

The surprise entries in NZ's list of top climate polluters

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Rivers bursting their banks, flash floods and more intense cyclones. How climate change is making floods more extreme.

New Zealand's [biggest emitters have been published by the Environmental Protection Authority](#), with Fonterra, Z Energy and Silver Fern Farms reporting some of the highest tallies of planet-heating greenhouse gases.

Big oil companies BP and Mobil also ranked highly, as did big fossil (or natural) gas companies such as Todd Energy and OMV.

Taken together, the top 10 biggest-emitting companies likely accounted for almost half the country's greenhouse gas emissions, although the tally for the whole country is not yet in.

Meat companies Silver Fern Farms, Alliance Group and Affco outranked some of the country's biggest coal and gas miners.

Their high ranking was because emissions from rearing and farming animals were counted at the point of slaughter and processing, even though most of the climate damage is done while stock are living, [burping](#) and [urinating](#) on farms.

[Electricity company Genesis Energy](#) and [NZ Steel](#) are the country's biggest coal importers, with [Fonterra's coal use](#) not far behind Genesis'.

One bright spot: petrol, diesel and other liquid fuel imports fell last year for the first time since 2015. 2020's Covid-induced drop in fuel demand appears to have stopped about 1.4 million tonnes of planet-heating gases reaching the atmosphere, compared with 2019.

However agriculture went the opposite way, increasing emissions by about 0.8 million tonnes.

This is the first time the EPA has published polluter data by company name, under a [new requirement introduced by last year's Emissions Trading Scheme reforms](#).

Both the meat industry and the oil and gas drilling industry [opposed making the figures public](#) when submitting on the law change.

[The report lists the climate pollution, in tonnes, of all companies covered by the Emissions Trading Scheme](#), as well as agriculture (which is required to report its emissions, but not pay for them).

All non-CO2 greenhouse gases (including methane, nitrous oxide and others) were converted into carbon dioxide equivalents based on their heating impact over 100 years.

Although the data doesn't cover all emissions – because only bigger emitters are captured – it covers 277 of the country's largest petrol, waste, industrial and other companies, which have to buy carbon credits under the ETS to cover at least some of their pollution.

Some trade-exposed companies have large exemptions from paying for most of their warming emissions, however they still have to report their entire total to the EPA.



NATASHA MARTIN/STUFF

Silver Fern Farms, Alliance Group and Affco appear as major emitters, because emissions are counted at the point where meat is processed. The report shows that just a few hundred companies account for the vast majority of [New Zealand's yearly total of roughly 80 million](#) tonnes of greenhouse gases, while the top dozen alone account for more than half. ([The official, full tally of the country's emissions for 2020](#) hasn't been released). Those companies are often suppliers, not end users of emissions-heavy products.

The [tally captures emissions "as far up the chain as possible" according to the EPA](#), which affects who is named as the polluter.

For example, coal, gas, petrol, diesel and jet fuel are counted against the tallies of whoever mines, drills for, or imports the

fossil fuel to New Zealand – not those who fill up their cars and trucks, burn gas or coal or buy jet fuel.

Likewise, greenhouse gas emissions from rearing and farming animals for meat are counted at the point where the animals are processed into food, meaning Silver Fern Farms, Alliance Group and Affco appear as major emitters.

The [EPA's breakdown by sector](#) shows nitrogen fertilisers used for farming and horticulture contributed 2.7 million tonnes of greenhouse gas to the atmosphere in 2020, while 15 million and 16 million tonnes respectively were sheeted home to the meat and dairy industries at the point of slaughter, or where milk was processed. (It's likely that slaughtered dairy cows count towards the meat total, despite coming from the dairy industry. *Stuff* is confirming those details).

Fonterra's total is substantially [lower than what the company itself voluntarily reports](#), however the company's figures cover its global supply chain.



MARTIN DE RUYTER/STUFF

Z Energy's fuel imports saw it ranked among the top emitters, alongside BP, Mobil and – top of the charts – Fonterra.

Mining for coal made 1.4 million tonnes of planet-warming gases, importing coal made another 1.7 million, while mining or drilling for fossil (or natural) gas produced 9.8 million tonnes – more than a tenth of the country's emissions.

All major landfills together produced about 1 million tonnes.

Some forestry companies report on their tonnes of carbon dioxide removed from the air, though their reporting is more complex.

The returns for emitters cover the 2020 calendar year.

See the highlights from the report below.

Biggest-emitting petrol companies, ranked: *(all figures are rounded to one decimal place)*

Z Energy: 7.5 million tonnes.

BP: 4.2 million tonnes.

Mobil: 4.2 million tonnes.

Gull: 0.9 million tonnes

Biggest coal importers:

Genesis Energy: 0.8 million tonnes

NZ Steel: 0.8 million tonnes

Biggest coal miners:

BT Mining: 0.6 million tonnes.

Birchfield: 0.3 million tonnes.

Greenbriar: 0.2 million tonnes.

Biggest gas miners/drillers:

Todd Energy: 2.4 million tonnes.

OMV NZ Production: 1.5 million tonnes.

OMV NZ: 0.9 million tonnes.

Todd Petroleum: 0.8 million tonnes.

Todd Pohokura: 0.7 million tonnes.

Biggest dairy sector emitters:

Fonterra: 12.3 million tonnes.

Open Country Dairy: 1.4 million tonnes.

Synlait Milk: 0.7 million tonnes.

Biggest-emitting fertiliser importers/manufacturers:

Ravensdown: 1.3 million tonnes.

Ballance Agri-Nutrients: 0.8 million tonnes.

Ballance Agri-Nutrients (Kapuni): 0.6 million tonnes.

Biggest meat sector emitters:

Silver Fern Farms: 3.8 million tonnes.

Alliance Group: 2.6 million tonnes.

Affco: 2.6 million tonnes.