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September 12, 2025

Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Members of the Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy,

We are honored to write on behalf of the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) in response to the Committee's request for submissions. With the support of half a million scientists and members, UCS is the United States' leading science-based nonprofit working for a healthy planet and a safer world.

For decades, the Union of Concerned Scientists has worked to understand, research, and combat disinformation about science, including about climate change science and solutions. UCS staff scientists and analysts brought together years of experience and documentation to publish the peer-reviewed article, "The disinformation playbook: how industry manipulates the science-policy process—and how to restore scientific integrity."<sup>1</sup>

We are members of Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD), a global coalition of more than 90 "leading climate and anti-disinformation organisations demanding robust, coordinated and proactive strategies to deal with the scale of the threat of climate misinformation and disinformation." We serve on CAAD's steering committee and co-chair its policy working group.

We will focus our submission on responding to **Terms of Reference (TOR) a, b, c, e, and g**. Because we are not expert in Australian politics or policy, for the most part we do not speak to those TORs. We include examples of recent and disturbing state actor attacks on climate science research and findings, which in our analysis demonstrate the fossil fuel industry's capture of legislative and regulatory processes and which shift disinformation from propaganda to policy.

We look forward to further opportunities to inform and support the important work of the Senate Select Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Reed G, Hendlin Y, Desikan A, MacKinney T, Berman E, Goldman GT. The disinformation playbook: how industry manipulates the science-policy process-and how to restore scientific integrity. J Public Health Policy. 2021 Dec;42(4):622-634. doi: 10.1057/s41271-021-00318-6.

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## Overview

Climate action more than ever relies on the health of our global, digital information ecosystem. Increasingly, corporate interests are working to deliberately undermine scientific integrity and circulate false and misleading claims regarding climate science and policy. This ongoing assault is deliberate, and is not new: fossil fuel industry interests have long been deploying orchestrated campaigns to obstruct the public’s understanding of the severity of the climate crisis and the industry’s role within it.

The creation and intentional circulation of misleading and inaccurate information is obstructing effective policy to address the climate crisis. These campaigns actively shape climate narratives in the public and seek to undermine the scientific consensus on climate change, leading to the success of corporate interests in their efforts to distort the relevant climate science, delay pressing policy solutions, and distract the public from effective, systemic solutions. Campaigns such as these are coordinated to cultivate “strategic climate skepticism, whose key effect is an erosion of public trust and a loss of public engagement on mitigation initiatives.

Scientific integrity has long been systematically undermined by corporate interests, across national borders and across commercial sectors, contributing to the erosion of trust in science’s goal to contribute to the public good. Policymakers and the public have also long been victims of corporate attacks on science related to public health, notably with the obfuscation of the public health impacts of tobacco use perpetrated by the tobacco industry starting in the 1950s. Fossil fuel industry players, aligned with those in the tobacco industry, have employed tactics to “distort, delay, or distract the public from instituting measures that improve health,” reflecting the intensifying efforts of corporate and their surrogates and allies institutions to influence evidence-based policymaking.

These attacks on the integrity of scientific information are violations of the right to information, especially information on the public health crisis of climate change and other human rights issues. Access to accurate information is a prerequisite to preventing discrimination and protecting human rights; coordinated, intentional disinformation campaigns directly prevent the protection of these rights. The right to life, non-discrimination, and bodily integrity all hinge on the universal right to access accurate and timely information regarding the harmful impacts of fossil fuel and climate-changing activities. The tactics employed by disinformation campaigns, designed to obstruct the public’s understanding of the severity of the climate crisis and the fossil fuel industry’s role in driving it, effectively prevent the rights to information, education and science, and therefore

effective human rights protection. Domestically and internationally, states have an obligation to their constituents to provide accessible public information regarding climate change and other human rights issues, including special attention to secure information access for the communities affected most directly by climate change.

Information consistency and transparency, and robust protection against disinformation campaigns, are necessary to create the conditions for the de-escalation of the climate crisis. It is imperative that states ensure “the realization of the rights of access to information and participation” using legal requirements on reporting transparency and independent experts in the information-gathering process. As the global information ecosystem remains unequally accessible, and enforcement of the right to accurate and accessible data remains uneven, global coalition building and the coordinated protection of information gathering and dissemination are desperately needed.

Progress towards a healthier information ecosystem in general and with specific reference to climate information and action *is* possible and indeed, is underway. The Brazilian government, the United Nations (UN), and UNESCO launched the Global Initiative on Information Integrity on Climate Change at the G20 summit in 2024. For the first time in the history of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conferences of the Parties, information integrity is on the proposed agenda for COP30 in November 2025 in Belém, Brazil.

## **Responses to Terms of Reference**

### **a. The prevalence of, motivations behind and impacts of misinformation and disinformation related to climate change and energy**

The prevalence of these strategic misinformation and disinformation campaigns, as well as their clear economic motivations, have become clearer in the last two decades as analysts at UCS have continued to uncover the fossil fuel industry’s coordination and tactics.

UCS’ reporting on fossil fuel industry disinformation tactics began with an analysis of the parallels to the tobacco industry: in 2007, “Smoke, Mirrors & Hot Air” found that “ExxonMobil has adopted the tobacco industry’s disinformation tactics, as well as some of the same organizations and personnel, to cloud the scientific understanding of climate change and delay action on the issue.”<sup>2</sup> Exxon had a network of 43 advocacy organizations that expressly sought “to confuse the public on global warming science,” to which it “funneled nearly \$16 million between 1998 and 2005.” The goals and the tactics of the fossil fuel industry and the tobacco industry were the same: prop up industry, protect commercial interests, and turn a profit by misleading the public.

In 2015 UCS released “The Climate Deception Dossiers,” which proved that these tactics were supported by decades of deliberate denial: “for nearly three decades, many of the world’s largest fossil fuel companies have knowingly worked to deceive the public about the realities and risks of climate change.”<sup>3</sup> Internal and external documents that had been leaked, collected in lawsuits, or

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<sup>2</sup> Shulman, Seth, Kate Abend, and Alden Meyer. 2007. *Smoke, Mirrors, and Hot Air*. Cambridge, MA. Union of Concerned Scientists. <https://www.ucs.org/resources/smoke-mirrors-hot-air>

<sup>3</sup> Mulvey, Kathy, Seth Shulman, Dave Anderson, Nancy Cole, Jane Phippenburg, Jean Sideris. 2015. *The Climate Deception Dossiers*. Cambridge, MA. Union of Concerned Scientists. <https://www.ucs.org/resources/climate-deception-dossiers>

disclosed publicly show a “coordinated campaign of deception”<sup>4</sup> that systematically “fabricated uncertainty about climate science.”<sup>5</sup> Fossil fuel interests had been profiting directly from the spread of intentional disinformation about the threat of their own emissions.

“Decades of Deceit,” which UCS published in May of 2025, presents the “wealth of evidence” behind dozens of lawsuits brought against major fossil fuel companies for “fraud, climate damages, or racketeering.”<sup>6</sup> “For decades these companies possessed detailed and accurate knowledge about the dangers their products pose to the global climate and understood that climate action would threaten their business models. Yet they planned, funded, and continue to engage in a campaign to profit from the planet’s destruction by deceiving the public and blocking climate action.”<sup>7</sup>

**b. How misinformation and disinformation related to climate change and energy is financed, produced and disseminated, including, but not limited to, understanding its impact on:**

**(i) Australian politics,**

**(ii) domestic and international media narratives, and**

**(iii) Australian public policy debate and outcomes**

In responding to this Term of Reference, we will use recent events in the United States that are illustrative and cautionary.

The impacts of disinformation campaigns in undermining climate research and action are acutely visible at this moment. Decades of widespread and deliberate deception perpetrated by fossil fuel industry actors have created conditions where disinformation goes beyond propaganda to form the basis of national climate and energy policy.

In the United States, these conditions were documented in a 2024 joint report from the federal House of Representatives Oversight Committee Democrats and the Senate Budget Committee, which details the fossil fuel industry’s long-running campaign, “waged using dark money, phony front groups, false economics, and relentless exertion of political influence—to block climate progress” and obstruct federal investigation, deceiving “the American public to keep collecting more than \$600 billion each year in subsidies while raking in record-breaking profits.”<sup>8</sup>

The adverse impacts are currently and amply displayed in US Department of Energy’s (DOE) July 2025 report on the “Impact of Greenhouse Gasses on U.S. Climate.”<sup>9</sup> As UCS stated in our public

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Merner, Delta, Kathy Mulvey, Laura Peterson, Seth Shulman. 2025. Decades of Deceit. Cambridge, MA. Union of Concerned Scientists. <https://doi.org/10.47923/2025.15837>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pg. 1

<sup>8</sup> US House Committee on Oversight and Accountability and US Senate Committee on the Budget, Joint Staff Report. 2024. Denial, Disinformation, and Doublespeak: Big Oil’s Evolving Efforts to Avoid Accountability for Climate Change. [https://www.budget.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fossil\\_fuel\\_report1.pdf](https://www.budget.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fossil_fuel_report1.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Climate Working Group. 2025. A Critical Review of Impacts of Greenhouse Gas Emissions on the U.S. Climate. Washington DC: Department of Energy, July 23, 2025. [https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/DOE\\_Critical\\_Review\\_of\\_Impacts\\_of\\_GHG\\_Emissions\\_on\\_the\\_US\\_Climate\\_July\\_2025.pdf](https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/DOE_Critical_Review_of_Impacts_of_GHG_Emissions_on_the_US_Climate_July_2025.pdf)



comments, a “handpicked, non-representative group of individuals with a record of disputing mainstream climate science”<sup>10</sup> drafted the report, which “contains demonstrably false statements, relies heavily on cherry-picked data to prop up incorrect conclusions, and actively employs deceptive framing to downplay the severity of climate change harms.”<sup>11</sup>

More than 85 independent scientists submitted a comprehensive, 430+ page review and rebuttal as comments to the DOE docket.<sup>12</sup> Given the report’s purpose in undermining a keystone of US climate regulatory policy, the Environmental Protection Agency’s Endangerment Finding,<sup>13</sup> it is unsurprising that, according to report contributor Ted Amdur of Aon Impact Forecasting, “the same zombie arguments from the 1990’s fossil fuel lobby are appearing again in this DOE report.”<sup>14</sup>

The proposed rollback of the Endangerment Finding, with a proposed rule relying on the DOE’s sham climate science report, joins efforts to undo power plant regulations<sup>15</sup> and refuse to enforce vehicle emissions standards<sup>16</sup> as part of the Trump administration’s undertaking “the biggest deregulatory action in US history.”<sup>17</sup>

To further this goal, the Trump administration is sharply increasing its attacks on science while radically unmaking the federal scientific enterprise, including some of the jewels of world climate research, the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the research arm of the EPA. Scientists from all 50 states and 34 countries from Afghanistan to Uruguay, protested NOAA budget and staffing cuts in an open letter to the Trump administration and Congress.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, good information on climate science findings, impacts, and solutions is being altered or removed from official

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<sup>10</sup> Cleetus, Rachel, Carlos Martinez, Julie McNamara, Delta Merner, and Marc Alessi. 2025. UCS Comments on the draft report produced by DOE’s Climate Working Group (CWG), titled “A Critical Review of Impacts of Greenhouse Gas Emissions on the U.S. Climate” (CWG Report). U.S. Department of Energy, docket number DOE-HQ-2025-0207. <https://ucs-documents.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/global-warming/comments-doe-climate-working-group-report.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pg. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Dessler et al. 2025. A Critical Review of Impacts of Greenhouse Gas Emissions on the U.S. Climate, under docket number DOE-HQ-2035-0207. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PwAR8I9YYmPhbQ6CRkHkroJGMbjbX7l/view>, with three corrections, two of biographical information and one of a word emission, posted here <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DmmYO1NfVv4TIIHl9vqjYJLcG9p-XrPqk6jf9AqV7NQ/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.71r9g8wpkkm4>.

<sup>13</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency. 2009. Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for Greenhouse Gases Under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act. <https://www.epa.gov/climate-change/endangerment-and-cause-or-contribute-findings-greenhouse-gases-under-section-202a>

<sup>14</sup> See [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BWSRgJwsQ3hDDVP7\\_btjli4RgUL8DZL5L6lYaWnxn9c/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.5lgczb9wz9s](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BWSRgJwsQ3hDDVP7_btjli4RgUL8DZL5L6lYaWnxn9c/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.5lgczb9wz9s) for this and other quotations from contributors to Dessler et al, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> EPA Proposes Repeal of Biden-Harris EPA Regulations for Power Plants, Which, If Finalized, Would Save Americans More than a Billion Dollars a Year. US Environmental Protection Agency. 2025. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-proposes-repeal-biden-harris-epa-regulations-power-plants-which-if-finalized-would>

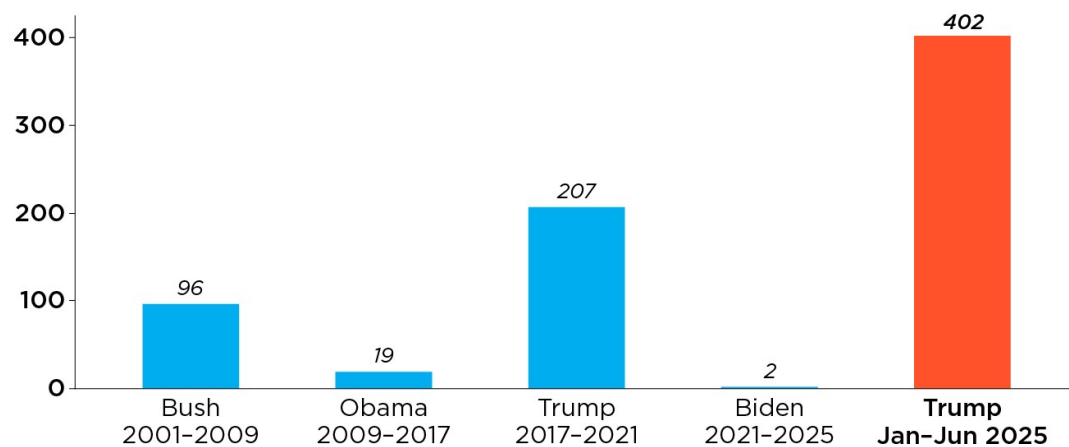
<sup>16</sup> Trump’s Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Announces Key Step Toward Making Cars Affordable in America Again. US Department of Transportation. 2025. <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/trumps-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-announces-key-step-toward-making-cars>

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-launches-biggest-deregulatory-action-us-history>.

<sup>18</sup> Scientists’ Letter in Support of NOAA. 2025. [https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/NOAA-letter-updated\\_0.pdf](https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/NOAA-letter-updated_0.pdf)

government websites. A recent UCS report clarifies these administration actions in the following three plain graphics.<sup>19</sup>

## Extreme Rise in Documented Attacks on Science

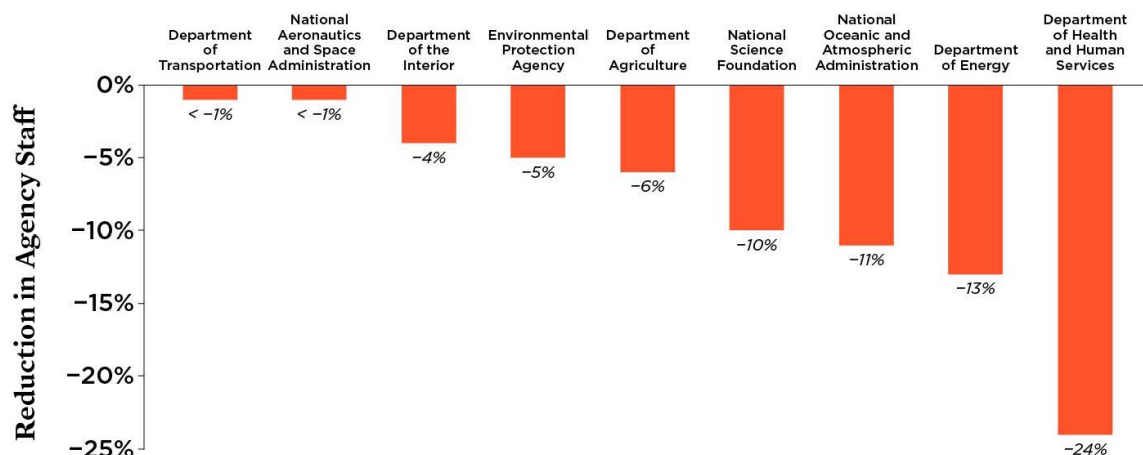


Data: UCS, current as of 6/30/25. Documented "attacks on science" include actions, statements, or decisions that result in censoring, manipulation, forging, or misinforming on scientific data, results, or conclusions conducted within the government or with federal funds. See full report and methodology for more information on criteria.

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<sup>19</sup> Minovi, Darya, Jules Barbati-Dajches, Rachel Cleetus, and Kristie Ellickson. 2025. *Science and Democracy Under Siege: Documenting Six Months of the Trump Administration's Destructive Actions*. Cambridge, MA: Union of Concerned Scientists. <https://www.ucs.org/resources/science-and-democracy-under-siege>

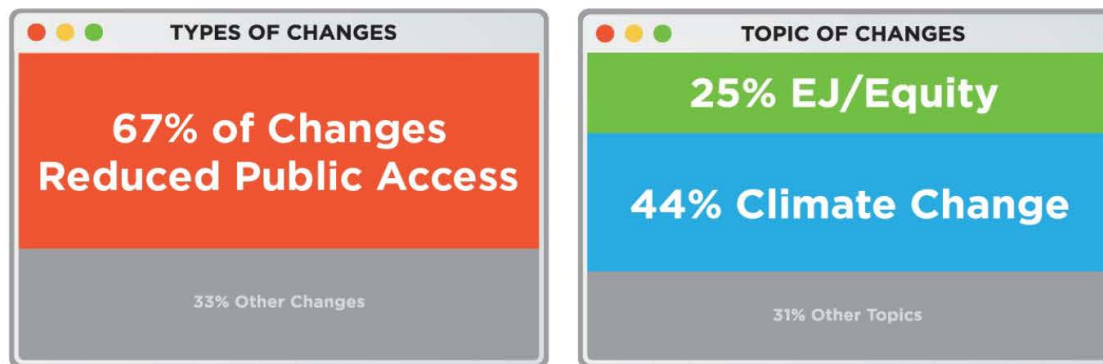
## Staff Cuts in Science Agencies January through Mid-May, 2025



Data: NYT and OPM Fedscope, current as of 5/12/25.  
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## Removal of Government Webpages and Information Related to Climate Change and Environmental Justice

From January through June 2025, at least 847 substantive changes were made to federal webpages that focus on environmental and climate programs and policies.



Data: EDGI, current through 6/30/25  
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### **c. The origins, growth and prevalence of ‘astroturfing’ and its impact on public policy and debate**

Deception and disinformation have an outstanding impact in the politics of public policy.

“Astroturf” front organizations are faux grassroots groups propped up—or run—by industry groups for lobby power. In a 2017 case study, UCS reported that “the top lobbyist for the fossil fuel industry in the western United States secretly ran more than a dozen front groups in an attempt to undermine forward-looking policy on climate change and clean technologies.”<sup>20</sup> These groups were made to sound like local, consumer movements, but “were actually ‘astroturf’ front organizations secretly run by the Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA), the top lobbyist for the oil industry in the western United States. WSPA, which counts BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Occidental among its members, used these fake consumer groups as part of a campaign to exaggerate public support for the lobbying goals of its member companies.”<sup>21</sup>

The impact of Big Oil sham fronts on public policy is severe, as shown in the way astroturf organization pushback stalls numerous climate solutions projects. In a peer-reviewed paper from 2025, Slevin et al “demonstrate how the discourses and strategies of local opposition groups are influenced by relationships with national-level groups and fossil fuel interests” in the context of opposition to East Coast offshore wind development.<sup>22</sup> They find that these local groups “receive massive and varied “information subsidies” from [known climate denial] think tanks, allowing them to spread numerous claims emphasizing the downsides of offshore wind,”<sup>23</sup> adding weight to a movement that “could delay or defeat the rapid energy transition that is needed to curtail disastrous climate change.”<sup>24</sup>

Again, there are real and costly implications of disinforming astro-turf campaigns. This year, the Trump administration “has sought to halt the construction of five giant wind farms off the coasts of Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island”<sup>25</sup> even though “electricity prices are climbing more than twice as fast as inflation”<sup>26</sup> and despite recent research that finds offshore wind could have saved New England ratepayers \$400 million during the winter of 2024 – 2025.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, disinformation from the administration continues. An official US

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<sup>20</sup> How Fossil Fuel Lobbyists Used “Astroturf” Front Groups to Confuse the Public. Union of Concerned Scientists. 2017. Cambridge, MA. <https://www.ucs.org/resources/how-fossil-fuel-lobbyists-used-astroturf-front-groups-confuse-public>. See also Colorado Targeted by Fossil Fuel Industry’s Disinformation Playbook. <https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Colorado-Targeted-by-Fossil-Fuel-Industry-Disinformation-Playbook-u.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. (Following pressure from investors and the public, BP quit WSPA in 2020, citing “misalignment” with the company’s climate policy positions. <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/bp-to-leave-three-trade-associations-after-detailed-review-of-climate-policies.html>).

<sup>22</sup> Isaac Slevin, William Kattrup, Charlotte Marcil, J. Timmons Roberts. Beyond dark money: Information subsidies and complex networks of opposition to offshore wind on the U.S. East Coast, Energy Research & Social Science, Volume 119, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103829>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pg. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pg. 7.

<sup>25</sup> The Lone G.O.P. Governor Opposing Trump’s War on Offshore Wind. The New York Times. 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/09/climate/youngkin-virginia-offshore-wind-trump.html>

<sup>26</sup> Electricity prices are climbing more than twice as fast as inflation. National Public Radio. 2025. <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/16/nx-s1-5502671/electricity-bill-high-inflation-ai>

<sup>27</sup> Value of Wind in Winter 2024/25. Daymark Energy Advisors for Renew Northeast. 2025. [https://renew-ne.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/RENEW\\_Value-of-Wind\\_July-2025-FINAL.pdf](https://renew-ne.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/RENEW_Value-of-Wind_July-2025-FINAL.pdf)

Department of Energy Facebook post recently received a “community note”<sup>28</sup> because it promoted disinformation about solar and wind power.



Australian public officials have experienced similar onslaughts of anti-renewable sentiment in the offshore wind sector, which is especially relevant given the fact that majority opinion in TOR submissions is measured by the *quantity* of commentary for or against a proposition. A 2014 TOR submission by the Australian Centre for Offshore Wind Energy (ACOWE) noted that “decision-makers must pay attention to large levels of opposition and the drivers of community concerns,” but “high levels of activism against a project or activity are rarely a true reflection of overall community sentiment” and “quantifying levels of opposition is a problematic measure of SLO [social license to operate] on its own.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, “[v]oices of substantial sections of the community – particularly those with moderate views– can be lost in these highly charged debates... In Australia large scale community surveys have pointed to moderate levels of community acceptance for the development of an offshore wind industry.”<sup>30</sup>

#### **e. The role of social media, including the coordinated use of bots and trolls, messaging apps and generative artificial intelligence in facilitating the spread of misinformation and disinformation**

Social media is both a key news source and a platform for the proliferation of biased or misinformed content. MIT researchers created a “model of online sharing behaviour in the presence of misinformation” to understand how mis- or disinformation spreads, and how platforms

<sup>28</sup> According to the Facebook Help Center, “Community notes are written by contributors on Facebook, Instagram and Threads to help keep you better informed about a post that might be misleading or confusing. A community note may be shown on the post if enough contributors agree that it’s helpful.” <https://www.facebook.com/help/1416832942629495/> accessed 9/12/2025. See also <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2025/sep/09/us-energy-department/energy-wind-solar-power-electricity-federal/>.

<sup>29</sup> Submission 38 to Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications offshore wind industry consultation process. Australian Centre for Offshore Wind Energy. 2025. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/ndownloader/files/52847828>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pg. 2.



take advantage of this behavior for increasing engagement and therefore profit. They find that “when the relevant articles have low-reliability and are thus likely to contain misinformation, the engagement-maximizing algorithm takes the form of a “filter bubble”—creating an echo chamber of like-minded users.”

These users garner engagement that translates to profit for them and their respective platforms. CAAD joint analysis of the “digital landscape of climate mis- & disinformation in the UK” explains that “these actors often play an outsized role in online conversation and help drive a consistent baseline of anti-climate mobilisation.” As actors “[build] their audience by posting regular content on this issue,” they monetize their anti-climate views. The authors find that some even directly link to commercial opportunities, “incentivising users to purchase merchandise.”<sup>31</sup>

An Institute for Strategic Dialogue “conspiracy clickbait case study” showing “how networks linked to individuals in Vietnam are using QAnon conspiracy theories and US political disinformation to generate revenue” finds that “although the motive may be commercial, the effect of such [commercially motivated disinformation] networks is to deepen political division and amplify conspiracy theories and disinformation.”<sup>32</sup> We are experiencing “the rise of a global industry producing conspiracy clickbait for profit,”<sup>33</sup> they say, and it has profound implications for policy across the globe.

The cooperation of major tech companies and state officials in the spread of profitable disinformation has further established the “clickbait for profit” phenomenon. A CAAD analysis released after COP29 found that thousands of bot accounts were used to disseminate pro-Azerbaijan propaganda following the release of news on the country’s planned increase in natural gas production, despite concurrent suppression of climate activism and a worldwide call for Azerbaijani accountability.<sup>34</sup> Platforms allowed this content to spread, becoming complicit in allowing “coordinated state propaganda and industrial disinformation” to take place, and “Big Tech companies... are helping Big Oil prevent effective action on climate change.”<sup>35</sup>

An increasingly motivated Big Tech, Big Oil, and nation-state effort to gather profit by allowing mis- and disinformation to spread unfettered is also primed to benefit greatly from generative AI tools. According to a CAAD analysis, “large-scale AI models have already enabled an explosion in falsified information.”<sup>36</sup> “AI turbocharging disinformation—on a topic already rife with anti-science lies and funded by fossil fuel companies and their networks” is one of the biggest threats to the modern information ecosystem<sup>37</sup>. AI “will allow climate deniers to more easily, cheaply and rapidly develop persuasive false content and spread it across social media, targeted advertising and search

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<sup>31</sup> Digital Landscape of Climate Mis- and Disinformation in the UK. Institute for Strategic Dialogue, CASM Technology, Climate Action Against Disinformation. 2024. <https://caad.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/UK-Position-Paper-ISD-Extra-Research.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Conspiracy Clickbait Case Study 1: Farming Facebook. 2022. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Conspiracy-Clickbait-Study-1.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pg. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Robo-COP29: Bots Boosted COP29 Petrostate Host’s Propaganda. CAAD. 2024. <https://caad.info/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/RoboCOP29-Bots-Boosted-COP29-Petrostate-Host-Propaganda.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pg. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Artificial intelligence threats to climate change. CAAD, Check My Ads, Friends of the Earth, Global Action Plan, Greenpeace, and the Kairos Fellowship. 2024. [https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AI\\_Climate\\_Disinfo\\_v6\\_031224.pdf](https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AI_Climate_Disinfo_v6_031224.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pg. 2.



engines,” again achieving profitability: “...social media companies have shown declining interest in stopping disinformation, reducing trust and safety team staffing. There is little incentive for tech companies to stop disinformation, as reports show companies like Google/YouTube make an estimated \$13.4 million per year from climate denier accounts.”<sup>38</sup>

### **g. The role that could be played by media literacy education, including in the school curriculum, in combating misinformation and disinformation**

Media literacy is a crucial tool in preparing students and adults for the realities of our current information ecosystem and online tools.<sup>39</sup> Mis- and disinformation thrive when human targets lack basic media literacy, such as source evaluation, critical thinking, and tactical understanding.<sup>40</sup> Those who would deploy and strengthen media literacy as a strategy to counter disinformation should carefully evaluate the benefits and limits of various media literacy interventions. On the one hand, a recent study found that disclosure can help people identify messages as advertising, and inoculating messages can reduce susceptibility to fossil fuel disinformation.<sup>41</sup> A systemic literature review of 80 experimental studies found that “intervention effectiveness depended more on the outcome variables targeted than on specific intervention characteristics” and that “pre-emptive interventions do not always have their desired impact.”<sup>42</sup>

Neither the ability of the public to identify disinformation, nor provision and accessibility of good information, are sufficient to clean up the polluted information ecosystem whilst economic incentives so generously reward it. According to testimony given to the European Union, there are “clear vulnerabilities in the way social media platforms are designed and governed at present which allows such content to rise to the surface.”<sup>43</sup> The testimony highlighted three areas where disinformation is incentivized on these platforms: advertising, monetization and amplification and goes on to explain:

The advertising ecosystem amplifies climate mis- and disinformation in two key ways. First, by creating a business model for ‘outrage merchants’ online, who continue to generate revenue for misleading and outright false content on their websites and channels via ad tech systems. Second, by increasing the reach of disinformers, who can use advertising products themselves to target consumers, voters and other key constituencies across the internet.

[On amplification, ed.] In the 4-week period before, during and after COP27, we found that just a dozen actors posted 388 times on Twitter using common disinformation keywords

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pg. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ziapour A, Malekzadeh R, Darabi F, Yildirim M, Montazeri N, Kianipour N, Nejhdadgar N. The role of social media literacy in infodemic management: a systematic review. *Front Digit Health*. 2024 Feb 14;6:1277499. doi: 10.3389/fdgth

<sup>40</sup> What is Media Literacy? Media Literacy Now, Inc. 2025. <https://medialiteracynow.org/challenge/what-is-media-literacy/#:~:text=We%20define%20media%20literacy%20as,confident%20and%20competent%20media%20consumers>.

<sup>41</sup> Amazeen, M.A., Sovacool, B.K., Krishna, A. *et al.* The “Future of Energy”? Building resilience to ExxonMobil’s disinformation through disclosures and inoculation. *npj Clim. Action* **4**, 19 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44168-025-00209-6>

<sup>42</sup> Droog, E., Vermeulen, I., van Huijstee, D., Harutyunyan, D., Tejedor, S., & Pulido, C. 2025. Combatting the Misinformation Crisis: A Systematic Review of the Literature on Characteristics and Effectiveness of Media Literacy Interventions. *Communication Research*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502251363705>.

<sup>43</sup> Expert Testimony to Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation. Jennie King, ISD Head of Climate Research and Policy. 2023. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ING2-Committee-Hearing-on-Climate-Disinfo-Jennie-King-Expert-Testimony.pdf>

around climate, and garnered an aggregate of 343,862 shares from this content. The organic audience of these accounts varies from 65k to over 1.9m followers. Nine of the twelve were, and remain, verified accounts.

[On monetization, ed.] Sensational content fuels the ‘outrage economy’, and therefore serves the current business model of most platforms, and climate is no exception - whether outright denial or other forms of disinformation, this content is generally high engagement, which increases the value proposition for advertisers on social media.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

The fossil fuel industry drives disinformation on issues well beyond climate change and renewable energy. For example, investigative journalists have documented how Big Oil funds and promotes US-based campaigns to undermine a range of rights and civil liberties including regarding reproductive care,<sup>45</sup> voting rights<sup>46</sup> and rights to protest,<sup>47</sup> and the safety and very existence of trans people.<sup>48</sup> Climate change is a “super wicked problem” that requires sustained collective action over time and space. Progress is hard enough without fossil-fueled campaigns that seem designed to foment division about charged political issues and weaken essential democratic processes.

And the companies’ strategy is global in scope, with impacts beyond the US and in international fora. A recent report from the UN Special Rapporteur on climate change and human rights found that:

Fossil fuels companies’ lobbyists have increased their influence in public policy spaces, internationally – notably at meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and at the national level, to limit regulations and enforcement. They have instilled doubt about the need to act on, and the viability of, renewables, and have promoted speculative or ineffective solutions that present additional lock-in risks and higher costs.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. pages 2 – 3.

<sup>45</sup> Mississippi’s latest move in its anti-abortion agenda? A tax break for corporate donations. New Orleans Public Radio. 2022. <https://www.wvno.org/politics/2022-10-06/mississippis-latest-move-in-its-anti-abortion-agenda-a-tax-break-for-corporate-donations>

<sup>46</sup> Faber, Daniel, Kayla Vestergaard, Nina Schlegel, Claire Spector. Voter Suppression, Climate Justice, and the Polluter-Industrial Complex. 2025. Boston, MA: Global Center for Climate Justice. <https://www.climatejusticecenter.org/publication/voter-suppression-and-the-pic>

<sup>47</sup> Revealed: how the fossil fuel industry helps spread anti-protest laws across the US. The Guardian. 2024.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/sep/26/anti-protest-laws-fossil-fuel-lobby>

<sup>48</sup> Fossil fuel billionaires are bankrolling the anti-trans movement. Heated. 2025. <https://heated.world/p/fossil-fuel-billionaires-are-bankrolling>

<sup>49</sup> Morgera, Elisa. The imperative of defossilizing our economies Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights. 2025. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/42>

Furthermore, the report finds that the tactics used in these campaigns “negatively impact the rights to information, education and science and prevent effective human rights protection.”<sup>50</sup>

Fossil fuel-funded networks of online presences, think tanks, and lobbying apparatuses undermine public understanding of, and trust in, science, institutions, and government. The International Panel on the Information Environment describes how “citizens become skeptical not only of the institutions working to create a sustainable future, but also of their own ability to meaningfully contribute to change” when subject to misinformation. In the long-term, disinformation drives “reduced engagement with climate policy issues and diminished interest in mitigating initiatives” that weaken policies and practices to reduce the peril of climate change.<sup>51</sup>

The confluence of global three crises—the climate crisis, the crisis in the world’s information ecosystem, the crisis of democracy<sup>52</sup>—mean that right now is a crucial point for which multi-lateral, multi-state action. Fortunately, such action is underway, and Australia has an opportunity to be an early supporter, as it was with the Paris Climate Agreement.

During the G20 meeting in Rio de Janeiro,<sup>26</sup> Brazil, the UN, UNESCO, and other nations launched the “Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change.” The Global Initiative “aims to promote and defend information integrity on climate change, address disinformation, and enhance climate change awareness and action.”

The UN’s Global Principles for Information Integrity<sup>28</sup> and the “Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms”<sup>29</sup> call Member States to prioritize:

1. Public interest media<sup>30</sup> and other essential mechanisms that restore public trust in science<sup>31</sup>
2. Public and policymaker understanding that social media platforms and online search engines can be held accountable for polluting the information ecosystem<sup>32</sup> just as the fossil fuel and other industries have polluted the biophysical ecosystem
3. Platform due diligence, transparency, and accountability for online advertising
4. User empowerment to promote safe and trustworthy digital environments.
5. Media outlets and journalists that, when confronted with industry campaigns undermining science and the public good, recognize and reference the “disinformation playbook”
6. Full enjoyment of freedom of expression and the importance of safeguarding the integrity of information”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Morgera, Elisa. Summary: The imperative of defossilizing our economies Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights. 2025.

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/the-imperative-defossilizing-our-economies.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> International Panel on the Information Environment [E. Elbeyi, K. Bruhn Jensen, M. Aronczyk, J. Asuka, G. Ceylan, J. Cook, G. Erdelyi, H. Ford, C. Milani, E. Mustafaraj, F. Ogenga, S. Yadin, P. N. Howard, S. Valenzuela (eds.)], “Information Integrity about Climate Science: A Systematic Review,” Zurich, Switzerland: IPIE, 2025. Synthesis Report, SR2025.1, doi: 10.61452/BTZP3426

<sup>52</sup> See for instance Valgarðsson, Viktor, Will Jennings, Gerry Stoker, Hannah Bunting, Daniel Devine, Lawrence McKay, and Andrew Klassen. “A Crisis of Political Trust? Global Trends in Institutional Trust from 1958 to 2019.” *British Journal of Political Science* 55 (2025): e15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000498> and Sorge, Helmut. On the Brink: A Global Democratic Crisis? Policy Center for the New South. 2024. <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/brink-global-democratic-crisis>

Our reality is stark. 2024 was the first year to exceed global average temperatures 1.5°C above pre-industrial level.<sup>53</sup> The first global stocktake under the Paris Agreement concluded that efforts towards meeting its goals are “insufficient and that the world is not on track to meet the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement. The world has a narrowing window of opportunity to get back on track.”<sup>54</sup>

It’s clear that the prevalence and power of fossil-fuel funded disinformation is pushing us in the entirely wrong direction. It is equally clear that concern about and action regarding information integrity is underway and gaining momentum. The work of the Australian Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy can be powerful driver of greater momentum.

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<sup>53</sup> 2024 is the first year to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial level. Press release from the Copernicus Climate Change Service. 2025. <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-2024-first-year-exceed-15degc-above-pre-industrial-level>

<sup>54</sup> UNFCCC. Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement. Outcome of the First Global Stocktake. 2023. <https://unfccc.int/documents/637073>