ENERGY JUSTICE
Law & Policy Center

Why New York's 20 Year Global Warming Metric for Methane is Critical for Environmental Justice and Climate Action

In 2019, New York enacted the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, or CLCPA, the nation's most ambitious and just climate law. The CLCPA put the state on a path to zero emissions electricity by 2040 and net zero economywide by 2050 - targets that the world's scientists say are necessary to avert the worst of the climate crisis. The CLCPA also required the state to act on environmental justice and ensure that emissions and co-pollutant reductions are prioritized in frontline communities.

New York state does this by facing the truth about methane, a dangerous greenhouse gas. Methane is incredibly potent, but dissipates faster than carbon dioxide, or CO2. The CLCPA accounts for methane in a way that follows the science and paints a realistic picture of the danger methane poses. Instead of using an outdated 100 year metric proposed in the early 1990s to determine the Global Warming Potential, or GWP, the **CLCPA uses the 20 year GWP for methane, which far better captures the climate damage caused by methane.**

The fossil fuel industry wants to roll back New York state's more accurate 20 year GWP. Why? To cover up the damage the industry is causing and slow down the targets of the CLCPA. Here's what you need to know:

- **The outdated 100 year GWP vastly underestimates methane's contribution to global warming.** Accordingly, this also undercounts the GHG contributions from fossil gas and the fossil gas industry. Undercounting methane makes fossil gas appear less dangerous than it really is when compared to cleaner sources.
- **The outdated metric obscures the true cost and ultimate ineffectiveness of so-called false solutions**. It has been shown in New York, for example, that under the 20 year GWP, the use of so-called "renewable natural gas" will not be justified at scale from an economic or GHG reduction standpoint.[1]
- **Getting rid of the 20 year GWP will slow down implementation of the CLCPA.** As stated in the NYS Climate Action Council Scoping Plan, 20 year GWP has caused the state to speed up the clean energy transition in the gas sector.[2]
- **The difference in using the 20 year GWP versus the 100 year GWP are profound.** In one example, the NY State Climate Scoping Plan calculates that the state's net total emissions, or gross emissions minus emission removals and biogenic CO2, were 338.5 MMT CO2e in 2019 using the 20 year GWP. Compare

[1]See the New York State Climate Action Council Scoping Plan (Scoping Plan) at 351, describing the limited potential of RNG, available at: https://climate.ny.gov/-/media/project/climate/files/NYS-Climate-Action-Council-Final-Scoping-Plan-2022.pdf
[2]Scoping Plan at 352.

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that to when the 100 year GWP is used - net emissions were calculated to be 165.5 MMT CO2e in 2019.[3]

- **Relaxing New York's GHG accounting will slow climate action,** underestimate damage from the fossil fuel sector, and keep polluting infrastructure in place longer, hurting frontline communities.
- **The Department of Environmental Conservation has already adopted GHG limits based on the CLCPA's 20 year GWP - the metric was also used to develop the state's Climate Action Council Scoping Plan**. Relaxing the current more accurate standard will require the state's entire GHG inventory and climate plan to be re-evaluated - it will literally turn back the clock on climate action in the state.
- **The 20 Year GWP is the LAW of the land for good reason- it accurately accounts for the damage methane, and the fossil fuel industry, is doing to New York, people and planet.**

As stated by Dr. Bob Howarth, Climate Action Council Member, Cornell Professor and renowned authority on methane:

> *"[T]he idea for using the 100-year GWP originated out of the Kyoto Protocol in the early 1990s; it made sense at the time, and in any case very few people were thinking about methane at all, so who cared whether or not it was quite right. By 2008, it was becoming increasingly clear that methane is more important to warming than had once been thought, and people began to question the wisdom of GWP100. The IPCC in the 4th AR synthesis report in 2008 said the choice of the 100-yr time frame was arbitrary, and that one should select a time frame based on your issue of concern. They reiterated that in the 5th synthesis from 2013. In the 6th IPCC synthesis from 2021, they put much more focus on methane, concluding that methane has contributed 0.5 deg C of all global warming to date since 1850, compared to 0.75 deg C for CO2. Importantly, the use of GWP100 hugely downplays this, leading to the conclusion that methane is not all that important. GWP20 does a pretty good job of capturing what methane has actually done to climate."*

As stated by Raya Salter, Climate Action Council Member and Executive Director of the Energy Justice Law & Policy Center:

> *"The fossil fuel industry wants to roll back the CICPA's methane standards in order to keep their dirty infrastructure and staggering profits at the expense of New York's health, economy, and frontline communities. Instead, we must follow the science and the Scoping Plan and keep the CLCPA's 20 Year GWP. New York needs a just transition that leaves fossil fuel infrastructure behind."*

[3] Scoping Plan at 47.