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Agriculture and emissions trading don't mix

The Rudd Government hopes to incorporate agriculture into its Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) in 2015 but a report entitled *Agriculture and Emissions Trading: The impossible dream?* by Dr Hugh Saddler and Helen King, released today by The Australia Institute, reasons that this initiative is unlikely to be successful.

'The whole point of an emissions trading scheme is accurate measurement of the emissions of individual polluters in order to make them pay for what they emit, but when it comes to agriculture it is neither possible, nor efficient, to accurately measure the emissions of a herd of cows or a paddock of wheat', said Dr Hugh Saddler.

The report explains why the diet of individual animals, the soil composition and weather systems of individual regions and even the way in which fertilizer is applied can all have a significant impact on the level of emissions by individual farms. Greenhouse gas emissions associated with burning a tonne of coal or a litre of petrol, on the other hand, can be measured both accurately and cheaply.

'There is another fundamental problem associated with agriculture in the CPRS. While only 1,000 large polluters from the rest of the economy will be covered, the government is talking about including all 130,000 farm enterprises. When the administrative costs and the compliance costs are combined with the inaccuracies in measuring emissions, the idea of including agriculture in the CPRS just doesn't stack up', said Helen King.

'Agricultural emissions account for 16 per cent of Australia's total emissions. There is no doubt that reducing these is an important element in tackling climate change, but there is also no doubt that emissions trading is poorly suited to the agricultural industries.'

'Imposing emissions trading on to agriculture is like trying to fit a saddle on a cow. The longer the government persists with attempts to measure the emissions of each farm, the longer we delay the implementation of more effective policies aimed at reducing agricultural emissions', concluded Helen King.