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

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

Dear Committee Secretariat,

On behalf of the Climate Social Science Network (CSSN), I am pleased to provide the following submission to help inform the *Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy*.

This submission was prepared by an international team of CSSN scholars. CSSN is an international network of climate scholars that conducts research focused on understanding political conflict over climate change. Scholars in the network are social scientists producing peer-reviewed research and collaborating in this field. CSSN also serves as an informational resource for journalists, policy professionals, litigation teams and others.

The submission draws on published research by CSSN scholars, including a forthcoming book on the topic entitled *Climate Obstruction: A Global Assessment* to be published by Oxford University Press in October 2025 (see appendix). More information about the network and the research produced by its members can be found at <https://cssn.org/>.

I would be happy to appear as witness and provide further information to the Committee.

Best wishes

Christian Downie
Professor, School of Regulation and Global Governance (RegNet)
Director, Governing Energy Transitions (GET) Lab

Submission to the *Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy* by the Climate Social Science Network (CSSN)

Christian Downie, Robert Brulle, Jennifer Jacquet, Carlos Milani, Timmons Roberts

This submission outlines the coordinated, multi-decade effort to mislead the public and obstruct climate policy in Australia and around the world. It details the history of this influence campaign, identifies the key organisations involved, and describes their political activities. It concludes with recommendations for combatting climate misinformation in Australia.

Part I: Climate misinformation is a key part of climate obstruction

A. What is climate obstruction?

The decades of insufficient action on climate change have often been explained by pointing to various barriers—human nature, uncertainties in the science, technical shortcomings of renewable energy sources, democracy deficits, neoliberalism’s emphasis on short-term economic logic, and deep religious and other cultural beliefs.

We do not dispute the plausibility of these factors. However, based on the accumulating evidence we document in *Climate Obstruction: A Global Assessment*¹ we offer a different argument: while the major social transformation required to avert dangerous climate change was never going to be easy, it has been made exponentially more difficult by various forms of obstruction. Efforts to address climate change have been unsuccessful, we believe, because of the work to obstruct them and our failure to understand and overcome this obstruction.

We 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. That scientific consensus is summarized and brought up to date in the assessments by the IPCC.

Climate obstruction has existed since at least 1980, when the American Petroleum Institute (API) began publicly downplaying the emerging threat of global warming.² Research into climate obstruction began in the early 1990s, as civil society groups in

¹ Roberts, Timmons, Carlos Milani, Jennifer Jacquet, and Christian Downie, eds. *Climate Obstruction: A Global Assessment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2025.

² B. Franta, “Early Oil Industry Disinformation on Global Warming,” *Environmental Politics* 30, no. 4 (2021): 663–668.

the United States, such as the Sierra Club³ and Ozone Action⁴ helped journalists expose the links between coalitions of fossil fuel companies and contrarian scientists who downplayed the unfolding realities of climate change.⁵

The network of organizations and individuals fighting action on climate change is substantial (for one representation, see Figure 1 below).⁶ Fossil fuel and allied corporations and wealthy individuals use various channels to seek and achieve policy outcomes that favor their fortunes: media ownership and influence, lobbying firms, campaign donations and organizations, advocacy groups in national capitals and across countries, trade organizations, think tanks, and funding funnelled to researchers and centers at strategically selected universities. This funding flows through family or corporate foundations as well as through “donor advised funds,” which hide the funders’ identities from public view. These influence groups target key politicians and other decision-makers with the goals of instilling doubt about the need to act on climate and creating uncertainty about the ability of renewable energy and other climate solutions to meet society’s needs. By raising these doubts, network members hope to achieve delays in rule-making, weak regulations, and postponement of the transition away from their products and practices.

³ M. Wald, “Pro-Coal Ad Campaign Disputes Warming Idea,” *New York Times*, July 8, 1991, Section D, page 2.

⁴ Ozone Action, *Ties That Blind I: Case Studies on Corporate Influence on Climate Change Policy* (Ozone Action, 1996).

⁵ J. Jacquet, “Guilt and Shame in U.S. Climate Change Communication,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*, <https://oxfordre.com/climatescience/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228620-e-575/> (accessed April 22, 2025).

⁶ Brulle, “The Structure of Obstruction: Understanding Opposition to Climate Change Action in the United States,” 2021, https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CSSN-Briefing_-Obstruction-2.pdf.

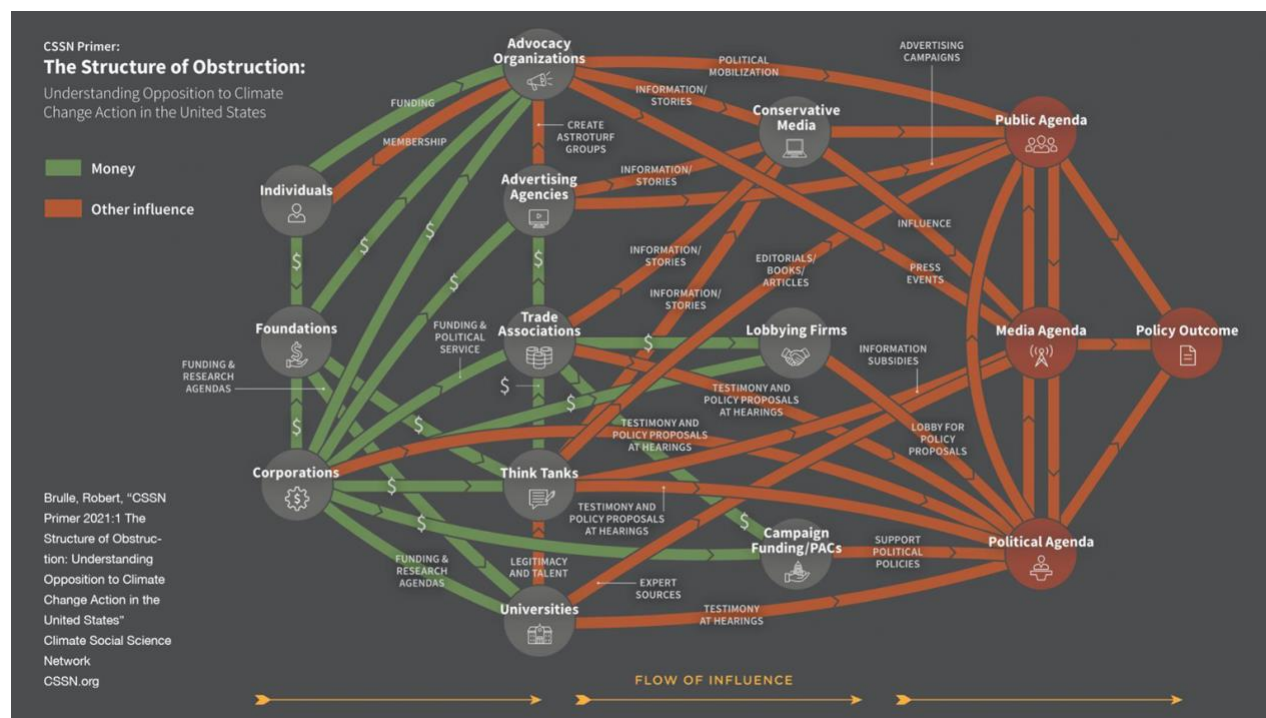


Figure 1: R. Brulle, "The Structure of Obstruction: Understanding Opposition to Climate Change Action in the United States," CSSN Primer, 2021, https://cssn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CSSN-Briefing_-Obstruction-2.pdf.

B. How is climate obstruction practised?

Research has uncovered an integrated network of organizational relationships (sometimes termed the 'denial machine') that exists to influence the public, media, and political arenas to slow, stop, or reverse effective climate action. This climate change countermovement is highly sophisticated, operates in multiple institutional arenas, and pursues a wide variety of coordinated strategies. These activities also operate in three distinct time frames: long term, intermediate term, and short term. *Figure 2* provides an overview of these activities. As there are some variations in the corporations and the conservative movement, that division is noted in the figure.

The first set of activities comprises long-term efforts ranging from five years to decades in duration. Their goal is to build and maintain a cultural and intellectual infrastructure of organizations that supports the development of ideas and policies favourable to conservative or industry viewpoints. One aspect of this effort is creating and maintaining academic programs at institutions of higher education, endowing academic chairs, and providing educational support for students in these programs. In the US, both corporations and the conservative movement engage in such efforts, which are only beginning to be documented in other countries, including Australia. For example, a recent report indicated of Australia's 37 public universities, 26 take money from fossil fuel companies.⁷ Another set of long-term activities is the development and

⁷ R. Campbell, M. Harrington, S. Predavec. "Fossil-fuelled universities – Australian unis selling their integrity to coal and gas companies." 2025, *The Australia Institute*, Canberra.

implementation of corporate or industry-sector promotional campaigns to enhance their cultural legitimacy and thus defuse potential regulations. In Australia, emissions intensive corporations, including Woodside, Santos, and Origin, have sponsored sports, arts and public events, including in the AFL, the NRL, Rugby, and Netball, among others.⁸ For example, Woodside has been a major sponsor of sporting teams, such as Fremantle in the AFL.⁹

Organized Efforts Opposed to Climate Action



Time Frame	Objectives	Activities	Conservative Movement Institutions Involved	Corporate Institutions Involved	Examples
Long Term 20 Years to 5 Years 	Development/ Promulgation of Specific Worldview Steering of Academic Activities	Provision of Elementary/Secondary School Curricula	Foundations Think Tanks	Corporations Trade Associations Public Relations Firms	Heartland Institute Publication Circulation
		Creation/Funding of Academic Curricula and Research Programs	Foundations	Corporations Corporate Foundations	Stanford University "Global Climate & Energy Project"
		Corporate & Industry Image Promotion		Corporate Public Relations Departments Public Relations Firms	API "Fueling it Forward" Campaign
Intermediate Term 5 Years to 1 Year 	Circulating Proposals & Specific Worldview in Media Fostering Desired Government Actions	Development/Promotion of Specific Worldview & Policy Actions	Think Tanks Advocacy Organizations	Corporate Public Relations Departments	ExxonMobil Proposed Carbon Tax
		Delegitimation of Opposing Worldviews and Policy Proposals	Think Tanks Advocacy Organizations		Climategate Effort
Short Term 1 Year to 6 Months	Carrying Out Political Action - Elections - Legislation	Lobbying		Lobbying Firms	\$8.6 Million ExxonMobil Spent on Lobbying 2018
		Legislative Issue Advertising		Public Relations Firms	ACCCE "Cold in the Dark Campaign"
		Citizen Mobilization	Conservative Political Groups	Public Relations Firms Front Groups	Americans for Prosperity
		Campaign Contributions	Political Action Committees	Political Action Committees	Freedom Partners Action Fund

Figure 2: R. Brulle, "Denialism: organized opposition to climate change action in the United States", pp. 328 - 341 in David Konisky (Ed.) *Handbook of Environmental Policy*. 2020. Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton MA.

The second set of climate opposition activities focuses on the intermediate time horizon of one to five years. This stage involves the translation and promulgation of scholarly ideas into concrete policies. One key example is Exxon's 2017 proposal for a carbon tax, which would have placed a small tax on carbon emissions while rolling back other regulations and indemnifying fossil fuel companies from civil suits related to their culpability for climate change.¹⁰ Such campaigns employ a wide range of channels to

⁸ A. Morgan et al. "Calling Time, How to Remove Fossil Fuels Sponsorship from Sports, Arts & Events." Morgan, A., Nimphius, S., 2023. *The Climate Council*. https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/CC_MVSA0356-CC-Report-Fossil-Fuel-Free-Sponsorship-Code_V5-FA-Screen-Single.pdf

⁹ T. Wildie & Herlyn Kaur. "Fremantle Dockers slammed for signing new sponsorship deal with Woodside Energy." *ABC News*, Sept 28, 2023. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-28/fremantle-dockers-criticised-over-woodside-sponsorship-deal-afl/102909870>

¹⁰ R. Brulle, "Denialism: organized opposition to climate change action in the United States", pp. 328 - 341 in David Konisky (Ed.) *Handbook of Environmental Policy*. 2020. Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton MA.

distribute their messages, from mass media to published books, and provide testimony at government hearings to influence legislation. The major institutional actors utilizing this time frame are think tanks, advocacy organizations, and public relations firms, which recruit credible third-party spokespersons to boost the legitimacy of their policy arguments. For example, in Australia the Institute for Public Affairs has a long history of financing and providing a speaking platform for “climate denialists”.¹¹

The third set of climate obstruction activities focuses on short-term (six months to one year) political outcomes such as elections or pending legislation. Actors put considerable effort into influencing public opinion around climate change. One style of public opinion management is to promote positive perceptions of fossil fuel corporations through the extensive use of advertising campaigns. A second tactic involves citizen mobilization and/or the creation of front groups to demonstrate popular support for a political position. A third approach involves lobbying activities, either directly (by corporations or trade associations), or indirectly (through employing public affairs firms to influence legislative outcomes). In Australia, emissions intensive firms have been central to lobbying efforts to slow, delay and water down, and roll-back climate policies in Australia, as we discuss below.

C. How is climate misinformation used to obstruct climate action?

A key practice of actors working to slow or block policies on climate change has been to deny the seriousness of anthropogenic climate change by manufacturing uncertainty about the scientific evidence, attacking climate scientists, and portraying climate science writ large as a controversial field—all of which are designed to undercut the perceived need for policies to address this crisis. Starting in 1989, several conservative think tanks opposed to government regulatory action, often assisted by a small number of contrarian scientists, joined fossil fuel corporations in generating scientific misinformation about climate change. This information was then spread, and continues to be spread, by conservative media, sympathetic politicians, and other actors. As climate impacts have accelerated, these efforts have placed more focus on delaying action and attacking proposed climate solutions such as renewable energy as expensive, unreliable, or even dangerous.

To be clear, misinformation can be defined as false and misleading information, most often spread without the intention to deceive. Disinformation is false and misleading information spread on purpose.¹² Given that intention is very difficult to assess, we use “misinformation” to refer to any falsehoods about climate change, whether or not they are spread with an intent to harm. Misinformation matters because it can influence attitudes and behaviour of both the public and political elites. Public opinion is of particular importance in democratic societies because it provides a link between what

¹¹ K. Napier-Raman. “How one think tank poisoned Australia’s climate debate.” *Crikey*, Jan 29, 2019. <https://www.crikey.com.au/2019/01/29/institute-of-public-affairs-climate-change-denialism/>

¹² S. Altay, M. Berriche, and A. Acerbi, “Misinformation on Misinformation: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges,” *Social Media + Society* 9, no. 1 (2023): 20563051221150412.

the people want, their electoral behaviour, and what politicians do on their behalf. The idea of democratic representation is therefore predicated on knowing and understanding public opinion.

Climate misinformation campaigns have been found to be at least somewhat effective in making people question the existence of human-caused climate change, especially in the United States.¹³ It is unsurprising, then, that the United States is home to the highest proportion of climate deniers and sceptics in the world.¹⁴ Australia is not far behind. A survey in 2020 showed that Australia ranks 3rd in the world for climate change denial, with 8% of Australians not considering it to be “at all serious”. This is twice the global average.¹⁵

D. *Who is responsible for climate obstruction and misinformation?*

i. Large oil and gas corporations, but they are only one of many.

Most of the early literature on climate obstruction focused on the oil and gas industry and the role corporations such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, Total, and Shell have played to slow or block action on climate change. But we now have evidence that as climate science was developing in the 1970s and 1980s, some major oil companies including Exxon also participated in research efforts that documented the likely future trajectory of global warming if fossil fuel use continued unabated. While the oil and gas industry led the way on climate misinformation and obstruction, research shows that numerous other industries—coal companies, utilities, car manufacturers, and meat and dairy producers—joined these efforts or deployed their own. Supply chains (both upstream and downstream) have created shared interests among corporations across sectors and industries.

One manifestation of this interdependency is economy-wide coalitions of business interests that collectively oppose climate policies. For example, in the US the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers have a history of pooling resources, sharing information, and undertaking joint political activities such as lobbying campaigns to block attempts to legislate a nationwide emissions-trading program. As we show in the next section, Australian trade associations have played a similar role.

¹³ A. Krishna, “Understanding the Differences Between Climate Change Deniers and Believers’ Knowledge, Media Use, and Trust in Related Information Sources,” *Public Relations Review* 47, no. 1 (2021): 1–8.

¹⁴ B. Teiturier and S. Duhautois, “Climate Change: Citizens Are Worried But Torn Between a Need to Act and a Rejection of Constraints,” Ipsos, 2020, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/climate-change-citizens-are-worried-torn-between-need-act-and-rejection-constraints>

¹⁵ C. Fisher. “The number of climate deniers in Australia is more than double the global average, new survey finds.” *The Conversation*, June 16, 2020. <https://theconversation.com/the-number-of-climate-deniers-in-australia-is-more-than-double-the-global-average-new-survey-finds-140450>

ii. *Trade associations are key agents of misinformation and obstruction.*

Trade associations, which represent entire industries, and business associations (which represent national or local business interests) allow corporations to “hide in the crowd” when engaging in obstructive actions; this reduces their risk of reputational damage. Firms in the fossil fuel industries use trade associations as a “command centre” for political campaigns to pool resources and coordinate political activities. The American Petroleum Institute has been at the forefront of climate obstruction for decades, coordinating the oil majors’ lobbying and advertising campaigns and launching front groups such as Energy Citizens, to delay US efforts to curb the oil and gas industry’s emissions. Overall, these are vast organizations. In the United States, about ninety trade associations working on climate issues had total revenues of \$25.6 billion between 2008 and 2018, with 13% of that, or \$3.4 billion, spent directly on political activities.¹⁶ As we show in the next section, Australian trade associations have played a similar role.

iii. *Networks of think tanks spread climate misinformation.*

Think tanks have promoted climate misinformation and contested climate policies via reports, presentations to legislatures, news and social media, and other channels. They present quasi-academic positions while shifting the framing of climate change from a science-based issue to a matter of individual liberty and economic freedom.¹⁷ They have also funded research reports and conferences to challenge the IPCC consensus on anthropogenic climate change. Many of the most influential think tanks are based in the United States, but the dominance of think tanks has spread globally, thanks in part to the Atlas Network,¹⁸ a global network of such organizations that advocates free-market (libertarian) and neoliberal policies.¹⁹ The Heartland Institute in the United States, the Free Market Foundation in South Africa, and the Global Warming Policy Foundation in the United Kingdom all have worked to challenge climate policies and programs.

iv. *PR firms enable climate misinformation and create front groups.*

Public relations and strategic communications firms collect intelligence on opponents (such as environmental nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs), conduct industry-friendly research, design advertising campaigns, launch front groups, and undertake opinion polling, among other activities. In the United States, PR firms such as Edelman, the DCI Group, and the Hawthorn Group have run campaigns such as “Advanced Energy for Life” in support of the coal industry. In Ireland, the PR firm Red Flag

¹⁶ R. Brulle, and C. Downie. “Following the Money: Trade Associations, Political Activity and Climate Change.” *Climatic Change* 175, no. 3 (2022): 11. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10584-022-03466-0>

¹⁷ A. Rowell, *Green Backlash: Global Subversion of the Environment Movement* (Routledge, 1996). 30.

¹⁸ Brad Lips, *The Freedom Movement*. (Atlas Network, 2020). <https://www.atlasnetwork.org/books/the-freedom-movement>

¹⁹ J. Walker, “Freedom to Burn: Mining Propaganda, Fossil Capital, and the Australian Neoliberals,” in *Market Civilizations: Neoliberals East and South*, ed. Quinn Slobodian and Dieter Plehwe (Zone Books, 2022), 189–220.

Consulting worked for the meat and dairy industry to promote positive messages about animal products. The growing role of PR firms in blocking climate action has led to their being named in public-interest lawsuits,²⁰ being criticized by the United Nations secretary-general,²¹ and to the passage of new laws banning advertisements promoting fossil fuels.²²

Part II: Climate Misinformation and Obstruction in Australia

In this section, we build on the international peer reviewed evidence to provide examples of the organizations engaged in climate misinformation and obstruction in Australia.

A. A short history of climate misinformation and obstruction in Australia

The history of climate policy failure in Australia largely reflects the power and influence of the incumbent fossil fuel industries. Attempts to implement policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have frequently come unstuck in the face of misinformation and obstruction campaigns. Such has been the influence of organizations, such as the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) and the Australian Industry Greenhouse Network (AIGN), and the firms that they represent, that their self-proclaimed title as the Greenhouse Mafia, is not without exaggeration.²³ Numerous studies have detailed their influence across decades of government decision-making from Australia's failed attempt to introduce a carbon tax in the 1990s, refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in the 2000s, to the abolition of the carbon price in the 2010s, to recent attempts to transition the electricity sector.²⁴

One of the best illustrations of the political strategies and influence of these organizations is from 2006 when John Howard was Prime Minister of Australia. A former Liberal party staffer released a book based on interviews with a small group of lobbyists who happily described themselves as the "greenhouse mafia". Consisting of executive directors of a handful of industry associations in the coal, oil, cement, aluminium, mining and electricity industries, these lobbyists were extremely well connected and had unparalleled influence on government policy. Many of the so-called greenhouse mafia people had previously worked in senior ranks of the Australian bureaucracy and they had an intimate knowledge of cabinet processes and committee

²⁰ D. Drugmand, "Oregon County Sues Fossil Fuel Entities and Enablers for Contributing to Deadly 2021 Heatwave," Desmog. June 22, 2023, <https://www.desmog.com/2023/06/22/oregon-county-sues-fossil-fuel-entities-and-enablers-for-contributing-to-deadly-2021-heatwave/>.

²¹ "Secretary-General's Special Address on Climate Action 'A Moment of Truth,'" United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2024-06-05/secretary-generals-special-address-climate-action-moment-of-truth-delivered> (accessed October 2, 2024).

²² I. Kaminski, "The Hague Becomes World's First City to Pass Law Banning Fossil Fuel-Related Ads," The Guardian, September 14, 2024.

²³ Guy Pearse. *High and Dry*. (2007) Penguin Books.

²⁴ K. Crowley, "Fighting the Future: The Politics of Climate Policy Failure in Australia (2015–2020)." *WIREs Climate Change* (2021); G. Pearse. *High and Dry*. (2007) Penguin Books; C. Hamilton, *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change* (2007) Black Inc.

processes. It was not a new network. Indeed, their influence was arguably what derailed attempts under the Keating government to implement a carbon tax in 1996.²⁵

Research shows that these trade associations and their corporate members continue to shape policy. What has changed, consistent with international evidence, is that the climate denial arguments that dominated climate obstruction efforts in the 1990s and 2000s, have been replaced by more insidious misinformation campaigns, which accept the science of climate change, but interpret the findings in ways that are less threatening to existing interests, emphasises uncertainties, economic costs, and proclaim technology solutions, which invariably do not exist yet.²⁶

B. Who responsible in Australia?

i. Corporations

Considerable work by scholars and investigative journalists have highlighted how emissions intensive industries in the gas, coal, and utility sectors, among others, have worked to mislead policymakers and the public about climate change science and policy. For example, in the gas industry Woodside has a long history of lobbying against climate policies in Australia and supporting trade associations that have done the same.²⁷ However, it is not only fossil fuels industries. Utilities, such as Origin, have consistently lobbied against Australian climate policy, such as on the recent reforms to the Safeguard Mechanism, and they have advocated for the continued use of fossil fuels, such as gas, which appear inconsistent with the climate science and the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement.²⁸ Even firms not traditionally associated with climate obstruction, such as superannuation firms, have been found guilty of climate misinformation. For example, in 2024 ASIC successfully prosecuted Mercer Superannuation (Australia) Limited in the Federal Court and it was ordered to pay a \$11.3 million penalty for making misleading statements about the sustainable nature and characteristics of some of its superannuation investment options.²⁹

ii. Trade associations

Consistent with international evidence, corporations have used trade associations in Australia as a key agent of their influence campaigns. As noted, associations, such as

²⁵ G. Pearse. *High and Dry*. (2007) Penguin Books; C. Hamilton, *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change* (2007) Black Inc.

²⁶ W. F. Lamb, G. Mattioli, S. Levi, J. T. Roberts, S. Capstick, F. Creutzig, J. C. Minx, F. Müller-Hansen, T. Culhane, and J. K. Steinberger, "Discourses of Climate Delay," *Global Sustainability* 3, (2020): 1–5

²⁷ InfluenceMap. "Woodside Energy Group." 2025 <https://lobbymax.org/company/Woodside-Petroleum/projectlink/Woodside-Energy-In-Climate-Change>.

²⁸ Climate Integrity. "Risky Influence: The legal implications of misaligned climate-related lobbying by Australian companies." (2024)

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/657654bd58d85f1af6083b13/t/665888670064114b7a6b8cce/1717078128037/Climate_Integrity_Risky+Influence_Report_2024.pdf

²⁹ ASIC. "ASIC's first greenwashing case results in landmark \$11.3 million penalty for Mercer." *ASIC Newsroom*. Aug 2 2024.

the MCA, have been engaged in climate misinformation and obstruction since at least the 1990s, as part of the ‘greenhouse mafia’. Many of these associations continue to engage in political activities today, such as lobbying and public relations, to slow, delay and obstruct climate action. For example, trade association representing the gas industry, coal industry, and utility industry, including Australian Energy Producers, MCA, and the Australian Pipelines and Gas Association, have campaigned against climate policies.³⁰

One of the most egregious contemporary cases was the campaign run by the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI) in 2022, which represents carmakers such as Toyota, to weaken fuel efficiency standards. Research³¹ and leaked documents reported in the Sydney Morning Herald³², show the FCAI lobbied government ministers, government departments, and ran a PR campaign to delay Australia’s transition to electric vehicles. This included downplaying the potential of EVs in Australia, promoting internal combustion engines, and making misleading statements about the costs of the proposed policy.

Much like in the US, Europe, and Asia, peak business associations, such as the Business Council of Australia (BCA), have frequently run campaigns to weaken climate policies in Australia. While some members of these peak associations have often opposed the position that organizations like the BCA have taken³³, this has not stopped them opposing climate policies. For instance, in 2023 the BCA, along with a raft of other trade associations, opposed the Victorian Government’s plan to ban gas connections to new dwellings.³⁴ In 2025, the BCA commissioned modelling used to emphasise the costs of meeting greenhouse gas emissions targets in their lobbying campaign.³⁵

iii. *Think tanks*

Australian think tanks, including the Centre for Independent Studies, the Institute of Public Affairs and LibertyWorks, have been active members of international networks associated with climate misinformation and obstruction, most notably the Atlas

³⁰ Climate Integrity. “Risky Influence: The legal implications of misaligned climate-related lobbying by Australian companies.” (2024)

³¹ InfluenceMap. “The FCAI and Australian Climate Policy The Automotive Industry’s Playbook to Weaken Australian Fuel Economy (CO2) Standard.” *InfluenceMap*. May 2023. <https://influencemap.org/briefing/The-FCAI-and-Australian-Climate-Policy-22253>

³² Ben Cubby. “Inside the car industry’s climate lobbying push.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 29, 2023. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/inside-the-car-industry-s-climate-lobbying-push-20230522-p5da61.html>

³³ C. Hamilton, *Scorcher: The Dirty Politics of Climate Change* (2007) Black Inc.

³⁴ InfluenceMap. “The Global Campaign Against Building Electrification An Analysis of How Oil & Gas and Utilities Industries Advocate to Prolong Fossil Gas Use in Buildings.” 2025. https://influencemap.org/report/Building_Electrification_Report

³⁵ D. Jervis-Bardy and A. “Andrew Forrest’s Fortescue rejects ‘credibility’ of business council modelling on 2035 emissions target” *The Guardian* Morton <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/sep/04/australia-needs-530bn-capital-to-meet-70-climate-goal-business-council-claims-ahead-of-new-2035-target>

network.³⁶ For example, the Institute for Public Affairs played a key role spreading misinformation about the impacts of carbon pricing policy in Australia. According to an IPA media release: “Between 1 January 2010 and 31 July 2014, IPA research on the carbon tax appeared on 209 occasions in print media, 363 occasions on radio and 261 occasions on television”³⁷ More recently, it has continued to be used as a platform to deny the science of climate change.³⁸ Many of these think tanks, such as the Australian Institute for Progress, have also received significant funding from coal companies.³⁹

iv. *Public relations firms*

PR and advertising firms have been key enablers of climate misinformation and obstruction campaigns in Australia. For example, PR corporations, such as WPP, which has a history of working for the American Petroleum Institute, and their Australia affiliates, such as Barton Deakin and the Brand Agency, regularly run campaigns on behalf of Australia’s largest fossil fuel producers, such as Woodside and Santos. As the NGO, Comms Declare, has documented these PR firms, are some of the countless PR firms in Australia that support fossil fuel corporations.⁴⁰ The role of PR firms obstructing climate policy in Australia has a long history. For instance, scholars have highlighted the role that Lawrence Creative played helping the coal industry campaign against emissions trading between 2008 and 2010.⁴¹ As the international evidence shows, PR firms are also often behind the creation of front groups designed to manufacture real or imagined community support for fossil fuels or opposition to climate policies. A recent example is the creation of a group called “Australians for Natural Gas,” which appeared ahead of the 2025 Federal election, which seeks to “educate and inform” the public about the role of gas.⁴²

³⁶ J. Walker. “Big Oil, Whales and Offshore Wind: Fossil-funded Atlas Network ‘think-tank’ disinformation is driving misinformed opposition to the Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone”. Submission to Australian Federal Government Department of Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Water. (2023).

³⁷ The Institute of Public Affairs. “IPA Recognised in Prestigious International Award Against Carbon Tax.” (Media Release). Sept 1 2015. https://ipa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/archive/1Sep15-JP-IPA_recognised_in_prestigious_international_award.pdf

³⁸ Scott Hargreaves, Ian Plimer and John Abbot. “Professor Ian Plimer Launches Climate Change: The Facts 2025 In Perth. *The Institute of Public Affairs*. (Media Release). Nov 21 2024. <https://ipa.org.au/publications-ipa/media-releases/professor-ian-plimer-launches-climate-change-the-facts-2025-in-perth>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Comms declare. “F-list.” 2025. <https://commsdeclare.org/f-list/>

⁴¹ D. McKnight and M. Hobbs. “Fighting for Coal: Public Relations and the Campaigns Against Lower Carbon Pollution Policies in Australia.” In: Brevini, B., Murdock, G. (eds) *Carbon Capitalism and Communication*. Palgrave Studies in Media and Environmental Communication. (2017) Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴² R. Kurlmelovs. “Meet the people behind the latest gas lobby group claiming to “educate and inform” consumers.” *Renew Economy*. Mar 20, 2025. <https://reneweconomy.com.au/meet-the-people-behind-the-latest-gas-lobby-group-claiming-to-educate-and-inform-consumers/>; A. Chadwick and L. Lester. “These 3 climate misinformation campaigns are operating during the election run-up. Here’s how to spot them.” *The Conversation*. April 23, 2025. <https://theconversation.com/these-3-climate-misinformation-campaigns-are-operating-during-the-election-run-up-heres-how-to-spot-them-253441>

Part III: Combating Climate Misinformation

Research suggests that combating climate change misinformation and obstruction will require a range of initiatives that make it harder for misinformation to spread and thrive. Here we suggest four that will be important, but more will be needed:

- i. *Enhancing individual immunity to misinformation* – Efforts to enhance individual immunity, often characterized as ‘public inoculation,’ can weaken the impact of misinformation campaigns by drawing explicit attention to the actors behind obstructionist efforts, their financial support, and the sources and nature of their misleading claims.⁴³
- ii. *Mandatory disclosure of revenue and spending* – While much of the focus in Australia is on political donations, research shows that organization engaged in climate misinformation and obstruction employ a raft of political activities that remain in the dark. One way to help address this would be to require mandatory disclosure of the sources of revenue and the political spending of actors, such as trade associations and think tanks. This information is available in other jurisdictions, such as the US, but it is not required in Australia.
- iii. *Instituting systemic changes* – This can involve regulation, legislation and litigation. For example, in some jurisdictions, policymakers seek to regulate corporate miscommunication and fraud in relation to investors and consumers. Increasing the powers and resources of ASIC and the ACCC do to this in Australia would be an important step. These tasks are especially urgent given that emissions intensive corporations in particular, often engage in actions promoting individual pro-environmental behaviours even as they resist more systemic forms of change in, for example, the law or financial regulations.⁴⁴
- iv. *Other non-legislative measures* – Recent scholarship has also called for non-legislative measures, such as the creation of a public misinformation monitoring program as a cross-sector entity to monitor misinformation trends across platforms, using natural language processing and social listening tools.⁴⁵

⁴³ N. Chater and G. Loewenstein, “The I-Frame and the S-Frame: How Focusing on Individual-Level Solutions Has Led Behavioral Public Policy Astray,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 46 (2022): 1–60; J. Farrell, K. McConnell, and R. Brulle, “Evidence-Based Strategies to Combat Scientific Misinformation,” *Nature Climate Change* 9, no. 3 (2019): 191–195.

⁴⁴ N. Chater and G. Loewenstein, “The I-Frame and the S-Frame: How Focusing on Individual-Level Solutions Has Led Behavioral Public Policy Astray,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 46 (2022): 1–60.

⁴⁵ A Carson, & M Grömping, “Measuring, monitoring and diagnosing the impact of mis /dis information to support future (non-legislative) policy development” *POLIS: The Centre for Social Policy Research ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences*. (2024).
<https://polis.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/measuring-monitoring-and-diagnosing-impact-mis-dis-information-support-future>