

Case Report

Case number: 0321-25
Advertiser: The Climate Study Group
Medium: Print
Decision date: 14-Jan-2026
Decision: Breach
Action: Ad not modified or removed

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMUNITY PANEL

- AANA Environmental Code - 1. Truthful & Factual - breach

AD DESCRIPTION

This print newspaper advertisement is titled 'Carbon Dioxide and Plant Nutrition' and features multiple claims regarding CO₂.

ADVERTISEMENT

CARBON DIOXIDE AND PLANT NUTRITION

Solar energy and Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) are absorbed by vegetation to make organic carbon compounds which are fundamental for all life on Earth.

The atmospheric level of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), a trace gas, is 418 parts-per-million (ppm) (0.04%) and "not far above the minimum level when plants die of CO₂ starvation leading to all other life forms perishing for lack of food"(1). • Current global CO₂ emissions (2) are now protecting plant nutrition from further CO₂ decline. (ref. Graph determined by geological markers).

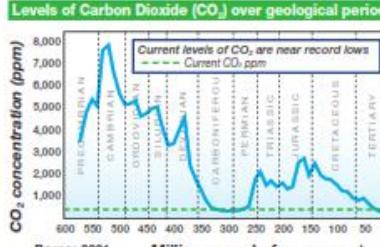
• At the commencement of the Carboniferous Period CO₂ was near 3.4 times the present level. The climate supported abundant vegetation which captured CO₂ and solar energy, then decayed and fossil fuels were formed preserving carbon and solar energy.

• Fossil fuel power stations utilise preserved solar energy to generate electricity and CO₂ is returned to the atmosphere. Vegetation and other CO₂ sinks captured most CO₂ reducing the increase from all global emissions, to the recent low of 2.67 ppm (0.00027%) per annum (2).

• Australian mainland vegetation and Continental Shelf plant forms absorb ten times the amount of CO₂ released meaning Australia is already at "Net Zero" CO₂ (3).

• Earth is now in an Interglacial Warm Period causing global temperature and sea level to gradually rise from the last Ice Age with interruptions from climate change factors unrelated to CO₂.

Levels of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) over geological periods



SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

- With ten times land and Continental Shelf emissions being absorbed a tax on Australian emissions is unwarranted (6). Nor are further subsidies for renewables warranted. Between 2006 and 2024 total subsidies to renewable energy, taking into account inflation, came to \$132 billion in 2023 dollars (7).
- With Australian vegetation absorbing ten times the amount of CO₂ released (3), even if Net Zero were required, Australia would achieve it irrespective of its energy mix. Therefore, choices between fossil fuel, renewables and nuclear power should be based on economic assessment and reliability.

References:

- 1 "The Enhancement and Standardization of Climate-Related Disclosures for Investors," William Happer, Professor of Physics, Emeritus, Princeton University. Richard Lindzen, Professor of Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences, Emeritus, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, June 17, 2022.
- 2 US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) report.
- 3 "Australia is already at Net Zero" Ian Plimer, Professor Emeritus University of Melbourne, Spectator Australia, 24 May 2023.
- 4 JR Christy. Univ. Alabama in Huntsville. Model output: KNMI Climate Explorer.
- 5 NASA Godard Space Center.
- 6 "Let's Tax Carbon: and Other Ideas for a Better Australia", Professor Garnaut.
- 7 "Econocide: green subsidies are hastening our energy demise" Alan Moran, Spectator Australia, February 17, 2025.
- 8 Global Energy Monitor, coal.

The Climate Study Group

SUMMARY

Complaint

A complaint was received on the grounds that the ad presented a climate change denial view that was likely to mislead people into reducing efforts to reduce the impact of climate change. Scientific consensus is that the earth has been warming consistently since the start of the industrial age, and that the consequences for mankind will prove catastrophic.

The position put forward by the advertiser has never been supported by businesses, banks, scientists, economists or peer reviewed studies. The ad relies on cherry-picked data to communicate a flawed argument and presents irrelevant information to create a misleading impression that is likely to deceive readers, and undermine efforts to reduce the impact of climate change.

A copy of the full complaint is included as Appendix A.

Advertiser response

The advertiser responded that its claims are adequately supported by the sources cited in the ad. A full copy of the response is included as Appendix B.

Decisions

The Panel found that the ad was in breach of section 1.1 of the AANA Environmental Claims Code as the ad communicated claims that appeared to be inaccurate and were likely to mislead.

ASSESSMENT AND DECISIONS

Section 1.1 (AANA Environmental Claims Code): Environmental Claims in Advertising must:

- a. Be truthful and factual. The overall impression created by the advertisement including the Environmental Claim should not be false or inaccurate.**
- b. Not be or likely to be misleading or deceptive to the Target Consumer.**

The Practice Note states:

Any Environmental Claim should be accurate, true and factually correct.

Even claims that are factually correct can sometimes still mislead consumers. Advertisers should consider the overall impression created by the claim and within the overall context of the Advertising, including through use of visual and audio elements. Advertising can be found in breach of this provision if the overall impression is false, inaccurate, misleading or deceptive even if each individual claim can be substantiated.

Panel assessment

The Panel considered that the ad appeared to be expressing a view that the fossil fuel industry is not as harmful as generally accepted and could benefit the environment by ensuring that there is sufficient CO₂ to sustain plant life on earth. It also made claims about the efficacy of

Australia's mainland vegetation and continental shelf plants in absorbing CO₂, the general operation of fossil fuel power stations, and the alleged consequences for choosing renewable energy sources over alternatives.

The Panel noted that this ad cited eight references in support of its claims. However, the citations did not always make it possible for the Panel to source the actual reference material. The Panel was also not clear on why all the sources referenced should be regarded as adequate, and experts in the subject matter. In some instances, the referenced material did not appear to correlate with claims made in the ad, and the Panel could not verify the accuracy of such claims.

The Panel expressed concerns over the fact that the opinions expressed in this document, and those in the ad, appeared to be contradictory to what is generally accepted as true for rapidly rising CO₂ emissions, and its harmful effects on nature. The Panel considered that the graph used to support the claims was dated 2001, suggesting that the data is at least 25 years old. The Panel considered that scientific research into the issue of climate change would have evolved dramatically over the past two decades, which cast doubt over the relevance of this graph in 2026. The Panel considered that information available to the public appears to contradict the advertiser's claims, especially those about the need to reduce rapidly rising CO₂ emissions.

The Panel also considered that the ad appeared to be relying on opinions and statements that do not appear to correlate with prevailing community sentiment on the matter, and do not appear to have been accepted as valid by the global community or had an impact on efforts to reduce the rapid rise in CO₂ levels. In addition, the Panel noted that the ad appeared to conflate issues in a way that might confuse readers. One example includes the references to fossil fuel power stations using solar energy which might be misunderstood by readers as a suggestion that fossil fuels are considered environmentally friendly, which is not the case. Such inconsistencies, along with the predominant green lettering (which some of the Panel members felt would imply an environmentally friendly claim) might lull the community into a false sense about the commonly accepted realities of the impact of fossil fuels and rising CO₂ emissions.

The Panel considered that, on a balance of probabilities, it was not satisfied that the claims made in this ad were truthful and accurate. The Panel considered that members of the community who saw this ad might be misled into believing that efforts to reduce rapidly rising CO₂ levels are unnecessary and should not be supported. The Panel considered, however, that nothing was placed before it to adequately support such a notion.

Panel decision

The Panel determined that the ad breached section 1.1 of the AANA Environmental Claims Code.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The Panel found that the ad did not breach any other section of the advertising codes.

ACTION

The advertiser has not provided a response to the breach decision.

APPENDIX A: COMPLAINT

An advertisement from The Climate Study Group in The Herald-Sun (Melbourne) newspaper on 10th December 2025 headed “CARBON DIOXIDE AND PLANT NUTRITION” contains a number of false statements and environmental claims.

Its overall message of climate change denial is dangerous, because readers will be less likely to support necessary spending and action. Governments, companies and other organisations would have less incentive to reduce the impacts of climate change.

The average reader of the Herald-Sun newspaper would be likely to be misled or deceived by the material. They would be more likely to reject the science of human-caused climate change.

Scientific consensus is that the Earth has been consistently warming since the Industrial Revolution [i].

Failing to Tackle Climate Change is Dangerous

There are very real dangers in ignoring strong climate action like net zero. These impacts include increased storms, droughts and weather extremes. The property assets and incomes of people and countries would be hit.

Possible scenarios for Australia and the world are well documented, with and without strong climate action.

Businesses, banks, scientists and economists, in major peer reviewed studies, never agree with the advertisement’s assertion that “a tax on Australian emissions is unwarranted”. Most study reports do support further subsidies for renewables, unlike The Climate Study Group.

3. False Claim ‘Already at Net Zero’

Scientific Information should be consistent with the evidence, not with cherry-picked data. The central untrue statement in this advertisement is that “Australia is already at Net Zero”, because “vegetation and Continental Shelf plant forms absorb ten times the amount of CO₂ released”. In fact, carbon gas levels have increased steadily, as recorded in pristine sites in Tasmania, Hawaii and elsewhere.

The advertisement provides no supporting evidence or references to this.

See ABC News ‘The cleanest air in the world is at Tasmania’s Kennaook/Cape Grim. It’s helping solve a climate puzzle. [ii].

See ‘global carbon dioxide levels reached a record high. Recorded in May 2025 at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii’ [iii].

4. The Current Consensus about Net Zero Emissions

If vegetation absorbed more carbon than what was pumped into the atmosphere, the commonsense conclusion would be that the reduced greenhouse gases would not result in global warming. But there are regular record temperatures all over the world. At the beginning of

the industrial revolution the two things happened at the same time. Neither was primarily to do with vegetation.

At the start of the industrial revolution in the 1700s there was a sudden increase in the use of coal for power, followed by more use of oil and gas. Not long after, the concentration of carbon gasses in the atmosphere started rising, causing steady temperature increases.

See 'Global average temperature rise, 1850-2024' [iv].

The link between carbon emissions and higher temperatures is proven. There is a scientific consensus that the Earth has been consistently warming since the Industrial Revolution [i].

5. Other Claims about Net Zero Emissions

Apart from wrong conclusions about net zero, many related statements are misleading.

Other information is correct, but does not support the assertions about plant nutrition and net zero, for example, "Earth is now in an Interglacial Warm Period". Though this is true, rising carbon gas emissions have followed industrialisation, not significantly the vegetation situation.

Levels of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) over geological periods (millions of years) as shown in the main graph, are not very relevant to the current situation. Higher concentrations of carbon gasses altered less quickly, allowing life to evolve and adapt.

The sudden jump in emissions from 250-300 years ago is very sudden by pre-historical standards. Both animal and plant life cannot adapt fast enough, now, resulting in, for example, more regular coral bleaching.

See 'Climate change and coral bleaching', Australian Academy of Science [v].

6. The Dangers of Climate Change Denial

There are a number of organisations (think tanks, consultancies, policy bodies) that have explicitly studied the cost of net zero (or strong climate action) with the cost of inaction / climate damage, both for Australia and globally. Here are some extensive and peer-reviewed case studies:

6.1 Case Study 1 - Climate Council

In Australia the Climate Council report 'Counting the costs of climate inaction in Australia' estimates the costs of failing to act. It warns of major economic and social costs if Australia abandons its net-zero target, quantifying lost GDP, increased disaster costs, and more.

See Climate Council - CONSEQUENCES OF ABANDONING NET ZERO [vi].

6.2 Case Study 2 - Australia Institute

The Australia Institute analysed 22 economic reports and concluded that the cost of ambitious climate action is very small compared with the reduced economic growth caused by inaction. The CSIRO Australian National Outlook report is consistent with the Australia Institute findings [vii].

6.3 Case Study 3 - Boston Consulting Group

In a report with the University of Cambridge (and other research), Boston Consulting Group (BCG) estimates that climate inaction could reduce global cumulative economic output by 15-34% by 2100, if warming reaches ~3 °C. But by investing around 1-3% of global GDP in mitigation and adaptation, that warming can be limited (e.g., to 2 °C) and damages reduced to just 2-4% of GDP. They also note that the net cost of inaction (i.e., climate damage minus the cost of taking action) could be 11-27% of cumulative global GDP [viii].

7. Conclusion - Net Zero Claim is Dangerous, and Breaks Advertising Rules

The advertisement from The Climate Study Group is not ‘truthful and factual’, and would be misleading or deceptive to readers of the Herald-Sun newspaper.

It is dangerous because it would undermine essential work, needed to fight human-caused climate change.

References

- [i] Scientific consensus is that the Earth has been consistently warming since the Industrial Revolution.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_consensus_on_climate_change
- [ii] The cleanest air in the world is at Tasmania's Kennaook/Cape Grim. It's helping solve a climate puzzle. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-05/tas-kennaook-cape-grim-pollution-monitor-station-cloud-project/103793926>
- [iii] Global carbon dioxide levels reached a record high of 430.5 parts per million (ppm), at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii. [the complainant provided a screenshot taken from the <https://www.facebook.com/ScienceAcumen> Facebook page making this claim.]
- [iv] Global average temperature rise, 1850-2024 [the complainant provided a screenshot from an article at <https://www.wri.org/insights/1-5-degrees-c-target-explained>]
- [v] ‘Climate change and coral bleaching’, Australian Academy of Science
<https://www.science.org.au/curious/coral-bleaching#:~:text=Coral%20bleaching%20on%20an%20individual,per%20cent%20of%20corals%20bleached.>
- [vi] Climate Council - CONSEQUENCES OF ABANDONING NET ZERO
<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/consequences-of-abandoning-net-zero/>
- [vii] Australia Institute.

A net-zero by 2050 emissions target is the least of what is required to attempt to avoid dangerous climate change. <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/net-zero-by-2050-emissions-target-provides-community-business-certainty/>

- [viii] Boston Consulting Group. Climate change will reduce income in all countries and across all sectors, affecting industries ranging from transport to manufacturing and retail. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidrvetter/2025/03/13/climate-inaction-could-cost-13-of-global-gdp-by-2100-bcg-warns/>

APPENDIX B: ADVERTISER RESPONSE IN FULL

In terms of scientific facts supporting our recent publications we really have got nothing to add to the accepted science of photosynthesis and the role it has to play in production of carbohydrates and oxygen from CO₂ and water. The references included with the publications confirm our position.