



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY  
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## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into Environment Protection (Fossil Fuel Company Advertising) Amendment Bill 2024

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## Climate Council of Australia

Submission to: Inquiry into the ACT Environment Protection (Fossil Fuel Company Advertising) Amendment Bill 2024

Addressed to: ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity

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## About the Climate Council

Climate Council is Australia's own independent, evidence-based organisation on climate science, impacts and solutions.

We connect decision-makers, the public and the media to catalyse action at scale, elevate climate stories in the news and shape the conversation on climate consequences and action, at home and abroad.

We advocate for climate policies and solutions that can rapidly drive down emissions, based on the most up-to-date climate science and information.

We do this in partnership with our incredible community: thousands of generous, passionate supporters and donors, who have backed us every step of the way since they crowd-funded our beginning as a non-profit organisation in 2013.

To find out more about the Climate Council's work, visit [www.climatecouncil.org.au](http://www.climatecouncil.org.au).

## 1. Introduction

Sports and major events are deeply embedded in the Australian way of life. Weekend matches bring us together - to cheer, to share pride and excitement, to feel connected to each other and to keep building our national story. When we barrack for our beloved teams, we are taking part in a ritual that has shaped social and cultural life in Australia for generations.

Climate change – driven by burning coal, oil and gas – is putting all of this at risk. From unsafe heat disrupting play at the tennis, footy and more, to matches cancelled by bushfire threats and floods damaging facilities, climate change is wreaking havoc on the activities and events we love. Already, we've seen big disruptions to major international events from extreme heat, such as the Australian Open tennis tournament. By 2040, heatwaves in Sydney and Melbourne could exceed 50 degrees Celsius. Yet at the same time as climate change is upending our way of life in real time, fossil fuel company logos are proudly displayed on the chests of athletes and hung high above our stadiums.

The fossil fuel industry is a major financial sponsor of hundreds of Australian teams and major events around the country. Big companies like Woodside, Santos and AGL are using these events to buy community goodwill and distract us from the planet-wrecking harm they cause. This needs to stop. No amount of cheerful corporate branding can cover up the fact that fossil fuel companies are fuelling harmful climate change. In a climate crisis, it is untenable for major sporting codes and facility owners to continue allowing the fossil fuel industry to use sponsorships and advertising to greenwash. From elite sport to community events and anywhere public matches get played, we need to end the visible presence of fossil fuels.

## 2. Burning coal, oil and gas causes climate pollution, and it's harming us all

The burning of coal, oil and gas is by far the largest contributor to climate change, accounting for over 75 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions (IEA 2019). Every day, fossil fuels like coal and gas are burned to generate power, travel from A to B, and for other purposes like heavy industrial manufacturing. This releases massive amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Greenhouse gases - including carbon dioxide, methane, ozone and nitrous oxide - act like a blanket. As a result, the Earth retains some of the heat that reaches us from the sun. This is known as the 'greenhouse effect' and is one of the basic processes that underpins life on Earth. The relentless burning of fossil fuels has raised the concentration of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere dramatically, rapidly heating our climate, playing havoc with our weather, and upsetting the relatively stable conditions that have enabled human societies to flourish.

While there is no safe level of global warming, holding the global average temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius - and striving to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius in the long term - is considered essential to avoid far more severe and irreversible changes to our climate. The most comprehensive assessment of the science ever undertaken, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, has shown that we must act far more quickly to phase out fossil fuels than our current pace if we are to secure a liveable future. (IPCC 2023).

### **3. Fossil fuel companies are using sports sponsorships and advertising to launder their public image**

Fossil fuel corporations invest big money in advertising and sponsorships. They use this kind of positive branding and association with our favourite teams, sporting codes or events to maintain their social licence to operate.

**Social licence** refers to the level of acceptance the community has about a particular project, company or industry (Governance Institute of Australia 2018). The term recognises that while companies may have legal or regulatory permission to undertake their activities, this is often not enough on its own. They also need community acceptance to be able to operate effectively, because without it, their profitability, brand perception and long-term viability are all at stake.

**Greenwashing** is one way that fossil fuel companies seek to gain social licence. This refers to deliberate, intentional attempts by companies or industries to downplay their impact on our climate and the environment. Companies use marketing techniques and buzzwords like 'sustainable', 'low-emissions' or 'natural' to present an environmentally responsible public image which is at odds with their real practices (ACCC 2023). In addition to intentionally downplaying their impact on our climate and environment,

companies use sponsorships and other paid links to popular social pillars like sport, the arts and public events to generate positive associations for their brand - giving rise to the concepts of **sportswashing** and **artswashing** (Wang et al. 2020).

Big fossil fuel companies like Woodside, Santos and Chevron regularly tout their plans to go 'net-zero', when in reality they are not making any real changes to their polluting business models. In fact, many are actively planning to expand the extraction and production of fossil fuels in Australia (Greenpeace 2022; Foerster & Spencer 2023). So it's no surprise then that fossil fuel companies are investing heavily in sponsorship deals that publicly link their brand to the athletes, sporting codes and major event facilities Australians know and love.

### 3. There are clean alternatives

There is sometimes a reluctance to end fossil fuel sponsorships and advertising because of concerns about replacing the revenue from other sources. These concerns are often misplaced.

As Australia's economy transitions to new, cleaner sources of energy, our renewables industry is growing rapidly, alongside new technology, innovation, advanced manufacturing and professional services firms that are competing on the global stage. Many of these firms didn't exist 10 years ago, but they're now growing rapidly and becoming important economic players. There is a great opportunity for these companies to step up to provide new, responsible sponsorship.

Leaders in this space are already taking advantage of these new partnership opportunities. Notable international examples include:

- In 2022, Southampton Football Club and EcoWatt partnered as part of the club mission to become Carbon Neutral by 2030 as the team seeks a sustainable future for their fans and community.
- Since 2016 Arsenal Football Club has made continual progress in their carbon emissions through partnership with Octopus Energy while also becoming the first Premier League club to switch to 100 percent green energy.
- The Philadelphia Eagles in the United States have demonstrated a long-term commitment to using renewable energy in their partnership

with NRG delivering 100% green energy at Lincoln Stadium and are leaders in the space.

Fossil fuel corporations are not the only big businesses in Australia, and there is lots of potential for new sponsors to step up. Sports clubs and facilities don't have to be stuck bearing the logos of dirty fossil fuels when there are viable alternatives.

## **4. The ACT can lead the way in getting fossil fuels off the field**

There has been significant positive momentum on ending fossil fuel sponsorships and advertising in the past 12 months. This ranges from Cricket Australia ending its deal with the coal power producer Alinta Energy, to the Perth Festival parting ways with the oil company Chevron, and Perth's Fringe World organiser dropping gas company Woodside earlier this year.

We need to keep this momentum going until fossil fuels are turfed off the field altogether. The proposal to ban fossil fuel advertising from major sporting venues in the ACT could be another significant step forward, showing that the Canberra community is again leading the way on necessary climate action.

Ensuring fossil fuel companies cannot advertise at ACT venues like the AIS, GIO Stadium, Manuka Oval and the Canberra Tennis Centre would set a new national benchmark for what responsible sponsorship and advertising practice at major event facilities looks like. It would also mean that out-of-town teams who come and play at ACT venues have to cover up any fossil fuel logos, sending a clear message that this kind of sponsorship is not acceptable to everyone watching right around Australia.

Over more than a decade, the ACT Government has shown positive leadership on issues relating to advertising, sponsorship and public places. Products like tobacco and armaments cannot be advertised at public facilities. Alcohol and fast food products are also not allowed to be advertised on the ACT's public transport system.

Ensuring fossil fuel ads cannot be displayed in any form at ACT sports facilities is another way the ACT Government can continue this leadership, reflecting both the values of the Canberra community and the urgency of phasing out coal, oil and gas as soon as possible.

Climate Council encourages the ACT Parliament to support the passage of the *Environment Protection (Fossil Fuel Company Advertising) Amendment Bill 2024*, because this is the make-or-break decade for action on climate change. That means the moment to draw a line under the promotion of polluting coal, oil and gas and move on to clean alternatives is now.

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