(English version)

Question for written answer E-002719/24
to the Commission
Saskia Bricmont (Verts/ALE)
(2 December 2024)

Subject: Recent developments regarding methane emissions possibly not complying with EU-New Zealand free trade agreement

The Government of New Zealand (NZ) has appointed a panel to deliver an independent review of methane science and the national 2050 methane reduction target 'for consistency with no additional warming from agricultural methane emissions' ([1]). However, according to scientists, adopting the concept of 'no additional warming' and weakening existing national methane reduction targets could undermine commitments made under the Paris Agreement ([2]). The recently adopted EU-NZ free trade agreement (FTA) aims to promote an increase in the trade of livestock and dairy products, which are a significant source of methane emissions. The Commission described the FTA as a 'gold standard' because it obliges the parties to effectively implement the Paris Agreement. This includes refraining from any action or omission that defeats the Agreement's object and purpose.

1. Is the Commission following these concerning developments in NZ and has it engaged in discussions with NZ about them?

2. What actions is the Commission taking to ensure that NZ does not backtrack on its climate ambitions when it comes to methane reduction?

3. Is the Commission prepared to use all means at its disposal to enforce the FTA if NZ indeed decides to weaken its national methane reduction targets?

Submitted: 2.12.2024

Answer given by Mr Šefčovič on behalf of the European Commission
(4 February 2025)

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the European Union and New Zealand establishes the structures and procedures to analyse, discuss and address any matters which arise in relation to the FTA, including issues related to the Paris Agreement ([1]) on climate change.

The Commission services are in contact with their New Zealand counterparts to prepare the first meetings of the committees established under the FTA, which are foreseen to take place in the first half of 2025. In these bilateral exchanges, various matters of interest and concern are being anticipated and discussed, including with regard to greenhouse gases such as methane.

Independently from the FTA, the Commission is engaged with New Zealand in high level dialogues on climate change to intensify bilateral and multilateral climate cooperation, including on methane emissions. The first such dialogue took place in 2023, while the second one is expected to be held this year.

If a potential matter of concern with regard to the commitments agreed in an FTA is identified, the Commission can formally engage with New Zealand with an aim to resolve the issue. In particular, the matter can be followed-up in the relevant committee of the FTA. If no solution were to be found with respect to a potential breach, the FTA foresees the possibility to resort to dispute settlement proceedings.

The Paris Agreement is an essential element of the FTA and the Commission is committed to ensuring that its objective and purpose is respected, including in our relations with our closest partners.

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1 [1]https://environment.govt.nz/assets/news/Methane-Science-and-Target-Review-Terms-of-Reference.pdf.
2 [2]https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab56e7/meta.
([1]) Key aspects of the Paris Agreement: https://unfccc.int/most-requested/key-aspects-of-the-paris-agreement