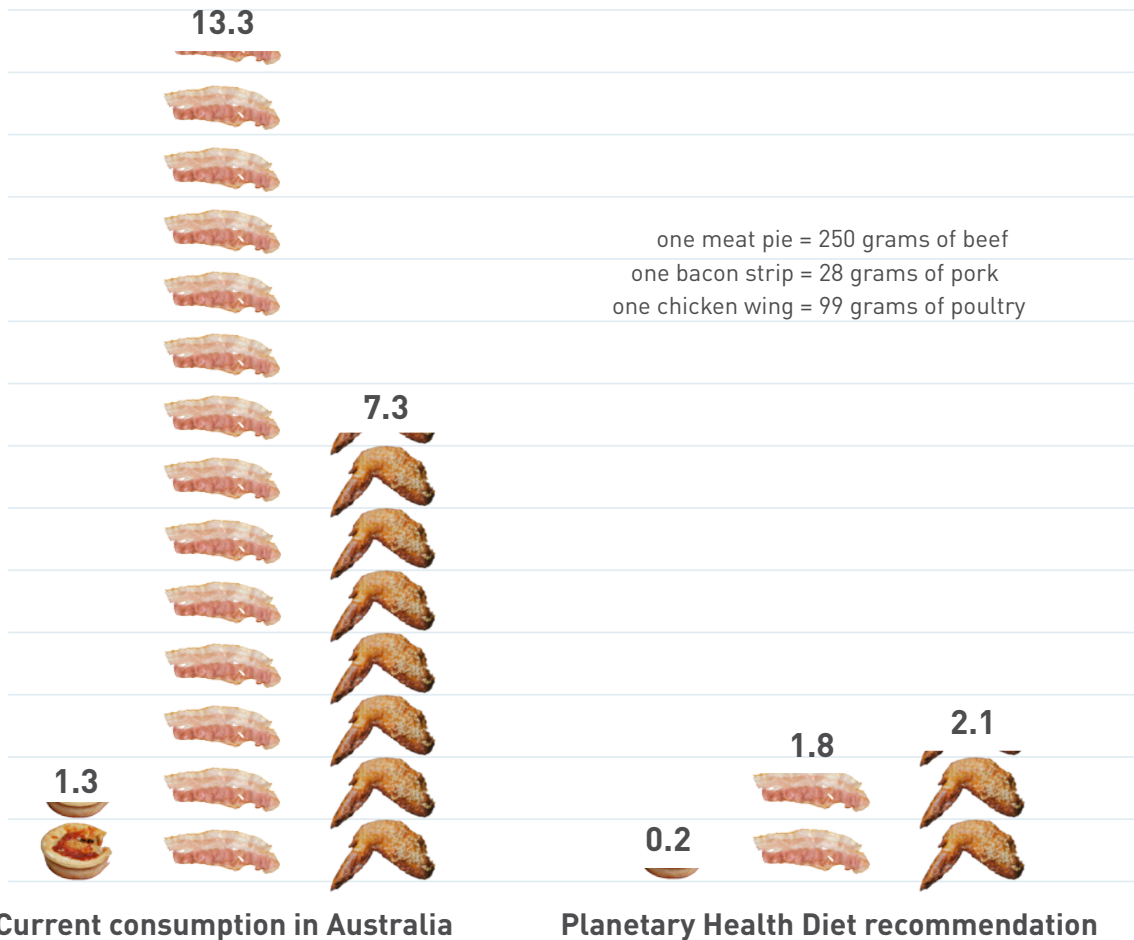


# Meat Exhaustion Day

How meat is eating up the planet  
2024 spotlight on Australia

Average meat consumption in Australia per week<sup>a</sup>



This graph depicts the total average meat consumption in Australia using popular food items that are emblematic to respective animal protein sources, and compares it with the Planetary Health Diet recommendation of total meat consumption per animal protein source.<sup>b</sup>

Global Alert!

**March 19**  
marks Australia's  
Meat Exhaustion  
Day 2024



FOUR PAWS follows up on the 2023 [Meat Exhaustion Report: When meat is eating up the planet](#), with a focus on consumption in countries. The USA already reached its [meat consumption day](#) on March 8, 2024.

Global meat production and consumption are **unsustainable** for the planet and human health.

The Planetary Health Diet guideline recommends eating a **maximum of 301g of meat per week<sup>1</sup>**.

<sup>a</sup> The Australian government's Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) publishes Agricultural commodities and trade data every quarter of the year (ABARES, 2024).

<sup>b</sup> The Planetary Health Diet recommends the consumption of 7 grams of beef, 7 grams of pork, and 29 grams of poultry per day. For this comparison, we calculated the total average meat consumption per week to its weight in meat pies containing 250 grams of meat. The total weekly consumption of the average Australian is 1.4 kilos –318 grams of beef (incl. sheep, goat, veal, horse, 'other meat'), 374 grams of pork, and 720 grams of poultry meat (incl. Chicken and turkey) per year.

Australia needs to reduce its meat consumption by up to **79%** to fit within planetary and health boundaries<sup>1</sup>.

## Australia has already reached its Meat Exhaustion Day on March 19, 2024.

This means that the average Australian has consumed 100% of their maximum recommended yearly meat intake before closing the first quarter of the year! So, by the end of the year, Australia would have on average consumed as much as five times more meat than what is healthy or sustainable for our planet.

- On average, a person in Australia consumes almost 1.41 kg of meat per week. This is the equivalent of up to 5.6 meat pies containing an average of 250 grams of meat filling.
- The recommended amount of 301 grams per week which equates to no more than 1.2 meat pies.

Overall, the consumption of meat in Australia as of 2022 is 73.4 kg per capita which is very high compared to other countries and regions of the world. **Australia's intake is indeed more than twice the yearly average global meat intake of 33 kg per capita<sup>2</sup>.**

Beef consumption is increasing and is particularly harmful to the climate because of the notorious short-lived but powerful heating gas, methane (CH<sub>4</sub>); the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) expects meat consumption to increase even further<sup>3</sup>.

Average consumption of meat per week in Australia compared to Planetary Health Diet recommendation.



one meat pie = 250 grams of meat

## Australia's meat production and overconsumption are bad for animals, the planet, and human health.

A survey conducted in 2019 in Sydney revealed a lack of general awareness about the negative implications of high meat consumption on human well-being and the environment<sup>4</sup>.

Animals slaughtered for consumption in 2021 in Australia amount to around 6.6 million cattle, 2.2 million pigs, 26 million sheep, and more than 677 million

chickens<sup>5</sup>. Animals bred and kept in Australian factory farms suffer in poor keeping conditions that cause major welfare issues including physical and behavioural distress, cruel husbandry practices, illnesses, injuries, and diseases. Further, animal suffering in agriculture is becoming more severe with the heightened impacts of the climate crisis, such as droughts, floods and extreme temperatures<sup>6</sup>.

**Australia was the fourth biggest beef exporter** until 2021 and the largest exporter of sheep meat worldwide, with live exports to destinations as far as the USA (12,000 kilometres and more) and China (8,000 kilometres and more)<sup>7</sup>. Every year, around 1 million live animals are exported to the Southeast Asian market from North Australia alone<sup>8</sup>.

Meat and live exports have increased by 30% compared to the 1970s. The live sheep trade, however, has declined by over two-thirds since 2017-18, from an average of 2 million animals a year to just 500,000 in 2022, with a planned phase-out of the live sheep export trade announced by the Federal Government. Western Australia's boxed and chilled sheep meat export trade is now worth \$576 million, more than six times that of the live sheep trade at \$92 million<sup>9</sup>.

Long distance live export of animals is done for mere economic reasons while commodifying animals and subjecting them to immense suffering<sup>10</sup>. Animals spend days and weeks being transported on shipping vessels, with many recorded examples of poor welfare outcomes, and are at risk of uncontrollable factors like the weather or geopolitical security conditions.

- In August 2023 a shipload carrying 57,937 sheep was rejected from Saudi Arabia because 6% of the sheep carried a disease called scabby mouth, and by the time the ship unloaded in Eritrea, 5,691 sheep had died<sup>11</sup>.
- In January 2024 a ship carrying 14,000 sheep and 1,000 cattle were kept at sea for more than a month after the vessel, MV Bahijah, could not reach its destination due to risk of attack in the Red Sea<sup>12</sup>.

Health impact of meat consumption is reflected by the high rate of bowel cancer in Australia, with one study finding that 17.8% of bowel cancers diagnosed were attributable to the consumption of red and processed meat<sup>13</sup>. The weekly consumption of red meat alone by Australians is estimated at an average of 691g and contributes to the country's burden of disease from diabetes, obesity, bowel and colorectal cancer.<sup>14</sup>

**Meat consumption is 52% higher than the maximum suggested by the National Guidelines** of 455g (that recommends consuming lean and unprocessed meat), and 86% more than the Eat-Lancet recommendation (98g).







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## Environmental effects of meat production in Australia are detrimental for habitats and biodiversity.

- Meat production was responsible of the deforestation of 2.1 million hectares of land in Queensland and destroying habitats for 388 nationally threatened species and 14 threatened ecological communities according to a five-year study conducted from 2014/15 to 2018/19<sup>15</sup>.
- **Australia has the highest rate of mammal extinction in the world**, driven by habitat loss due to deforestation<sup>15</sup>.
- 92% of all forests are cleared for livestock pasture which is then responsible for pollution, as sediment and chemicals run off into waterways that reach the Great Barrier Reef, endangering the fragile ecosystem<sup>16</sup>.

Reducing meat intake and replacing animal-based products with plant-based products can lead to a decrease in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. One study showed that replacing beef with a plant-based option such as wheat generates 113 times less greenhouse gas emissions per nutrient<sup>17</sup>, while another study showed that abiding by the Australian dietary guidelines leads to a 42% lower climate footprint<sup>18</sup>. Meanwhile, a further decrease that fits the Planetary Health Diet would result in further GHG reductions and environmental benefits.

## What is Meat Exhaustion Day?<sup>a</sup>

Meat Exhaustion Day determines the day on which the maximum recommended meat consumption per year has been reached, with respect to the Earth's limit (planetary boundaries) and considering human health requirements (health boundary). It is comparable to the [Earth Overshoot Day](#) (also known as ecological debt day).

The date is calculated by comparing a country's actual average consumption of meat per person per year with the recommendations of the Planetary Health Diet<sup>1</sup>. A diet recommended by the EAT-Lancet commission that can be adopted on the country level as was done by Denmark, as well as on the retail level as was done by LIDL Germany<sup>19,20</sup>.

Global meat production and consumption are unsustainable for the planet and human health. In the Global North, meat intake needs to be reduced by more than 70%!

Our food system must change to counter the harmful effects of animal-based foods. The problem lies in the whole current food system that supplies immense quantities of cheap meat through factory farming, and that carries hidden costs that exceed its contribution to global prosperity<sup>21,22,23</sup>. For more information on the impacts on animal welfare, human health and the environment, see the 2023 Report, and our 2024 Fact Sheet focus on the USA.

A food system change towards a diverse ecological farming system that prioritises plant-based production and maintains low farm animal densities, while changing to diets that reduce animal based products, will essentially adopt higher animal welfare, while protecting planetary and human health<sup>24</sup>.



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<sup>a</sup> For further details on the calculation, see pp. 25–28 of the [2023 report Meat Exhaustion Day: How meat is eating up the planet](#). The data source for the USA was extracted from the USDA's 2022 dataset. The data source for calculating Australia's date was extracted from ABARES's latest 2024 dataset. You can also check the [Planetary Health Diet webpage](#) for more information on the dietary recommendations and planetary boundaries.



# FOUR PAWS recommendations

**Governments should phase out factory farming and intensive production**, and instead subsidize diverse production systems and plant-based food production systems. Set clear targets across the food chain to reduce meat and dairy production and consumption in line with the EAT-Lancet Diet within planetary boundaries (with indicators and monitoring).

Government-led policy change can increase the share of plant-based options in public procurement, while simultaneously reducing animal-sourced foods. Policymakers should define minimum standards that respect high animal welfare criteria and that specify the serving of a certain portion of plant-based protein per week<sup>25</sup>.

Retailers and other food system actors should be engaged to reduce, refine and replace meat options at the retail level. [Check out the FOUR PAWS food industry rankings on animal protein reduction.](#)

Consumers can reduce meat consumption, especially cheap and highly processed meat; replace animal-based food with legumes and other plant-based options.

Consumers can also refine choice of retailers, restaurants and products and economically engage with cruelty-free suppliers.



FOUR PAWS submitted its input to the Australian government's Agriculture and Land Sectoral Plan that can be found [here](#).

FOUR PAWS leads campaigns to ban long distance transport and live animal exports. See here: [FOUR PAWS FAQs on live animal exports](#) and timely news about [live exports in Australia](#).



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