



The Sydney Peace Foundation  
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Sydney  
New South Wales  
Australia, 2006

Open letter sent by email: [peace.foundation@sydney.edu.au](mailto:peace.foundation@sydney.edu.au)

30th September 2016

Dear Sydney Peace Foundation,

**Re: Sydney Peace Prize 2016**

I understand you have awarded the 2016 Sydney Peace Prize to author and activist Naomi Klein, with the following citation:

*“For exposing the structural causes and responsibility for the climate crisis, for inspiring us to stand up locally, nationally and internationally to demand a new agenda for sharing the planet that respects human rights and equality, and for reminding us of the power of authentic democracy to achieve transformative change and justice.”*

Unfortunately, in her writing and campaigning, Ms Klein appears to have overlooked or ignored a major “structural cause” of the climate crisis, namely animal agriculture.

Leading climate scientist, Dr James Hansen (along with his fellow researchers), argues that we will not overcome the crisis without massive reforestation and significant cuts in emissions of non-CO2 climate forcers, such as methane, nitrous oxide, tropospheric ozone and black carbon. [1] Meaningful action in that regard cannot be achieved without a general move toward a plant-based diet.

Consistent with that view were the findings of a 2009 study by the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, indicating that a global transition to a completely animal-free diet would reduce climate change mitigation costs by around 80 per cent. A meat-free diet would reduce them by 70 per cent. A key factor would be the ability of lands cleared or degraded for livestock grazing and feed crop production to regenerate forests and other forms of vegetation. [2]

The assessment was based on a targeted atmospheric CO2 concentration of 450 ppm. The issue is even more critical when aiming for essential lower levels.

Similarly, a paper from researchers at the Institute for Social Ecology, Vienna, published in April 2016, reported on the potential to avoid further deforestation while feeding a growing global population. [3] They considered 500 food supply

scenarios using forecasts for crop yields, agricultural area, livestock feed and human diet supplied by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The lead author, Karl-Heinz Erb, has stated: [4]

*“The only diet found to work with all future possible scenarios of yield and cropland area, including 100% organic agriculture, was a plant-based one.”*

In Australia, since European settlement, we have cleared nearly 1 million square kilometres of our 7.7 million square kilometre land mass. Of the cleared land, around 70 per cent has resulted from animal agriculture, including meat, dairy and wool. [5]

The World Wildlife Fund has identified Australia as one of eleven global “deforestation fronts” in the twenty years to 2030 due to livestock production. [6]

The grossly and inherently inefficient nature of animals as a source of nutrition causes us to use far more resources, including land, than would be required on a plant-based diet.

### **Peace with Justice**

A general transition toward a plant-based diet is also consistent with the Sydney Peace Foundation’s promotion of peace with justice and the practice of non-violence.

The issue of social justice was highlighted in a 2013 paper from the Institute on the Environment at the University of Minnesota, which stated: [7]

*“The world’s croplands could feed 4 billion more people than they do now just by shifting from producing animal feed and biofuels to producing exclusively food for human consumption”.*

Animal feed crops represent 90% of that figure (in turn representing 3.6 billion people), and biofuels only 10%.

The FAO estimates that around 795 million people were chronically under-nourished in the period 2014-2016. [8]

The lead author of the University of Minnesota paper, Emily Cassidy, has said:

*“We essentially have uncovered an astoundingly abundant supply of food for a hungry world, hidden in plain sight in the farmlands we already cultivate. Depending on the extent to which farmers and consumers are willing to change current practices, existing croplands could feed millions or even billions more people.”*

And let’s not forget the animals themselves. We currently breed and slaughter around 70 billion land animals annually, compared to a human population of around 7.4 billion. [9] The livestock reproduction rate is significantly above natural levels, and involves abuse and confinement on a massive scale, even for so-called “free range” systems.

In Australia and elsewhere, animal cruelty has been [legalised](#) by way of exemptions to so-called “prevention of cruelty to animals” legislation in favour of livestock and other industries.

### **Human health**

I note that you support the UN’s [Sustainable Development Goals](#), including the goal to “ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”.

The detrimental health impacts of animal-based foods have been well documented by organisations such as the World Cancer Research Fund, the World Health Organization, and others.

A recent example was the April 2016 study by researchers from the Oxford Martin School (University of Oxford) reporting on the health and climate change benefits of changing diets, including reduced consumption of animal products. [10]

The researchers estimated that if the global population were to adopt a vegetarian diet, 7.3 million lives per year would be saved by 2050. If a vegan diet were adopted, the figure would be 8.1 million per year.

More than half the avoided deaths would be due to reduced red meat consumption. The results would primarily reflect reductions in the rate of coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, and type 2 diabetes.

### **Former winner calls for vegan diet**

The 2002 winner of the Sydney Peace Prize, [Mary Robinson](#), has recently called for those who care about climate change to stop eating animals and animal-based products. [11]



Here is some of what she said:

*“We have to change, we cannot go on with business as usual. We need each of us to think about our carbon footprint. Eat less meat, or no meat at all. Become vegetarian or vegan.”*

Mrs Robinson was speaking at the “One Young World Summit” in Ottawa, Canada, earlier this month, attended by young leaders from 196 nations.

### **Conclusion**

A positive gesture to highlight these critical issues would be to serve only vegan food at the Sydney Peace Prize Gala Dinner on 11th November.

You may also wish to consider broadening your approach on peace, social justice and non-violence to include animals.

I would be pleased to discuss the issues in more detail if you are interested in doing so.

Kind Regards,

**Paul Mahony**  
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Australia  
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