

Earth's Biggest Threat | Animal Liberation Victoria

From [Tamasin Ramsay, Ph.D | Environmental Anthropologist ALV Animal Liberation Victoria](#)

June 2024

Posted on All-Creatures.org: June 26, 2024

Even if we consider animals as commodities without hearts, minds, bodies, social and emotional worlds, families and kinship networks. Even if we consider them in the most callous and unsympathetic way possible, it is not in our self-interest to harm and kill animals. The harm and death we inflict on non-human animals is being turned back on us.



Are you wondering why you haven't heard about the catastrophic effect animal industry is having on the environment? Have you ever wondered why 'environmentalists' talk about mining, fracking and fossil fuels while eating pepperoni pizza? Have you ever wondered why 'environmentalists' have four-minute showers and turn off lights while eating organic free range meat? To many of us, it is a mystery. Yet, on the face of it, diet should be one of the easiest and quickest changes to make. What we eat is our choosing. Our lifestyle is in our hands. No one can tell us what we should or shouldn't eat. Or can they?

Academics and scientists at Chatham House were curious about this glaring social vacuum and conducted some [research](#) to find answers.

The findings determined a number of reasons for the disconnect between the values people hold, and their unaware behaviours. Most Australians are against animal cruelty and care about the environment. Yet most Australians support an industry of cruelty that is clearly detrimental to the environment. The reasons: private sector resistance by animal enterprises, cultural hurdles, public resistance to personal change, real lack of belief that each individual can make a big difference, and – very interestingly – [a gap between awareness and action](#) in the general population.

Considering most Australians care about animals and care about the environment, it is worthwhile looking at the widespread damage to the environment being done by animal agriculture... something a lot of us are unaware of.



Click to view the environmental impact of eating animals, from the cradle to the grave - <https://www.ewg.org/consumer-guides/ewgs-quick-tips-reducing-your-diets-climate-footprint> .

As you will read below, the single best thing you can do for the environment is become vegan.

Global Warming

Many of us are familiar with the [widely cited statistic](#) that agriculture contributes 18% of our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (the figure was [reduced to 14.5%](#) by the FAO in 2013). This calculation is based on the warming potential of GHGs using a 100-year time frame and [the decision to use that number was arbitrary](#)(p 711).



It makes much more sense to use the 20-year time frame: we can see the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and we can see the power of our ability to mitigate warming. It is clear now, that in the immediate future [“we will have to radically change our approach to energy production and consumption.”](#) Calculated using a 20-year time frame, our domestic agricultural industry actually contributes around [54% of Australia’s total greenhouse gas emissions](#). A collective move away from consuming animals can drastically and rapidly reduce these emissions.

Heat generating emissions from land clearing (for pasture), enteric fermentation (cow belching and breathing), burning savannah, manure, and livestock production generates [83% of all Australian agricultural emissions](#) (p 45).

Compared to the animal industry, fruit, vegetables and grains are small potatoes.

Some background about greenhouse gases.

When calculating gases and determining their warming potential, everything is converted to carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e) as a way to standardise the warming potential of lots of different gases. Fossil fuels, electricity generation, mining and other industrial processes all create CO₂e. The global-warming potential (GWP) is a relative measure of how much heat a GHG traps in the atmosphere. It compares the amount of heat trapped by a certain gas with the amount of heat trapped by CO₂. A GWP of a particular GHG is calculated over a specific time interval, commonly 20, 100 or 500 years. GWP is expressed as a factor of CO₂ (whose GWP is standardised to 1). Using this equation, [methane lives in the atmosphere for 12.4 years and has a GWP of 86 over 20 years \(and 34 over 100 years\)](#). Other reports show similar numbers. Therefore, when changing the time horizon from 100 to 20 years it becomes clear that one of the greatest CO₂e producers is the animal agriculture industry.

As CH₄ has a high GWP and a short atmospheric lifetime, it behoves us to act quickly, and bring a rapid halt to the industry of animal agriculture.

The thing is, all of this is very good news. The effect of methane is great but brief. After around seven years, it has already lost half of its potency. [Other heat-causing gases last in the atmosphere much longer](#).



The reduction in rearing and killing animals for food will mean a very quick reversal in the global warming caused by methane.

Water Usage

In wealthy and developed countries like Australia each person uses a lot of water: around 500 litres of water a day. As part of that, we use 40 litres of water in an average 4-minute shower. Remember the “4 minute showers” initiative a few years ago? There were even waterproof timers to help us keep on track. In any case, most of us wouldn’t stand in the shower for hours, as we know it would be a real waste of water. Yet, how aware are we of the water that goes into the food we consume? [Sometimes it is difficult to tell, because animal industries aren’t looked at separately from fruit, vegetables and grains](#). If we remember that most crops are grown to feed animals pre-slaughter, then it becomes easier to see the impact of animal agriculture on Australian water supply.

One of the biggest contributors to our footprint is our diet, and meat and dairy are the most resource intensive. [Each kilogram of meat uses around 14,000 litres of water](#) (p 28). Each kilogram of protein rich vegetables uses 300 litres. It is much less water intensive and more efficient to get your nutritional requirements from a plant-based diet. Think about it: every time you sit down with your family to eat “steak,” as well as eating part of a cow who has been killed for you, you are also using the same amount of water as if you left your shower running for 24 hours.

[By eating the amount of meat and dairy that we do](#), we are asking industry to keep depleting our water supply and polluting our estuaries, pushing us further towards chronic drought.

If you want to save water, eat a plant-based diet.

The [global footprint of animal agriculture](#) means that our diet is having a direct and lasting impact on our fresh water resources. We are now at the point where we have to consider policies that can protect us from the negative impacts of animal production and consumption. Animal agriculture is putting pressure on global water resources. Animal production and consumption are depleting and polluting the world’s scarce freshwater resources.

If you are truly an environmentalist, you have to take meat, eggs and dairy off your plate.

Oceanic Dead Zones

Oceans are the world’s largest ecosystem. [Covering 70% of the earth’s surface](#), the entire planet relies on oceans to survive. Clean oceans are critical to keeping the planet healthy. And to keeping humans healthy.



Most of our “emissions” (the heat causing gases we are emitting into the atmosphere), [are being absorbed by the oceans](#), as oceans can hold vastly more heat than air. Around [90% of warming is going into the oceans at an alarming rate](#): equivalent to [four Hiroshima bombs per second](#).

Nature constantly strives to maintain balance and equilibrium. When it comes to oceans and the atmosphere, there is an exchange of CO₂ between the top layers of the oceans and the atmosphere. CO₂ in the atmosphere dissolves in the shallow water of the oceans to equalise the CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere. The problem is, the dissolved CO₂ generates dramatic changes in ocean chemistry causing the oceans to warm, and to become more acidic.

Tiny changes in acidity can cause [huge changes in ocean health](#). A 0.1 decrease in pH of ocean surface water corresponds to a [30% increase in acidity](#). Many marine organisms rely on a process called calcification to make shells or supporting plates. These organisms, other life forms and coral are dying. Native species are losing their ability to sense predators causing species loss, species change and the loss of oceanic biodiversity. The acidification is killing a lot of the marine life that keep our water, and so our land and air, clean.

Domestically, Australian waters don't yet suffer from chronic dead zones. But this is because of the nature of our coast rather than lack of human influence. However the Australian “[pollution halo](#)” is increasing due to urbanisation and the effects of agriculture. Without increased emphasis on coastal management it is likely that [we will start seeing oceanic dead zones around our coast](#).

One of Australia's greatest treasures, and an early signaller of our overall climate health, is the Great Barrier Reef. [Animal agriculture is destroying the Reef](#). Grazing of animals that are killed for food creates sediment, waste and runoff. [The Reef receives the fine sediment runoff from 38 major catchments that drain 424,000 km² of coastal Queensland](#). The sediment draining into the Reef contains pesticides, excess land nutrients, and waste from animal agriculture industry. This inflow is increasing causing the Reef to warm and acidify. The sediment reduces the light available to seagrass ecosystems and inshore coral reefs, reducing the Reef's biodiversity and destroying marine life. Government plans have been published to reduce pollution, but only 17% of graziers have complied, since compliance is voluntary.

We are killing animals. We are killing the oceans. We are killing ourselves.

Land Clearing



Early Europeans commented that the continent of Australia looked like a park, with extensive grassy patches and pathways, open woodlands and abundant wildlife. [Pre-colonial Australians had a sophisticated system of land management using fire, the life cycles of native plants, and the natural flow of water to ensure plentiful wildlife and plant foods throughout the year with little effort.](#)

Australia was one estate, with many custodians. Indigenous Australians looked after the country understanding complex laws and responsibilities surrounding the care of land, water, animals and plants. Now vast quantities of forests, open woodlands and native grasslands have been [cleared to create grazing pasture for pre-slaughter farmed animals](#) (p 15). We've cleared around [1 million sq km of our 7.7 sq km land mass, 70% of clearing is estimated to have been for livestock production including wool.](#)

Outside of Australia the situation is just as bad. Animal agriculture is responsible for around [90% of destruction in the Amazon rainforest](#), one of the worlds greatest carbon sinks.

We can stop this crisis by eating a plant-based diet.

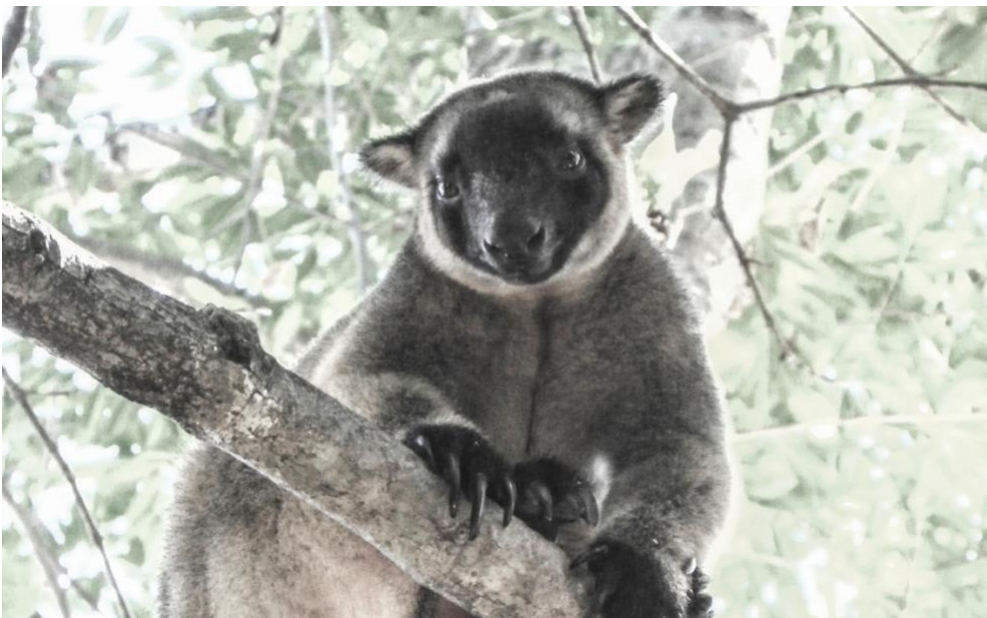
Australians are the [world leaders in meat eating](#). If each one of us stops eating animals, we can drastically reduce the effects of global warming. If we stop eating animals, industry will stop killing them. If industry stops killing them, there will be no need to artificially breed them.

The result – animals live, rainforests survive, we slow global warming, and humanity may just survive in a way we have never experienced before. Imagine. All this, by making a simple change in our personal lives.

Stop environmental destruction. Go vegan.

Species Extinction

Every day, up to [150 species are lost](#). Every year, between [18,000 and 55,000 species become extinct](#), due to human activities. We are witnessing [unprecedented rates of species extinction](#), globally.



As the collective impact of human activity approaches earth's biophysical limits, the ethics of food becomes critical and no longer about personal choice. Hundreds of millions of people remain undernourished, yet [only 60% of the global](#)

[harvest is consumed by humans, while 35% is fed to livestock and 5% to biofuels](#). We are affecting our own species as well as others.

The current land-use arrangements are destroying habitats, driving species extinction, reducing biodiversity and contributing to global warming. We are diverting almost half of the food we produce to feed animals pre-slaughter. And people are going hungry. Our actions suggest that dietary and transportation preferences of the wealthy are more important than feeding the hungry, or the stability of Australia's ecosystems that are essential to life. Politically we are so off track. Socially we have to heal the disconnect between our awareness and our behaviour. Otherwise it won't only be other species whose habitat is destroyed and who risk extinction.

We have to act. And we have to act today. Go vegan.

Suffering and Death

Many of us have relationships with animals. And for those animals who are close to us, we know their personalities and understand their social, emotional and moral worlds. We see them play, experience love and comfort, make risk assessments and act with reason. We watch as they respond to love and affection, and at times experience fear and sadness. We understand them as complex living beings with their own ways of communicating and experiencing the world. They seek comfort, love, food and shelter just as we do. They are beings with agency, just as we are. They wish to live just as we do.



Thinking of slaughtering our dogs for food is abominable to us. We abhor animal cruelty yet we accept the idea of “humane slaughter”. This illusory notion allows us to continue eating some species while protecting others. We are told that animals are killed fearlessly and painlessly. And we believe it. Despite having first hand experience of animal intelligence, instinct and sensitivity, we convince ourselves that animals are unaware of their fate as they approach their moments of harm and death. It's easier that way. We choose to believe this absolute untruth so we don't have to change our ethically untenable habit of eating some animals and loving others.

Approximately [80 billion land animals](#) and [1-3 trillion sea animals](#) are killed each year, making humans the most indiscriminate and lethal predator in the world. Each one of these animals is unique, has her or his own agency, and

wishes to live. And we take life from them as a matter of routine. [Industry has made it the most rapid, horrific and ordinary thing in the world.](#)

[Standard animal agriculture practices](#) have shown pervasive fear and terror experienced by animals even in “humane” slaughterhouses. Undercover footage shows widespread acts of harm and cruelty towards animals in every single Australian slaughterhouse. Often we are told that instances of animal cruelty are “isolated” incidents by “rogue operators”. This vilifies the slaughter-man but protects the industry. In fact [the industry works by dulling innate human empathy](#) making it easier for humans to go against their natural instinct, in order that they may kill and harm innocent beings who wish to live and be safe. This impacts the animals who are harmed and killed, and the humans who harm and kill. It also negatively affects the families and communities that are home to those who work in slaughterhouses. In rural Australia, in areas in which slaughter-men live, there are significantly more instances of [violent crime, rape, arrests and domestic violence](#) than in other communities.

Even if we consider animals as commodities without hearts, minds, bodies, social and emotional worlds, families and kinship networks. Even if we consider them in the most callous and unsympathetic way possible, it is not in our self-interest to harm and kill animals. The harm and death we inflict on non-human animals is being turned back on us.

To save ourselves, to protect others, and to ensure the world as we know it continues, we must become vegan. If we don't want to participate in the harm and slaughter of others, it is the only option.