supporting the development of methane measurement, disclosure, certification, and financing frameworks.

COP31 and the second global stocktake (GST2) may also provide opportunities to reinforce the importance of methane within the UN climate regime. Parties could build on the call from GST1 to accelerate reductions in non-carbon dioxide emissions, particularly methane, and assess whether current efforts are delivering reductions consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement. Processes under the Paris Agreement, including nationally determined contributions (NDCs), Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs), and the Facilitative Multilateral Consideration of Progress (FMCP), could help improve accountability while creating greater visibility into methane-related policies, commitments, and implementation efforts.

Looking further ahead, **methane governance could evolve in several directions.** Options range from strengthening accountability within existing voluntary initiatives to developing more formal bilateral or plurilateral agreements among interested countries. Some have also raised the possibility of a standalone international methane agreement that could establish clearer objectives, reporting systems, and accountability arrangements. Whether existing institutions prove sufficient or demand grows for more formal governance arrangements will depend on the ability of current voluntary initiatives to translate growing political momentum into measurable methane reductions over time.

Questions for consideration

- Can existing voluntary methane initiatives deliver emissions reductions at the scale and speed required by climate science, or is stronger accountability needed?
- How can COP31 and GST2 strengthen implementation, transparency, and accountability for methane action within the UN climate architecture?
- What forms of methane governance, from enhanced voluntary cooperation to more formal international arrangements, may be needed if current efforts prove insufficient?

A. Why Methane Is a Strategic Climate Priority

1. Methane is one of the most expedient and cost-effective opportunities for slowing global warming in the near term while delivering broader economic, health, and development benefits.
2. Atmospheric methane concentrations continue to rise each year, accounting for roughly one-third of global temperature rise since the industrial revolution.¹
3. Emitted primarily from the fossil fuel, agriculture, and waste sectors, methane remains in the atmosphere for only around 12 years, as compared to centuries for carbon dioxide. Since methane is particularly potent, contributing to 80 times the global warming effects of carbon dioxide in a 20-year period, reducing methane emissions, can produce climate benefits much more quickly than carbon dioxide reductions alone.
4. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (**IPCC**) has concluded that pathways consistent with limiting warming to 1.5 degrees C require substantial methane reductions, including cuts of approximately 34 percent by 2030 and 51 percent by 2050 relative to 2019 levels.²
5. The agriculture sector accounts for the largest share of methane emissions, making up 40 percent of anthropogenic emissions, largely linked to livestock and rice cultivation. Improved agricultural management—such as improved management of water in rice production, manure in herds, and better livestock quality through breeding and better feeding practices—as well as dietary shifts away from emissions intensive livestock products, can reduce methane emissions in line with 1.5 degrees C pathways.³ Methane emissions from the fossil fuel sector, which accounts for 35 percent of methane emissions from human activity, are still not falling despite proven mitigation pathways. An International Energy Agency (**IEA**) report found that methane emissions from oil, gas, and coal production output in 2025, which reached record highs that year, totaled 124 million tonnes.⁴ Around 70 percent of methane emissions from fossil fuels can be abated through existing technologies and 30 percent can be reduced at no cost.⁵
6. Strong, rapid, and sustained methane mitigation can produce significant co-benefits, including improved energy security,⁶ cleaner air,⁷ increased food security,⁸ improved public health outcomes,⁹ and economic opportunities.¹⁰

B. The Rise of Voluntary Methane Governance

7. With methane a growing focus of climate cooperation, a key question is how the evolving landscape of voluntary initiatives, sectoral partnerships, financial mechanisms, and UNFCCC processes can collectively contribute to emissions reductions at the scale and speed required to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement.



8. The Global Methane Pledge, which now includes 159 countries and the European Union, has helped establish broad political support for methane reduction and demonstrated that action is possible across all major emitting sectors.
9. The COP31 Action Agenda has identified waste methane as a priority implementation area, reflecting growing recognition of methane's importance beyond the energy sector.¹¹
10. At COP30, the United Kingdom led a statement on “Drastically Reducing Methane Emissions in the Global Fossil Fuel Sector” that was signed by an additional 12 countries—including four G20 countries—and sought to drive robust monitoring, transparent reporting, elimination of routine flaring and venting, and stronger partnerships between producing and consuming nations.¹² Given that two thirds of methane emissions originate from G20 countries,¹³ commitment to emissions reductions by G20 countries is significant.

C. Why Current Approaches May Not Be Delivering Fast Enough

11. Despite growing political momentum and an expanding ecosystem of methane partnerships and initiatives, global atmospheric methane emissions continue to rise each year.
12. Current voluntary efforts have been successful in mobilizing technical cooperation, financial support, and implementation initiatives, but they have not yet delivered emissions reductions at the scale required. The methane governance landscape remains fragmented across sectors, institutions, and initiatives, making it difficult to evaluate overall effectiveness.
13. Existing approaches rely heavily on voluntary commitments, which can vary significantly in ambition, implementation, and transparency. Many initiatives lack common reporting methodologies, accountability mechanisms, or processes for assessing collective progress.
14. While voluntary initiatives have successfully generated momentum and cooperation, they have not yet demonstrated an ability to deliver global methane reductions consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement. This governance gap may create pressure for stronger forms of international coordination in the future.
15. There may be opportunities for COP31 and GST2 to strengthen methane governance. The UN Secretary-General's Call to Action on Methane has further highlighted the need to shift from commitment-making toward implementation, accountability, and accelerated emissions reductions.¹⁴ Canada and the European Union endorsed the call to action and urged countries to strengthen methane mitigation in the lead up to COP31.¹⁵ France and the United Kingdom encouraged all countries to accelerate emissions reductions at COP31 and work jointly to develop a marketplace for fossil fuels with near-zero methane intensity proposed in the call to action.¹⁶

D. Looking Ahead to COP31 and GST2: What Can the UN Climate Regime Do to Accelerate Reduction of Methane Emissions

16. As methane has become an increasingly prominent feature of international climate cooperation, a key question for Parties is how evolving efforts inside and outside the UNFCCC can reinforce one another. COP31 and GST2 offer distinct but complementary opportunities to consider this question.

COP31

The Action Agenda

17. The GCAA already provides an institutional framework for tracking and accelerating climate action by non-Party stakeholders (*NPS*). Through its annual implementation cycle, the GCAA reviews committed actions and progress updates, including through indicators aligned with the GST, and publishes the *Yearbook of Climate Action* to highlight progress, identify gaps, and showcase effective initiatives.
18. The findings of the 2025 *Yearbook of Climate Action* suggest that methane remains one of the weakest-performing areas of climate action despite its significant mitigation potential.¹⁷ While methane reductions



could deliver approximately 75 percent of the available emissions-abatement potential, the Yearbook found no measurable progress toward reducing methane emissions from the oil and gas sector, no progress in methane reductions across the broader energy sector, and insufficient data to assess the methane-abatement potential covered by existing fossil fuel and oil and gas methane pledges.¹⁸ These findings point not only to an implementation gap, but also to persistent challenges in measurement, reporting, and accountability.

19. The GCAA already hosts several initiatives intended to accelerate methane mitigation. This includes the Plan to Accelerate Integrating Agricultural Development and Methane Mitigation, hosted by the Clean Air Task Force, Climate & Clean Air Coalition, and Environmental Defense Fund, providing global coordination to accelerate implementation of efforts to reduce emissions stemming from livestock and rice systems.¹⁹ The Accelerate the World Bank's Global Methane Reduction Plan for Development (*CH4D*) aims to support development goals in agriculture, waste, and food systems through cost-effective methane reductions that align with the 2030 targets under the Global Methane Pledge.²⁰
20. The COP31 Action Agenda could focus on strengthening accountability and transparency across the growing ecosystem of existing methane commitments, partnerships, and implementation initiatives. The methane landscape now includes the Global Methane Pledge, sector-specific commitments, implementation plans, and a range of public-private collaborations including the Global Methane Hub and Global Methane Initiative. While these initiatives have helped build political momentum, the limited progress identified in the 2025 *Yearbook of Climate Action* suggests that greater attention should be paid to how implementation is tracked and assessed over time.
21. The new GCAA put in place by the Brazil COP30 Presidency aligns with the outcomes of the global stocktake. One way forward to ensure that initiatives on methane deliver could be to follow through on the new GCAA structure. COP31 could build upon the GCAA's existing annual review process by encouraging participating initiatives to report more systematically on implementation progress, emissions outcomes, and barriers to delivery. They could also showcase examples of successful implementation and highlight lessons learned from initiatives that have achieved measurable methane reductions.
22. The GCAA could also provide an opportunity to elevate methane action by actors beyond national governments. Companies engaged in international cooperative initiatives could highlight efforts related to methane measurement, disclosure, leak detection and repair, methane-intensity reduction, and supply-chain management. For example, the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative was involved in the GCAA at COP30. Financial institutions could demonstrate how methane performance is being incorporated into financing decisions, investment strategies, and disclosure frameworks. Given the Action Agenda's focus on waste methane, cities and subnational governments could help showcase practical mitigation opportunities in landfills, wastewater systems, and organic waste management. Bringing these actors into the implementation cycle could complement national efforts and improve visibility regarding where methane reductions are occurring in practice.
23. Building on the UN Secretary-General's calls for stronger methane action, the COP31 GCAA could also facilitate discussions on the development of markets for products and energy produced with low- or near-zero methane emissions. Such discussions could examine emerging methane-intensity standards, certification systems, measurement and verification approaches, and disclosure frameworks. The GCAA could help improve transparency and comparability across these emerging initiatives and assess whether market-based incentives can complement regulatory approaches in driving additional methane reductions.

Potential Negotiated Outcomes at COP31

24. Parties could consider building upon GST1 language regarding the acceleration of non-CO₂ emissions reductions, particularly methane. For example, a formal decision could: (i) recognize methane as a critical element of efforts to slow near-term warming while delivering energy, health, agricultural, and development benefits; (ii) note growing international attention to methane across the UN system, the



G20, and various international initiatives; (iii) acknowledge ongoing discussions regarding methane goals, benchmarks, implementation arrangements, and accountability mechanisms; and (iv) invite continued consideration of how methane ambition might be reflected in future cycles of climate action, thereby creating space for future discussions without prejudging their outcome. Such language could reinforce political momentum without necessarily establishing new targets or commitments.

Leveraging Existing Processes Under the UNFCCC

25. Parties are required to report methane emissions through the greenhouse gas inventories included in their Biennial Transparency Reports (**BTRs**). However, methane-specific policies, targets, and implementation measures are not always clearly reflected in NDCs, particularly where methane-related actions are pursued through voluntary initiatives such as the Global Methane Pledge. This creates a disconnect between reporting on methane emissions and reporting on efforts and policies to reduce them, as there is currently no mandate to include this information in BTRs. Reporting on voluntary initiatives could be included in the upcoming review of the BTR guidelines however.²¹
26. Preliminary analysis of NDCs 3.0 show that an increasing number of Parties are including methane in their commitments, with 84 percent of new NDCs addressing methane from at least one emitting sector. To accelerate methane emissions reductions through greater transparency and accountability, Parties could consider more explicitly incorporating methane reduction objectives, sectoral measures, and implementation strategies into future NDC updates and related national climate planning processes. While many Parties have already submitted their most recent NDCs, future rounds of NDC enhancement provide an opportunity to better align methane-related commitments with Parties' formal obligations under the Paris Agreement.
27. Greater integration of methane into NDCs would also create additional opportunities to utilize existing accountability mechanisms under the Paris Agreement. In particular, Parties could make greater use of the Facilitative Multilateral Consideration of Progress (**FMCP**) process as a venue for discussing methane action and implementation. The FMCP allows Parties to ask questions regarding one another's progress in implementing and achieving their NDCs. Where methane-related commitments and measures are reflected in NDCs, Parties could use the process to seek information on methane policies, implementation efforts, monitoring systems, and progress toward methane reduction objectives. In practice, Parties have already begun raising questions related to methane commitments and implementation during FMCP sessions, suggesting that there is scope to build on an emerging precedent.
28. The FMCP also provides Parties with an opportunity to showcase their commitment to global climate action beyond their own borders through international cooperative initiatives (**ICIs**) participating in the Action Agenda, such as the Global Methane Pledge. In doing so, Parties can also surface implementation gaps and translate barriers into investment and cooperation opportunities.

GST2

29. GST2 could provide an opportunity to assess whether current methane-related efforts are collectively delivering emissions reductions at the scale required by climate science to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement.
30. Parties could consider whether the existing GST1 call to accelerate reductions of non-carbon dioxide emissions, particularly methane, remains sufficient or whether stronger signals may be warranted. One option could be to reaffirm existing GST1 language while emphasizing implementation and delivery. Another option could be to strengthen expectations around methane action by more explicitly linking methane reductions to pathways assessed by the IPCC.
31. Parties could also consider whether GST2 should articulate a clearer collective benchmark against which global methane progress can be assessed. Possible approaches could range from qualitative signals regarding the importance of methane reductions to quantitative targets and timelines informed by scientific assessments. Discussions could explore the relationship between any global methane

benchmark and future national climate commitments, while recognizing different national circumstances and development priorities.

32. GST2 could also provide an opportunity to assess whether recent developments outside the UNFCCC process, including voluntary initiatives, methane finance efforts, methane-intensity frameworks, and emerging market mechanisms, are contributing meaningfully to emissions reductions.
33. For example, GST2 could set out a target of reducing methane emissions 45 percent by 2040.²² In this context, Parties could consider whether a strong methane target within the Paris Agreement framework would help align ongoing efforts by governments, companies, investors, and subnational actors around a common direction of travel.
34. More broadly, GST2 could provide a forum for examining how methane fits within the next phase of climate cooperation and whether existing approaches are sufficient to support achievement of the Paris Agreement's long-term goals.

E. Is a Standalone Methane Treaty Worth Considering?

35. The options discussed above focus on strengthening implementation, transparency, and accountability within existing institutions and voluntary initiatives. However, if current approaches continue to fall short of delivering methane reductions at the scale and speed required by climate science, Parties may increasingly consider whether additional forms of international governance are needed. One question that could emerge over time is whether methane governance should continue to rely primarily on voluntary arrangements or evolve toward more formal international frameworks.

Potential Benefits of a Standalone Methane Agreement

36. One possible option would be the development of a standalone international agreement focused specifically on methane mitigation. Unlike existing arrangements, such an agreement could establish clearer collective objectives, common reporting methodologies, and more structured processes for reviewing implementation.
37. A dedicated methane agreement could also provide a more coherent framework for international cooperation. The current methane governance landscape consists of a growing network of pledges, partnerships, sectoral initiatives, financing arrangements, and implementation platforms. A more formal agreement could help connect these efforts within a single institutional framework while strengthening transparency and accountability, drawing lessons from other agreements such as the Montreal Protocol.
38. In an address at the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley suggested a concise, enforceable agreement, modeled after the Montreal Protocol, which successfully phased out substances that deplete the ozone layer.²³ The proposal has gained some traction, although some have warned that building widespread support for adoption could face challenges.²⁴
39. The suggestion to model a new methane agreement after the Montreal Protocol is based on the latter's success in achieving global cooperation. The Montreal Protocol, established in 1987, is widely regarded as one of the most successful international environmental agreements, having led to the near-complete phase-out of ozone-depleting substances.²⁵ Such a framework could help streamline, guide, and enhance international cooperation, ensuring that all Parties are incentivized to take meaningful, coordinated actions toward reducing methane emissions. It could also provide a clearer mechanism for assessing collective progress toward methane reduction goals and identifying implementation gaps. Given methane's potent warming effects in the short term, a comparable global framework for its reduction could have similarly transformative impacts on climate change mitigation, particularly if it is structured to be both flexible and enforceable.²⁶

Potential drawbacks of a standalone methane agreement

40. A standalone methane agreement may face significant practical and political challenges. Negotiating a new treaty could require considerable diplomatic effort and potentially many years of discussion, negotiation, and ratification. Such a process could compete with efforts to accelerate implementation through existing institutions and initiatives.
41. Methane emissions originate from a diverse set of sectors, including fossil fuels, agriculture, and waste, each with distinct economic, technological, and political considerations. Reaching agreement on common obligations, timelines, or accountability arrangements across these sectors could prove challenging. In addition, the effectiveness of any agreement would depend heavily on participation by major methane-emitting countries. A treaty that excluded key emitters could have limited impact on global emissions. At the same time, a new treaty need not necessarily be universal, but could rather involve specific countries that are particularly relevant to tackling methane emissions.

Alternative pathways: from voluntary cooperation to more formal arrangements

42. Between the current system of voluntary initiatives and a new methane treaty lies a range of intermediate governance options. One possibility would be the gradual evolution of existing voluntary arrangements into more structured forms of cooperation among interested countries, building on the new GCAA structure. For example, two or more countries could enter into bilateral or plurilateral agreements focused on methane mitigation. Such agreements could establish common reporting approaches, implementation frameworks, sector-specific methane standards, or accountability arrangements among participating countries. They could also facilitate cooperation on methane measurement and monitoring, technology deployment, financing, certification systems, or methane-intensity standards for traded products.
43. These arrangements would differ from existing political pledges by creating more formal expectations regarding implementation and transparency among participating members. At the same time, they would involve fewer countries than a universal treaty, potentially making them easier to negotiate and implement.
44. Over time, experience gained through bilateral, plurilateral, or other coalition-based approaches could provide practical lessons regarding stronger methane governance arrangements. If such arrangements prove effective, they could remain limited to participating countries, expand to include additional members, or eventually inform broader discussions regarding international methane governance. In this way, methane governance could evolve incrementally, building upon existing initiatives while creating opportunities to test new approaches to accountability, transparency, and international cooperation. If such arrangements are considered ineffective, countries could decide to enter into more formal agreements or a treaty.

F. C2ES Resources

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- ¹² CCAC, “Statement on Drastically Reducing Methane Emissions in the Global Fossil Fuel Sector,” accessed September 18, 2026, <https://www.ccacoalition.org/content/statement-drastically-reducing-methane-emissions-global-fossil-fuel-sector>.
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