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Piglets stand in a stall at a pig farm near Kempen, Germany. Photo: Lukas Schulze, Getty Images

## Revealed: The livestock consultants behind the Dublin Declaration of Scientists

The document, which describes efforts to reduce meat eating as ‘zealotry,’ is being used to push back against the EU’s green deal and beating cancer plan

Piglets stand in a stall at a pig farm near Kempen, Germany. Photo: Lukas Schulze, Getty Images

## Revealed: The livestock consultants behind the Dublin Declaration of Scientists

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Piglets stand in a stall at a pig farm near Kempen, Germany. Photo: Lukas Schulze, Getty Images

27.10.2023

[Zach Boren](#)

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R2216 (ii) PAC33

Leading European agribusiness groups are using a pro-meat manifesto called the Dublin Declaration to lobby senior EU officials against recommendations for reduced meat consumption in the bloc's cancer strategy and sustainability policies.

But the document, which presents itself as a "declaration of scientists", was written by people with "close ties" to the livestock industry, documents obtained by *Unearthed* reveal.

[The Dublin Declaration of Scientists on the Societal Role of Livestock](#), launched at the Irish government agricultural agency Teagasc in October [last year](#), is a short document that argues for the nutritional, environmental and social benefits of meat-eating.

It says that livestock is "too precious to society to become the victim of simplification, reductionism or zealotry".

It has been signed by over 1,000 scientists, and was covered by newspapers including the Telegraph and the New York Post, which headlined its piece: "[Scientists blast 'zealots' pushing plant-based diets](#)".

But hundreds of pages of emails, meeting minutes and other documents obtained through freedom of information requests reveal that the Declaration was written, released and promoted by agribusiness consultants, and has been used by trade groups and lobbyists to oppose green policies in Europe.

Meat-eating and the role of livestock in driving climate change are the subject of fierce debate. Recent years have seen a growing body of evidence on the greenhouse gas emissions of livestock, with eminent institutions including the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [highlighting](#) the environmental benefits of a shift to more plant-based diets.

"We don't want to tell people what to eat," IPCC adaptation working group co-chair Professor Hans-Otto Pörtner [said in 2019](#).

“But it would indeed be beneficial, for both climate and human health, if people in many rich countries consumed less meat, and if politics would create appropriate incentives to that effect.”

Spurred on by these findings, the EU has been considering a suite of laws aimed at reducing meat consumption as part of its Green Deal package. But these measures are encountering stiff resistance, and groups funded by the meat industry have used the Declaration to lobby EU politicians.

At the World Meat Congress, held in the Netherlands earlier this month, one of the Dublin Declaration’s authors, Professor Peer Ederer, told an audience of livestock industry leaders to “aggressively” use “scientific instruments” such as those associated with the Dublin Declaration to lobby policymakers.

He said: “I think the private sector needs to raise its voice to the politicians and the policymakers more directly in their respective national constituencies.”

Professor Erik Mathijs, who chaired the EU Commission’s [scientific working group](#) on sustainable food systems, told *Unearthed*: “Besides a jab at anti-meat ‘zealotry’, what’s in the Dublin Declaration is actually fairly uncontroversial... One can and should recognise the good qualities of animal food products, including their social, historical and cultural value.

“That recognition, however, does not contradict the scientific imperative that the world – especially those in developed economies like the EU – must reduce its consumption and production of these carbon-intensive foods that are driving land use change and pose some health risks.”

He added: “It’s important to stress that less meat does not mean no meat.”

Dr Matthew Hayek, an assistant professor in environmental studies at New York University, told *Unearthed*: “The Declaration is a hugely misleading endeavour. It is authored by industry-funded scientists, [and] fosters confusion and doubt when there should be none.”

The Dublin Declaration’s organising committee told *Unearthed* in a statement: “We categorically deny that the manifold relationships to private or public organisations which we are maintaining, are affecting the objectivity of our scientific research and the scientific evidence which we create.”

#### Also reported by

- [The Guardian](#)

#### The agribusiness consultant

The Dublin Declaration was launched following a conference held by Irish agricultural agency Teagasc in [October 2022](#), which featured presentations to an audience of nearly 200 by its lead authors — including Peer Ederer, an economist who runs a consultancy for the food and agribusiness sector.

Ederer, who is described by a member of the organising committee in an email as the Declaration’s “primary author”, is a former McKinsey consultant who works closely with agribusiness and whose clients have included McDonalds, US meat producer Smithfield, and soya giant Bunge. Ederer told *Unearthed* the Declaration has no lead author, and that the rest of the six person organising committee are “equal cocreators”.

Today at the World Meat Congress in Maastricht I talked about the meat industry not winning its strategic must win battles, and therefore more effort is required to make the case to society on the superior nutritional, ecological, economic and ethical performance of livestock... [pic.twitter.com/hMS2RT1y0w](https://pic.twitter.com/hMS2RT1y0w)

— Peer Ederer (@ederer\_peer) [October 11, 2023](#)

In 2020 Ederer gave [a talk](#) to the Global Warming Policy Foundation, the UK’s principal climate science denial group, titled ‘Why cows are not responsible for man-made climate change’. He told the group that while he is not a scientist, he is “trained to read scientific papers”.

Ederer told *Unearthed* his research suggests “we will need to increase global meat production in order to provide sufficient nutrition to 10 billion people and without ruining the planet in the process.” On Twitter, he has [described](#) veganism as an “eating disorder requiring psychological treatment”.

The content of the Dublin Declaration of Scientists far less incendiary than Ederer’s personal statements. It calls for a balanced debate on livestock, based on science and recognising the nutritional and environmental benefits, as well as the cultural significance, of meat and dairy. This is what 1,166 scientists have endorsed.

The “original DNA” of the Dublin Declaration, he wrote to a group of contributing authors ahead of last year’s launch, can be traced back to a two-page position paper from a 2021 UN food summit. There, he represented the World Farmers’ Organisation, a Rome-based group that represents agricultural trade bodies worldwide, and acted as a “focal point” for negotiations in the group looking into sustainable livestock production. He told *Unearthed* he was not paid for representing the World Farmers Organisation.

The Declaration owes nearly 200 of its 700 words to [a paper](#) produced for the summit, written by a coalition of groups including livestock industry associations such as the International Meat Secretariat and delegates from meat-producing countries Brazil and Argentina, that called for increased meat production. Ederer told *Unearthed* the livestock industry’s involvement in the creation of the paper was “completely negligible”.

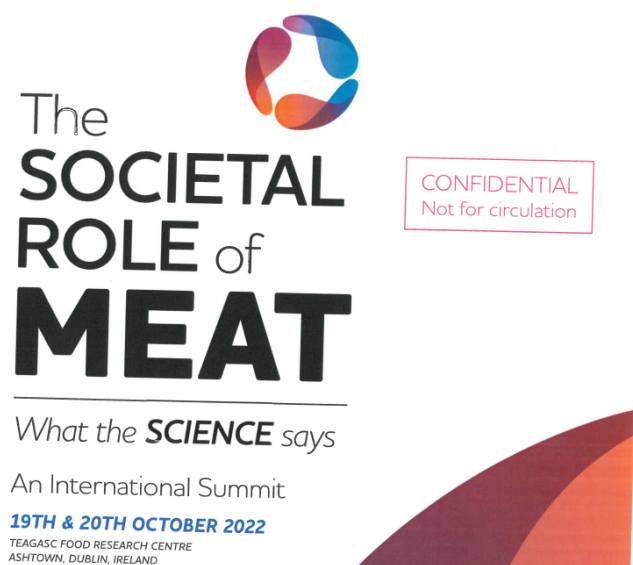
But the Dublin Declaration does not make its this link to industry clear. Ederer wrote in emails to his co-authors: “We have called it so far always the Dublin Declaration of Scientists because we wanted to highlight that it is a scientist’s voice.”

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The rationale for the Declaration, he explained, was “to counter a tendency among a small but vocal group of scientists who believe that livestock must be dramatically reduced in both presence and in nutrition, and who pretend to be speaking on behalf of all scientists.”

“The Dublin Declaration is another instance of the livestock industry taking a page out of the fossil fuel playbook to fight action on climate change,” said Professor Jennifer Jacquet of the University of Miami.

She added: “Similar to the [Oregon Petition](#) in the 1990s and the more recent [CLINTEL](#) ‘World Climate Declaration’ to challenge the scientific consensus on man-made climate change, the Dublin Declaration tries to leverage the academic profession and its institutions to downplay the role of livestock in climate change.”



### ‘Close ties’ to industry

Other members of the Declaration’s organising committee also have “close ties” to industry, a member of the committee wrote in internal memos.

Declan Troy, assistant director of research at Teagasc, the Irish agricultural agency that hosted the project’s launch, compiled a list of possible links the organising committee had to the livestock industry, in response to criticism from the Irish politician Neasa Hourigan.

He listed Dr Collette Kaster, chief executive of the American Meat Science Association (AMSA), which is funded by major meat producers such as [Cargill, Smithfield and Tyson](#), as having “close ties”. He also included Dr Mohammad Koohmairai, head of the meat division at food research company IEH Laboratories, who has clients from “various companies including those from the meat sector”.

Troy wrote that Ederer has “possible research / consultancy funding from industry” while fellow author, Professor Frédéric Leroy, receives “possible research funding from industry”.

Leroy is a food science academic at Vrije Universiteit Brussels, president of the Belgian Association for Meat Science and Technology, and a regular presence on the [meat industry conference circuit](#). He is also the author of [Aleph 2020](#), an academic-led initiative in support of meat production.

The Declaration’s organising committee also includes Dr Rod Polkinghorne, a self-described “pioneer of the Australian feedlot industry” who [works with](#) meat industry actors – such as the [Australian Meat Processor Corporation](#) and [Meat & Livestock Australia](#) – through his consultancy, [Birkenwood International](#).

In an interview with *Unearthed* at the World Meat Congress, Ederer acknowledged that he has “commercial customers” in the livestock sector but insisted no company told him or members of the organising committee to launch the initiative, or paid for their work on it. “We are very, very fiercely watchful of our intellectual independence,” he added.

When pressed on whether his meat industry clients represent a potential conflict of interest, Ederer argued that “everything is a possible conflict of interest”, and that “there is no such thing as ‘conflict of interest free’ research”.

Speaking on behalf of the organising committee, Ederer told *Unearthed*: “Each of us is adamant that we do not cross the line into becoming lobbyists for any particular cause. Our aim as scientists is to provide scientific evidence to the policy making process, and to general society at large.”

After Ederer was contacted by *Unearthed* and *the Guardian*, the Dublin Declaration website added [a page](#) disclosing the commercial interests of members of the organising committee. He said: “Your questions alerted us to the fact that the authorship to the Dublin Declaration was not clearly spelled out on the website, and that we had not reported about our potential conflicts of interest as would be common in scientific practice.”

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- [Revealed: How the livestock industry funds the ‘greenhouse gas guru’](#)



Animal Frontiers (2023)

### Animal frontiers

In April, the Dublin Declaration was the centrepiece of an edition of the peer-reviewed journal [Animal Frontiers](#), headlined, The Societal Role of Meat. This included papers by Ederer and some of the Declaration's co-authors and signatories on topics including the nutritional value of meat, the ethics of meat consumption, and affordability of meat in the Global South.

A letter from the Declaration's authors also appeared in the prestigious journal [Nature Food](#). [In a published response to the letter](#), a group of sixteen scientists from Sweden, Finland and the UK complained that it "contains unsubstantiated generalizations and statements that go beyond the focus of the Declaration, particularly regarding the expansion of livestock production".

The Animal Frontiers edition is described by Ederer as the scientific underpinning of the Dublin Declaration. At the World Meat Congress, Ederer listed the Animal Frontiers papers alongside the Dublin Declaration as "scientific instruments" to be used in the advocacy of pro-livestock policies.

Professor Peter Smith, a climate scientist at the University of Aberdeen and a lead author for the IPCC, said: "The Dublin Declaration reads more like livestock industry propaganda than science, so I am not surprised by the findings that this article, and the journal it was published in, are promoting vested interests."

He added: "There is no place in science for journals that promote the interests of the industries that fund them. It makes a mockery of independent, objective science publishing.... This is not about stifling debate – it is about protecting scientific integrity".

Matthew Hayek, of New York University, told [Unearthed](#): "The scientific consensus is that we need rapid meat reduction in the regions that can afford that choice. Consensus can and should always be challenged, but doing so requires strong, novel, and large amounts of high-quality evidence. The Animal Frontiers issue does not accomplish that."

He was critical of many of the journal's articles. "Within them, self-citing is common," he said, "creating a distorted game of telephone with long, shaky walks back to any real primary evidence that justify its claims that high meat consumption is sustainable."

The Animal Frontiers management board told [Unearthed](#): "Animal Frontiers publishes discussion and position papers that present several international perspectives on the status of high-impact, global issues in animal agriculture... Animal Frontiers is funded by the scientific societies."

### "Targeting the Brussels bubble"

The Declaration's launch in Dublin was hosted by the Irish agricultural agency Teagasc. The agency, which [receives 75% of its funding from the Irish and EU governments](#), helped pay for the event, contributing €39,000 of the event's €45,000 cost, mainly in the form of travel, accommodation and support for speakers, the documents show.

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A networking event at the conference was sponsored by two industry groups: The American Meat Science Association (AMSA) and the North American Meat Institute (NAMI).

Professor Hannah Daly, of University College Cork, told *Unearthed*: “Teagasc is lending its funding and credibility to a campaign that is undermining efforts to tackle climate change. Ireland has the second highest emissions-per-capita in Europe, driven in large part by our export-oriented agriculture model based on beef and dairy products.”

A spokesperson for Teagasc said: “Teagasc routinely hosts international scientific conferences to bring together the latest science available on a particular topic, and to facilitate discussion around the science... it was left to individual scientists to decide if they wanted to sign it or not.”

The Declaration’s organisers initially focused closely on influencing European politicians. Mairead McGuinness, the EU financial services commissioner, [spoke](#) at the Dublin event, while Janusz Wojciechowski, EU agriculture commissioner, [endorsed](#) the Declaration on Twitter as a “very valuable contribution”.

Ederer wrote to his colleagues afterwards that the support of politicians is vital to the project’s success: “We need high ranking politicians at these launch events. What started the coverage in Ireland is not the brilliance of our science but the fact that we had a minister and a commissioner there.”

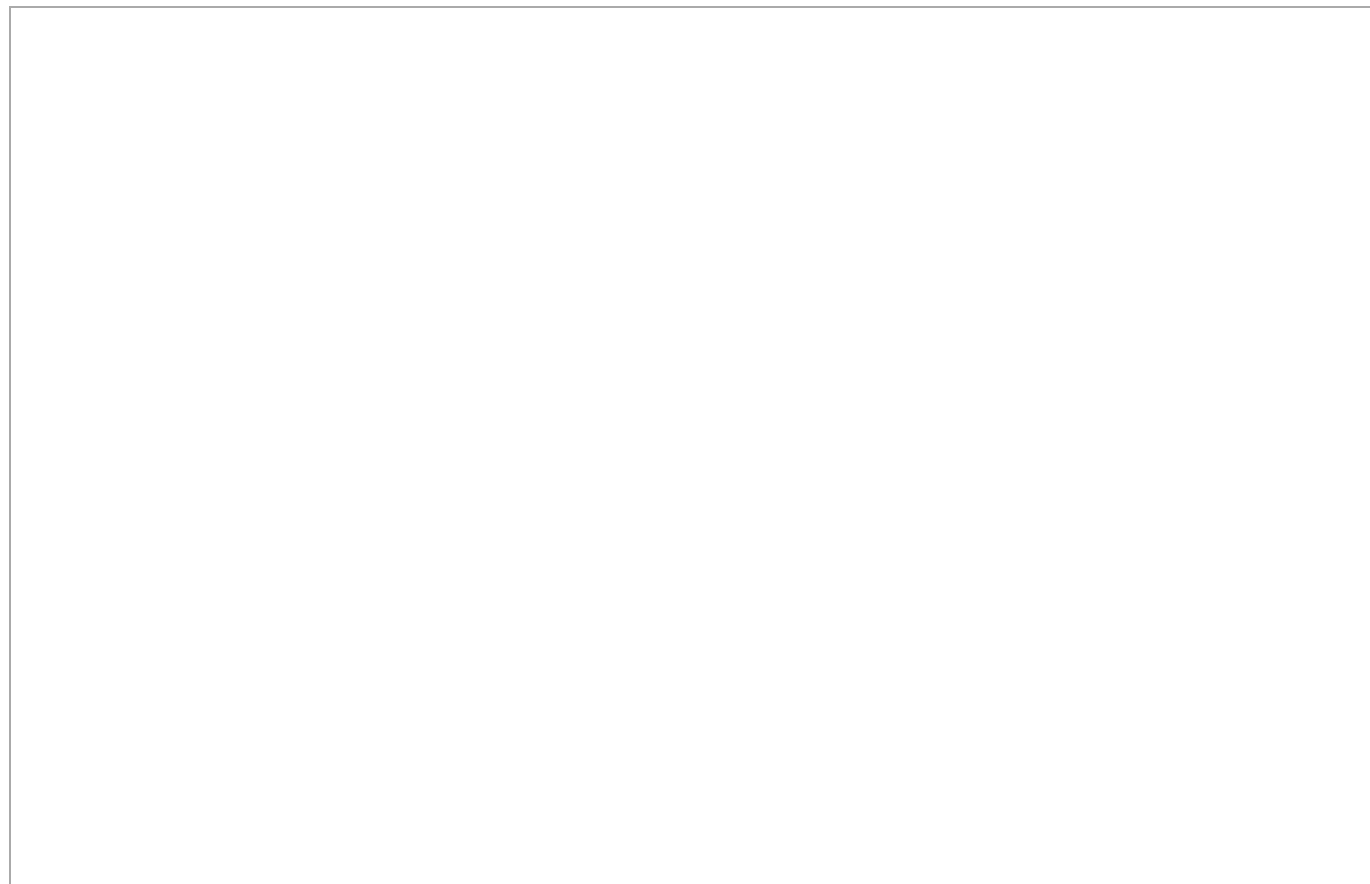
For a [Brussels event in April](#), timed to coincide with the Animal Frontiers edition, Leroy emailed: “we’re specifically targeting the Brussels EU bubble”, and the organising committee discussed inviting senior officials from the agricultural, climate, environmental and health directorates. A member of Wojciechowski’s team [attended](#).

The Brussels event was [jointly hosted](#) by the Belgian Association for Meat Science and Technology, whose president is the declaration’s co-author Frederic Leroy, and the Animal Task Force (ATF). This group [partners](#) with major European agribusiness trade groups including Copa Cogeca, the meat processors’ group Clitravi, the European Livestock and Meat Trades Union, and poultry association AVEC, alongside universities and research bodies.

The task force’s vice-president praised Leroy for involving it, noting that it would give the declaration credibility with policy makers as a “scientific initiative”, adding: “even if ATF is also the private sector ;)”.

The ATF’s vice-president told *Unearthed*: “While not the author, ATF supported the dissemination of the Dublin Declaration of Scientists in Brussels, as already done in the past with other scientific documents. ATF was not involved in any other issue of the scientific journal Animal Frontiers.”

*Unearthed* made repeated efforts to contact Leroy.

**Beating cancer**

The Declaration has been used by agribusiness groups to lobby senior EU politicians, particularly Wojciechowski, the agriculture commissioner.

In November 2022, the EU’s leading agri-food groups wrote to Wojciechowski using the Dublin Declaration to argue against a plan to end



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public funding for the promotion of red and processed meats. The bloc [spent](#) €252m (£220m) over five years advertising meat and dairy products, including €3.6m (£3.1m) on a campaign urging the public to [‘Become a Beefatarian’](#) in 2020.

The proposal to stop funding publicity for red and processed meat is part of the [Beating Cancer Plan](#), a political commitment to ‘turn the tide’ on cancer, including preventative measures such as a shift to more plant-based diets.

The trade associations drew the commissioner’s attention to the Dublin Declaration, writing: “This declaration clearly shows how important it is to listen to the whole scientific community and that policy directions cannot be based on a single study as is the European Beating Cancer Plan.”

Dr Kurt Straif, who ran [the programme](#) for identifying cancer risk for the World Health Organisation’s cancer research body, the IARC, when it conducted a major evaluation on the subject, told *Unearthed* his team had concluded “with confidence” that processed meat is carcinogenic and red meat is “probably carcinogenic”.

He said: “Efforts to obscure or downplay the cancer risk of meat products could have a deleterious effect on the public’s awareness of such risks and may even harm the public’s health.”

The European meat processors association Clitravi told *Unearthed* it was “not part of the process and neither funded, worked on or signed the Declaration itself”. The group’s deputy secretary said it “considers the Declaration as the voice of many scientists around the world who are working to guarantee a safe operative space to sustainable livestock and, in general, to a sustainable agriculture and agri-food production. It is always easy to blame one sector and to not propose any solution. Many of the scientists who signed the declaration are working to propose concrete solutions”.

**A meeting in Warsaw**

In January 2023, a delegation for the Declaration travelled to Warsaw to present their findings at an event organised by the Polish Beef Association and attended by Wojciechowski, the agriculture commissioner.

Jerzy Wierzbicki, head of the Polish Beef Association, told the Dublin Declaration team the commissioner should be “seeking as much scientific support to help him push back against the anti meat green deal and various EU plans to reduce livestock numbers,” according to meeting minutes.

Ederer told *Unearthed*: “We talked with a few members of the cabinet team of the Commissioner in the break time. We did not have direct interaction with the Commissioner himself.”

Afterwards, Ederer wrote to his colleagues that Wojciechowski’s senior staff told him “the Dublin Summit and the Dublin Declaration was the first piece of utilizable science they have received in all their four years of Commission work”.

He continued: “They are more than enthusiastic about our clarity and depth of scientific evidence and relevance that we pulled together. They will support us with any other event we want to organize, especially if we do something in Brussels. Feels good to receive this feedback. We are on the right track.”

Wierzbicki denied that he or the Polish Beef Association played any role in the Dublin Declaration and that he was “aiming only to provide the Commissioner with a comprehensive understanding of the situation”. He added: “I support the Declaration because I am convinced that it presents objective scientific studies about the role of animals in sustainable agriculture and the role of beef in a sustainable, responsible diet.”

*Unearthed* has also learned that industry groups including Clitravi used the declaration to lobby the EU Commission’s scientific advisers to weaken recommendations in its upcoming report on sustainable food.

A [summary](#) of the meeting published by the Commission reported that participants “noted” the Declaration had not been mentioned in the scientific advisors’ presentation. In response, “The advisors confirmed that they are aware of the declaration, and that the available evidence had been very carefully analysed by many different topic experts, allowing the Opinion to provide a highly reliable and balanced view, in line with the Dublin declaration.”

The EU’s sustainable food systems law, previously touted as a [“flagship initiative”](#) of the farm to fork strategy, was dropped by the European Commission [earlier this month](#).

Olga Kikou, head of the EU office at Compassion in World Farming, told *Unearthed*: “The Commission seems to have undertaken a U-turn in its promised reform of the EU agriculture policy.”

The proposals on ending the promotion of meat were “nowhere to be seen” in the Commission’s recent work despite extensive consultations, she said.

Kikou added: “It is clear that more transparency is needed on the interactions between politicians, their political groups and big industrial players, and how lobby tools such as the Dublin Declaration are used to justify the influence of vested interests.”



Taken from a Red Flag brochure (2018)

## Red Flag

After the Declaration's launch, it was promoted by PR agencies that specialise in working with the meat industry. The Global Meat Alliance (GMA), a British-Australian consultancy that partners with trade associations including the British Meat Processors Association and Meat and Livestock Australia, as well as JBS-owned Pilgrims, helped push the project online. "Dublin Declaration work will be continued" at COP28, the GMA wrote in a recent briefing.

But the lead promotional role was played by Irish agency Red Flag, whose clients include the North American Meat Institute (NAMI). For the Dublin Declaration, Red Flag prepared press releases and developed promotional strategies, emails show.

Ederer confirmed Red Flag's involvement but said neither the Dublin Declaration team nor Teagasc paid for its services. "It's possible that somebody in the background did this," he said, "I have no knowledge about this."

Red Flag has previous experience in pushing back on science that threatens the meat industry: marketing materials obtained by *Unearthed* detail how it acted on behalf of NAMI and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association in attacking the World Health Organisation's cancer arm IARC after it concluded red and processed meat were 'probably carcinogenic'.

"The meat industry was facing its biggest threat in decades," a leaflet touting its work begins, "Red Flag's situation analysis, campaign and strategic recommendations led to the World Health Organization (WHO) walking away from the International Agency for Research on Cancer's (IARC) allegation that red meat was a serious cancer risk."

The Global Meat Alliance's CEO told *Unearthed* that while the firm communicates relevant information about the meat industry, including reporting and supporting the Dublin Declaration, it is not a dedicated public relations arm for the Dublin Declaration.

*Unearthed* made repeated efforts to contact Red Flag.

## Coming to America

A year on from its launch, the Declaration played a starring role this month at the World Meat Congress, held in Maastricht, the Netherlands. Leaders from the global livestock industry were greeted by a stand promoting the project as they entered the conference hall, and Ederer's presentation was attended by roughly 200 delegates.

His next step, he announced, was taking the Declaration beyond Europe, with a Dublin-style summit in Colorado next October.

"We're not winning the key battles as an industry," Ederer told the audience, "And if we're not winning those battles, then that means they will come back to haunt us in terms of either supply restrictions, or demand influences that will hollow out the foundations of our industry."

The Declaration is, he said, a "scientific instrument" for industry to use when engaging policymakers in the battle against policies that he described as based on "voodoo".

"Actively involve your members of parliament, actively involve the ministries, and use aggressively those scientific instruments that we're providing you with," he urged the audience. "Keep on saying 'what is the scientific evidence' and hold those policymakers accountable to be basing their policy on scientific evidence."

"Just keep repeating 'scientific evidence'."

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## Meat industry

# Revealed: the industry figures behind 'declaration of scientists' backing meat eating

**Document used to target top EU officials over environmental and health policies but climate experts view it as propaganda**

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**Damian Carrington** *Environment editor*

🐦 @dpcarrington

Fri 27 Oct 2023 12.00 CEST

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A public statement signed by more than 1,000 scientists in support of meat production and consumption has numerous links to the livestock industry, the Guardian can reveal. The statement has been used to target top EU officials against environmental and health policies and has been endorsed by the EU agriculture commissioner.

The “[Dublin Declaration](#) of Scientists on the Societal Role of Livestock” says livestock “are too precious to society to become the victim of simplification, reductionism or zealotry” and calls for a “balanced view of the future of animal agriculture”. One of the authors of the declaration is an economist who called veganism an “eating disorder requiring psychological treatment”.

The declaration was [published a year ago](#) but gave no information on its provenance. Its supporters appear to be overwhelmingly researchers in animal, agricultural and food sciences.

Documents [obtained by Uearthed](#), Greenpeace UK’s journalism project, and seen by the Guardian, show the creation, launch and promotion of the declaration have significant links to the livestock industry and its consultants.

The declaration and associated studies are viewed as “propaganda” by leading environmental scientists. Prof Matthew Hayek of New York University in the US said: “The scientific consensus is that we need rapid meat reduction in the regions that can afford that choice.”

Studies in the highest-ranking scientific journals have concluded that cutting meat and dairy consumption in rich countries is the [single best way](#) to reduce a person’s impact on the environment and that the [climate crisis cannot be beaten without such cuts](#). People already [eat more meat](#) than health guidelines recommend in most developed nations.

The EU was pursuing policies to reduce meat consumption on environmental and health grounds, but some of these [have recently been dropped](#).

### **‘Dietary comedy’**

The Dublin Declaration was launched at a meeting hosted by the Irish government’s agriculture and food agency, Teagasc, in October 2022, with the summit costing €45,000. It claims “livestock-derived foods are the most readily available source of high-quality proteins” and that “well-managed livestock systems ... can generate many other benefits, including carbon sequestration, improved soil health, biodiversity, watershed protection”.

It was supported in April by a special issue of an academic journal, Animal Frontiers, guest edited by Prof Dr Peer Ederer and Prof Dr Frederic Leroy. Both were part of a six-member organising committee that initiated the declaration.

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Ederer runs the [Global Food and Agribusiness Network](#) (GFAN), a company that [provides](#) research and advice to clients in the meat and livestock sector. He said recently on social media that veganism was an [“eating disorder requiring psychological treatment”](#) and likened it to the [Heaven’s Gate cult](#).

He has also criticised the [“climate hysteric policies”](#) of the EU and in 2020 [gave a talk](#) to the Global Warming Policy Foundation, the UK’s most high-profile climate sceptic group, in which he said “cows are not the reason for whatever climate change we have”.

Emails related to the declaration were released by Teagasc under freedom of information rules. In one, another member of the organising committee, Collette Kaster, the chief executive of the [American Meat Science Association](#), described Ederer as the “primary author” of the declaration, although he denies this.



Ranchers load feed pens for cattle on a farm in Marabá, Pará state, Brazil. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

He said: “The authorship for the declaration lies with the entire group of 36 scientist co-authors who contributed to the scientific articles of the Animal Frontiers special edition.” A [webpage describing](#) the authorship appeared on the declaration website after Ederer was contacted by the Guardian. “We had not reported about our potential conflicts of interest as would be common in scientific practice, so we fixed this,” Ederer said.

“I have clients in the livestock sector,” Ederer said. “This emphasis on whether some researchers have customers from private industry is, in my view, and many people’s, completely meaningless, because there’s no such thing as [conflict-of-interest free research](#).” He said no one was paid for their involvement in the

Dublin meeting or declaration.

Leroy is a food scientist at Vrije Universiteit Brussels and president of the Belgian Association of Meat Science and Technology. He has called plant-based meat alternatives “[dietary comedy](#)”, suggested green campaigners “[would secretly enjoy a savage apocalypse](#)” and called politicians backing green policies “out-of-touch, [virtue-signalling simpletons](#)”.

The EU’s biggest farming lobby group, Copa Cogeca, says it “supports” a [pro-livestock information](#) initiative administered by Leroy and the documents show Leroy discussed the declaration with Copa Cogeca. Leroy did not respond to requests for comment.

## Polish beef

The declaration shares some text and themes with a [position paper prepared](#) for the UN food systems summit in 2021 by dozens of groups, including nine private industry associations such as the International Meat Secretariat, International Poultry Council and the International Dairy Federation. Ederer said: “The private industry associations had minimal input into the document.”

An assistant director of Teagasc, Declan Troy, one of the Dublin organising committee, noted in an email that some of its members had “close ties” to the meat sector, “but then so does Teagasc”.

A spokesperson for Teagasc said: “Contracts with food companies outline that they will not have any influence over the publications of the outputs of the research or knowledge transfer programmes.” The American Meat Science Association (AMSA), represented by Kaster on the committee, is a professional society of meat scientists and supported financially by many of the [world’s biggest meat producers](#).

The Dublin Declaration website is hosted by a meat industry research project called the [International Meat Research G3 Foundation](#), which is registered to the same Warsaw address as the Polish Beef Association (PBA) and is chaired by the PBA’s president.

The declaration was publicly promoted by the [Global Meat Alliance](#), an industry-funded group, and the PR agency Red Flag, which has worked for the North American Meat Institute and the US National Cattlemen’s Beef Association. Ederer said he did not know who paid Red Flag.

## ‘Fossil fuel playbook’

The declaration states that “the highest standards of ... evidence underscore that the regular consumption of meat, dairy and eggs, as part of a well-balanced diet, is advantageous for human beings” and that “drastic reductions of livestock numbers could actually incur environmental problems on a large scale”.

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As evidence, the declaration points to seven papers [published in the special issue of Animal Frontiers](#) in April 2023. The publication is the “[official journal](#)” of the [World Association for Animal Production](#) (WAAP) and four animal science societies, which fund it. These include AMSA, with Kaster serving on the [management board](#) of the journal. [WAAP also states](#) that “industry representatives are involved in its activities”.

The journal’s content was delivered by Ederer and Leroy as guest editors. Ederer said he considered the special issue to be the work of all six members of the Dublin organising committee.

Prof Peter Smith of the University of Aberdeen, UK, a lead author on eight reports by the authoritative Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said: “The Dublin Declaration reads more like livestock industry propoganda than science. It makes a mockery of independent, objective science publishing. This is not about stifling debate - it is about protecting scientific integrity.”

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Smith viewed the declaration and the Animal Frontiers studies as extremely poor, selective science and he is working with other experts on a comprehensive rebuttal. For example, he asserted that they overgeneralise evidence that applies to a very small fraction of global livestock and fail to acknowledge the serious and acute public health and environmental harms of livestock.

Hayek said: “It is clear from the past two decades of independent, peer-reviewed evidence that business-as-usual meat production and consumption is unsustainable and growing.”

He added: “Scientific consensus can and should always be challenged, but doing so requires strong, novel, and large amounts of high-quality evidence. The Animal Frontiers issue does not accomplish that.” In Hayek’s view, many of the articles are “just slanted reviews that rehash and re-adjudicate old debates”.

Prof Jennifer Jacquet of the University of Miami, US, said: “The Dublin Declaration is another instance of the livestock industry taking a page out of the



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Declaration is another instance of the livestock industry taking a page out of the fossil fuel playbook to fight action on climate change. It tries to leverage the academic profession and its institutions to downplay the role of livestock in climate change.”

A statement from the management board of Animal Frontiers said: “Animal Frontiers publishes discussion and position papers that present international perspectives on the status of high-impact, global issues in animal agriculture. The journal requires all authors to disclose any potential conflict of interest at the point of submission.”

Leroy and Ederer published a [letter in the journal Nature Food](#) in June 2023 decrying “hyperbolic arguments” against meat production and consumption and highlighting the Dublin Declaration and Animal Frontiers papers.

A recent [response in the same journal](#) by 16 scientists said the letter “contains unsubstantiated generalisations and statements” and “overlooked and downplayed research demonstrating the incompatibility of current and projected levels of consumption of animal products with the imperatives of bringing humanity’s economy within the planetary biophysical limits”.

### **Winking face emoji**

The Dublin Declaration has been used to try to influence senior EU officials. Ederer and others presented the messages in the declaration at a PBA meeting in Warsaw in January 2023, which was attended by Janusz Wojciechowski, the EU’s agricultural commissioner, and his officials. Wojciechowski had already [endorsed the declaration](#) on social media in October, calling it “a very valuable contribution to the ongoing debates in the EU”.

A [blog post](#) from the Global Meat Alliance (GMA) about the meeting said: “Ensuring that the evidence presented at the Dublin summit is visible to the European commissioner is of huge significance.” Ederer told the GMA that the meeting had “proved fruitful”. The blog post’s author said they had watched the meeting via Zoom “with a glass of wine in hand and a rather large steak”.



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Janusz Wojciechowski, the EU's agricultural commissioner, attended a meeting in Warsaw that presented the declaration's messages. Photograph: Charles Platiau/Reuters

Shortly after the Warsaw meeting, Ederer wrote to Leroy, Troy and the rest of the organising committee: "I spoke with the head of cabinet of the commissioner and his press coordinator. They both said that the Dublin summit and the Dublin Declaration was the first piece of utilisable science they have received in all their four years of commission work. They are more than enthusiastic about our clarity and depth of scientific evidence and relevance that we pulled together. They will support us with any other event we want to organise, especially if we do something in Brussels. We are on the right track."

In April, there was an event in Brussels promoting the declaration, hosted by the [industry-backed group Animal Task Force](#) (ATF). Leroy wrote of the event: "We're specifically targeting the Brussels EU bubble."

In email discussions before the meeting, Leroy suggested involving ATF on the basis that it was a "network of scientists". Ana Granados Chapatte, an [ATF vice-president representing industry bodies](#), backed the suggestion, saying it would help the event "remain a scientific initiative ... far from the use of science that the private sector or NGOs can do for their own interest ... even if ATF is also the private sector", ending the sentence with a winking face emoji.

Chapatte told the Guardian: "ATF is a partnership that brings together public research and the private sector to define research and innovation priorities for European Commission research programmes aimed at enhancing livestock sector sustainability, with a focus on Brussels' EU policymakers and stakeholders."

## **Indefinite delay**

In November 2022, the EU's leading agrifood lobby groups wrote to Wojciechowski using the Dublin Declaration to argue against a plan to end public funding for the promotion of red meat. The EU has spent [hundreds of millions of euros](#) advertising meat and dairy products but the plan to end the funding is deadlocked in Brussels.

The declaration was also highlighted to [the European Commission's group of chief scientific advisers](#) as it produced its advice on moving "towards sustainable food consumption".

The EU's [sustainable food systems legislation was expected](#) to be published in

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September but has since **been dropped**. “It’s clear that this commission, when it comes to food and farming, started with a very **high level of commitment**, at least in words, but it has ended up with basically nothing,” said Marco Contiero, Greenpeace’s EU policy director on agriculture.

Olga Kikou of the campaign group Compassion in World **Farming** said: “The commission seems to have undertaken a U-turn in its promised reform of the EU agriculture policy. It is clear that more transparency is needed on how tools such as the Dublin Declaration are used.”

Contiero said: “Opposing the necessary reduction in livestock production and consumption means supporting vast amounts of deforestation, huge loss of biodiversity and a guaranteed end to a stable climate.”

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