

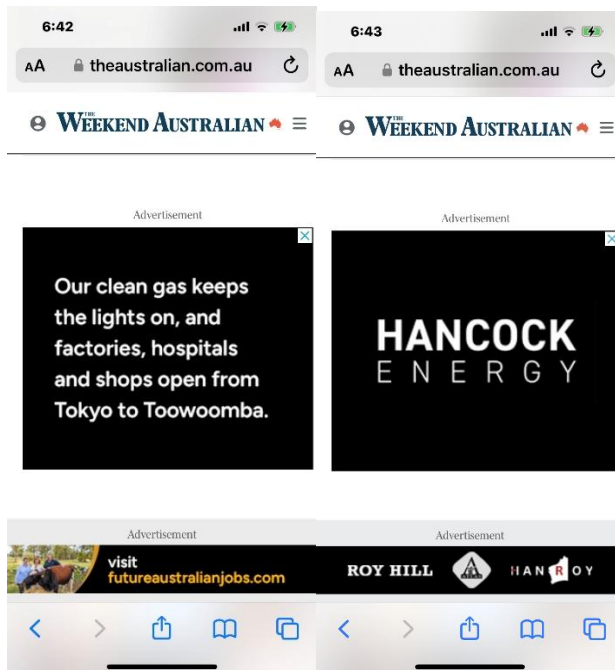


Comms Declare
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Complaint

Hancock Prospecting – ‘Future Australian Jobs’ advertisement in the Weekend Australian online, 5 October 2024



Issues Raised

AANA Environmental Code\1 Truthful and Factual

AANA Environmental Code\3 Substantiation

Description of Advertisement

The ad describes the alleged benefits of working at Hancock Prospecting and includes a link to a recruitment webpage for the company; futureaustralianjobs.com.

One of several pages of the ad claims, "Our clean gas keeps the lights, and factories, hospitals, and shops open from Tokyo to Toowoomba." (please see image).

The ad is aimed at prospective employees who may be misled into thinking that working in the gas industry is environmentally beneficial, and that gas poses no danger to the environment.

We believe the claim that Hancock Prospecting's gas is "clean", is false, misleading and not substantiated.

Why Hancock Prospecting Claims may breach the Code

Meaning of Environmental Claim

1. The Code defines 'Environmental Claim' as:

any express or implied representation that an aspect of a product or service as a whole, or a component or packaging of, or a quality relating to, a product or service, interacts with or influences (or has the capacity to interact with or influence) the Environment.

2. The Claims are Environmental Claims to which the Code applies because they represent that "clean" gas has a positive influence on the Environment (as defined in the Code).

Relevant provisions of the Code

- (a) s 1(a), which provides that Environmental Claims shall not be misleading or deceptive or be likely to mislead or deceive;
- (b) s 1(b), which provides that Environmental Claims shall display any disclaimers or important limitations and qualifications prominently, in clear, plain and specific language;
- (c) s 2(a), which provides that Environmental Claims must be relevant, specific and clearly explain the significance of the claim; and / or
- (d) s 2(b), which provides that Environmental Claims must not overstate the claim expressly or by implication.

False Representation

"Our clean gas"

This is a blanket statement that falsely presents gas as having *no* negative environmental impacts.

The Marriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word "clean" as having multiple meanings, including:

- **Adjective:** Free from dirt or pollution, or free of objectionable behaviour or language:

- **Free from dirt or pollution:** "Clean clothes"
- **Free of objectionable behaviour or language:** "Led a clean life"
- **Not harmful:** "Clean drinking water"
- **Not illegal:** "A clean driver's license"
- **Fair:** "It was a tough but clean game"
- **Accurate:** "The plane made a clean takeoff"
- **Taste or smell:** "The wine has a clean taste and a lovely golden colour" ¹

We believe the use of word “clean” in the ad by Hancock Prospecting is falsely asserting that gas is a) free of dirt or environmental pollution, and b) not harmful.

Ad Standards ruling against APPEA in 2023 found a claim that ‘gas is 50% cleaner’ was “not sufficiently specific and did not clearly outline the significance of the Claim.”²

In 2020, Ad Standards found in a ruling against Australian Gas Networks, that it is misleading to call gas ‘cleaner and greener’, stating “the Panel considered that this claim is misleading as there are other energy sources which would be considered cleaner and greener than gas.”³

The ACCC’s guideline ‘Green marketing and the Australian Consumer Law’ recommended: “When making claims about a particular characteristic or part of a product, you should also consider the whole product life cycle.”

a) Gas is free of dirt or environmental pollution

Gas emits substantial amounts of environmental pollutants throughout its extraction, transport and when it is burned for energy.

The American Environment Protection Agency states, “The emissions from natural gas-fired boilers and furnaces include nitrogen oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO), and carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), trace amounts of sulfur dioxide (SO₂), and particulate matter (PM).”⁴

Oxides of nitrogen, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide and mercury are officially pollutants and are all listed on the Australian Government National Pollutant Inventory.⁵

b) Gas is not harmful

The Australian Journal of General Practice reports that gas, when burned in the home, has “substantial negative health impacts, and the widespread use of gas in domestic settings is an avoidable health risk.”⁶

A 2013 meta-analysis of 41 studies found that gas cooking increases the risk of asthma in children and that NO₂ exposure is linked with currently having a wheeze. Most recently, a

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clean#:~:text=%CB%88kl%C4%93n-,1,3%20of%203%20verb>

² <https://adstandards.com.au/sites/default/files/reports/0119-23.pdf>

³ <https://reneweconomy.com.au/regulator-rules-it-is-misleading-to-claim-gas-is-cleaner-and-greener-56914/>

⁴ <https://www3.epa.gov/ttnchie1/ap42/ch01/final/c01s04.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/npi/substances/fact-sheets>

⁶ <https://www1.racgp.org.au/ajgp/2022/december/health-risks-from-indoor-gas-appliances>

study found that 12.7 percent of childhood asthma cases in the U.S. can be attributed to gas stove use.⁷

Portable gas heaters release excessive quantities of NOx into the indoor environment; they also pose risks for carbon monoxide poisoning.⁸

Gas is flammable and is also a cause of injury and death through accidents and explosions.⁹

Communities that live near gas plants and gas workers are more prone to heart disease, cancer, respiratory problems, sleep disturbances, cognitive problems and reproductive harm.¹⁰

Gas is also a potent fossil fuel, and one of the largest contributors to global heating, causing death and destruction across the planet, as the United Nations says, "This poses many risks to human beings and all other forms of life on Earth."¹¹

Substantiation

"Our clean gas"

The assertion that gas is "clean" is vague, not relevant or specific, has no disclaimers and is not backed up or clarified in any materials on the ad or on the website it points to; futureaustralianjobs.com.

In addition, the website for Hancock Energy (www.hancockenergy.com.au) makes no mention or offers no clarification about the pollution or environmental impacts of its gas operations or products.

Thank you for looking into this matter

Belinda Noble

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⁷ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-health-risks-of-gas-stoves-explained/#:~:text=A%202013%20meta%2Danalysis%20of,attributed%20to%20gas%20stove%20use>.

⁸ <https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/healthy-urban-environments/housing/health-risks>

⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-07-01/canberra-men-burned-gas-explosion-speak-pain-trauma/102545330>

¹⁰ https://envhealthcenters.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/natural_gas_USCEHC_eng.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change#:~:text=Fossil%20fuels%20E2%80%93%20coal%2C%20oil%20and,of%20all%20carbon%20dioxide%20emissions>.