

# comms declare



## SUBMISSION

Select Committee  
on Information  
Integrity on Climate  
Change and Energy

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## **Introduction**

Disinformation related to climate change is not an abstract threat - it is deliberate, organised, and highly impactful effort that distorts public understanding, undermines democratic discourse, and delays climate action. These tactics erode trust in institutions and obstruct evidence-based policymaking.

Comms Declare welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy. As a network of communications professionals committed to transparency and climate truth, we witness firsthand how narratives are shaped, and often manipulated, by vested interests using sophisticated and well-funded campaigns.

These campaigns frequently include items listed on the Committee's Terms of Reference; astroturfing, misleading political advertising, sponsorships and strategic use of digital platforms to erode support for climate action - often reinforced by politicians and media sympathetic to climate polluting industries such as coal and gas. In today's political landscape, misinformation no longer focuses solely on denying climate science, but increasingly on undermining climate solutions, seeding doubt and delaying fossil fuel phase out.

The science is unequivocal: climate change demands rapid, large-scale transformation across all economic and cultural sectors. Yet the spread of falsehoods obscures this urgency, confuses the public, and delays progress. This submission outlines examples Comms Declare has monitored and provides recommendations to protect climate action and democratic processes.

### **1. Climate Disinformation in the 2025 Federal Election**

Disinformation is knowingly false information designed to deliberately mislead and influence public opinion or obscure the truth for malicious or deceptive purposes.

While misleading the public in commercial advertising is prohibited under Australian Consumer Law, there is no such law for political advertising - a dangerous loophole that was exploited in the 2025 Federal Election. This is explored further in a report by Comms Declare and WhoTargets.Me, 'The Astroturfing Election'. The report is included in Annexure A.

A sample of fossil fuel-linked, anti-climate social media advertisers on Google and Meta during the 2025 federal election includes:

Advance

Her Truth (Advance)

Greens Truth (Advance)

Election News (Advance)

Institute of Public Affairs (IPA)

Generation Liberty (IPA)

Energy for Australians

Australians for Natural Gas

Minerals Council of Australia (MCA)

Get Clear on Nuclear (MCA)

Australian Energy Producers (APPEA)

Queensland Resources Council

Tasmanian Minerals, Manufacturing and Energy Council

Mining Queensland

The Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia

NSW Mining

Coal Australia

Jobs for Mining Communities.

Concerningly, there were other social media accounts that spread false climate information where we could not identify the funding or organisation behind them. Fake community groups can be set up using untraceable web pages and contacts.

### **Election Case Study: Trumpet of Patriots**

Clive Palmer's Trumpet of Patriots spent over \$60 million on campaign advertising, including \$24.1 million on television, YouTube, and on-demand platforms.

The party's political advertising, free from rules enforcing truth, reached tens of millions of Australians with climate disinformation<sup>1</sup>.

Climate lies in its YouTube ads alone included<sup>2</sup>:

- 'Net Zero will destroy the Hunter'
- '(Net Zero) will destroy Australia forever'
- Net Zero will cost '\$642 billion more'
- Greenland's polar region is getting cooler

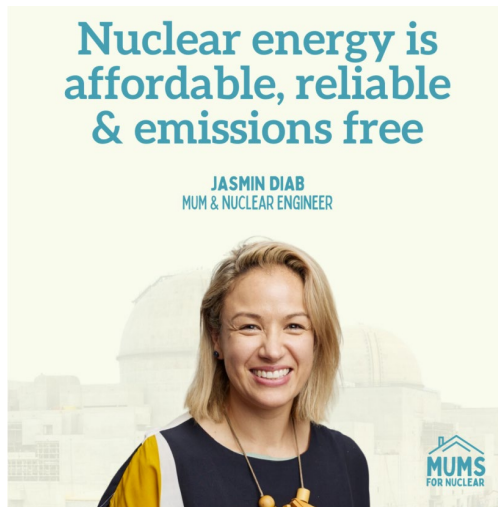
That Palmer, who has extensive coal holdings, can platform and promote climate disinformation by forming a political party, shows how the political advertising laws can and are being manipulated by fossil fuel interests.

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<sup>1</sup> Dick, S. (2025) '[Trumpet of Patriots fails to win lower house seat despite texts and millions spent on ads](#)', ABC News, 5 May.

<sup>2</sup> Google Ad Transparency Centre

## Election Case Study: Mums for Nuclear



A notable trend in the election was the shift from denying climate change to promoting false climate solutions - using astroturfing accounts.

An example is Mums for Nuclear, which spent \$33,000 on Meta ads falsely associating nuclear energy with lower household costs<sup>3</sup>. Though the group claimed to be non-political and led by mums, its contact details linked to Nuclear for Australia, a lobby group supported by businessmen with nuclear ambitions and associated with the Liberal Party, which was also supporting nuclear energy. The campaign ceased following AEC intervention for lacking proper authorisations.

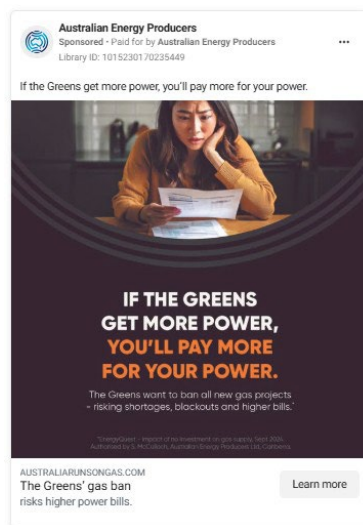
As one of the sunniest countries on the planet, most consider nuclear power to be a poor option for Australia and too slow and expensive to deliver urgently needed emissions cuts<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Noble, B. (2025) '[How the nuclear energy lobby is targeting mums with misleading ads](#)', Women's Agenda, 7 April.

<sup>4</sup> Lifton, RJ (2019) '[The false promise of nuclear power in an age of climate change](#)' Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 20 August

## Election Case Study - Australian Energy Producers



One of the most constant and well-funded anti-climate advertisers is petroleum lobbyist Australian Energy Producers. Its pro-gas ads run all year and overstate the need for gas in a renewable energy system, as well as misleading consumers that gas is required to 'keep the country running'. Its ads give the impression that gas is a climate solution when, in fact it is mainly methane - a highly potent climate pollutant that often leaks during extraction and transport.

During the election campaign, Australian Energy Producers pivoted to disinformation about the costs of the Australian Greens policy of stopping new gas projects, claiming: 'If the Greens get more power, you'll pay more for your power.'<sup>5</sup>

This raises concerns about the ability of well-funded actors with vested interests to shape public discourse and mislead the electorate during elections.

## 2. Climate mis and disinformation in schools

Comms Declare research has found over 60 education programs across Australia<sup>6</sup> are currently sponsored by fossil fuel companies. Many include curriculum materials that:

- Present a biased view and promote the continued use of fossil fuels

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<sup>5</sup> Comms Declare (2025) '[\\$42M spent on digital political ads](#)', 7 May

<sup>6</sup> Comms Declare (2025) [School sponsorships](#)

- Omit or downplay information about renewable alternatives and climate change
- Mislead students and compromise the integrity of science-based education.

The presence of fossil fuel sponsorships in schools and their educational resources is helping polluting industries build trust and credibility with young people - despite their role in driving climate change and related health impacts.

Public sentiment has increasingly turned against such sponsorships. A recent study by Pure Profile for Comms Declare of over 1,000 nationally representative parents found that:

- 76% of parents are concerned about climate change's impact on their children
- 56% support restricting fossil fuel companies' involvement in schools
- 87% believe education should be funded by governments, not fossil fuel companies.

In response to these concerns, the ACT Legislative Assembly in March 2025 approved a policy that mandates the following actions<sup>7</sup>:

1. Update the Sponsorship Policy by the 2026 school year to exclude fossil fuel companies
2. Support schools currently receiving such sponsorships to transition to alternative funding

We believe that such measures can stop half-truths about climate and energy reaching Australian school children and should be adopted by all states and territories.

A report into this issue in Canada found that: *'industry-supported materials routinely downplay the fossil fuel industry's role in climate change (responsible for >75% of climate-heating greenhouse gas emissions), while they exaggerate fossil fuel*

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<sup>7</sup> Comms Declare (2025) '[ACT moves to protect students from fossil fuel marketing](#)' 7 March

*companies' pro-environmental actions, oversell technical fixes to climate change, and emphasize consumer responsibility and modest individual behaviour change*<sup>8</sup>.

We argue these programs (and many others) are a form of advertising, designed to manipulate children and establish a “brand relationship” with extractive industries, including coal and gas.

Children under eight years of age are cognitively and psychologically defenceless against such tactics, and advertising to children has been banned in at least four overseas countries<sup>9</sup>.

When it comes to climate dis- and misinformation, we believe banning fossil fuel-sponsored content should be a first step along with media literacy education.

To build resilience to misinformation, particularly among young people, the Federal Government is well-placed to work with state and territory governments to fund the integration of media literacy and misinformation training into school curriculums. This would help future voters critically assess the credibility of climate-related claims.

At the same time, adequate funding should be maintained for the ABC, to ensure it continues to deliver accurate, high-quality public interest journalism, particularly with respect to climate (in)action and its impacts on local communities.

Such initiatives would also make Australia more compliant with the Paris Agreement which states in Article 12<sup>10</sup>: *‘Parties shall cooperate in taking measures, as appropriate, to enhance climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information, recognizing the importance of these steps with respect to enhancing actions under this Agreement.’*

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<sup>8</sup> Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (2025), [“Polluting Education: The Influence of Fossil Fuels on Children’s Education in Canada”](#)

<sup>9</sup> American Academy of Paediatrics (2006), [Children, Adolescents, and Advertising](#), 1 December

<sup>10</sup> UNFCCC, (2015) [The Paris Agreement](#).

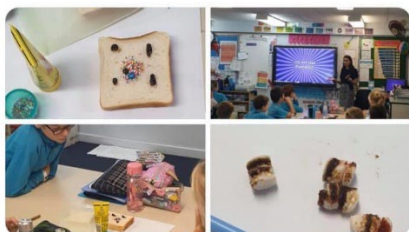


## School Case Study - Woodside Australian Science Project (WASP)



Sorrento PS Room 8  
@SorrentoPS\_5\_6

Promoting STEM in schools. Thanks  
[@WoodsideEnergy](#) for the Reservoir  
Sandwich activity today. Hands-on  
fun learning about drilling for oil. 👍  
[#sorrentops](#) [#STEM](#)



Funded by gas company Woodside, this program provides education materials related to the STEM curriculum. Lessons include sea level rise and at least one mentions that fossil fuels are partly responsible for global warming. However, there is also misleading information about renewables and support of false climate solutions.

For example a Year 10 STEM lesson says: 'While there are renewable sources of energy, many of these are still expensive and/or inefficient.' while advocating for carbon capture: 'Companies who aim to be both more environmentally friendly and economically competitive are investing in research to look at means of using the carbon dioxide, these processes are known as Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS).'<sup>11</sup>

Despite massive investment, carbon capture has not been proven to work at scale, meaning one of the best ways to reduce carbon is to stop mining gas - an option not on the lesson plan.

Australia's largest oil and gas company also targets children through sport including through the sponsorship of the Woodside Fremantle Dockers 'Next Generation Academy' (NGA) and the naming rights sponsorship of WA Surf Lifesaving Nippers Program.

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<sup>11</sup> WASP, [CCUS Teacher Resource](#)

In relation to both programs, Woodside is keen to emphasise its support for the next generation. In respect of the NGA, the Woodside announcement states, 'Woodside and the Fremantle Dockers are two great WA-based organisations that strive for excellence, focus on sustainability, care for our team-mates and contribute to the community'. In respect of Nippers, Woodside promotes 'Support WA's surf lifesaving to train the next generation. Challenge Accepted'.<sup>12</sup>

Woodside's sponsorship of future focused, youth development programs, provides an uncomfortable paradox: a company aligning itself with the next generation, while its core business contributes to the climate crisis which directly threatens the very future those next generations will inhabit.

This characterisation of Woodside playing a key role in the transition sits uncomfortably with Woodside's shareholders in 2024 voting down Woodside's Climate Transition Action Plan – with 58% of shareholders voting against the Plan, which included only \$US 5billion capex to 2030 on low-emissions energy initiatives.

### **School Case Study - Oresome Resources**

The Oresome Resources program, created by The Minerals Council of Australia and its state offshoots, offers free education materials and teacher training on minerals and energy, including books for kindergarten children. Its fact sheets<sup>13</sup> on energy feature unproven emissions-reduction measures such as carbon capture while ignoring or playing down the booming renewables sector. Information on fossil gas, coal and petrol don't mention global warming or emissions and often include information and logos of lobby groups.

Omitting, or downplaying, the climate impacts of fossil fuels is a subtle form of disinformation.

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<sup>12</sup> Woodside Energy (2025), '[Woodside and Surf Life Saving Western Australia – Woodside Nipper Program.](#)'

<sup>13</sup> Oresome Resources, [Fast Facts Coal](#)

#### 4. Disinformation at the intersection of sport and climate change

Sport holds a unique place in cultural life in Australia, and globally. The Australian Government notes that *“sport is an important part of life in Australia. It improves our physical and mental health, benefits the economy, and helps to strengthen our national pride and international relationships”*.<sup>14</sup>

The statistics around participation, economic contribution and community benefits demonstrate the breadth of sport’s integration into Australian communities and way of life, a fact which leads the Australian Sports Foundation to conclude that *“sport’s impact on the Australian way of life is underestimated. It’s at the very heart of every community impacting our culture, society and economy”*.<sup>15</sup>

Globally, sport’s influence has been recognised by the UN, and the IPCC’s 6<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report notes that *“changes in meanings and cultural norms can also accelerate transitions, especially when they affect consumer practices, enhance social acceptance and create legitimacy for stronger policy support”*.

Fossil fuel companies understand the imperative of maintaining cultural norms and social acceptance of their products and use advertising and sponsorship of sport to do so. What you see in the context of sport is a broad spectrum of advertising and sponsorship that allows expression of disinformation, manipulates content and creates false connections, painting fossil fuels against the contextual backdrop of sport which provides positive associations and effective social licence.

Like the examples above, fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship of sport is designed to paint fossil fuel products in a positive light, absent of references to the damage wrought by the products. This is classic sportswashing, though not all of it is accurately characterised as examples of pushing disinformation.

The case studies below seek to highlight explicit examples of disinformation put into the public domain by fossil fuel companies, with links to sport. It does not seek to be comprehensive, nor does it seek to highlight examples of sportswashing. It’s important

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<sup>14</sup> Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, [About Sport in Australia](#)

<sup>15</sup> Australian Sports Foundation, [The Benefits of Sport](#)

to note that these are not neutral marketing efforts, and globally, fossil fuel companies spend billions of dollars on sports sponsorships and advertising. A 2024 analysis found that oil and gas companies spent at least \$5.6 billion on sports deals<sup>16</sup>.

### **Sport Case Study: Glencore – ‘Never miss a big game’**



Coal for electricity helps us never miss a big game moment

This Glencore advertisement<sup>17</sup> provides a clear example of climate disinformation through sport. The advertisement portrays workers in hi-vis uniforms watching a rugby match, with the caption ‘Coal for electricity helps us never miss a big game moment’. By framing thermal coal as the enabler of sport, the advertisement creates a range of false connections between coal and sport, including that without coal, sport couldn’t exist, or being able to watch television would not be possible. It seeks to portray coal as a natural partner of sport, not a key threat to its continued viability.

### **Sport Case Study: Santos – ‘Fuel for the Future’.**

Santos is one of Australia’s largest oil and gas producers, and its business model is dependent on the continued expansion of gas production. Santos invests heavily in sports sponsorship and associated marketing and advertising. Viewed collectively as a body of promotion of its products, it is an example of disinformation.

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<sup>16</sup> New Weather Institute (2024) , [Dirty Money-How Fossil Fuel Sponsors Pollute Sport](#)

<sup>17</sup> Meta Ad Library

By way of non-exhaustive list, Santos is the naming rights sponsor of the Tour Down Under Cycling race, the Wallabies, the Festival of Rugby and a jersey sponsor of the Port Adelaide AFL Club.

Sport provides Santos with a platform to normalise fossil fuels, downplay the consequences of climate change and embed its brand in everyday cultural life.

For example:

- AFL matches at Adelaide Oval this year have displayed LCD banners carrying slogans which included: Santos: Energy for Change. The phrase 'Energy for Change' is particularly misleading. It implies transition and progress and masks the reality of Santos' business model, which relies on the continued use and expansion of gas production and use.
- As part of the 2019 announcement of Santos' renewal as naming rights sponsor, Santos described gas as 'a fuel for the future' and 'the perfect partner for renewables'. The statement also noted that the Tour Down Under 'has great alignment with our community investment objectives – to support healthy living, regional communities and the environment'.
- The South Australian Ministry for Sport noted in its release of the sponsorship: 'Proudly Australian, Santos has been the naming rights sponsor of the Tour Down Under for 10 years and to celebrate, Santos has launched a new campaign featuring Santos employees who ride to work, passionate about safely and sustainably developing natural gas; a fuel for the future.'<sup>18</sup>

These combined narratives utilise sport to emphasise personal responsibility over systemic change, cast gas as a safe and socially responsible energy source in spite of the climate science to the contrary and ignores the other non-fossil fuel commercial solutions to the variability of wind and solar energy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> South Australian Ministry of Sport (2019), ['Santos Remains Naming Rights Sponsor Of Tour Down Under'](#)

<sup>19</sup> Santos (2019), ['Santos powers the Tour Down Under for another three years'](#)

All of the above are examples of deliberate disinformation intended to obscure the climate risks of fossil fuel expansion and mislead the public into accepting gas as part of the energy mix.

### **3. Dis- and misinformation and the public climate debate**

Australia's future prosperity depends on bipartisan support for climate action. A majority of the public, business and civil society support emissions cuts, however a few bad actors have delayed and even reversed our progress in cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Although science strongly supports urgent action, successive federal governments have not adequately prepared the public for upcoming changes and impacts by either: 1. limiting fossil fuel propaganda or 2. running public information campaigns.

This timidity has left an information vacuum which has been filled with climate disinformation from a handful of fossil fuel-backed actors and their supporters in politics and media, then supercharged in online platforms, especially YouTube and Facebook.

In particular, Sky News Australia creates and legitimises climate mis- and disinformation and has been declared a global hub for misinformation by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue. Sky News Australia digital platforms on YouTube and Facebook regularly promote opinions about climate change that have been debunked by scientists. For example, climate scientist Professor Andy Pitman, had to publicly refute the misuse of his work by Sky News commentator, Andrew Bolt who used it to argue that global heating is good for the planet. The biased commentary about climate science by Andrew Bolt, Chris Kenny and others in News Corp media is clearly published with the aim of misleading the public.

The most stubborn climate lies pushed by these actors could be summarised as:

- "Fossil gas is a climate solution"

- “The climate has always changed and current fluctuations are not caused by humans”
- “Climate scientists are biased, politicised or being paid to publish lies”
- “Carbon dioxide is not pollution”
- “Increased fossil fuel extraction is required for Australia’s future prosperity”
- “Climate change is a “left-wing” issue.”
- “Renewables are not reliable and will make electricity more expensive”

#### **4. Recommendations**

Urgent reforms are needed to address the risks posed by dis- and misinformation as it relates to climate. The following measures aim to support a more informed electorate and help ensure that climate policies are grounded in evidence and reflect the urgency and scale of the crisis. This is especially vital as more than three in four Australians recognise the reality of climate change. The following recommendations include:

- Passing Federal Truth in Political Advertising laws
- Reviewing and increasing transparency around third-party election advertising
- Mandating a base level of transparency for advertising across all digital platforms, and
- Banning advertising and sponsorships by fossil fuel interests.

#### **Pass Federal Truth in Political Advertising Laws**

Unlike commercial advertising laws, Australia’s political advertising laws do not currently prohibit misleading or deceptive claims.

Comms Declare understands that an Electoral Communications Bill<sup>20</sup> has been introduced to Parliament, that broadly addresses truth in political advertising.

The Federal Government has signalled its intent to reform political advertising.

Debate of this legislation provides an opportunity for federal legislators provides all MPs an opportunity to ensure robust protections are in place to curb the potential harm of mis- and disinformation campaigns, while too addressing freedom considerations and dilemmas associated with any such legislation.

### **Review and increase transparency of Third-Party Election Advertising**

The Federal Government should undertake a comprehensive review of the role and value of third-party election advertising. While such advertising can have an important role to amplify minority voices, recent elections have shown that it is often used by anonymous or opaque entities to run negative or misleading campaigns. The review should consider whether spending caps, stricter disclosure rules, or other regulatory measures are needed to ensure that the primary voices in elections remain those of candidates and political parties, rather than unaccountable third parties. Strengthening verification for all accounts and increasing transparency around funding sources will also help build public trust in the democratic process.

### **Mandate a base level of transparency for all advertising across all digital platforms.**

Advertising transparency must be significantly strengthened. There is currently a lack of consistency between platforms in how they define advertising and regulate “political” issues, which can include climate. Regulation should establish a standardised, national definition of political advertising to include all ads by or about political parties, candidates, and issues of electoral significance. It should also mandate robust

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<sup>20</sup> Parliament of Australia, [‘Amendment of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918’](#)



verification processes for advertisers and require all platforms to provide standardised, publicly accessible data, such as ad libraries and real-time spending disclosures.

### **Ban advertising and sponsorships by climate polluters and their proxies**

Just like tobacco before them, coal, oil and gas companies are funding front groups to promote industry-friendly policies and fight emissions reduction. Part of their toolkit is advertising, sponsorships and communications materials with climate lies or half-truths.

More than 40 jurisdictions globally have supported fossil fuel marketing restrictions, including 18 Australian councils and the Australian Capital Territory.

Federal legislation to stop fossil fuel advertising and sponsorships is a logical and inevitable step to change the climate narrative and stop the main source of funding and dissemination of dangerous climate dis- and misinformation.

# comms declare



## CHANGING THE INFORMATION CLIMATE

Comms Declare promotes sustainable communication, and is dedicated to shifting the narrative around climate action. We exist to reduce the social licence of climate polluters and champion those that integrate sustainability into their communications practice.

At our core is our unwavering belief in the power of communications to create cultural change and shape a safer, healthier future for each of us and our planet.

We represent dozens of communications agencies and hundreds more professionals across advertising, marketing and media.

Comms Declare is a registered charity and member of CANA.

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