



Digital Media
Research Centre

QUT DMRC Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy

SUBMITTED BY

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Submission overview

Dear Committee members,

The [QUT Digital Media Research Centre \(DMRC\)](#), one of the top Australian centres for media and communication research, is pleased to make this submission in the service of this important inquiry into [Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy](#).

The DMRC conducts world-leading communication, media, and law research for a flourishing digital society. Our centre incorporates the QUT node of the Australian Research Council (ARC) [Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making & Society \(ADM+S\)](#) and, more recently, the GenAI Lab. The DMRC participates in the [ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child](#), headquartered in the Faculty of Creative Industries, Education, and Social Justice.

As such, we have a broad range of knowledge and skills dedicated to researching problematic information (misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, conspiracy theories, propaganda—see an [Explainer](#) attached). We develop and deploy computational methods to study the dynamics of contemporary information spaces; we have experts studying problematic information and its drivers across a range of topics and country contexts; researchers specialising in media and information literacy; and we have deep subject matter knowledge of Australian and international politics, and—specifically—climate, energy, and environment-related issues.

In this submission, we step the Committee through the current state of knowledge from our domestic and international colleagues, and then drill down to provide you with some tangible examples from our recent research about *what* we are seeing, *how* these information tactics are working, and—importantly—*who* is driving them and in *collaboration with whom*.

As a recent synthesis report from the [International Panel on the Information Environment \(IPIE\)](#) about climate information integrity found that, to address this complex and many-sided problem, we need to focus on regulation; litigation (e.g., against greenwashing and astroturfing); education; and establishing counterpublics, or ‘coalitions of the willing’, to push back against the powerful vested interests obstructing and delaying climate action. **In essence: While research efforts to-date are certainly useful and enlightening, there is much more work that needs to be done to mitigate the crisis of information integrity around the pivotal issues of climate change and energy.** We need to get this right now: any delays to a response that is consistent with the scientific consensus poses serious societal consequences. We list our top four recommendations below, and refer you to our detailed responses to the Terms of Reference for a more in-depth analysis, context, and further ideas.

We would be delighted to provide the Committee with any further information to support the objectives of this inquiry.

Our top four recommendations are:

1. **Support better observability:** We need to understand the extent of the problem and its drivers to best respond. We need to know what is being said, by whom, to whom, where, and to what effect. To that end, we must mandate meaningful, equitable data-sharing obligations on platforms, ensuring accredited researchers and civil society have ongoing access to high-quality



data for independent monitoring to empower timely interventions.

2. **Develop fit-for-purpose regulation:** Reframe regulatory efforts around transparency and accountability rather than content moderation, drawing upon and refining elements of the 2023 Misinformation Bill. Engage with subject matter experts to develop fit-for-purpose legislation that is aligned with international best practice (e.g., EU Digital Services Act) by focusing on systemic risks and platform accountability.
3. **Educate widely:** Invest in high quality media literacy education and the development of world-class programs, resources, and awareness-raising campaigns for lifelong learning, from school students, to adults, and media industries.
4. **Harness a coordinated and well-resourced response:** Support the connection of 'coalitions of the willing' to combat the very aligned and effective strategies of the climate change counter movement. This includes a national commitment and strategy to support proactive and audience-appropriate communication, along with genuine engagement with communities and other key stakeholders to fill damaging information vacuums. Techniques like 'pre-bunking' should be used to address likely problematic information before it happens.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Daniel Angus, FQA

Director, Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology

Detailed responses to Terms of Reference:

(a) the prevalence of, motivations behind and impacts of misinformation and disinformation related to climate change and energy and (b) how misinformation and disinformation related to climate change and energy is financed, produced and disseminated, including, but not limited to, understanding its impact

In the face of incontrovertible evidence of the observed effects of climate change and its anthropogenic causes¹, only two-thirds of Australians accept human-caused climate change is happening and—despite having an environment prone to floods and fires—we have amongst the highest scepticism and least concern in the world². However, as scholars have highlighted, this level of concern is increasing amongst some population segments, and there is more consensus amongst the public than what is reflected in our nation's political response³. Problematic information about climate change—that is, climate misinformation and disinformation—not only fosters outright climate denial; it also confuses understanding about the causes of climate change and the level of threat posed, and it can impact public support for climate solutions⁴.

Climate misinformation that delays climate action

Climate misinformation runs from denial (of climate change itself, or its human causes) to narratives that seek to delay action to address climate impacts, such as misinformation about renewable energy or overreliance on underdeveloped technological solutions. Such discourses of climate delay⁵ (refer to *section (d)* for more information) obstruct policy to address climate change directly and promptly, extending timelines for harmful fossil fuel extraction, which exacerbates the projected impact of climate change. Globally, this 'new denial'—misinformation about climate policies and attacks on solutions like renewable energy—has increased substantially across social and traditional media over the past decade⁶, with generative AI posing new challenges⁷. See *sections (c), (d)* and *(e)* for more detailed discussion about this. **Climate misinformation confuses the public's understanding of climate change as well as reduces support for climate policy.**

¹ Ripple, W. J., Wolf, C., Gregg, J. W., Rockström, J., Mann, M. E., Oreskes, N., Lenton, T. M., Rahmstorf, S., Newsome, T. M., Xu, C., Svenning, J.-C., Pereira, C. C., Law, B. E., & Crowther, T. W. (2024). The 2024 state of the climate report: Perilous times on planet Earth. *BioScience*, 74(12), pp 812-824. <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biae087>

² Leiserowitz, A., Verner, M., Goddard, E., Wood, E., Carman, J., Ordaz Reynoso, N., Thulin, E., Rosenthal, S., Marlon, J. & Buttermore, N. (2023). *International Public Opinion on Climate Change, 2023*. New Haven, CT: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and Data for Good at Meta. <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/international-public-opinion-climate-change-2023.pdf>; Hornsey, M. J., & Fielding, K. S. (2020). Understanding (and reducing) inaction on climate change. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 14(1), 3–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12058>; Paas, K., Bradley, G., Deshpande, S., Foxwell-Norton, K., & Mackey, B. (2024). Griffith Climate Action Survey 2023: Summary for Policy and Decision Making. Griffith University. <https://doi.org/10.25904/5S6N-S893>

³ Leviston, Z., Stanley, S. K., & Walker, I. (2024). Perceived support for climate policy in Australia: The asymmetrical influence of voting behaviour. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 100, 102488. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2024.102488>

⁴ Logemann, H. T., Rode, J. B., Maertens, R., & Linden, S. van der. (2025). The gateway (mis)belief model: How misinformation impacts perceptions of scientific consensus and attitudes towards climate change. *British Journal of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.70022>

⁵ Lamb, W. F., Mattioli, G., Levi, S., Roberts, J. T., Capstick, S., Creutzig, F., Minx, J. C., Müller-Hansen, F., Culhane, T., & Steinberger, J. K. (2020). Discourses of climate delay. *Global Sustainability*, 3, e17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2020.13>

⁶ <https://counterhate.com/blog/the-new-climate-denial-major-new-report-on-youtube-uncovers-evolution-of-climate-deniers-tactics/>

⁷ <https://www.desmog.com/2025/08/27/ai-slop-websites-are-publishing-climate-science-denial/>

In Australia, the recent attacks on the renewable energy roll-out offer examples of problematic climate information. Despite no evidence that offshore wind development could lead to whale deaths, claims that offshore windfarms harm whales are prevalent in communities and astroturf groups online⁸. Misinformation about whale mortality and windfarms has been shared/amplified on social media by politicians⁹ and public figures, including a fake study, claiming to be published in a respected scientific journal, which was shared by a Facebook group with 7,000 members¹⁰. Such misinformation is amplified by traditional media outlets, sometimes through misguided attempts to 'both-sides' a climate claim, where a minority view is given equal weight to a widely held consensus.

Strategic use of problematic climate information by vested interests primarily sows doubt about its causes, and debates the feasibility and effectiveness of climate solutions¹¹. Other problematic climate content and tactics, such as outright denial or claims that climate change is a hoax, also overlap conspiracy theory content on social media.

Climate denial and conspiracy theories

Recent misinformation appearing online during and immediately following ex-tropical cyclone Alfred in March 2025 included reference to conspiracy theories about weather modification¹². Current research being conducted within the Digital Media Research Centre¹³ notes an alignment between problematic climate change information and conspiratorial discourse on Instagram, particularly theories of weather manipulation such as the chemtrails conspiracy theory¹⁴. In this research, climate misinformation and chemtrails (and other) conspiracy theories are intertwined through visuals, hashtags, and text. These multimodal formats ('multimodal' in this context refers to how social media posts can include mixtures of pictures, videos, text, audio and other metadata) are known to be shared faster, and travel further, on social media than text-based misinformation alone. Multimodal climate misinformation on Instagram is shared alongside other problematic information such as the Agenda 21 (or 30) conspiracy theory, which misrepresents United Nations (UN) sustainable development agendas as campaigns for "global governance", and other sometimes-related discourse that rejects rational authority or scientific method. The UN conspiracy theory has been used by Senator Malcolm Roberts historically to deny climate change¹⁵.

These anti-science discourses have detrimental impacts that extend beyond the delay in action to address climate change and its impacts. Such discourse, for example, increases vaccine hesitancy and distrust in institutions such as government, scientific bodies, or higher education, with radical end-game outcomes potentially threatening social stability through rejection of civic authority. For example, the

⁸ <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/absolutely-incorrect-the-evidence-is-in-on-whales-and-offshore-wind-farms-20240625-p5jol3.html>

⁹ <https://x.com/craigkellyAFEE/status/1803199753863438452>

¹⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-07/editor-blasts-fake-study-linking-whale-deaths-to-wind-farms/103069922>

¹¹ 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. <https://www.ipie.info/research/sr2025-1>

¹² <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/cloud-seeding-chemtrails-cyclone-alfred-conspiracy-theories/hda5pbwsn>

¹³ Gardam, C., Riedlinger, M., & Angus, D. (in press). Multimodal narratives of climate denial: A novel, visual-first methodology for analysing conspiracy theory discourse on Instagram. *Discourse, Context & Media*.

¹⁴ Chemtrails narratives suggest that, rather than the condensation trails that they are, vapour visible behind commercial or military aircraft contains particles that contribute to large-scale weather and climate manipulation.

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-36972449>

sovereign citizen movement has shown its deadly potential through the killing of two police officers in Victoria in August 2025 by a self-proclaimed sovereign citizen¹⁶.

Findings from our multimodal examination of climate denial on Instagram supports similar research that suggests that, on Instagram, “climate denial is a systemic conspiracy theory associated with conspiracy theories about COVID-19, 5G, smartmeters, Bill Gates, government intrigue, leftist evil, malicious pharmaceutical companies, chemtrails, and the rejection of the sphericity of the Earth”¹⁷. The sovereign citizen movement overlaps and co-opts other movements such as conspiratorial communities and the anti-vax network¹⁸. Consequently, the confounding of climate denial and the conspiratorial community on social media has immediate consequences for civic safety alongside the short- and long-term consequences of climate change.

Impacts and drivers of mis/disinformation

The recent synthesis report from the *International Panel on the Information Environment* (IPIE) found that powerful actors (explained below in *section (d)*) intentionally spread inaccurate or misleading narratives about human-caused climate change. The authors write: “These narratives circulate across digital, broadcast, and interpersonal communication channels. The result is a decline in public trust, diminished policy coordination, and a feedback loop between scientific denialism and political inaction.”¹⁹

The authors of the recent-released open access book *Climate Obstruction: A global assessment*—the first of its kind—came to a similar conclusion²⁰. While the issue of problematic information is complex and has many variables and drivers, with some of these being structural, human-centric (values-based, or influenced by the way we think and our identities), or compounded by our fast-paced and fragmented information environments, Roberts and colleagues found that efforts so far to address climate change have largely been unsuccessful **due to the work done to deliberately obstruct them, and our collective failure to understand how this is happening**.

This combination of motivating factors is highlighted by a comparative study of the relationship between conservatism, conspiratorial beliefs, and climate scepticism across 24 nations²¹. As noted earlier, Australia has amongst the highest rates of climate scepticism in the world. The authors found a pattern where climate scepticism was linked to conservative ideology in nations that were high emitters, like Australia, the US, Brazil and Canada²²—nations all economically connected to fossil fuels and with active conservative think tanks (see *section (d)*). They write:

¹⁶ <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/08/29/australia/australian-sovereign-citizens-manhunt-intl-hnk>

¹⁷ Vécsey, V. (2025). Web of denial: Climate change denial discourse on Instagram. In *Communicating Science, Climate Change and the Environment in Hybrid Media*. Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003479550-4/web-denial-vir%C3%A1g-v%C3%A9csey>, p. 48

¹⁸ <https://www.afp.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/123-2023.pdf>

¹⁹ *Information Integrity about Climate Science* synthesis report, p. 3

²⁰ Roberts, J. T., Milani, C. R. S., Jacquet, J., & Downie, C. (Eds.). (2025). *Climate obstruction: A global assessment*. Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/climate-obstruction-9780197787151>, see also: <https://cssn.org/>

²¹ Hornsey, M. J., Harris, E. A., & Fielding, K. S. (2018). Relationships among conspiratorial beliefs, conservatism and climate scepticism across nations. *Nature Climate Change*, 8(7), 614–620. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0157-2>

²² A Canadian example is via Solomun (2025), which describes “extractive populism: in Alberta, where “an attack on fossil fuels becomes an attack on identity—and a transition away from fossil fuels an existential threat”. See: Solomun, S., Monroy, I. B., Bugiel, J., Chan, E., Gowd, N., Hayes, H. A., Jayme, N. H., Kim, S., Ross, C., & Tollefson, H. (2025). *Climate Obstruction: On the State and Spread of Climate Disinformation in Canada*. <https://www.mediatechdemocracy.com/climate-obstruction-report>, p. 12

“This suggests that ideological barriers to accepting science do not just emerge ‘bottom-up’, in the sense of individuals spontaneously critiquing scientific consensus through the lens of their worldviews. Rather, ideological barriers to accepting science can also be cultivated and nourished ‘top-down’ by influential individuals and organizations who have a vested interest in communicating the notion that the science is flawed or inconclusive.”
(Hornsey et al., 2018, p. 615)

In Australia, the most significant predictor of acceptance of climate science is political affiliation (the political party that one aligns themselves with), with voters using ‘elite cues’ from political leaders to adjust their attitudes towards climate action and policy. LNP politicians view climate change to be less of a threat than their other political colleagues²³ and perceive their electorate to be less concerned about the issue, while their voters are more likely to believe that climate change is natural²⁴.

But trust in science mediates political partisanship's effect on climate acceptance²⁵. For example, when someone has high trust in IPCC evidence, this trust can override their political party's position. The individual's trust essentially becomes the primary driver of their climate beliefs, reducing the direct influence of partisan identity. Recent work from Todorova and colleagues (see Figure 1) shows that trust in climate science and perceived scientific consensus on climate change are significant predictors of accepting climate change science and supporting climate policy.

All this is to say that we cannot solve this problem with the knowledge deficit model—i.e., correcting misinformation, or addressing misleading information, and expecting that it will be accepted. **This issue is far more complex and political actors and vested interests are key drivers of the problem.**

Attacks on science

Finally, as well as having the potential to diminish trust in science and support for policy, the impacts of climate misinformation such as climate-related conspiracy theories (e.g., that climate change is a hoax) can prompt attacks on science and scientists. A self-limiting effect has been noted regarding scientists when reporting their own results regarding climate change. Contrarian attacks can cause climate scientists to second-guess the science in a process described as seepage²⁶, thereby overstating uncertainty or under-communicating climate knowledge. This can cause a circular result: underreporting climate risks or spending too much time addressing undue criticism causes doubt in climate science, which begets more climate contrarianism, and so on. Scientists at CSIRO and university professors have been professionally attacked by anti-windfarm activists²⁷ during a campaign in Illawarra where misrepresentation and disinformation were said to be used as political tactics. These attacks on science form another harmful outcome from climate misinformation. More recently, some members of

²³ Fielding, K. S., Head, B. W., Laffan, W., Western, M., & Hoegh-Guldberg, O. (2012). Australian politicians' beliefs about climate change: Political partisanship and political ideology. *Environmental Politics*, 21(5), 712–733.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2012.698887>

²⁴ Tranter, B. (2017). It's only natural: Conservatives and climate change in Australia. *Environmental Sociology*, 3(3), 274–285.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2017.1310966>

²⁵ Tranter, B., Lester, L., Foxwell-Norton, K., & Palmer, M. A. (2023). In science we trust? Public trust in Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projections and accepting anthropogenic climate change. *Public Understanding of Science*, 32(6), 691–708.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/09636625231165405>

²⁶ Lewandowsky, S., Oreskes, N., Risbey, J. S., Newell, B. R., & Smithson, M. (2015). Seepage: Climate change denial and its effect on the scientific community. *Global Environmental Change*, 33, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2015.02.013>

²⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-30/illawarra-offshore-wind-farm-misinformation-in-federal-election/105097852>

communities have turned on each other and developers²⁸, with genuine community concerns and an information vacuum being leveraged by vested interests—more about this below.

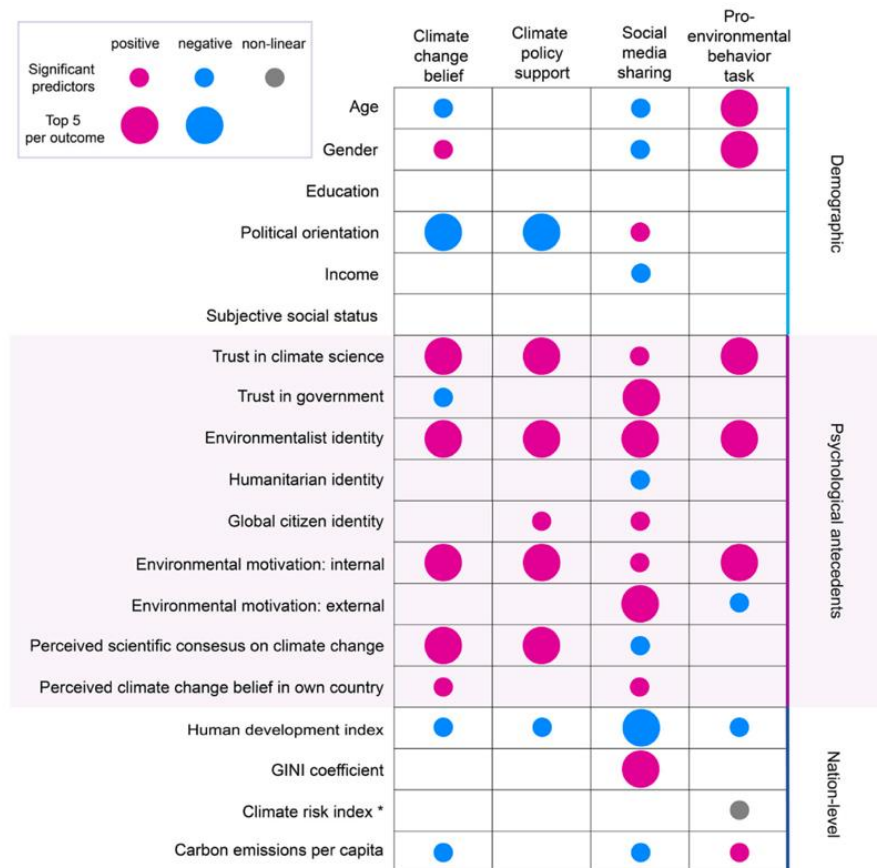


Figure 1: Todorova et al., (2025)²⁹ – [article available open access](#) – examine the predictors of several climate-relevant outcomes, including climate change belief and policy support, across 55 countries, including Australia. The colour of the circle indicates the nature of the relationship – if it’s positive (pink) or negative (blue) – and the size of the circle indicates its significance. For example, trust in climate science is a top 5 predictor for a person’s likelihood of supporting climate policy (Figure used as per CC BY 4.0).

Key recommendations:

1. Regarding the prevalence of problematic climate information: to truly understand the who, what, where (what channels), how, and in collaboration with whom; **communication and digital media researchers need better observability of communication spaces** to monitor what is being posted, how audiences are responding, and understand what informational alliances exist.
2. While communication spaces are key sites of knowledge generation, amplification, and contestation, they do not necessarily represent wider public attitudes, nor are indicators of knowledge. Therefore, we must combine the knowledge generated from communication spaces

²⁸ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2025-02-23/renewable-energy-projects-divide-farming-communities/104740690>

²⁹ Todorova, B., Steyrl, D., Hornsey, M. J., Pearson, S., Brick, C., Lange, F., Van Bavel, J. J., Vlasceanu, M., Lamm, C., & Doell, K. C. (2025). Machine learning identifies key individual and nation-level factors predicting climate-relevant beliefs and behaviors. *Npj Climate Action*, 4(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44168-025-00251-4>

with other research, **including engaging with information creators and consumers, to better understand their practices and drivers**. An ideal approach is considering extensive cross-platform digital media data alongside surveys and targeted interviews. This wide-ranging approach would enhance our understanding about how attitudes are changing over time; what information sources people are consuming and their information consumption practices; and levels of media, information, and scientific literacy. Some of this work already exists and can be collated and built upon. As one example: the timely and critical renewable energy transition requires social licence, yet has been the target of strategic problematic information. CSIRO conducted one of Australia's **most comprehensive surveys about attitudes towards the energy transition** a couple of years ago³⁰. Continuing this monitoring could provide a baseline on which to build upon and track attitudinal shift, including the drivers.

3. Importantly, in collaboration with collecting these data, **we need a coordinated national approach to addressing problematic information**: this challenge is too great and too significant to leave to piecemeal or reflex efforts. Discussions have begun in the context of trust in science and technology³¹, and we need to think about this widely to ensure resources are best leveraged and audiences are best supported in their information needs. This relates to media literacy (see *section (g)*), but must go further to establish—at a national level—a best practice co-ordinated approach to responding to the multi-faceted issue³². This expert working group could also play a key role in informing a regulatory response (see *section (f)*). It could also provide a central point of contact to share knowledge from internationally-based colleagues working in this research, policy, and communications and engagement space.

³⁰ Poruschi, L., Scovell, M., McCrea, R., Walton, A., & Gardner, J. (2024). *Australian attitudes toward the renewable energy transition – Part 1: General attitude*. CSIRO. <https://doi.org/10.25919/55ec-nx45>

³¹ <https://research.csiro.au/ri/events/>

³² Wilson, K., & Lubicz-Zaorski, C. (2025). Empowering the Collective: The fight against mis/disinformation. *AQ - Australian Quarterly*, 96(3), pp. 24-30, 1 July 2025. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/258705/1/AQ_96.3_JUL-SEP_2025_ONLINE_extracted_no_cover.pdf

(c) the origins, growth and prevalence of ‘astroturfing’ and its impact on public policy and debate;

Astroturfing is a strategy used by corporations and political groups to disguise their involvement, making it seem as though support or opposition for an issue is coming from ordinary citizens and authentic grassroots movements. **The practice is widespread in the Australian media landscape.**

Evidence from the Australian Ad Observatory during the 2025 Australian federal election, unpacked more fully in a parallel submission from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision Making & Society (ADM+S), shows how astroturfing was a central advertising strategy. Many powerful interests conspired to present themselves as small community groups while concealing links to major parties³³, donors or lobbyists³⁴, while some even mimicked the names and look of genuine grassroots organisations to sow confusion. As one example, Energy for Australians³⁵, an astroturfing front for a pro-nuclear lobby, is strikingly similar to the genuine grassroots anti-nuclear community group Energy for Australia. These tactics distort debate by amplifying misleading or decontextualised claims about energy affordability, nuclear timelines, and the role of fossil gas, while exploiting weak disclosure and platform self-classification to hide their provenance.

The consequences are threefold. **First, the views of vested interests are laundered as public sentiment**, creating the false impression of widespread support for corporate-backed policies. **Second, misinformation is normalised** through cherry-picked figures and emotive content that sidesteps better evidenced and balanced expert commentary and experience. **Third, the lack of platform and general accountability is systematically exploited**: innocuous authorisation lines reveal little meaningful accountability, significant third-party thresholds are skirted, and platform ad libraries and self-selected categories allow lobby groups to disguise themselves as community or non-profit pages. Independent researcher-led observability made these patterns visible despite platform opacity, underscoring the need for durable public monitoring infrastructure.

Astroturfing now extends well beyond paid advertising into contemporary online spaces where vested interests seed narratives and mobilise manufactured participation. Research on offshore wind opposition in Rhode Island documents a playbook of climate-delay discourse, including cherry picking, conspiracist frames, and reliance on fake experts, amplified through national networks that provide an information subsidy to local campaigns³⁶. The same repertoire is increasingly visible in Australian debates about renewables and energy projects. A key example is the Beetaloo Basin, where a pro-fracking site with minimal transparency and almost no organic audience was accused of astroturfing³⁷ after using an Aboriginal Elder’s image without consent while urging email campaigns to MPs³⁸. The lack of contact details, corporate attribution, and registration illustrates how easily such operations can masquerade as community voices while shaping public debate.

³³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-04-04/coalition-pollster-working-with-australians-for-natural-gas/105129478>

³⁴ <https://www.crikey.com.au/2025/03/28/nuclear-for-australia-mums-for-nuclear-aec-campaign-spending/>

³⁵ https://app.polidashboard.org/meta_ads?country=au&startDay=04-05-2025&endDay=05-03-2025&advertiser=Energy+for+Australians+Incorporated

³⁶ Slevin, I., Kattrup, W., and Roberts, T. (2023). *Against the Wind: A Map of the Anti-Offshore Wind Network in the Eastern United States*. The Climate and Development Lab. <https://www.climatedevlab.brown.edu/services-1>

³⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-22/nt-beetaloo-astroturfing-website/102007954>

³⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/feb/22/environmentalists-accuse-beetaloo-basin-pro-fracking-website-of-astroturfing>

The ACCC already exercises significant powers under the Australian Consumer Law to address misleading or deceptive conduct, including greenwashing. Recent prosecutions have targeted false environmental claims such as Clorox's misleading use of "ocean plastic"³⁹, "reef-friendly" sunscreen marketing by Hawaiian Tropic and Banana Boat⁴⁰, and Australian Gas Networks' claims about renewable household gas⁴¹. These cases demonstrate the Commission's readiness to pursue deceptive environmental messaging, a framework that could be examined to determine its ability to cover covertly orchestrated 'astroturf' campaigns.

Key recommendations:

1. **Support transparency:** Real-time disclosure of third-party funding and donors, closing loopholes that allow concealment.
2. **Platform accountability:** require accurate classification and disclosure of advertisers to stop mislabelling (e.g. lobby groups as "community organisations").
3. **Enforcement:** Environmental astroturfing should be examined to determine whether it falls within the remit of the ACCC's enforcement powers. If it does not, consideration should be given to extending the remit so that deceptive claims regarding community consensus are addressed, thereby protecting genuine community groups and avoiding misleading claims.

³⁹ Clorox Australia fined \$5.2 million over false claims of using recycled plastic (2025). *Reuters*.

<https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/clorox-australia-fined-52-million-over-false-claims-using-recycled-plastic-2025-04-14/>

⁴⁰ Popular sunscreens accused of greenwashing by ACCC over "reef-friendly" claims. (2025). *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jul/01/hawaiian-tropic-banana-boat-sunscreen-accused-of-greenwashing-by-acc-reef-friendly>

⁴¹ Australian consumer watchdog takes gas company to court alleging it misled consumers over renewables claim. (2025). *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jun/26/australian-consumer-watchdog-takes-gas-company-to-court-alleging-it-misled-consumers-over-renewables-claim-ntwnfb>

(d) connections between Australian organisations and international think tank and influence networks associated with the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation related to matters of public policy

The scholarly and non-scholarly work cataloguing the interconnections of ideologically-aligned actors seeking to undermine climate science and curtail emissions reduction policy and action is substantive and alarming⁴². Described as the Climate Change Counter Movement (CCCM), organised denial, the ‘denial machine’, climate obstruction, and in various other ways, it is essentially the same set of neoliberal partisan actors, deploying a very similar set of tactics that were honed during anti-tobacco regulation days⁴³. In Roberts and colleagues’ newly-released first comprehensive global assessment of the problem⁴⁴, they define climate obstruction as: **“intentional actions and efforts to slow or block policies on climate change that are commensurate with the current scientific consensus of what is necessary to avoid dangerous human-caused interference with the climate system”** (p. 2).

Who’s involved: the actors

The core actor types involved in obstruction are⁴⁵:

- Corporations and trade associations
- Free market/conservative think tanks
- Contrarian scientists
- Opposition coalitions and front groups
- PR firms
- Astroturf organisations and campaigns (as in *section (c)*)
- Conservative philanthropists and foundations
- Conservative politicians
- Partisan right-wing media
- Denial blogs and online influencers

>> For a quick overview, please see the [Climate Social Science Network’s Briefing Note](#). This also contains a useful map on the structure of obstruction in the US: the origins of the movement.

⁴² These are just a few key texts: Roberts, J. T., Milani, C. R. S., Jacquet, J., & Downie, C. (Eds.). (2025). *Climate obstruction: A global assessment*. Oxford University Press. <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/climate-obstruction-9780197787151>, see also: <https://cssn.org/>; Dunlap, R. E., & Brulle, R. J. (2020). Sources and amplifiers of climate change denial. *Research Handbook on Communicating Climate Change*, 49–61; Dunlap, R. E., & McCright, A. M. (2011). Organized climate change denial. In J. S. Dryzek, R. B. Norgaard, & D. Schlosberg (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of climate change and society* (Vol. 1, pp. 144–160); Ekberg, K., Forchtner, B., Hultman, M., & Jylhä, K. M. (2022). *Climate Obstruction: How Denial, Delay and Inaction are Heating the Planet*. Taylor & Francis; Wilkinson, M. (2020). *The carbon club: How a network of influential climate sceptics, politicians and business leaders fought to control Australia’s climate policy*. Allen & Unwin; Kurmelovs, R. (2024). *Slick*. University of Queensland Press; Walker, J. (2022). Freedom to Burn: Mining Propaganda, Fossil Capital, and the Australian Neoliberals. In *Market Civilisations: Neoliberals East and South*. Zone Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1vbd2mv.10>; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-08-02/readfearn---climate-victory/4169648>;

⁴³ Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2010). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

⁴⁴ Roberts et al. (2025). *Climate obstruction: A global assessment*

⁴⁵ Dunlap, R., and R., Brulle. (2020). *Sources and amplifiers of climate change denial*; Dunlap, R., and McCright, A. (2011). *Organized climate change denial*; Roberts et al. (2025). *Climate obstruction: A global assessment*; CCSN briefing note: https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CCSN-Briefing_-Obstruction-2.pdf

The origins and interconnections of these actors have been extensively researched, and we refer readers to this work (see references under footnote 44). In essence, established and organised climate obstruction is linked to a global network of free market conservative think tanks via the Mont Pelerin Society and the Atlas Network, both known for opposing climate policy progression⁴⁶. Attracting Australian mainstream media attention recently, the Atlas Network acts as an umbrella organisation, offering training and other benefits to its 500 neoliberal think tank members to provide guidance about how to influence policy. In Australia, the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA)⁴⁷, Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) and the Australian Taxpayers' Alliance⁴⁸ are connected to Atlas⁴⁹. Representatives from the IPA and CIS are also members of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS)⁵⁰, with CIS founder Greg Lindsay AO a past MPS president⁵¹. While refuting links to Atlas⁵², partisan right-wing lobby group Advance—the so-called grassroots group bank-rolled by mill(bill)ionaires—was established and is funded by representatives of the IPA and CIS⁵³. Advance was a key spender during the 2025 Australian federal election, along with the Australian Taxpayers' Alliance (refer to the ADM+S submission to this inquiry, which covers these recent findings in detail)⁵⁴.

How do they do it: the claims and tactics

Scholars broadly agree that while arguments and tactics once centred on outright denial of climate science (for example, the '*3 Pillars model*'—tactic 1: claim that climate science is bad; tactic 2: dismiss climate change acceptance and support for action as ideologically-driven; and tactic 3: foreground the falsehood that there is scientific controversy about climate change)⁵⁵, as public support for climate action has grown—and the impacts from unsustainable pollution become clearer—narratives have shifted more towards policy delay arguments, or 'response scepticism'⁵⁶.

William Lamb and colleagues (2020) explore these storylines in the below diagram and in this article in *The Conversation*, calling them 'Discourses of climate delay'⁵⁷ (Figure 2). They say: "Genuine concerns

⁴⁶ Roberts et al. (2025). *Climate obstruction: A global assessment*; <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-04-24/atlas-network-think-tanks-active-in-australia-and-new-zealand/104788732>; <https://www.desmog.com/2014/01/15/exclusive-mont-pelerin-society-revealed-home-leading-pushers-climate-science-denial/>

⁴⁷ See: <https://www.desmog.com/institute-public-affairs/>

⁴⁸ See: <https://www.desmog.com/australian-taxpayers-alliance/>

⁴⁹ See: Atlas Network Annual Report 2018;

⁵⁰ Directory obtained and recreated by DeSmog to remove contact details: <https://www.desmog.com/wp-content/uploads/files/Mont%20Pelerin%20Society%20Directory%202010.pdf>. Members at 2010 – a more recent list is not available.

⁵¹ See: <https://montpelerin.org/past-presidents/>

⁵² See: <https://www.desmog.com/2023/10/10/a-secretive-network-is-fighting-indigenous-rights-in-australia-and-canada-expert-says/>

⁵³ <https://theconversation.com/right-wing-political-group-advance-is-in-the-headlines-what-is-it-and-what-does-it-stand-for-261164>; Elliott, T. (2025). '*Copied the MAGA model*': The 'grassroots' lobby group funded by some of Australia's richest. Brisbane: Fairfax Media Publications Pty Limited. <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/copied-maga-model-grassroots-lobby-group-funded/docview/3191184540/se-2>

⁵⁴ <https://theconversation.com/follow-the-money-the-organisations-that-spent-the-most-on-social-media-during-the-election-256784>

⁵⁵ The Pillars of Climate Change Denial: <https://ncse.ngo/pillars-climate-change-denial>

⁵⁶ Painter, J., Ettinger, J., Holmes, D., Loy, L., Pinto, J., Richardson, L., Thomas-Walters, L., Vowles, K., & Wetts, R. (2023). Climate delay discourses present in global mainstream television coverage of the IPCC's 2021 report. *Communications Earth & Environment*, 4(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-023-00760-2>; International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), Elbeyi, E., Bruhn Jensen, K., Aronczyk, M., Asuka, J., Ceylan, G., Cook, J., Erdelyi, G., Ford, H., Milani, C., Mustafaraj, E., Ogenga, F., Yadin, S., Howard, P. N., Valenzuela, S., Brulle, R., Jacquet, J., Lewandowsky, S., & Roberts, T. (2025). *Information Integrity about Climate Science: A Systematic Review*. International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE). <https://doi.org/10.61452/BTZP3426>

⁵⁷ <https://theconversation.com/climate-denial-hasnt-gone-away-heres-how-to-spot-arguments-for-delaying-climate-action-141991>

about the wider impacts of climate policies become delay arguments only when they are used to downplay the scale of the problems we face, or to obscure the need for immediate and radical cuts to greenhouse gas emissions.” This is an important point: people are, of course, entitled to have, and express, genuine concerns about emissions-reduction actions and policies (for example, there are some good lessons for how the renewable energy transition can be better handled in regional areas in *Regional energy transitions in Australia*⁵⁸), but **the issue is when these genuine concerns are misrepresented, amplified, or stoked by well-funded and coordinated vested interests.**

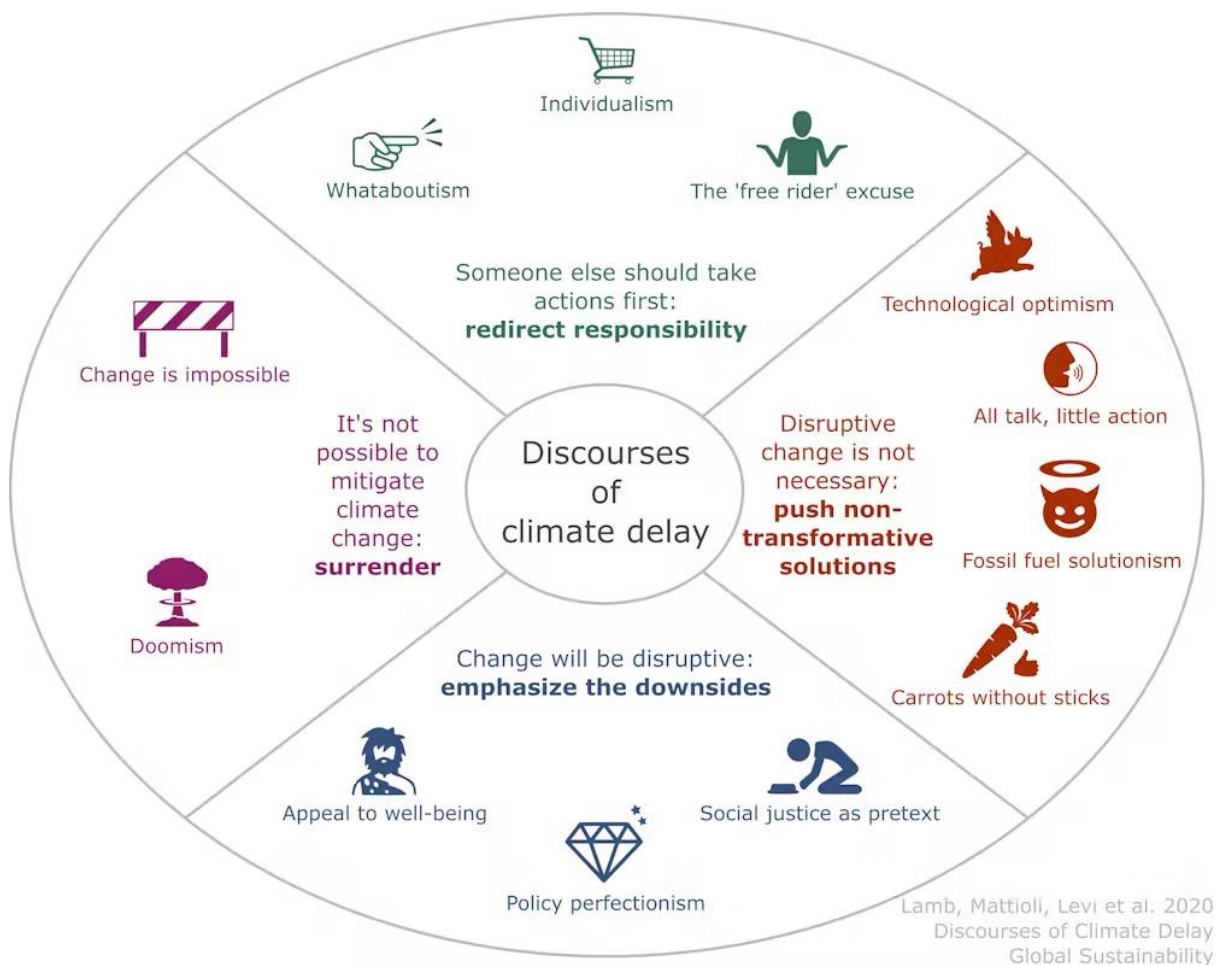


Figure 2: Some of the key storylines used to delay climate policy responses. Learn more about them in the summary article in *The Conversation*, or the [full open access journal article here](#).

Referring to the discourses of climate delay model, some key narratives we observe in the Australian context are fossil fuel solutionism (ongoing use of fossil fuels is needed for energy security); technological optimism (nuclear SMR technology can be operational in time to meet Net Zero

⁵⁸ Edwards, G. A. S., Wiseman, J., & Cahill, A. (Eds.). (2025). *Regional energy transitions in Australia: From impossible to possible*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003585343>

commitments, or carbon capture and storage is viable now); and appeals to wellbeing. Examples of these storylines include ‘Renewable energy will take-up prime agricultural land’ (therefore primary producers will be disadvantaged, or our food security impacted), a misleading claim with some farmers reporting increased productivity with renewable energy infrastructure co-existing on their properties⁵⁹; and the very sticky cost narrative that Australia can’t afford an energy transition, and/or it will cripple the nation economically (this cost narrative is also highlighted in [Influence Map’s research](#)). These narratives are particularly salient during a cost-of-living crisis. The core of these arguments is about keeping the fossil fuel status quo, omitting the detail that ageing coal-fired power stations are unreliable, failing, and would be costly to replace, and ignoring the myriad of opportunities associated with renewable energy. Furthermore, these flawed storylines totally disregard the decentralised opportunities that renewable energy provides, which—ironically for entities foregrounding ‘freedom’—ultimately means more energy independence for consumers.

Within another segment of the discourses of climate delay (Figure 2), belief in the chemtrails conspiracy theory can lead to surrender to ‘doomism’, which also paralyses climate action⁶⁰. Although we have no data for the Australian public, research suggests up to 40% of Americans believe that the chemtrails conspiracy theory is somewhat true, with a quarter of these (10% of all respondents) saying it is “completely true”⁶¹.

The network of actors listed earlier engage with both denial and delay arguments, strategically targeting their approach to their intended audience and implementing their multi-phased playbook to embed themselves into societal structures and gain legitimacy⁶². The shorter-term components of their strategy involve using think tanks, advocacy associations, PR firms and astroturfing (fake grassroots) to push policy arguments, supported by aligned media outlets and influencers. In the case of Australia, this has included campaigns against the carbon pricing scheme, Great Barrier Reef protection, renewable energy, and the nation’s science-aligned and legislated Net Zero by 2050 commitment. Another key tactic established globally is using ‘contrarian scientists’—scientists who are against the vast majority of their colleagues and may not even have specific expertise in that field—to undermine science and scientific institutions (the aforementioned ‘3 Pillars’ model) to derail public and political support for policy. This well-worn tactic of denial and others can be found on Skeptical Science: [5 Characteristics of Science Denial](#).

The International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE)’s [Information Integrity about Climate Science: A Systematic Review](#)—a synthesis of about 300 studies released this year—found that powerful actors, including corporations, governments and political parties, intentionally spread

⁵⁹ <https://icedcs.anu.edu.au/news-events/news/no-threat-farm-land-just-1200-square-kilometres-can-fulfil-australia%E2%80%99s-solar-and>; https://www.re-alliance.org.au/renewables_done_right

⁶⁰ Moreno Olmeda, T. (2024). Detrás de las estelas: teorías conspirativas sobre los «chemtrails» y obstrucción de la acción climática. Enrahonar. *An international journal of theoretical and practical reason*, 73, 195-218. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/enrahonar.1579>

⁶¹ Tingley, D., & Wagner, G. (2017). Solar geoengineering and the chemtrails conspiracy on social media. *Palgrave Communications*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-017-0014-3>

⁶² Dreiling, M. C., Nakamura, T., & Braun, Y. A. (2024). Nuclear denial in Japan: The network power of an energy industrial complex. *Theory and Society*, 53(1), 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-023-09513-8>; Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2010). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*; see also: <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/fossil-fuelled-universities/> – Universities are not immune: the fossil fuel industry strategically invests in higher education and university partnerships. For noting: Queensland University of Technology divested fossil fuel interests in 2016.

problematic information about human-caused climate change⁶³. Of note, policymakers (elected officials and public servants) are key targets of these efforts⁶⁴. This finding highlights the need for these opaque tactics to be made transparent so that decision makers and the voting public appreciate the true nature of the messages they are consuming, who is driving them, and whose interest they actually serve (tip: it's rarely the general public's).

However, an important side note is that while outright denial was perhaps reaching the stage of being socially unacceptable, under the current US Trump administration, 'old' denial is certainly not dead. Established tactics to counter the established science with pseudo-science are being deployed in the US and other locations to contest the legitimacy of climate science and destroy effective climate and energy policy. Given the established links to a well-organised and funded US-based denial machine that is escalating efforts in Europe⁶⁵, caution should be exercised in Australia about the rise of these approaches that are outwardly aggressive against scientific knowledge.

>> Quick reference guide: Denial and delay

Here is a summary of some key open access resources on this topic that the Committee may find useful for enhancing their understanding about some of the long-established narratives and tactics used to undermine climate policy and action:

- 1) A **taxonomy of claims** made by contrarians by Travis Coan and colleagues: provides categorised lists of the outright denial and some policy delay claims used to undermine climate action): <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-01714-4/figures/1>
- 2) The **FLICC framework** by John Cook: includes arguments and logical fallacies used to further climate misinformation: <https://crankyuncle.com/a-history-of-flicc-the-5-techniques-of-science-denial/>
- 3) **Discourses of Climate Delay** open access journal article by William Lamb and colleagues: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/global-sustainability/article/discourses-of-climate-delay/7B11B722E3E3454BB6212378E32985A7#article>. See also the accompany article in *The Conversation*.
- 4) **The New Climate Denial** by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate report, which finds that "New Denial narratives are now the most prevalent arguments used to undermine climate action. Climate advocates and policymakers must recognize this shift or risk losing the information battle necessary to deliver climate solutions." (p.33): <https://counterhate.com/research/new-climate-denial/>
- 5) Influence Map's playbook: Outlines the **narratives of the fossil fuel industry to delay action**: <https://influencemap.org/briefing/Undermining-Progress-Investigating-the-Fossil-Fuel-Sector-s-Continual-Dominance-26562>
- 6) The **summary report for policymakers** from the IPIE's recent climate integrity report: *Facts, Fakes, and Climate Science: Recommendations for Improving Information Integrity about Climate Science*: <https://www.ipie.info/research/sfp2025-2>

⁶³ International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE), Elbeyi, E., Bruhn Jensen, K., Aronczyk, M., Asuka, J., Ceylan, G., Cook, J., Erdelyi, G., Ford, H., Milani, C., Mustafaraj, E., Ogenga, F., Yadin, S., Howard, P. N., Valenzuela, S., Brulle, R., Jacquet, J., Lewandowsky, S., & Roberts, T. (2025). *Information Integrity about Climate Science: A Systematic Review*. International Panel on the Information Environment (IPIE). <https://doi.org/10.61452/BTZP3426>

⁶⁴ IPIE's Facts, Fakes, and Climate Science: Recommendations for Improving Information Integrity about Climate Science: <https://www.ipie.info/research/sfp2025-2>

⁶⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jan/22/us-thinktank-climate-science-deniers-working-with-rightwingers-in-eu-parliament-heartland-institute>; Brulle, R. J., Roberts, J. T., & Spencer, M. C. (Eds.). (2024). *Climate Obstruction across Europe* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197762042.001.0001>

The Australian context

Given the above, it is essential that we understand the nature of the problem so that we can best respond to the threat as an aligned community. While efforts to map these interconnections has largely focussed overseas: particularly in the US, and more recently in Europe, and at a broader global level; there has been less empirical work dedicated to the Australian context. Some key Australia-centric research includes work mapping convert corporate networks of influence across Australian politics and the fossil fuel industry⁶⁶. Some of the authors of this submission are seeking to enhance knowledge by studying interconnections in hybrid communication spaces (social media, traditional media, public submissions), noting that these are key sites where opinion is formed, expressed, and contested to varying degrees. Below we outline a case study of the Great Barrier Reef and synergies with renewable energy to highlight how some of these actors and tactics are operating at the domestic level, while having global connections.

A case study: The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef (the Reef) is a global environmental, social, cultural, and economic icon. Its very existence is threatened by climate change⁶⁷. The Reef has also become an ongoing target for climate change denial and policy delay. This case study highlights some of the actors and tactics that are familiar with internationally documented climate obstruction, as listed earlier in this section. Of significance, the Great Barrier Reef seems to have become a project of Atlas-aligned partisan conservative think tank the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), and the impact of this ongoing misinformation is part of a much larger problematic information ecosystem⁶⁸. Conservative think tanks in Australia have a history of stoking emissions reduction policy delay, and even rescindment. The IPA campaign against Australia's so-called "carbon tax"—an effective policy mechanism to reduce emissions and support renewable energy that was in place from 2012-2014 until the Abbott government dismantled it—is a prime example of this⁶⁹. In recent times, the IPA has been prolific in its campaigning against Great Barrier Reef regulations designed to address water quality pollution, the second biggest threat to the Reef after climate change, and is a staunch opposer of the renewable energy transition and Net Zero. While this organisation is just one voice in a crowded communications environment, it is the opaque interconnections that mean their influence is hard to track, and the opacity of their funding makes their agenda difficult for the public to truly appreciate⁷⁰.

⁶⁶ Lucas, A. (2021). Investigating networks of corporate influence on government decision-making: The case of Australia's climate change and energy policies. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 81, 102271. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102271>

⁶⁷ Henley, B. J., McGregor, H. V., King, A. D., Hoegh-Guldberg, O., Arzey, A. K., Karoly, D. J., Lough, J. M., DeCarlo, T. M., & Linsley, B. K. (2024). Highest ocean heat in four centuries places Great Barrier Reef in danger. *Nature*, 632(8024), 320–326. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07672-x>

⁶⁸ Lubicz-Zaorski, C., Newlands, M., & Petray, T. (2023). Fuelling the climate and science 'denial machine' on social media: A case study of the Great Barrier Reef's 2021 'in danger' recommendation on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. *Public Understanding of Science*, 33(3), 270–289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09636625231202117>; Andreotta et al., in press

⁶⁹ Pearse, R. (2017). *Pricing Carbon in Australia: Contestation, the State and Market Failure*. Routledge.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315363455>; Copland, S. (2020). Anti-politics and Global Climate Inaction: The Case of the Australian Carbon Tax. *Critical Sociology*, 46(4–5), 623–641. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920519870230>

⁷⁰ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-04-24/atlas-network-think-tanks-active-in-australia-and-new-zealand/104788732>; Readfearn, G. (2018, July 20). Gina Rinehart company revealed as \$4.5m donor to climate sceptic thinktank. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jul/21/gina-rinehart-company-revealed-as-45m-donor-to-climate-sceptic-thinktank>

An open access article is available from Lubicz-Zaorski and colleagues (2023)⁷¹, but some key points are summarised below and expanded upon that may be of particular interest to the Committee.

Data collection and case study context

Data were collected across Facebook, Twitter (now X), and YouTube during the UNESCO/IUCN's Great Barrier Reef 'in danger' recommendation in June 2021 for six weeks (until the World Heritage Committee voted not to list it as 'in danger'). The recommendation to list the Reef as 'in danger' took the incumbent Coalition government, including then-Environment Minister Sussan Ley, by surprise, with the international organisations expressing concern about Australia's insufficient action to address the threats. Media and social attention peaked during the June draft decision announcement, with much less coverage once the decision was made against the 'in danger' listing (a status that's under regular review). For further context as it relates to the discussion below, China was the temporary chair of the World Heritage Committee at the time, a role that rotates through member parties.

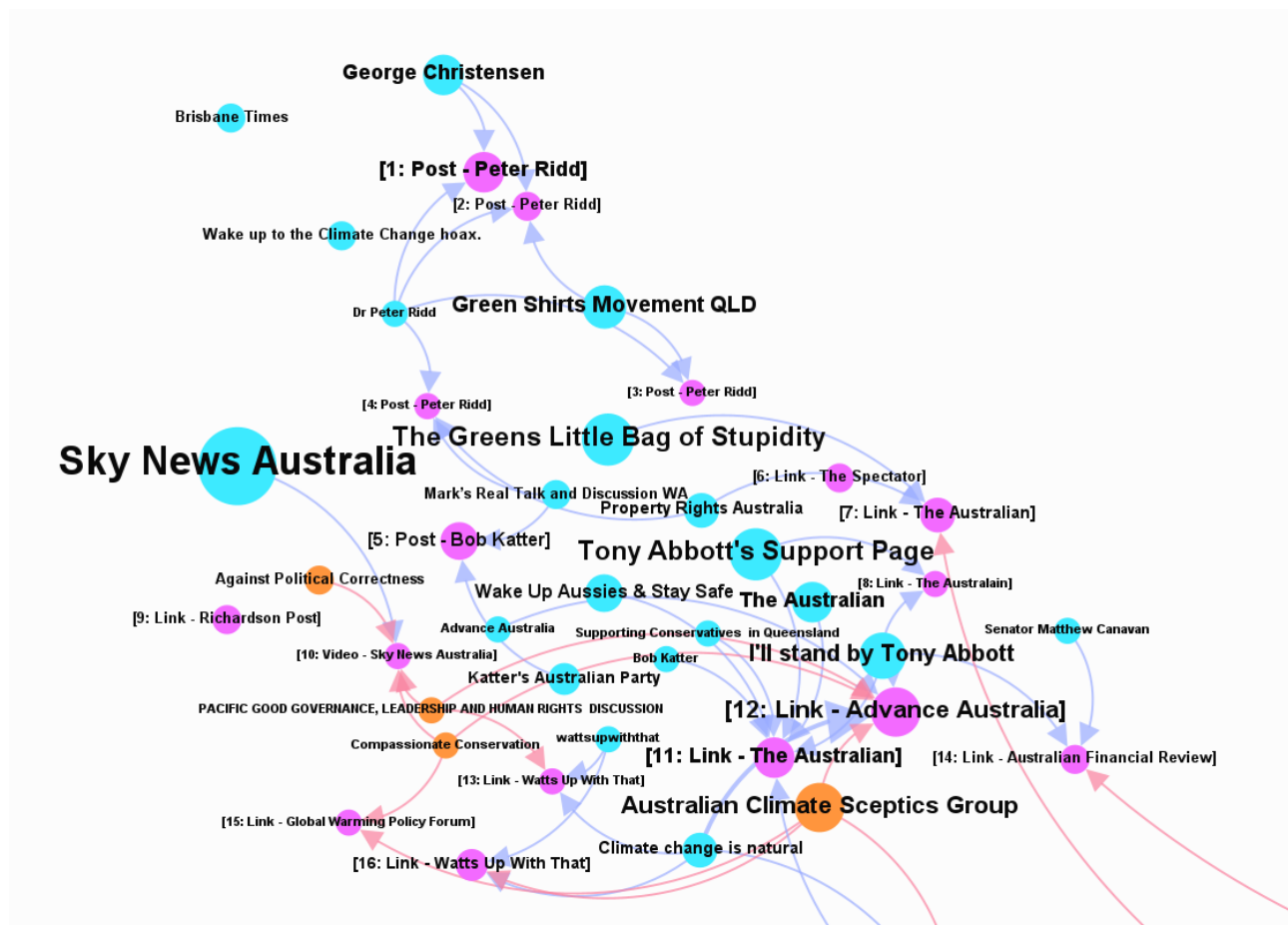


Figure 3: A two-mode network visualisation showing what links (external and internal) some public Facebook pages and groups shared on Facebook during a Great Barrier Reef policy event.

⁷¹ Lubicz-Zaorski et al., (2023). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/09636625231202117>

Explaining the network: What are we looking at?

Figure 3 shows a ‘two-mode’ network created from Facebook public pages and public groups and the hyperlinks (internal and external) that are shared.

- Each circle is called a node, and they are sized by their frequency of activity.
- There are two ‘node sets’: one is Facebook spaces (pages in blue and groups in orange) and the second is links shared by these pages or groups (pink/purple).
- To ensure the network is readable, it has been filtered to include only more frequent interactions.
- Also to enhance legibility, the URLs (pink/purple) have been replaced by numbers, the type of content, and the associated actor, but a list of these URLs is listed at the end of this section of the submission.
- The arrows signify what internal or external links Facebook spaces are linking to.

As an important note: These data were collected when Meta’s CrowdTangle platform existed. This tool is no longer available, and data are now much harder to access. Even at the time of this collection (2021) there were still many restrictions. Further, data gathering is available only for public spaces for privacy reasons (no profiles or closed groups). This means we are seeing only high-level public discussion.

An insight into climate obstruction

Looking at the visualisation, there are some alignments and interconnections with the climate obstruction actors outlined above. To be clear: not all accounts/links in this cluster are associated with climate obstruction (for example, the [Brisbane Times’ story](#) about Australia securing enough international support to avoid an ‘in danger’ listing was shared by both the *Brisbane Times* and Facebook page Wake Up to the Climate Change Hoax, drawing them into close proximity), although a significant proportion are to varying degrees. Furthermore, this is only one case study on one platform for six weeks so these identified obstructors are by no means exhaustive. However, this work does highlight the critical need for ongoing monitoring and observation.

Partisan right-wing media

Sky News Australia and *The Australian*—both owned by News Corp—are visible nodes in this cluster, with the *Sky News Australia* page being an active sharer of content about the Great Barrier Reef. This News Corp content is mainly framed around science scepticism (via Peter Ridd and the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) —below), delegitimising the climate threat via blaming China, or focussing on the perceived unfairness of the process, echoing the incumbent Coalition government’s talking points at the time. However, the immediate reach/impact of News Corp outlets is under-stated by looking at this visualisation alone as several of the actors within it, including denial blog *Watts Up With That* and anti-Reef regulation campaigners the Green Shirts Movement, reproduce *The Australian’s* content, freeing it from the paywall. This makes the content more accessible to a wider audience, but more difficult to track impact by looking at domains alone. In terms of the significance of this actor: There is ample literature focussed on News Corp’s history of climate obfuscation in Australia and overseas that others

may table for this inquiry⁷². In summary, News Corp uses both outright denial, particularly via right-wing commentators like Andrew Bolt and its 'Sky After Dark' cohort, through to more subtle forms of policy delay and advocacy for the fossil fuel industry. This has most recently manifested in a targeted campaign against renewable energy and blatant and misleading promotion of fossil gas. News Corp and Rupert Murdoch are closely connected to conservative think tanks, particularly the IPA in Australia⁷³. Finally, content from right-wing magazine *The Spectator* also appears in this cluster, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between neoliberal think tanks and ideologically-aligned media outlets. The link is an opinion column from the Executive Director at the Queensland-based conservative think tank the Australian Institute for Progress, which leans into conspiracy to falsely claim that the Reef is part of an "extortion scam" where conservation groups, research scientists, and the Queensland government are supposedly saying the Reef is at risk to extort the federal government for money. IPA-based contrarian scientist Peter Ridd is also cross-referenced to undermine the veracity of Reef science—a tactic discussed next.

Free market/conservative think tanks and contrarian scientists

The Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and its agenda are well-represented in this network via Dr Peter Ridd—a contrarian scientist, IPA policy fellow, and leader of engagement initiatives seeking to educate the public and younger people about the 'real science' of the Great Barrier Reef⁷⁴. The IPA's Facebook page is also in this network, along with a link it shares to an IPA research report that falsely claims climate change is natural⁷⁵, but these nodes are not visible in Figure 3 because they are less prevalent. As noted above, enlisting contrarian scientists to question the quality of science, science institutions and practices, and cast doubt on the scientific consensus is 'denial 101' from the climate obstruction playbook. In this case, Ridd and the IPA cherry pick data from the Australian Institute of Marine Science's (AIMS) [Annual Summary Report of Coral Reef Condition](#) to argue that the Reef has recovered, Great Barrier Reef science is flawed and institutions are untrustworthy, and there's no threat from climate change⁷⁶ (Figure 4). As an important caveat, similar to the point made earlier, science absolutely should be subject to question and scrutiny, but the issue is the partisan tactics used and the opaque alignments and agendas.

⁷² For example: Taylor, M. (2014). *Global Warming and Climate Change: What Australia knew and buried...then framed a new reality for the public*. ANU Press; Chubb, P. (2012). Really, fundamentally wrong: Media coverage of the business campaign against the Australian carbon tax. In E. Eide & R. Kunelius (Eds.), *Media Meets Climate. The Global Challenge for Journalism*. (pp. 179–194). Nordicom; Burgess, T., Burgmann, J. R., Hall, S., Holmes, D., & Turner, E. (n.d.). *Australian newspaper reporting of the nation's worst bushfire season*, 30. <https://www.monash.edu/mcccrh/publications/reports/black-summer-australian-newspaper-reporting-of-the-nations-worst-bushfire-season>; McKnight, D. (2010). A change in the climate? The journalism of opinion at News Corporation. *Journalism*, 11(6), 693–706. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884910379704>

⁷³ Walker, J. (2022). Freedom to Burn: Mining Propaganda, Fossil Capital, and the Australian Neoliberals. In *Market Civilisations: Neoliberals East and South* (pp. 189–219). Zone Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1vbd2mv.10>; Dunlap, R., and McCright, A. (2011). *Organized climate change denial*; Wilkinson, M. (2020). *The carbon club: How a network of influential climate sceptics, politicians and business leaders fought to control Australia's climate policy*.

⁷⁴ See Reef Rebels: <https://www.youtube.com/@reefrebels>. Ridd was also involved in the Project for Real Science, but the page is no longer live. See this podcast instead: <https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/peter-ridd-the-project-for-real-science-ep-106/id1568844882?i=1000621398754>

⁷⁵ <https://ipa.org.au/research/climate-change-and-energy/what-corals-can-tell-us-about-climate-change>

⁷⁶ Lubicz-Zaorski et al., 2023; Andreotta et al., in press

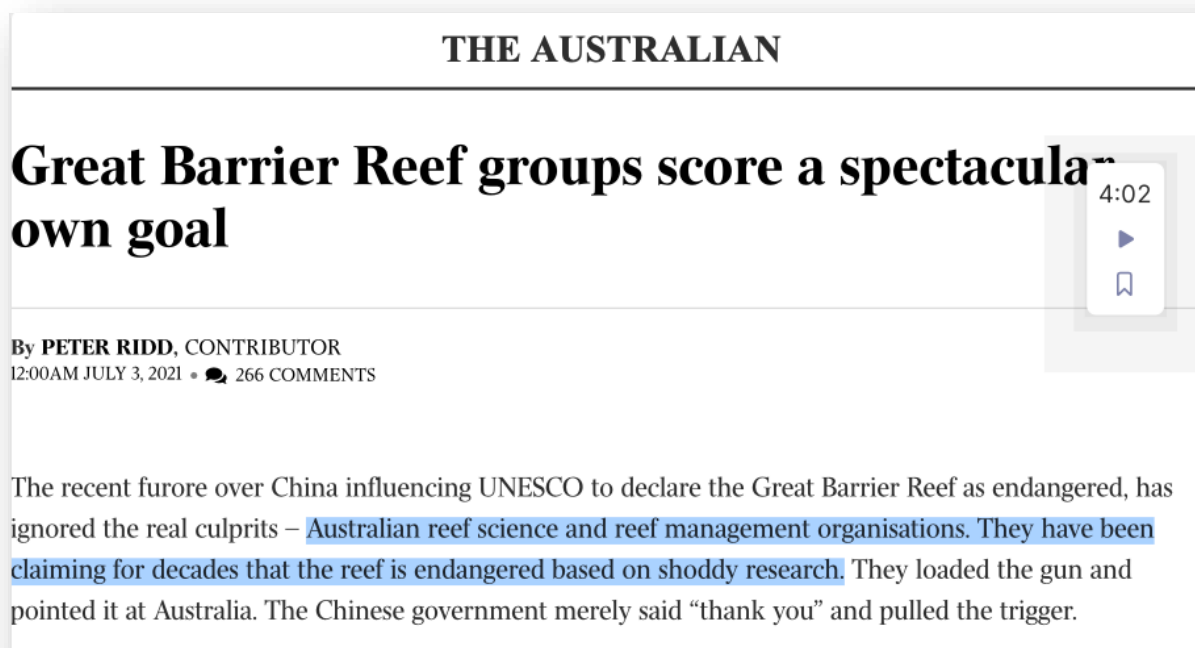


Figure 4: This content is link number 7 in the network showing some interconnections: Contrarian scientist (Ridd) from free market/conservative think tank (IPA) uses partisan right-wing media (*The Australian*) to draw on science denial [Pillar 1](#) (tactic 1: claim that science is bad), while re-directing attention by misleadingly blaming China (which was only the temporary Chair of the World Heritage Committee at the time, with multiple member countries required to vote on UNESCO’s recommendation to determine if the Reef was listed as ‘in danger’).

The Global Warming Policy Foundation (also known as the Global Warming Policy Forum and Net Zero Watch)—a UK-based climate obstructing think tank⁷⁷—is also present in the visualisation. This is due to actors sharing a link to the GWPF’s website that republished Peter Ridd’s column from *The Australian*: ‘Record coral cover of Great Barrier Reef shames climate alarmists’ (while the original link to this article is no longer working, it is available via archives [here](#)). Ridd is a member of the GWPF’s academic advisory council⁷⁸. Former Australian Prime Minister Abbott, who would not accept the scientific consensus about climate change and was a key campaigner against carbon pricing, is on the [GWPF’s board of trustees](#). Mr Abbott is also a [distinguished fellow at the IPA](#).

Conservative politicians

While Tony Abbott himself isn’t active in the cluster, some support pages are, sharing content from *The Australian*: ‘China-led ambush on the health of the Great Barrier Reef’, which uses the ‘blame China’ delegitimisation tactic (the same narrative echoed by Ridd in this column above). Vaccine sceptic and then-Nationals MP George Christensen shares the same China-led “[ambush](#)” story in *The Australian*. The Katter Australian Party and leader Bob Katter furthers similar content, saying the recommendation

⁷⁷ Roberts et al. (2025). *Climate obstruction: A global assessment*

⁷⁸ <https://thegwpf.org/peter-ridd-joins-gwpgs-academic-advisory-council/>

was not due to environmental concerns, rather a “bullying move by the Chinese regime”. Meanwhile, Nationals Deputy Leader Matthew Canavan uses the technique of cherry picking and misrepresenting the science from AIMS’ coral cover report to argue the Great Barrier Reef has “completely recovered” and therefore the “ridiculous regulations” on the farmers can be removed (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: A Facebook post from Senator Matthew Canavan misrepresenting Great Barrier Reef science (the report in 2021 said the Great Barrier Reef was in a ‘recovery window’ – in 2025 it still has not recovered, this year reporting a sharp decline).

During this time period, Senator Canavan also appeared on *Sky News Australia* in an interview with ‘Sky News After Dark’ host Chris Kenny. When asked by Kenny about the World Heritage Committee’s decision not to list the Reef as ‘in danger’, Canavan said it was a “bittersweet victory”, going on to say that the Reef had fully recovered and UNESCO’s recent attention was the fault of problematic scientific reports, implying ulterior motives were at play (similar to Ridd’s narrative in Figure 4):

“UNESCO, to give them their due, they were just quoting from the Queensland and federal government reports that have been written in recent years with the most doomsaying, exaggerated threats about the Reef so when they read these reports of course they’re going to think it’s in danger. When, apparently, surprise, surprise, wasn’t it such a coincidence, Chris, that last week just before it came up on the agenda, one of these organisations – the Australian Institute of Marine Science – released a report, saying it’s all OK. The coral is back to record levels! [laughs]. It’s all fine. That needs to be investigated too Chris: How come that report just popped up last week when we’ve been saying that for years and ignored and ridiculed.”

In this statement, not only does the Senator disparage the science of his own government’s marine science agency, he also implies that institutions cannot be trusted. The OECD *Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Australia* report found that when institutions are seen to act in society’s best interest, trust increases in both federal and local government. When considering the role of trust in science on support for policy (as outlined in sections (a) and (b)), and declining trust in government, elected representatives using the above tactics are far from ideal.

Denial blogs and online influencers

Partly funded by US conservative think tank and Atlas affiliate the Heartland Institute⁷⁹, climate change denial blog *Watts Up With That* promotes “consistent human-influenced climate denialism propaganda”⁸⁰. In this case it was instrumental in furthering Ridd’s obstructive claims by taking the content from his column in *The Australian*, which was behind a paywall, and publishing it on its blog, thereby making the content more readily accessible and sharable (Figure 6 – left). For example, Mike Huckabee—a conservative US politician and former governor whose Facebook page described him as “the host of ‘Huckabee’ on TBN, a *Fox News* and *Western Journal* contributor” (News Corp owns Fox News)—shared this content on his Facebook page (Figure 6 – right). While the platform put a content warning on the post at the time, these independent fact checkers no longer exist after Meta removed them earlier this year⁸¹.

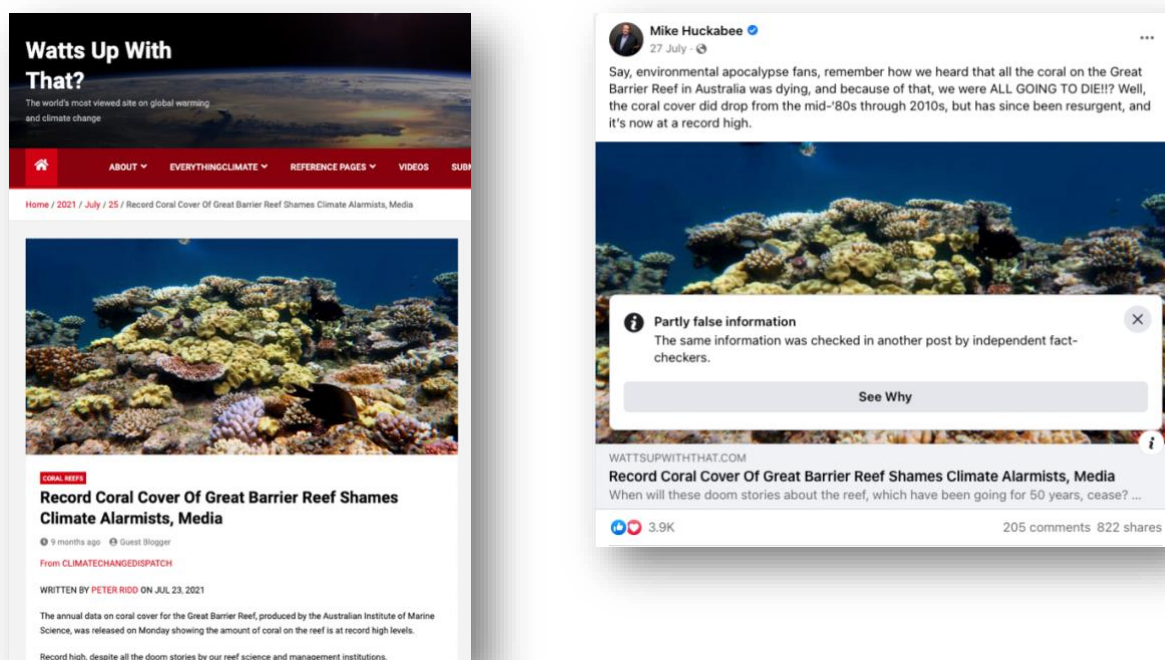


Figure 6: Climate change denial blog *Watts Up With That* using Peter Ridd’s column from *The Australian*, with the blog shared by a US politician.

⁷⁹ Ekberg et al. (2022). *Climate Obstruction: How Denial, Delay and Inaction are Heating the Planet*

⁸⁰ <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/watts-up-with-that/>; also see: Dunlap, R., and McCright, A. (2011). *Organized climate change denial*; Bloomfield, E. F., & Tillery, D. (2019). The Circulation of Climate Change Denial Online: Rhetorical and Networking Strategies on Facebook. *Environmental Communication*, 13(1), 23–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2018.1527378>; Kirilenko, A. P., & Stepchenkova, S. O. (2014). Public microblogging on climate change: One year of Twitter worldwide. *Global Environmental Change*, 26, 171–182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2014.02.008>

⁸¹ <https://theconversation.com/meta-is-abandoning-fact-checking-this-doesnt-bode-well-for-the-fight-against-misinformation-246878>

Opposition coalitions and front groups

As detailed earlier, partisan conservative lobby group Advance Australia is far from a grassroots entity and has connections to organised climate obstruction. In this case study, a link to its website with a story headlined: ‘[New data shows Great Barrier Reef Coral Cover is at a Record High](#)’ is prominent (Figure 7), with the blog post quoting Ridd and defending the social licence of pollution-intensive industry to keep on polluting: “For years Australians have been fed the lie Queensland’s mining, energy and agricultural industries are destroying one of Australia’s most valuable gems: The Great Barrier Reef.” The article uses the decontextualised report findings to claim that Reef water quality regulations are unnecessary.



Figure 7: Advance’s Facebook post invokes the ‘media and environmentalists are alarmist’ claims (Level 5 in the [Contrarian taxonomy](#))

This is the same argument also prosecuted by other grassroots groups [Property Rights Australia](#) and the [Green Shirts Movement](#), present in the network. While Property Rights Australia says it is genuinely representing community interests⁸², it does not make their tactics any less partisan. And this is perhaps where genuine concern and other motivations become harder to unravel. Looking beyond the Reef

⁸² <https://www.facebook.com/PropertyRightsAustralia/posts/are-you-an-astroturf-group-or-a-true-grassroots-community-group-worried-about-th/1067256578871607/>; <https://www.facebook.com/PropertyRightsAustralia/posts/if-you-are-a-community-group-protesting-about-renewables-why-should-you-do-a-sub/1077155387881726/>

context to more recent happenings: Property Rights Australia draws on IPA research to prosecute its arguments. It also partners with the [National Rational Energy Network](#) (NREN) to do [research/surveys](#), with both involved in anti-renewables campaigning, drawing on legitimate concerns to fuel misinformation⁸³. Katy McCallum is the vice chair of NREN, and was also a One Nation candidate for the Queensland state election⁸⁴. This serves to highlight how these alliances often span across issues, and seemingly non-political organisations can still have political connections.

The culmination of this dynamic in recent times is best evidenced the Reckless Renewables Rally held in Canberra (February 2024), which attracted an eclectic mix people: from those concerned about the renewable energy transition to vaccine sceptics, climate change deniers, and conspiracy theorists⁸⁵. Organised by the NREN and touted as “grassroots”, the host of speakers listed on the agenda are some of the familiar faces from climate obstruction circles. [See the full list here](#), but some notable inclusions were Peter Ridd (more recently, Ridd has become the Chair of the Australian Environmental Foundation, a charity sounding similar to the Australian Conservation Foundation, but set-up by the IPA with quite different objectives)⁸⁶; former IPA director and Heartland Institute affiliate Alan Moran⁸⁷ (recall the Heartland Institute has been a funder of denial blog *Watts Up With That*, discussed earlier); the IPA’s Deputy Executive Director Daniel Wild; CIS’ Aidan Morrison; along with right-wing climate obstructing political actors including former Liberal MP Craig Kelly, Nationals Senator Matthew Canavan, One Nation’s leader Pauline Hansen and Malcom Roberts, plus Gerrard Rennick, Barnaby Joyce, Bob Katter, and others. These were joined by other community associations and NREN representatives.

So what? It is unlikely that the average person consuming the news that night would realise the interconnections of a large portion of those involved in this event, certainly not all genuine grassroots community concern. Returning to the playbook, we can see activation of Level 4 claims in the [Contrarian taxonomy: Climate Solutions won’t work](#) (to reiterate once more: this is absolutely not to say that genuine concerns from people in regional communities undergoing the renewable energy transition are not valid and warranted, but the issue is when these concerns are leveraged to align with broader agendas that may not be visible).

Of utmost concern is when these partisan alliances transfer into policy spaces, notable given that the IPIE’s *Information Integrity about Climate Science* synthesis report found that policymakers are key targets of problematic information. Figure 8 is a network visualisation from the 2024-25 Inquiry into nuclear power generation in Australia, zoomed in on the section that shows submitters that are pro-nuclear and anti-renewables. Property Rights Australia, NREN, and the CIS are all pulled into close alignment due to sharing a similar position. Other community groups include Responsible Future (Illawarra Chapter) Inc and RED4NE. According to *ABC News* reporting, the former has been accused of “Trumpian-style” tactics, spreading misinformation, and attacking scientists in its fierce opposition to offshore wind farms that spreads far beyond its local community remit⁸⁸. RED4NE is a grassroots group

⁸³ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/08/parliament-house-protest-renewable-energy-plan-barnaby-joyce-pauline-hanson-matt-canavan-craig-kelly>

⁸⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/jul/07/renewable-energy-australia-rural-resistance-katy-mccallum>

⁸⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/17/canberra-reckless-renewables-rally-donald-trump-conspiracy-theories>

⁸⁶ <https://www.desmog.com/australian-environment-foundation/>; <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/aug/28/great-barrier-reef-expert-panel-says-peter-ridd-misrepresenting-science>

⁸⁷ See: <https://www.desmog.com/alan-moran/>

⁸⁸ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-30/illawarra-offshore-wind-farm-misinformation-in-federal-election/105097852>

in Nationals MP Barnaby Joyce's electorate of New England, an elected official who opposes renewables, Net Zero by 2050, and rebuts the scientific consensus on human-caused climate change (invoking 'old' and 'new' denial narratives). The community group's website says: "Red4NE is proposing fair and responsible renewable energy development by accepting its share of projects but not saturation of our region" and there is no visible mention of nuclear⁸⁹, yet—based on its submission to the recent nuclear inquiry—it's clearly in favour of nuclear over renewables for the New England Tablelands region.

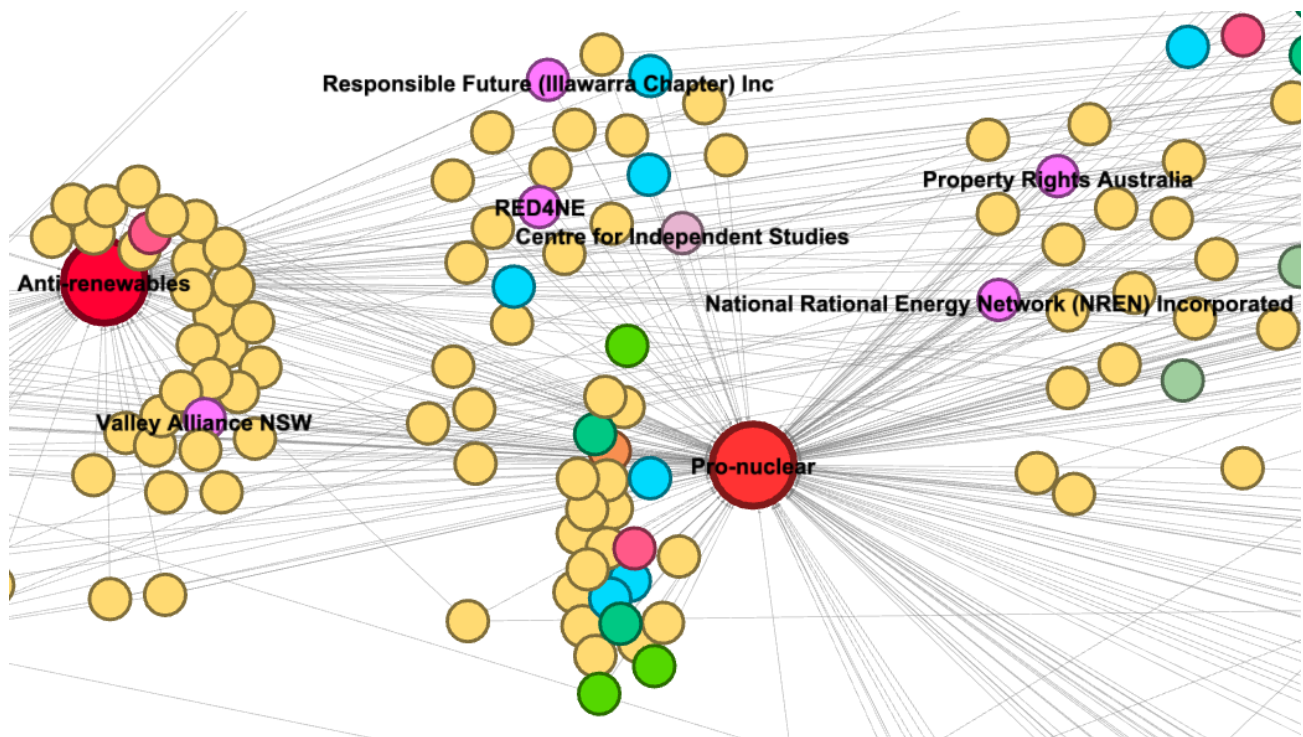


Figure 8: A two-mode network visualisation showing some submitters to the 2024-25 Inquiry into nuclear power generation in Australia and their stance towards energy sources and support for climate action. The dots (nodes) are coloured by submitter type (e.g., yellow is individuals, community groups are bright pink, think tanks are light pink, etc). Only community groups and think tanks are labelled for clarity and privacy reasons.

Wake Up to the Climate Change Hoax, Wake Up Aussies and Stay Safe, Climate Change is Natural, Australian Climate Sceptics Group

While the independence and funding sources of these climate sceptic groups is unclear, they use the Great Barrier Reef's so-called 'recovery' to undermine the need for climate action, and/or oppose perceived growth-limiting regulation. Wake Up to the Climate Change Hoax shares content from conservative radio broadcaster 2GB [alleging the UN](#)—the body recommending the Reef for 'in danger' listing—is corrupt. The delegitimising of international governance bodies is a well-worn tactic in climate delay and denial. It also shared a column from vocal climate sceptic and News Corp pundit Andrew Bolt in News Corp's [Herald Sun](#), claiming the scientific report shows that "climate warmists [sic] are wrong".

⁸⁹ <https://red4ne.com.au/> (accessed 8 September, 2025)

What's the impact?

While this research was conducted in 2021, as recently as August 2025, IPA Fellow and coordinator of the 'Reef Rebels' program Dr Peter Ridd continues to make claims on *Sky News Australia* and in opinion columns in *The Australian* that Great Barrier Reef scientific institutions are untrustworthy and the health of the Reef is "defying the doomsayers". Meanwhile, AIMS' Annual Summary Report of Coral Reef Condition and Ridd's simplified graphic continue to be used by international climate obstructing actors to service the argument that the Reef has recovered and climate change doesn't exist (see Figure 9). Andreotta and colleagues' forthcoming research highlights this ongoing misleading 'Reef recovery' frame across the interconnected media and social media system, and shows how the narrative has become entrenched into the global climate obstruction discourse.

As for possible on-ground impact, in a survey of 1877 residents in the Great Barrier Reef region, Curnock and colleagues (2024)⁹⁰ found that about 30% were sceptical about the science that informed waterway health and management. The group with the least trust in Reef science were mainly men (69%) and had the highest proportion employed in agriculture and mining compared with the other groups. Science sceptical respondents were most likely to perceive waterway management decisions as unfair and were less motivated to improve waterway health than those who trusted Reef science. Furthermore, these respondents were much less likely to view climate change as a threat to the Reef and perceived inshore coral reefs to be in better condition than other groups. The authors say: "While a potential counteractive effect of climate change misinformation in the GBR region has not yet been determined, repeat studies in 2021 and 2023 have shown that the proportion of residents who perceive climate change as an 'immediate threat' has decreased considerably" (p. 20)⁹¹.

Therefore, a key question is: what's causing the decline in threat perception when the risk posed by climate change is becoming greater? It's not possible to decisively know this answer from either the communications or survey work discussed above (causality cannot be proven: that would be misrepresentation), but it does pose some avenues for further exploration. Particularly when considering findings from a recent survey of nearly 3000 Australians⁹²: political party alignment, progressive-conservative political ideology, and frequency of consuming *ABC* and *Sky News Australia* were the most consistently significant variables predicting climate opinion, with more frequent consumers of *Sky News Australia* more likely to oppose climate action.

Finally, from a policy perspective, water quality targets are not being met and the Great Barrier Reef continues to be under the dual pressures of declining water quality and more frequent and intense marine heat waves and coral bleaching that is leaving minimal time for recovery⁹³.

⁹⁰ Curnock, M. I., Nembhard, D., Smith, R., Sambrook, K., Hobman, E. V., Mankad, A., Pert, P. L., & Chamberland, E. (2024). Finding common ground: Understanding and engaging with science mistrust in the Great Barrier Reef region. *PLOS ONE*, 19(8), e0308252. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0308252>

⁹¹ Curnock, M., et al. (2024): Finding common ground: Understanding and engaging with science mistrust in the Great Barrier Reef region.

⁹² Colvin, R. M., Jotzo, F., & Fielding, K. S. (2024). Is Australia's urban-regional schism on climate reality or rhetoric? *Journal of Rural Studies*, 112, 103446. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103446>

⁹³ <https://theconversation.com/unesco-expresses-utmost-concern-at-the-state-of-the-great-barrier-reef-257638>; Henley, B.J., McGregor, H.V., King, A.D. et al. (2024). Highest ocean heat in four centuries places Great Barrier Reef in danger. *Nature* 632, 320–326. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-024-07672-x>

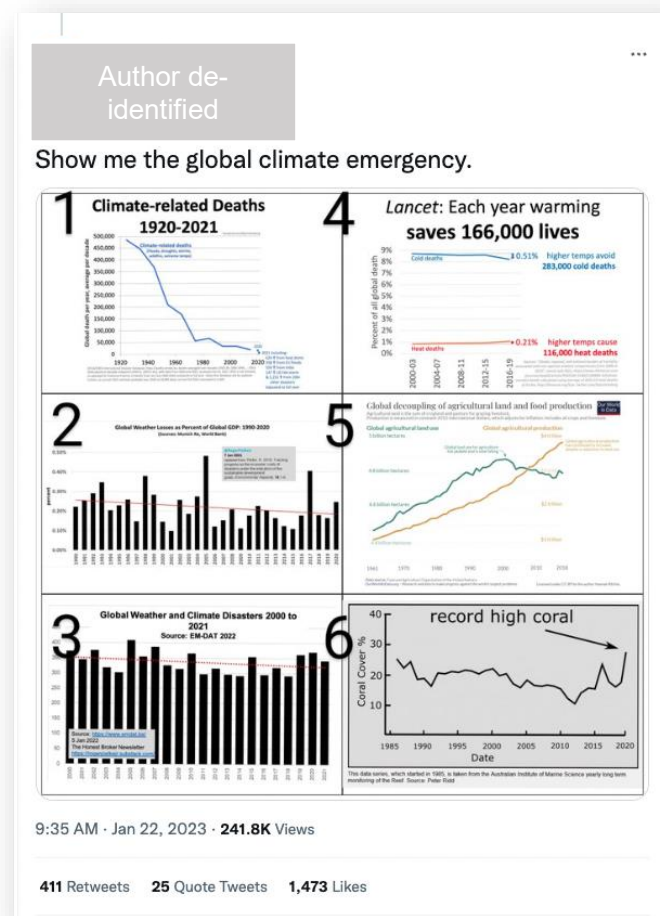


Figure 9: A post from Twitter (now X) in 2023: Ridd’s ‘record high coral’ graph continues to be used as a trope of climate change denial, along with other misleading and cherry-picked data that has since been debunked⁹⁴.

Looking beyond the Reef and the renewable energy transition: at the time of writing, efforts are doubling down to attempt to have Australia’s legislated commitment of Net Zero by 2050 dropped, making the policy partisan once more and echoing tactics described as “anti-net zero populism” overseas⁹⁵. Figure 10 below shows some of the familiar faces spearheading the Australian campaigns and well-worn tactics at play: Note the use of cost narratives in the IPA, while Advance goes for a more divisive grab-bag of denial and delay narratives, ironically using the term “green elite” given where it sources its funding.

⁹⁴ For example: <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.364W7QZ>

⁹⁵ Paterson, M., Wilshire, S., & Tobin, P. (2023). The Rise of Anti-Net Zero Populism in the UK: Comparing Rhetorical Strategies for Climate Policy Dismantling. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 26(3–4), 332–350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876988.2023.2242799>

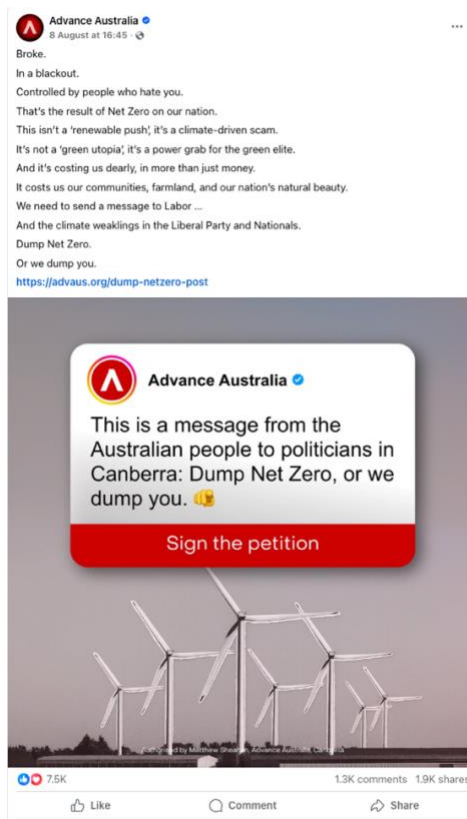
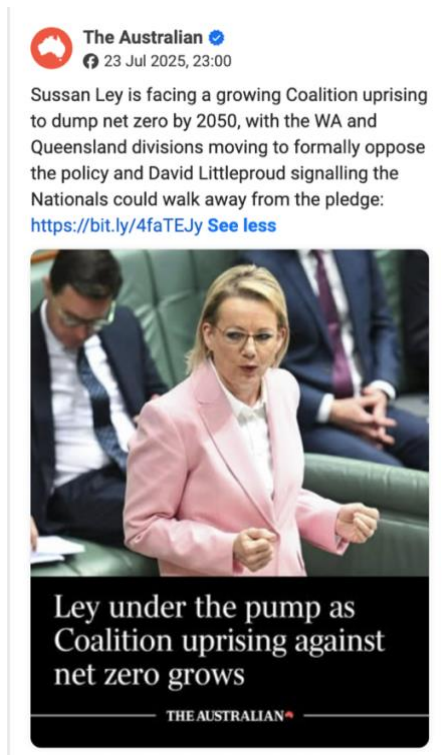


Figure 10: Recent campaigning from climate obstructors the IPA, Advance, *The Australian*, *Sky News Australia*, Barnaby Joyce, and Matthew Canavan.

Case study conclusion

This case study is just one example of the national and international interconnections involved in organised climate obstruction, and highlights how these alliances could play a role in impacting public and political support for policy. More empirical work is needed in the Australian context to trace these threads and understand who is driving these narratives, the tactics used, and how they are connected. Yet data access is getting increasingly harder. Since conducting the Great Barrier Reef research, Twitter has been purchased by Elon Musk who revoked the free academic API (a key mechanism to gather data) and made access further inaccessible to researchers by pricing them out⁹⁶. While Meta, the owner of Facebook, Instagram and Threads, which provided the once functional CrowdTangle, has since replaced data access to the Meta Content Library which is clunky and restrictive (see *section (f)*).

What we can do

While this problem is alarming, and dispiriting in terms of its ongoing assault on environmental and social justice, it is especially troubling that members of government themselves have actively participated in discrediting science and amplifying narratives of climate denial and delay. This is not just a matter of poor judgment: it represents a callous disregard for the well-being of their own communities and constituents, and in doing so, undermines the democratic obligation to protect citizens from foreseeable harm. The good news is there is already so much we do know about these climate obstructing networks at the global level: the playbook is out there for all to see. However, because these powerful actors are so embedded in established systems, and their narratives are so entrenched and naturalised, challenging their power is difficult, and there will be ongoing resistance to change⁹⁷ (we expect that some members of this Committee may attempt to downplay evidence of their own complicity). Yet with global emissions continuing to rise and international commitments to limit warming to 1.5C becoming increasingly challenging, there is no better time to push for change than now⁹⁸.

Most Australians want action on climate change; it's just that many are also being misled about the immediacy and urgency of the problem through these obstructive networks obfuscating the degree of risk and impact. As the IPIE's *Information Integrity about Climate Science* synthesis report found, we need coalitions of the willing to come together and combat these harmful networks and tactics. We need to name and shame climate laggards and call out their corrosive practices that only serve vested interests for what they are. We need to demand that they stop polluting our lives and contaminating our communications environments with misinformation and division. The community expects and deserves better than that.

Key recommendations:

1. To truly monitor and understand the key entities, information flows and tactics online of Australian organisations and international think tank and influence networks, **researchers must be afforded timely and useful access to data across various online spaces**. As noted by the IPIE's

⁹⁶ <https://www.theverge.com/2023/5/31/23739084/twitter-elon-musk-api-policy-chilling-academic-research>

⁹⁷ Roberts et al. (2025). *Climate obstruction: A global assessment*

⁹⁸ Ripple, W. J., Wolf, C., Gregg, J. W., Rockström, J., Mann, M. E., Oreskes, N., Lenton, T. M., Rahmstorf, S., Newsome, T. M., Xu, C., Svenning, J.-C., Pereira, C. C., Law, B. E., & Crowther, T. W. (2024). The 2024 state of the climate report: Perilous times on planet Earth. *BioScience*, biae087. <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biae087>

Information Integrity about Climate Science synthesis report, methodological development and additional empirical studies are needed to track complex messaging about climate change.

2. **Think tanks and lobby groups must be subject to Truth in Political Advertising laws** given the highly political nature of their work and potential to mislead under the guise of research.
3. **Digital platforms need to be regulated** (see *section (f)*) to address this misleading behaviour by vested interested. These regulations need to be fit-for-purpose and involve appropriate consultation. In parallel, existing regulations that apply to the traditional/broadcast media sector need to be re-examined to determine if they are effective and proportionate.
4. In alignment with a key recommendation of the *IPIE's Information Integrity about Climate Science* synthesis report, **we need to better form 'coalitions of the willing' to combat the very aligned and effective strategies of the counter movement**. This includes having better proactive communication and genuine engagement with communities and other key stakeholders to avoid an information vacuum. Techniques like 'pre-bunking' should be used to address likely problematic information before it happens.
5. As noted in *section (g)*, **we need a national media literacy approach that empowers people to critically evaluate media and information, including how communications systems are used to persuade and agenda-set, and how cognitive biases work**. This education needs to be both school and community-based to address people's needs throughout their life as studies have shown that people of all ages and education levels struggle to correctly identify misinformation⁹⁹.

>> Addendum

List of links from Figure 3 Facebook spaces-links network:

1. **Post – Peter Ridd** [Ridd vs JCU, free speech vs authoritarianism, real science vs groupthink science: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=259639669293916&set=a.192641669327050&type=3>];
2. **Post – Peter Ridd** [Something is wrong: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=283616753562874&set=a.192641669327050&type=3>];
3. **Post – Peter Ridd** [Mr Xi, UNESCO and GBRMPA: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=267162288541654&set=a.192641669327050&type=3>];
4. **Post - Peter Ridd** [Historical bleaching: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=264323158825567&set=a.192641669327050&type=3>];
5. **Post – Bob Katter** [China-controlled UNESCO: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=344835863867351&set=a.341426900874914&type=3>];
6. **Link - The Spectator** [<https://www.spectator.com.au/2021/07/the-great-barrier-reef-extortion-scam/>];
7. **Link - The Australian** [<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/great-barrier-reef-groups-score-a-spectacular-own-goal/news-story/9eeffa81e5328bc374b045c0184db19b>];
8. **Link – The Australian** [<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/marine-physicist-peter-ridd-has-his-day-in-high-court-against-james-cook-university/news-story/4b92990a8a56c0324b4b5523b6c696bf>];
9. **Link – Richardson Post** [<https://richardsonpost.com/thomas-lifson/22326/china-criticises-australias-emissions-with-inscrutable-straight-face/>];
10. **Video – Sky News Australia** [Government 'delighted' at UNESCO Great Barrier Reef decision: <https://www.facebook.com/SkyNewsAustralia/videos/844219623148472>];
11. **Link – The Australian** [<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/chinaled-ambush-on-health-of-the-great-barrier-reef/news-story/b99813fe30fbc1919325058327980ce6>];
12. **Link – Advance Australia** [https://www.advanceaustralia.org.au/new_data_shows_great_barrier_reef_coral_cover_is_at_a_record_high];
13. **Link – Watts Up With That** [<https://wattsupwiththat.com/2021/06/21/claim-china-weaponising-un-protection-for-the-great-barrier-reef/>];
14. **Link –**

⁹⁹ Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2024). *Adult Media Literacy in 2024: Australian Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra. https://medialiteracy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/AML2024_report_final-compressed.pdf; Park, S., Notley, T., Thomson, T. J., Hourigan, A., and Dezuanni, M. (2024). *Online Misinformation in Australia: Adults' experiences, abilities, and responses*. University of Canberra and Western Sydney University. <https://doi.org/10.60836/jpmm-dw04>

Australian Financial Review [<https://www.afr.com/rear-window/great-barrier-reef-foundation-doubled-revenue-kept-jobkeeper-20210726-p58d3w>]; **15. Link – Global Warming Policy Forum** [<https://www.thegwpf.com/peter-ridd-record-coral-cover-of-great-barrier-reef-refutes-climate-alarmists/>]. NOTE: This link is no longer working, but the original article can be found here: https://web.archive.org/web/20210729225505/https://www.thegwpf.com/peter-ridd-record-coral-cover-of-great-barrier-reef-refutes-climate-alarmists/?mc_cid=5ce056ec94&mc_eid=db26089c2c; **16. Link – Watts Up With That** [<https://wattsupwiththat.com/2021/07/25/record-coral-cover-of-great-barrier-reef-shames-climate-alarmists-media/>]

(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, and the bots and trolls that inhabit these online spaces, can be used in the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Information about climate change is not exempt from this. During Black Summer, as the 2019–2020 Australian bushfire season has been dubbed, these natural disasters were the target of a misinformation campaign. As a reminder, the Black Summer fires were fuelled by climate change and burned 240,000 square kilometres, directly resulted in the deaths of 33 people, and cost Australia's economy at least \$100 billion, making it the most expensive natural disaster in Australian history. The CSIRO has stated that the area, severity, and length of the fires are a result of anthropogenic climate change¹⁰⁰.

Despite the clear evidence for human-induced climate change, the Black Summer bushfires were the target of a misinformation campaign, with climate change deniers utilising the hashtag #ArsonEmergency on social media. This was in opposition to the hashtag #ClimateEmergency, which calls for rapid action to limit global warming, and was used throughout the Black Summer to raise awareness of this urgent issue. Many Australians who reject the science around anthropogenic climate change instead suggested that arson was the cause of the fires, and shared this opinion across social media¹⁰¹. One Twitter account posted the following message: "With the vast majority of fires being deliberately lit, a better hashtag for the bushfires instead of #ClimateEmergency would be #ArsonEmergency"¹⁰².

Graham and Keller (2020)¹⁰³ studied about 300 Twitter accounts that were utilising #ArsonEmergency to determine if they were engaging in inauthentic behaviour. They determined that many of the accounts were behaving in a suspicious manner similar to that previously observed by Russian trolls during the 2016 United States presidential election. While the coordinated #ArsonEmergency campaigners were very unlikely to be a state-backed operation, the techniques they used and the impact they had shared similar characteristics. These bots and trolls managed to infiltrate genuine

¹⁰⁰ Read, P., & Denniss, P. (2020) With Costs Approaching \$100 Billion, the Fires Are Australia's Costliest Natural Disaster. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/with-costs-approaching-100-billion-the-fires-are-australias-costliest-natural-disaster-129433>; Cook, G., Dowdy, A., Knauer, J., Meyer, M., Canadell, P., & Briggs, P. (2021, November 29). *Australia's Black Summer of fire was not normal – and we can prove it*. CSIRO. <https://www.csiro.au/en/news/all/articles/2021/november/bushfires-linked-climate-change>

¹⁰¹ Readfearn, G. (2021). *Bushfire Article in the Australian That Fuelled Misinformation Cleared by Press Council*. *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/media/2021/feb/16/bushfire-article-in-the-australian-that-fuelled-misinformation-cleared-by-press-council.

¹⁰² Keller, T., Graham, T., Angus, D., & Bruns, A. (2020) #ARSONEMERGENCY: Climate change disinformation during the Australian bushfire season 2019–2020. In *Selected Papers in Internet Research 2020: Research from the 21st Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers*. Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), United States of America, p.5

¹⁰³ Graham, T., & T. Keller. (2020). *Bushfires, Bots and Arson Claims: Australia Flung in the Global Disinformation Spotlight*. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/bushfires-bots-and-arson-claims-australia-flung-in-the-global-disinformation-spotlight-129556>

discussion around climate change and bring large-scale attention to the narrative that the Black Summer bushfires were not a result of human-induced climate change, but instead arsonists. This included a collaborative or ‘participatory’ model of disinformation¹⁰⁴ where the goal was to co-opt and cultivate others to produce and share ‘evidence’ supporting the ‘Arson Emergency’ narrative, and to interact with elites (e.g., politicians, influencers, and partisan news media) to get the narrative to spread. This promotion of institutional distrust and a declined respect for scientific institutions have far-reaching implications and consequences for the future (see *section (a) and (b)*).

The previously discussed coordinated inauthentic behaviour—such as bots and trolls—are not new or exclusive to climate change debates and topics. Graham and FitzGerald (2023)¹⁰⁵ analysed almost a million tweets collected during the Republican Primary Debate and the counterprogrammed Donald Trump interview with Tucker Carlson. In the space of just two and a half hours of data collection, they found multiple coordinated troll networks in support of Donald Trump, a coordinated network of misleading and automated news outlets, along with a bot network supportive of Donald Trump. Previously, as researchers, we have been able to readily collect data from various social media platforms to more accurately track and analyse trends such as hashtag campaigns and bot activity. However, with a lack of data collection tools for academics and a trend towards reduced moderation practices on digital platforms, this work has become increasingly difficult and mis/disinformation campaigns are left free to spread largely without consequence.

The issue of social bots spreading misinformation has been rapidly impacted by the emergence of ChatGPT and similar language models, including in the spread of climate misinformation. A case study we recently conducted¹⁰⁶ highlights the concerning impact of the ChatGPT bot economy and misinformation on platforms such as X. When Professor Terry Hughes, Australia’s leading coral researcher, discovered a network of suspicious accounts posting about the Great Barrier Reef, the initial assumption was targeted climate misinformation. However, forensic analysis revealed something more complex: a ChatGPT-powered bot network whose primary purpose was cryptocurrency promotion, generating climate-related content merely as cover to appear legitimate. These particular bots operated through X’s monetisation program, known as the Ad Revenue Scheme, paying US\$8 monthly for blue tick verification in exchange for ad revenue sharing based on engagement. Unlike traditional copy-paste bot networks, they generated human-like conversational content that scored 100% on AI detection tools as ChatGPT-generated.

The bots engaged in what can be termed “zombie discourse”—recycling previous responses as inputs to generate new content, creating meaningless but algorithmically valuable chatter. These bots were inadvertently, it would seem, sharing misleading content about the Great Barrier Reef and climate change. An investigation by ABC journalist James Purtill led to an interview with a bot maker on X, who was quoted as saying that “It’s hard to remove Twitter bots from Twitter because Twitter is mostly bot”¹⁰⁷. The climate information integrity implications are significant not because these bots intentionally

¹⁰⁴ Starbird, K., Arif, A., & Wilson, T. (2019). Disinformation as Collaborative Work: Surfacing the Participatory Nature of Strategic Information Operations. *Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact.*, 3(CSCW), 127:1-127:26. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3359229>

¹⁰⁵ Graham, Timothy & FitzGerald, Katherine M. (2023) *Bots, Fake News and Election Conspiracies: Disinformation During the Republican Primary Debate and the Trump Interview*. Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Qld. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/242533/>

¹⁰⁶ Graham, T. (2025). Bots and Moral Panic. In Kirkland, Tracey & Fang, Gavin (Eds.) *Age of Doubt: Building Trust in a World of Misinformation*. Monash University Publishing, Clayton, VIC, pp. 225-234. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/256957/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2024-02-28/twitter-x-fighting-bot-problem-as-ai-spam-floods-the-internet/103498070>

spread climate misinformation, but because they demonstrate how platform economic structures and design features incentivise the production of low-quality content that can inadvertently amplify misleading climate narratives. When platforms algorithmically reward engagement regardless of epistemic value, they create conditions where "botshit"—AI-generated content with no regard for truth¹⁰⁸—becomes a business model.

It is not just bots and trolls that spread mis/disinformation. Australian politicians have previously been involved in misinformation and disinformation campaigns. Graham and FitzGerald (2024)¹⁰⁹ analysed the Twitter activity of former member for Hughes, Craig Kelly, and used a combination of novel coordination network analysis with a qualitative deep reading to determine if there was evidence of inauthentic activity such as bots and trolls amongst Craig Kelly's audience.

Findings indicated that Kelly, a Member of Parliament at the time of data collection, and his followers were connected with bot-like networks and disinformation campaigns. This included well-organised, highly resourced influence operations. A significant portion of his frequent posting was, and continues to be, related to climate change denial and undermining public health messaging through criticising vaccines. This paper serves as a case study of the potential harms associated with politicians who occupy a privileged space in society and on social media of posting misinformation. Conservative politicians are skilled at strategically addressing and attracting a highly engaged audience of predominantly far-right activists and some conspiracy theorists who help mobilise and amplify misinformation and post-truth narratives. Other politicians who have a sizable social media audience who express scepticism of climate change include Senator Matt Canavan.

Key recommendations:

- 1. We need a continued focus on studying and investigating the role of social media** in spreading misinformation about climate change, along with supporting researchers to do this important work by ensuring data access. Amongst other benefits, these activities will help to determine if there is inauthentic user behaviour and factually incorrect information about this topic occurring online to enable timely and targeted interventions.
- 2. While social media platforms are key sites for the amplification and spread of misleading narratives on climate change, the role of traditional broadcasters should not be downplayed.** These spaces are not independent of one another: narratives often originate in mainstream media before being amplified through social platforms, while social content in turn shapes the agendas and frames taken up by broadcasters. To study the spread of climate misinformation therefore requires attention to both traditional and digital channels as hybrid systems of communication. Holding broadcasters to strong standards of accuracy and responsibility is as critical as addressing the harms of platform algorithms, since together they form the media ecosystem in which climate denial and delay thrive.

¹⁰⁸ Hannigan, T. R., McCarthy, I. P., & Spicer, A. (2024). Beware of botshit: How to manage the epistemic risks of generative chatbots. *Business Horizons*, 67(5), 471-486. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2024.03.001>

¹⁰⁹ Graham, T., & FitzGerald, K. M. (2024). Exploring the role of political elites in post-truth communication on social media. *Media International Australia*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X241244919>

(f) the efficacy of different parliamentary and regulatory approaches in combating misinformation and disinformation, what evidence exists and where further research is required, including through gathering global evidence;

One of the clearest lessons from recent inquiries and research is that **Australia lacks the infrastructure to independently monitor and understand the circulation of misinformation and disinformation at scale**. While parliamentary and regulatory approaches, such as the exposure draft of the Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill 2023, recognised the urgency of this problem, they fell short in enabling robust, ongoing public oversight of the digital information environment.

The failed Bill absorbed substantial government and public attention, but its ambition was undermined by an overly narrow focus on ‘harmful content’ and by political concerns over free expression. Yet embedded within that draft were good ideas that should be refined rather than discarded. Chief among these is the need to compel greater transparency from platforms. Reframing the effort as a Digital Platforms Transparency and Accountability Bill would remove the most contentious aspects of regulating speech, while ensuring researchers, regulators, and the public can scrutinise how platforms shape information flows.

Currently, access to platform data is profoundly inadequate. Tools such as the Meta Content Library or Google’s limited ad transparency dashboards provide only a partial picture. These datasets are often error-prone, difficult to use, and do not capture the full range of content or engagement dynamics. X (nee Twitter’s) recent withdrawal of its Academic API demonstrates the fragility of voluntary arrangements. **Without reliable and legislated access, independent researchers cannot expose how average Australians are encountering, sharing, and being influenced by problematic content.**

Evidence provided throughout this submission shows why this matters. At present, our visibility into these dynamics exists almost entirely because academics and civil society have been able to scrape together partial datasets, ad hoc observatories, and data donation projects despite platform resistance.

Parliamentary and regulatory approaches so far have been piecemeal. International models provide a more forward-looking path. The EU Digital Services Act obliges very large online platforms to assess and mitigate systemic risks, including disinformation, while balancing protections for media freedom. This demonstrates that regulation can move beyond content-level interventions toward systemic transparency and accountability obligations. Australia should follow suit by embedding similar provisions.

Here, the Australian Internet Observatory (AIO)¹¹⁰, operating through a co-investment model of the Australian Research Data Commons under the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy

¹¹⁰ <https://internetobservatory.org.au/>

(NCRIS), offers a working model for the kind of national-scale, research capability that Australia urgently needs. Through modest initial investment, the AIO has already begun to deliver transparent, public-interest observability of digital platforms, demonstrating clear improvements in insight and oversight. What is required now is secure, ongoing, and scaled investment to build on this proven capacity, ensuring it is not left vulnerable to short-term grant cycles or the whims of platform data access policies. Only by investing in a permanent independent observability can Australia ensure that parliamentary and regulatory interventions are guided by robust evidence, and that citizens' encounters with information online can be scrutinised in the public interest.

Key recommendations:

1. **Reframe regulatory efforts around transparency and accountability** rather than content moderation, drawing on but refining elements of the 2023 Misinformation Bill.
2. **Mandate meaningful, equitable data-sharing obligations on platforms**, ensuring accredited researchers and civil society have ongoing access to high-quality data for independent monitoring.
3. **Secure and expand investment in key infrastructures** like the Australian Internet Observatory as essential for monitoring misinformation, disinformation and platform influence at scale, and for innovating new approaches.
4. **Align with international best practice**, particularly the EU Digital Services Act, by focusing on systemic risks and platform accountability.

(g) the role that could be played by media literacy education, including in the school curriculum, in combating misinformation and disinformation; and

Media literacy has a central role to play in combating misinformation and disinformation and supporting climate and energy information integrity, and we welcome the Australian Federal Government's call for the development of a national media literacy strategy¹¹¹.

School-based education is vitally important, but media literacy education also needs to respond to lifelong learning needs. The *Adult Media Literacy in 2024: Australian Attitudes, Experiences and Needs* survey¹¹² found that most adults want to learn how to identify and respond to misinformation along with how to find reliable and trustworthy news.

The report also highlights the importance of considering new and emerging technologies in media literacy to combat misinformation and disinformation, and "media literacy educators need to consider the ways that generative AI may become increasingly integrated into people's information seeking and decision-making processes, and the challenges associated with this."

Findings from the ARC Linkage Project *Addressing Misinformation with Media Literacy Through*

¹¹¹ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/news-map>

¹¹² Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2024). *Adult Media Literacy in 2024: Australian Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra.
<https://apo.org.au/node/327239>

*Cultural Institutions*¹¹³ show that a broad-based approach to media literacy is necessary. Rather than narrowly focussed skills-based interventions or training in out-of-context fact-checking, **media literacy education needs to connect with people's everyday lives, their interests, their cultural backgrounds and their day-to-day needs.**

Developing individuals' skills is one part of how societies need to respond to misinformation and there is also a need for policy reform and a change in technology company practices.

>> Quick reference guide: Media literacy

Here is a summary of some key resources on this topic that the Committee may find useful about media literacy:

- 1) Adult media literacy in 2024: Australian attitudes, experiences and needs: this report examines adult media literacy abilities, needs and experiences in Australia: <https://apo.org.au/node/327239>. **See also this infographic overview.**
- 2) Re-visiting the Australian Media Arts curriculum for digital media literacy education: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13384-021-00472-6>
- 3) Media literacy in Australia: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118978238.ieml0140>
- 4) Developing children's algorithmic literacies through curatorship as media literacy: <https://researchportal.scu.edu.au/esploro/outputs/journalArticle/Developing-childrens-algorithmic-literacies-through-curatorship/991013279210902368>
- 5) Values and media literacy: Exploring the relationship between the values people prioritize in their life and their attitudes toward media literacy: <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/19415>
- 6) How news media literacy is taught in Australian classrooms: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13384-021-00457-5>
- 7) Exploring the relationship between media literacy, online interaction, and civic engagement: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01972243.2023.2211055>
- 8) Using YouTube to seek answers and make decisions: Implications for Australian adult media and information literacy: <https://researchers.westernsydney.edu.au/en/publications/uso-de-youtube-para-buscar-respuestas-y-tomar-decisiones-implicac>

Key recommendations:

1. **Invest in high quality media literacy education** and the development of world-class programs and resources and awareness-raising campaigns for lifelong learning.
2. **Develop resources for media literacy education in schools** that are evidence-based, easily adaptable by teachers to different classroom contexts, and aligned to the Australian Curriculum.
3. **Support media industries** to understand their impact on society and to contribute to media literacy efforts.

¹¹³ <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/addressing-misinformation-with-media-literacy>

(h) any other related matters.

Addressing misinformation and disinformation also requires ensuring that credible scientific information can reach the public in the first place. Unfortunately, Australia's environmental and climate scientists face widespread suppression in communicating their work. This is notably worse for those working in our public service: one 2020 survey recorded over half (52%) of government respondents experienced prohibition from public communication about their research, compared to 38% from industry and 9% from university respondents¹¹⁴. This was severe by 2020, and by accounts of multiple ex-government scientists in 2023, worsening still¹¹⁵.

These censorship practices reflect broader sector pressures that force public service communication into increasingly constrained formats over time for internal use as well as public communication, leaving scientists with impossible choices to make about accuracy against brevity¹¹⁶. This erosion of communication is exacerbated by Australia's chronic underfunding of research, which has fallen to a 30-year low¹¹⁷ and left institutions operating more as commercial consultants¹¹⁸ rather than independent and reliable sources of evidence.

These systemic barriers create an information vacuum that misinformation readily exploits. Effective responses must therefore include protecting scientific independence, substantially funding climate research, and ensuring scientists can communicate their findings—complementing media literacy education with reforms that support credible information sources.

¹¹⁴ Driscoll, D., Garrard, G., Kusmanoff, A., et al. (2021). Consequences of Information Suppression in Ecological and Conservation Sciences. *Conservation Letters* 14, no. 1: e12757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12757>.

¹¹⁵ Davis, J., & Logan, T. (2023). Gagged and Grief-Stricken, yet Defiant: Ecologists and Climate Scientists Reveal Devastating Culture of Suppression. *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-24/odyssey-climate-scientists-suppress-truth-or-risk-funds-careers/102968970>.

¹¹⁶ Vilkins, S. (2024). Faith in Australian Numbers: New Pressures on Public Data Communication in Australia as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Communication Research and Practice* 10, no. 2: 200–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2024.2351778>.

¹¹⁷ Butler, J. (2024). Australia Being 'Left behind' as Federal Research and Development Funding Sinks to 30-Year Low. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/jan/22/australia-being-left-behind-as-federal-research-and-development-funding-sinks-to-30-year-low>.

¹¹⁸ Morton, Adam. (2022). CSIRO Has Become 'Extravagant Consulting Company', One of Its Former Top Climate Scientists Says. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/02/csiro-has-become-extravagant-consulting-company-one-of-its-former-top-climate-scientist-says>.



About the Digital Media Research Centre

The [QUT Digital Media Research Centre](#) (DMRC) conducts world-leading communication, media, and law research for a flourishing digital society. One of only nine University Research Centres established at QUT in 2019, it is one of the top Australian centres for media and communication research, areas in which QUT has achieved the highest possible rankings in the national research quality assessment exercise ERA, and it is closely linked with the School of Communication.

The Centre incorporates the QUT node of the Australian Research Council (ARC) [Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making & Society](#) (ADM+S), and more recently the GenAI Lab. The Centre also participates in the [ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child](#), headquartered in the Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice. QUT, through the DMRC, is also a founding member of the Australian Media Literacy Alliance. Its current Chair is DMRC program leader Professor Michael Dezuanni.

The DMRC works across four programs, which include:

- [Transforming Media Industries](#)
- [Digital Publics](#)
- [Computational Communication & Culture](#)
- [Creating Better Digital Futures](#)

The Centre draws together people from six Schools and three Faculties, the DMRC investigates the digital transformation of the media industries, the challenges of digital inclusion and governance, the growing role of AI and automation in the information environment, and the role of social media in political polarisation. The DMRC has an international reputation for both critical and computational methods, and has access to cutting-edge research infrastructure and capabilities in areas such as social media analytics and critical simulation.

We actively engage with industry and international partners in Australia, Europe, Asia, the US, and South America; and we are especially proud of the dynamic and supportive research training environment we provide to our many local and international graduate students.

The DMRC is a member of the global Network of Centres – a group of academic institutions with a focus on interdisciplinary research on the development, social impact, policy implications, and legal concerning the Internet.

We address local, national and global challenges at the forefront of digital transformation, and provide an ambitious, stimulating and supportive research culture for our researchers, students, and partners.

For further information, see: <http://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc>

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning. QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community.



Contributor Biographies

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Carly Lubicz is a PhD researcher focussed on environment, climate, and energy-related information integrity in political communication spaces, including digital media and public submissions. She studies the networks involved, the key arguments being made and how, and considers how these dynamics could ultimately impact public and political support for emissions reduction efforts. She has studied the Great Barrier Reef, and is now focussed on Australia's renewable energy transition. Carly has a professional background in media, communications, public affairs, and policy. She is a member of the Brown Climate Social Science Network (CSSN): a global group of scholars researching climate obstruction.

Professor Daniel Angus

Prof. Daniel Angus is Professor of Digital Communication in the School of Communication, and Director of QUT's [Digital Media Research Centre](#).

Daniel's research examines issues at the intersection of technology and society, with a focus on artificial intelligence, automation, misinformation, and new methods to study the digital society. Daniel has been involved in computer and social science research for 20 years and he contributes regularly to media, industry and government on the impact of technology on society.

Daniel received a BS/BE in research and development, and electronics and computer systems, and a PhD in computer science from Swinburne University of Technology. He is a Chief Investigator in the [ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision Making & Society](#); and, the ARC Linkage Project: [Young Australians and the Promotion of Alcohol on Social Media](#). He is also a member of the Queensland Chief Scientist's Social Science Reference Group.

Caroline Gardam

Caroline Gardam is a PhD candidate in the Digital Media Research Centre. Her research interests include climate change communication and organised climate denial, mis-/dis-/mal-information, chemtrails and related conspiracy theories, visual and multimodal communication, and social media. A communications professional and editor, Caroline's creative, critical, and editorial writing has been widely published. She is a member of the Computational Analyses of Climate Visuals Network (CCVision).

Katherine M. FitzGerald

Katherine FitzGerald is a PhD Candidate at the Digital Media Research Centre. Katherine has an academic background in psychology and digital communications. Katherine has published in journals such as the *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, *Media International Australia*, and contributed her expertise to multiple edited volumes. She uses qualitative and digital ethnography

methods to study conspiracy theories, information disorder, and knowledge production on digital platforms.

Dr Kim Osman

Kim Osman researches digital inclusion issues that impact the quarter of Australia's population unable to access and use digital technologies in the ways they want and need. Kim's research has enabled organisations and government to develop evidence-based policy and programs through her development of best-practice advice, guides, and toolkits for improving digital inclusion. Using place-based and ethnographic methods, Kim researches how social infrastructure like libraries support people to develop the digital skills and literacy needed to access education opportunities and fully participate economically, socially, and culturally in Australian society. Kim is a Senior Research Associate with the Digital Media Research Centre at the Queensland University of Technology.

Associate Professor Timothy Graham

Dr Timothy Graham is Associate Professor in Digital Media at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). His research combines computational methods with social theory to study online networks and platforms, with a particular interest in online bots and trolls, disinformation, and online ratings and rankings devices. He develops open-source software tools for social media data analysis, and has published in journals such as *Information, Communication & Society*, *Information Polity*, *Big Data & Society*, and *Social Media + Society*. In 2021, Tim was announced as an ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher Award recipient and was awarded funding for his project, Combating Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour on Social Media. He is currently a Chief Investigator of an ARC funded Discovery Project, Understanding and Combatting 'Dark Political Communication' (2024-2026).

Dr Samantha Vilkins

Samantha Vilkins is a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Digital Media Research Centre, working on the ARC Laureate Fellowship project Determining the Drivers and Dynamics of Partisanship and Polarisation in Online Public Debate. Her background is in mathematics and science communication, and her PhD was in the role of interpretation in producing and communicating statistics in public discourses. She has drawn on her expertise and experience from both academic research and professional roles in communication and design in consulting for government as well as national associations and related stakeholders, including the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Science Technology Australia, the Australian Academy of Science, and the Australian Council of Learned Academies.

Associate Professor Michelle Riedlinger

Michelle Riedlinger's research interests include the emerging environmental, agricultural and health research communication practices, roles for "alternative" science communicators, online fact checking and public engagement with science. She coordinates QUT's Global Engagement Theme in the Global Journalism Innovation Lab and she has been a co-investigator on Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded projects investigating the online circulation of health research and

online explanatory journalism. Michelle is the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Science Communication (JCOM).

Professor Axel Bruns FAHA FQA

Axel Bruns is an Australian Laureate Fellow and Professor in the Digital Media Research Centre and is a Chief Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society. His books include *Are Filter Bubbles Real?* (2019) and *Gatewatching and News Curation: Journalism, Social Media, and the Public Sphere* (2018), and the edited collections *Digitizing Democracy* (2019), the *Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics* (2016), and *Twitter and Society* (2014). He is one of the world's most cited social media researchers.

His current research focusses on the study of public communication in digital and social media environments, with particular attention to the dynamics of polarisation, partisanship, and problematic information, and their implications for our understanding of the contemporary public sphere; his work draws especially on innovative new methods for analysing 'big social data'. He served as President of the Association of Internet Researchers in 2017–19, and is an elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Professor Michael Dezuanni

Professor Michael Dezuanni undertakes research about digital media, literacies and learning in home, school and community contexts. He is the Program Leader for Digital Inclusion and Participation for QUT's [Digital Media Research Centre](#) which produces world-leading research for a creative, inclusive and fair digital media environment. He is also a chief investigator in the [ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child](#). Michael has been a chief investigator on six ARC Linkage projects with a focus on digital literacy and learning at school, the use of digital games in the classroom, digital inclusion in regional and rural Australia and in low income families, and the use of screen content in formal and informal learning. Michael is the author of *Peer Pedagogies on Digital Platforms - Learning with Minecraft Let's Play videos* (MIT Press 2020), he has edited three academic books, and is the author of over 45 journal articles and book chapters. Michael has served on advisory committees for the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance, the Australian Media Literacy Alliance, national charity The Smith Family, the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA), the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, and Facebook Asia Pacific.