



FOSSIL FUEL FREE SPONSORSHIP CODE

# CALLING TIME

HOW TO REMOVE FOSSIL FUEL SPONSORSHIPS FROM SPORTS, ARTS & EVENTS



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The Climate Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, meet and work. We wish to pay our respects to Elders past and present, and recognise the continuous connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country.

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# CONTENTS

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Introduction.....	1
Fossil fuels are driving harmful climate change .....	8
Climate change is threatening the sports, arts and public events we love .....	13
Fossil fuel companies use sponsorships to launder their dirty image .....	19
Growing sponsorship risks for sports, arts and events organisations.....	25
Call Time! How to sign up to the Fossil Fuel Free Sponsorship Code.....	29
Fossil Fuel Free Sponsorship Code.....	30
Starting the conversation: resources for athletes, artists, and musicians .....	31
Starting the conversation: resources for decision-makers .....	33
Sponsorship choices are part of responsible environmental, social and governance practice.....	40
Appendix.....	42
References .....	44
Image credits .....	47



# INTRODUCTION

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Sports, arts and major events are deeply embedded in the Australian way of life. Weekend matches, concerts and festivals 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, discover the work of a new local artist or laugh until our cheeks hurt at a comedy show, 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 flooded festivals, to concerts cancelled by bushfire threats and unsafe heat disrupting play at the tennis, footy and more, climate change is wreaking havoc on the activities and events we love. As it accelerates, more supporters, fans and patrons will connect the dots between extreme weather and the harmful actions

Figure 1: The Perth Festival, which has in the past been sponsored by fossil fuel giants Chevron and Woodside.



of Australia’s fossil fuel companies, and reject the businesses and organisations that continue to associate with them.

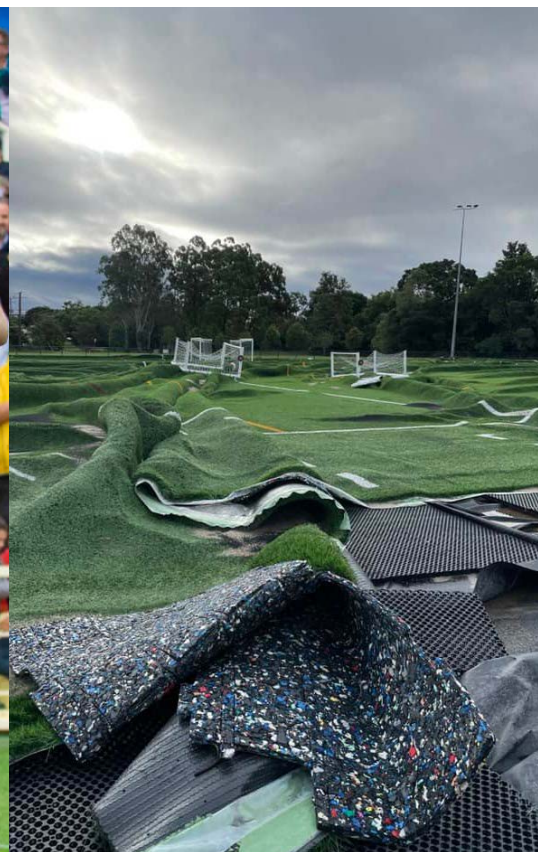
Already, we’ve seen big disruptions to major international events from extreme heat, such as the Australian Open tennis tournament. By 2040, heatwaves in Sydney and Melbourne could exceed 50 degrees Celsius (Lewis et al. 2017).

It is absurd that as climate change is upending our way of life in real time, fossil fuel company logos are proudly displayed on the chests of athletes, emblazoned on gallery walls and hung high above festival grounds.

The fossil fuel industry is a major financial sponsor of hundreds of Australian teams, arts institutions 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, arts bodies and events to continue allowing the fossil fuel industry to use sponsorships to greenwash. From elite sport to community events, we need to end fossil fuel sponsorship.

Figure 2 - left: Autumn Nations Series '22- Italia vs Australia. Right: Synthetic football pitch at Mitchelton Football club ruined by flooding in Brisbane in March 2022.





No athlete, whether an elite professional or a community player, is immune to our increasingly hot summers, which are a health hazard for those playing and watching sport.



Figure 3: Australian cricket team at drinks in the First Test against the West Indies in Perth, December 2022.

The majority of Australians agree. Polling commissioned by The Australia Institute in October 2022 found that more than half (53 percent) of Australians believe that fossil fuel companies should be banned from sponsoring national sporting teams, while almost two-thirds (60 percent) liken fossil fuel sponsorships to tobacco sponsorship. Sport clubs, arts organisations and public events that continue to accept fossil fuel sponsorship are compromising a safe future for everyone, and putting themselves at risk in the process.

By committing to reject sponsorship deals from fossil fuel companies, clubs, organisations and sponsoring bodies can protect Australians from dangerous climate change, and contribute to a safer, healthier environment for all.

## LEAD FROM THE FRONT BY TAKING THE FOSSIL FUEL FREE PLEDGE

### Read and sign the Pledge

If you're ready to reject sponsorship deals from fossil fuel companies, and commit to safeguarding the health and wellbeing of your fans, patrons and communities, [click here to read and sign the Fossil Fuel Free Pledge.](#)



Figure 4: Belinda Smith kicking in the AFL Women's preseason match between the Adelaide Football Club and Fremantle Football Club in January 2018.



**BOX 1: WHAT IS A FOSSIL FUEL COMPANY?**

This Code defines a fossil fuel company as one that is **directly involved in the extraction and processing of coal, oil and gas**, and/or one which generates the majority of its revenue from **fossil fuel-powered energy generation**. Examples of the kinds of companies operating in Australia that meet this criteria include:

Table 1: Examples of fossil fuel companies operating in Australia.

Coal	Oil	Gas	Coal-fired power generation
Anglo American	Shell	Woodside	AGL
Glencore	Chevron	Santos	Origin Energy
Centennial Coal	ConocoPhillips	Inpex	Alinta Energy

Examining the links any current or future sponsors have to fossil fuels is an important way to ensure our favourite sports clubs, arts organisations and events aren't being used to buy social licence.

Figure 5: Open cut coal mine in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales.





## THE BALL IS ALREADY ROLLING

As Australians increasingly seek alignment between their values and where they spend their money, brands that support fossil fuel advertising will become less attractive.

When you consider fossil fuel industries face an inevitable decline as progress accelerates towards net zero, it also doesn't make sense to rely on fossil fuel funding.

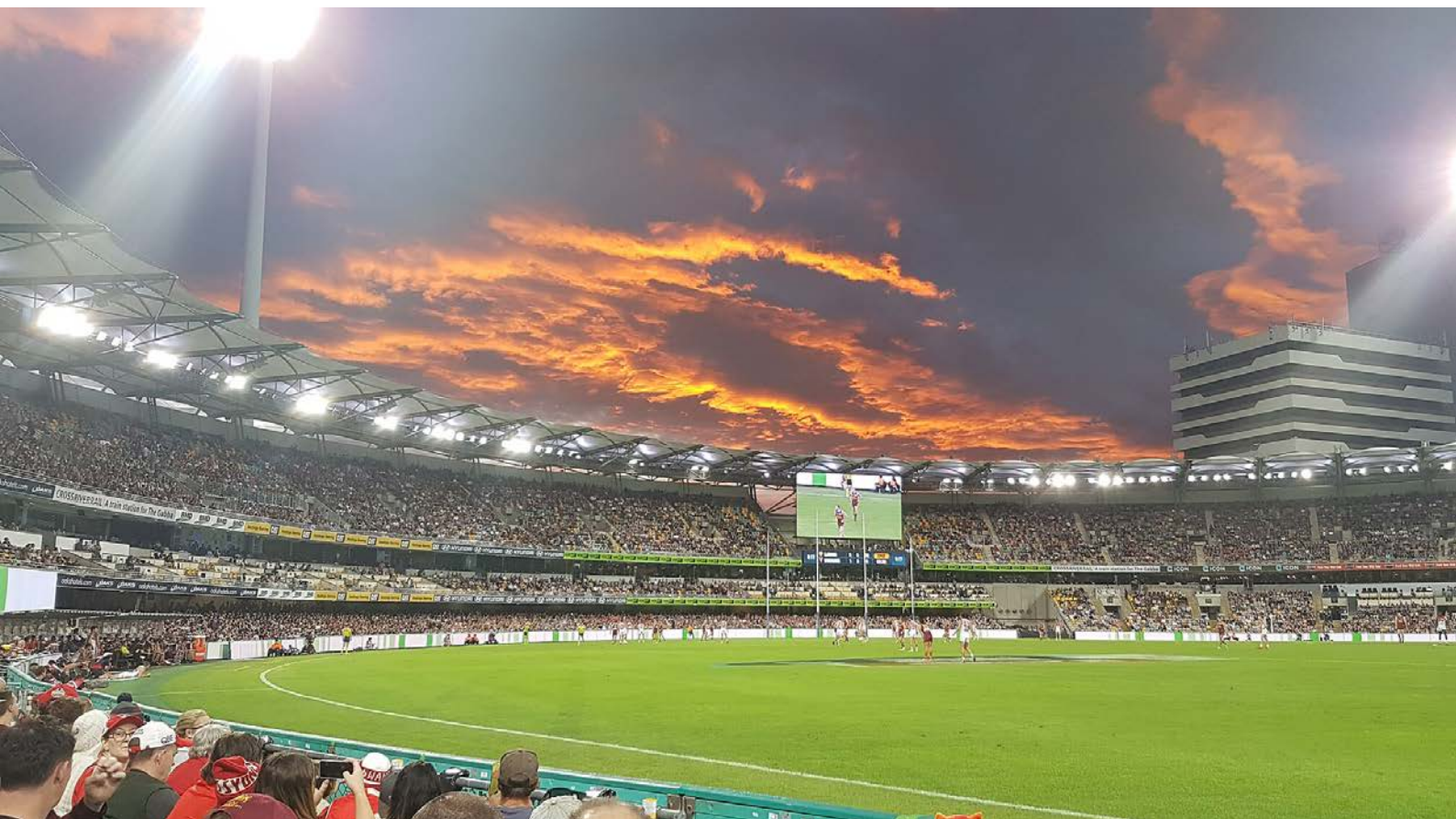
Directors and governing bodies will increasingly be held accountable for how they safeguard their organisations both from exposure to fossil fuel interests and from the impacts of climate change.

This **Fossil Fuel Free Sponsorship Code** is a resource for Australian sports and arts bodies, athletes, artists and anyone else in the community who wants to join the movement and be recognised for their commitment to ending fossil fuel greenwashing through sponsorships.

The social licence of fossil fuel companies is fast eroding. Just as tobacco companies used sports as a way to glamorise their toxic product until it was banned in the 1990s, today we see history repeating itself.

So, we need a loud chorus of voices joining the call to kick fossil fuels out of our sporting and cultural lives for good. Australians right around the country speaking up to their own clubs and organisations to say enough is enough.

Figure 6: Eastern end of the Gabba in Brisbane at sunset during an AFL Game.





## READY TO GET STARTED?

In this Code you'll find everything you need to start the conversation about ending fossil fuel sponsorship including:

- › Information about how climate change is upending Australian sports, arts and public events.
- › An explanation of fossil fuel greenwashing and how these major multinational corporations use our favourite teams and events to buy social licence.
- › A step-by-step guide to assessing current sponsorships and making plans for cutting ties with fossil fuel sponsors who are driving climate harm.

There is growing community momentum to end fossil fuel sponsorships. This Code builds on important ongoing campaigns by a range of organisations - local, state and national. If you'd like to find out more and support Climate Council's work or one of these campaigns, visit [www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/call-time-fossil-fuel-sponsorship](http://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/call-time-fossil-fuel-sponsorship)

# FOSSIL FUELS ARE DRIVING HARMFUL CLIMATE CHANGE

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Australians are already bearing the brunt of harmful climate change.

From catastrophic bushfires and worsening flood disasters to more powerful storms and deadly heatwaves, we are living with the impacts of a changing climate on our communities, our economy and the environment around us. These impacts will worsen in the years ahead, but we can substantially limit future harms through stronger action now to rapidly move beyond fossil fuels.

Figure 7: Firefighter battling a blaze burning in Queensland, 2007.





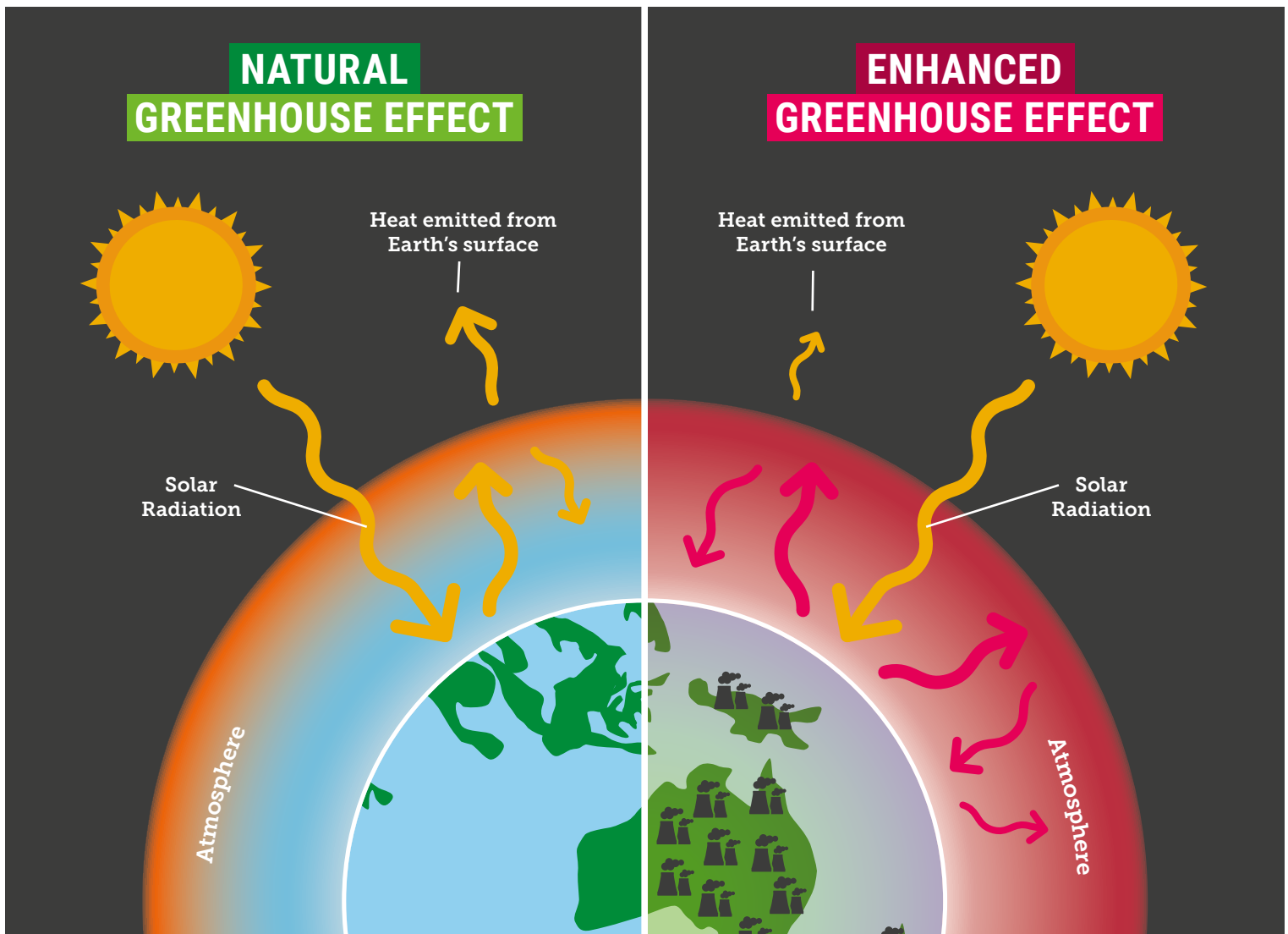
## HOW DO FOSSIL FUELS CAUSE CLIMATE CHANGE?

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 (see Figure 8).

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.

Figure 8: How the greenhouse effect works on our planet.



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). The International Energy Agency (IEA) has concluded there can be no new coal, oil and gas projects if we are to have a chance at limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (IEA 2021).

Put simply, all countries - including Australia - have an obligation to get their emissions plummeting by moving swiftly beyond fossil fuels to renewable energy (Climate Council 2021c, WMO 2022, IPCC 2023).

**Figure 9:** The burning of coal in our energy system is a major source of harmful carbon pollution which is fuelling climate change.





## AUSTRALIA'S FOSSIL FUELS ARE MAKING THE PROBLEM WORSE

In 2021, Australia's fossil fuel exports - mainly coal and gas - accounted for 1.2 billion tonnes of carbon pollution (DCCEEW 2022). As Figure 10 shows, this is more than double the total greenhouse emissions we produce within Australia. The extraction and export of fossil fuels is Australia's biggest contribution to harmful global warming. In fact, Australia is the world's third largest exporter of these fossil fuels, behind only Russia and Saudi Arabia (The Australia Institute 2019).

Climate change affects us all. Big fossil fuel corporations like Woodside, Santos, Chevron and Glencore aren't just harming Australians with their products - they're fuelling climate change around the world, putting a safe future out of reach for everyone.

**Figure 10:** Comparison of Australia's entire domestic emissions from 2022 and the Scope 3 emissions from Australia's 2021 fossil fuel exports.

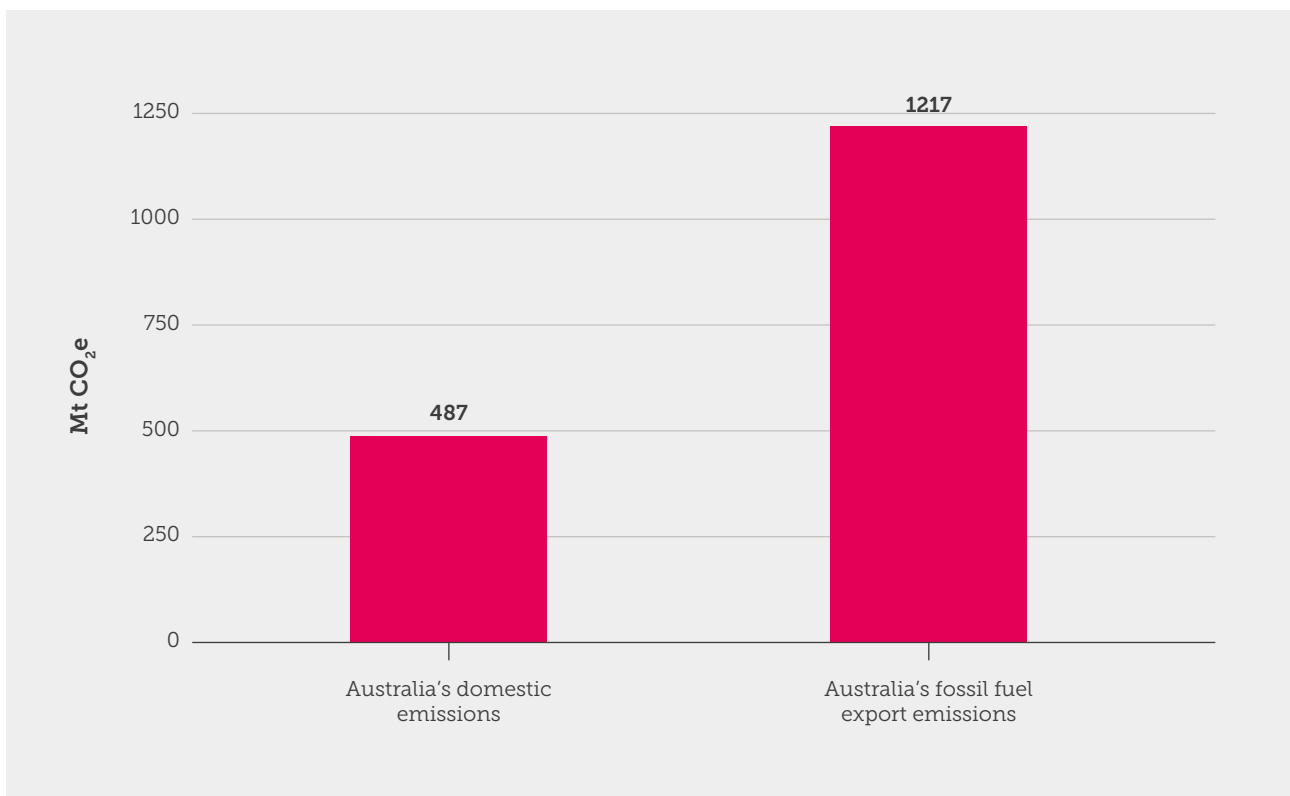




Figure 11: Coal moving on conveyor belts.



# CLIMATE CHANGE IS THREATENING THE SPORTS, ARTS AND PUBLIC EVENTS WE LOVE

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Climate change is already happening and Australians are paying the price through worsening extreme weather events like the 2019 Black Summer bushfires and Australia's 2022 East Coast floods.

Major crises like these threaten lives and destroy homes, with lasting costs to our economy and enduring trauma for communities who live through them, often time and time again. And they're upending our sports and arts events, as these weather emergencies get more frequent and more intense.

Figure 12: Narrabundah Ballpark, ACT, shrouded in bushfire smoke in December 2019.





In recent years, extreme heat has regularly interrupted play at the Australian Open tennis tournament (Guardian, 2023b), and threatened the health of cyclists in the ironically-named Santos Tour Down Under (VeloNews 2018). In 2019, the Big Bash League was forced to cancel a match between the Sydney Thunder and Adelaide Strikers mid-play in Canberra due to bushfire smoke (ABC 2019), while in 2017, intense and persistent heat led to all Sydney grade cricket games being called off for the first time in history (Daily Telegraph 2017).

Who can forget the chaotic footage of festival-goers stranded in knee-deep mud, after flooding in northern New South Wales led to the cancellation of major musical acts at Splendour in the Grass 2022 (ABC 2022)? Or the forced closure of Australia's National Gallery (Artnet 2020) to protect precious works by Matisse and Picasso from seeping bushfire smoke?

Figure 13: Lang Park (Suncorp Stadium) in Brisbane submerged after intense rainfall and floods in January 2011.

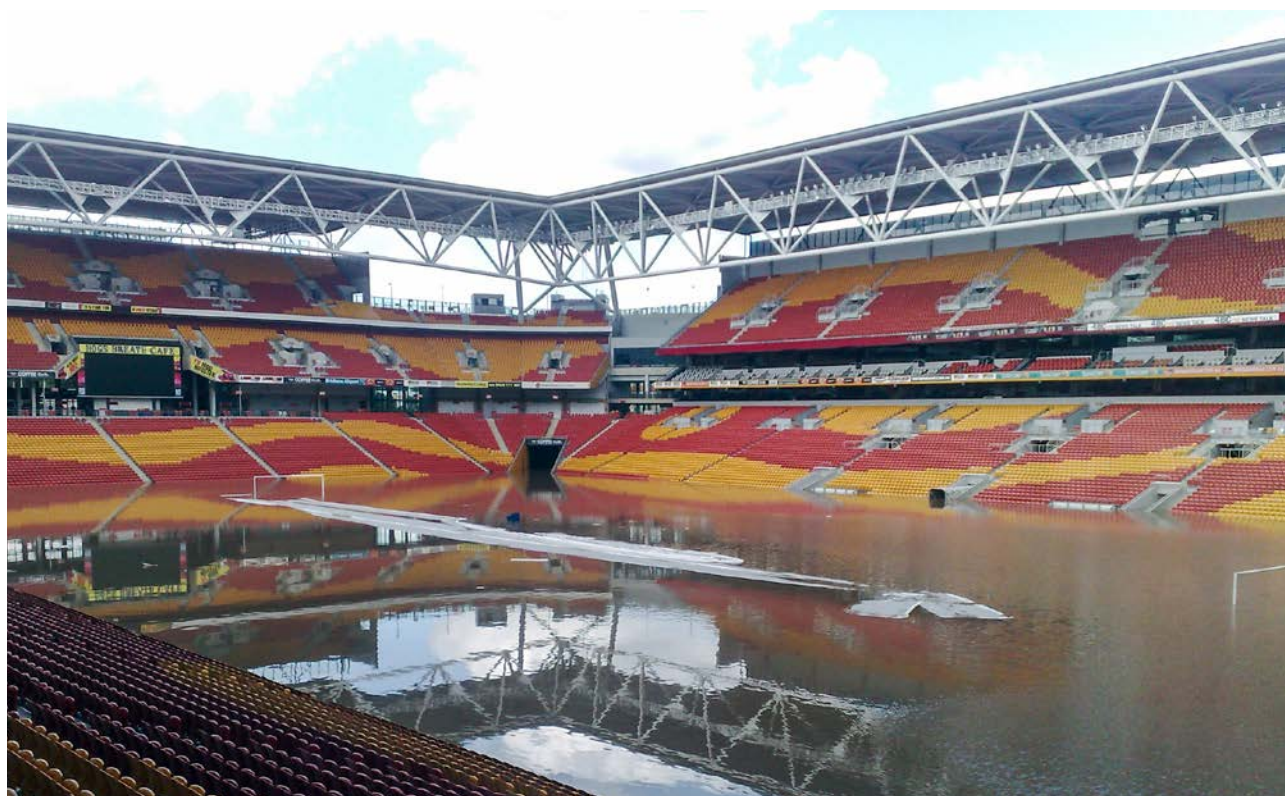




Figure 14: Ancient Rock art in Murujuga National Park, on the Burrup Peninsula, Western Australia.

Sites with significant cultural importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners have also been irreparably damaged by bushfires. During the Black Summer bushfires, rock art sites west of Armidale in the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales - Anaiwan Country - were destroyed during the ferocious firestorms, with experts fearing many more cultural sites will see the same fate (The Guardian 2020b). Meanwhile Woodside has admitted to damaging ancient, sacred and irreplaceable Murujuga rock art on the Burrup Peninsula, to make way for construction of the Burrup Hub, a mega gas project in WA (Mirage, 2023).

These impacts are being felt right down to the community level, with flooded local ovals regularly disrupting Saturday sports and iconic local events cancelled under the threat of bushfires or extreme heat. Even the most iconic of Australian sports, surfing, is not immune. Coastal erosion brought about by rising sea levels re-shapes breaks and exposes new hazards right along our coastlines (Lewis et al. 2017; Climate Council 2021a).

It is beyond the pale that the corporations fuelling the climate crisis continue to enjoy brand exposure to millions of Australians by positioning their logos all over our favourite sports, arts and events. The very events their products are putting at risk.

**“Sport provides some of society’s most influential role models. If sport can change how it operates to act at the speed and scale necessary to halt the climate emergency, others will follow.”**

**— Andrew Simms, Co-ordinator, Rapid Transition Alliance**



Figure 15: Melting tennis ball art installation outside the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne, 2020.

## SPORT AND THE ARTS ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF OUR NATIONAL STORY

Sport and the arts aren't just embedded in Australia's cultural life because they're fun pastimes. They are spaces and places to come together around our shared values of fair play, working as a team, being creative, excelling and looking after our mates. These values are totally at odds with the fossil fuel industry, which is destroying our way of life and our future, putting profits ahead of people, with little to no accountability.

Artists are often seen as activists - or 'artists' - and many have been leading the charge against fossil fuels. For example, in January 2020, a 'melting' tennis ball was placed in Federation Square in Melbourne to show Australian Open tennis fans the link between fossil fuels and dangerous climate change, and how this impacts the sports we love.

Athletes and performers are also becoming increasingly vocal about the need to take urgent action on climate change. As community role models, these public figures can play an important role in educating Australians about climate change and building momentum for strong action to tackle it. But how freely can they really speak when they are constrained by contractual requirements and big dollar fossil fuel sponsorship deals?

For all these reasons, we need to blow the final whistle on fossil fuel sponsorship of our beloved Australian pastimes. Some organisations are already leading the way. Tennis Australia officially cut ties with Santos ahead of the 2022 Australian Open, Opera Australia has ended its partnership with Exxonmobil, while Cricket Australia will soon sunset its partnership with Alinta Energy. Now, it's time for everyone to realise that the tide is changing, and #CallTime on fossil fuel sponsorship in our sports, arts and public events.



“It is no longer appropriate to have a fossil fuel company as our major sponsor moving forward. We should not allow our club’s good name to be used by a corporation to enhance its reputation.”

— Open letter from Fremantle fans calling on the Fremantle Dockers AFL club to end its partnership with Woodside Energy, October 2022 (quoted in SBS 2022).

Figure 16: Woodside Energy advertising at Fremantle Oval.



# COPPING IT: CLIMATE CHAOS IS DISRUPTING OUR BELOVED PASTIMES

## NORTHERN TERRITORY / NEW SOUTH WALES

### ARNHEM LAND & NORTHERN TABLELANDS: Culture - Aboriginal rock paintings



Worsening floods, fires and cyclones are already damaging sites of cultural significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Fires have irreparably damaged rock art sites in NSW, while sites in Arnhem Land have been damaged or destroyed due to cyclones.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### PERTH: Sport - Test Cricket



Extreme heat threatened play for the Test cricket match between Australia and New Zealand at Perth Stadium in 2019, prompting health warnings and concerns the ground would be impacted by the heat, affecting wicket play.

### PERTH: Sport - A-League



Severe electrical and thunderstorms in Perth postponed an A-League match at Campbelltown Stadium between Sydney FC and Perth Glory (schedule for 7 Dec 2011) because the Perth Glory team was unable to travel.

### PERTH: Sport - Horseracing



Ascot horse race was abandoned due to extreme heat in December 2019.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

### ADELAIDE/REGIONAL SOUTH AUSTRALIA: Sport - Santos Tour Down Under



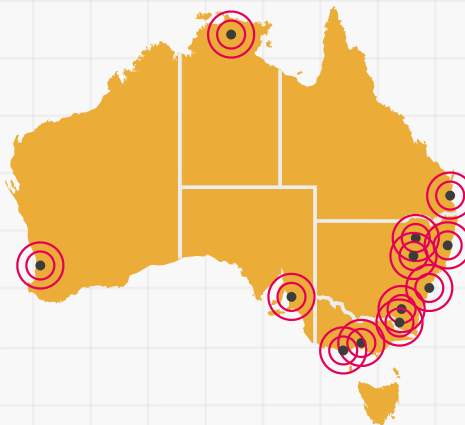
Extreme heat and heatwaves forced organisers to shorten the Tour Down Under route in 2018 and 2019, while riders passed through bushfire-affected areas in 2020. The San Remo Family tour was cancelled in 2023 due to extreme heat.

## QUEENSLAND

### BRISBANE: Sport - Football club



The synthetic field of a Brisbane football club worth \$1.5 million was ruined in the 2022 floods. This and other materials were destroyed, suspending play for at least six weeks.



## ACT

### CANBERRA: Arts - National Gallery of Australia



During the 2019-2020 Black Summer bushfires, the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra was forced to close, with fears that precious artworks would be tainted and irreparably damaged by bushfire smoke.

## VICTORIA

### MELBOURNE: Sport - Australian Open



In 2023, play was disrupted twice by extreme heat, then again a few hours later due to torrential rain.

### LORNE: Music Festival/Event - Falls Festival



In 2019 the Falls Festival in Lorne, Victoria was cancelled due to extreme weather conditions, including temperatures reaching 40°C, high winds and significant bushfire risk.

## NEW SOUTH WALES

### BYRON BAY: Major Event - Splendour in the Grass



The 2022 festival had its first day cancelled due to flooding, with festival-goers knee deep in mud and sleeping in their cars to avoid the downpour, leading some spectators to rename it 'Splendour in the Mud'.

### SYDNEY: Sport - Local community sport



In 2022 unseasonably wet conditions forced the closure of waterlogged ovals across Sydney. Many clubs found their grounds and facilities were ill-equipped to deal with worsening extreme weather.

### LISMORE: Arts - Lismore Regional Gallery



Record breaking rainfall and flooding in 2022 had widespread impact on the arts community in Lismore, including the Lismore Regional Gallery. Floodwaters rose to the second-floor ceiling of the gallery, including damaging valuable pieces such as the Hannah Cabinet and an exhibition of Afghan war rugs.

## NEW SOUTH WALES / ACT

### NSW/ACT ALPINE REGION: Culture - Kosciuszko huts



The 2019-2020 Black Summer bushfires destroyed twelve huts in the NSW and ACT Alpine region. Originally constructed in the 1800s and 1900s, the huts are used as refuges for bushwalkers and cross country skiers today. Ten of the huts will be rebuilt.



# FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES USE SPONSORSHIPS TO LAUNDER THEIR DIRTY IMAGE

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Fossil fuel corporations invest big money in advertising. Walk down the streets of our biggest cities and you'll see brands like Woodside and Santos dotting the city skyline. Tune into any commercial TV or radio station, catch the bus, or head to the stadium for a game of footy, and count how many logos and slogans from Australia's biggest fossil fuel companies you can spot.

While many of us may not even notice it, fossil fuel companies use this kind of positive branding to maintain their social licence to operate. This kind of corporate behaviour is insidious, risky and well past its use-by date.

Figure 17: Woodside showing its support for the Fremantle Dockers AFL team, Perth 2015.



## WHAT IS SOCIAL LICENCE, AND WHY DO FOSSIL FUEL GIANTS NEED IT?

**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).

Figure 18: Activists are increasingly calling public attention to corporate greenwashing.





Figure 19: Fremantle Dockers players sport the Woodside logo during AFL matches.

## FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES ARE SPONSORING THE THINGS WE LOVE TO BUY SOCIAL LICENCE

Examining the climate action plans of Australia's biggest fossil fuel companies reveals wide discrepancies between their public claims and their actual efforts to cut emissions.

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).

This is completely at odds with expert advice about what is needed now to hold global warming as close as possible to 1.5 degrees Celsius for a safer future (see p.10 above). A recent UN expert report made it clear that companies cannot claim to have genuine net zero plans while they are continuing to build or invest in new fossil fuel supply (United Nations 2022). By greenwashing their activities, fossil fuel companies hope that

Australians will grant them social licence to keep operating even as the climate crisis worsens around us.

So it's no surprise then that fossil fuel companies are investing heavily in sponsorship deals that publicly link their brand to the athletes, artists and cultural institutions that Australians know and love.

A recent analysis by 350.org exposed just how widespread fossil fuel sponsorship is. This work found more than 500 Australian organisations - many within the sports, arts, education and community sectors - are currently sponsored by big fossil fuel corporations (The Guardian 2022a, based on research by Penny Tangey and 350.org). It's easy to see why: if we're thinking about how many runs the Australian men's cricket team scored while wearing an Alinta Energy jersey, we might subliminally associate that brand with feeling good and a sense of pride.

Let's take a closer look at some real-world examples of sportwashing and artswashing.



 **BOX 2: WOODSIDE**

Gas giant Woodside has made a public commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. Yet, this giant multinational corporation is forging ahead with the enormous Scarborough gas project, which will produce an estimated 1.37 billion tonnes of harmful emissions into the atmosphere over the years to 2055 - more than 14 times Western Australia's total emissions in 2019 (Climate Analytics 2021). Woodside is also proposing to develop the Browse gas field off the coast of Western Australia, with clear plans to extract and export this highly potent fossil fuel well into the middle of this century.

Woodside's business plans will have untold consequences for our climate, but that's not stopping it from running a flashy brand campaign in Western Australia.

Woodside currently sponsors:

- › The AFL and AFLW Fremantle Dockers, despite vocal opposition from supporters and past Fremantle staff.
- › Surf Lifesaving WA and the Nippers program, despite the significant threat to Australia's cherished surf breaks and beaches from rising sea levels, coastal erosion, changes in wave patterns and ocean warming.
- › Artrage, a West Australian arts and cultural organisation involved in the Perth Fringe Festival and WA Day Festival, despite these events becoming increasingly affected by extreme heat, bushfires, floods and violent storms.
- › Public institutions, including the Western Australian Museum and the WA Premier's Science Awards, which has been described as "allowing a tobacco company to sponsor the cancer ward of a hospital."



### BOX 3: SANTOS

Australian gas giant Santos has produced a staggering 27.7 million tonnes of carbon pollution since 2016, more than the annual emissions of every person in South Australia (Climate Council 2023b). The corporation is also currently in the process of expanding its gas fracking operations, with its Narrabri Gas Project getting the green light to drill up to 850 new gas wells on Gomerol land in Northern NSW. This project is set to add up to 100 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over its lifetime (ABC 2022b).

Santos' core business model is extracting planet-wrecking fossil fuels. But they'd much rather you think of them as sports fans and local heroes.

Here are just a few examples of events - domestic and international - Santos has aligned their brand with:

- › **Santos Tour Down Under:** as the naming rights sponsor of the Southern Hemisphere's largest cycling race. This event takes place across South Australia in January, at the height of the Australian summer. In 2018, organisers were forced to cut the race short due to an extreme heatwave. In 2020, race routes were impacted by the Black Summer bushfires.

- › **Narrabri local sport:** as the major sponsor of the Narrabri Rugby Blue Boars. Santos' gas operations in the Narrabri region carry significant climate, health and environmental risks to the local community. In 2014 the corporation was fined for poisoning the local aquifer with uranium at levels 20 times higher than safe drinking water guidelines. Living close to gas extraction and processing facilities, like the proposed Narrabri Gas Project, can also have impacts on reproductive and respiratory health (Climate Council 2021d)

- › **International climate events:** proudly slapping their logo across the Australian pavilion at COP26, the annual UN Climate Change Conference in 2021. In front of world leaders and world-leading climate scientists, Santos decided to showcase its unproven and unsuccessful Moomba carbon capture and storage (CCS) project in outback South Australia.

Santos' claims about gas as a 'clean fuel' and stated net zero plans using unproven CCS have now been challenged in Federal Court, with the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR) accusing Santos of engaging in greenwashing and misleading and deceptive conduct.



Figure 20: Santos sponsorship of the Tour Down Under in Victoria Square, Adelaide.

Fossil fuel corporations aren't parting with their profits out of the goodness of their executives' hearts. They are paying to put a rosy tint over their public image and maintain a positive social licence to continue carrying out their harmful and polluting businesses.



# GROWING SPONSORSHIP RISKS FOR SPORTS, ARTS AND EVENTS ORGANISATIONS

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While historically sponsorship in sport, the arts and events was provided for philanthropic and altruistic reasons, these days it is all about strategic business partnerships where both parties benefit (Koronios et al. 2021). When things are going well, sponsorship partners benefit from each other's brand strength and positive reputation. But if a scandal or crisis hits one, this can negatively affect all partners (van Rihn et al. 2019).

This is particularly true for sport, arts and events organisations, as maintaining a positive reputation is critical to ensure on-going fandom, attendance and community support. As community awareness grows about the climate crisis and its causes, fans and patrons are more closely scrutinising partnerships with the fossil fuel industry. Sponsored organisations which are perceived to be renting their positive reputations out for the benefit of climate vandals can expect increasing community pushback.

Other sponsors may also be increasingly wary of having their own brands presented alongside those of major fossil fuel companies for similar reasons. There is a real risk that organisations with ongoing fossil fuel sponsorships could lose current and potential sponsors.

As more Australians experience the climate crisis first hand, any association with climate-wrecking corporations isn't just a bad look. There are also significant financial, reputational and legal risks, which executives and boards can - and will - be held accountable for.



Figure 21: Entrance to the Perth Festival's Pleasure Gardens, sponsored by fossil fuel giant Woodside in 2019.

 **BOX 4: WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?**

Some organisations are reluctant to end fossil fuel sponsorships because of concerns about replacing the revenue from other sources. These concerns are often misplaced. Take, for example, Netball Australia and the women's national team, the Diamonds. In late 2022, fossil fuel giant Hancock Prospecting pulled the plug on a \$15 million sponsorship deal with the code after several Diamonds players raised legitimate concerns about the corporation's social and environmental record. Within a month Visit Victoria - the Victorian Government's tourism agency - had stepped up with a sponsorship deal of the same value, totally plugging the gap (The Guardian 2022b).

It isn't just governments that have capacity to provide major sponsorship to our sports teams, arts and public events. 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.

The bottom line is that fossil fuel corporations aren't the only big businesses in Australia, and there's lots of potential for new sponsors to step up. Sports clubs, galleries and festivals don't have to be stuck bearing the logos of dirty fossil fuels when there are viable alternatives.

"If it's wrong to wreck the planet, it's wrong to profit from the wreckage."

— Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org



## **BOX 5: WE'VE DONE IT BEFORE: GETTING TOBACCO SPONSORSHIPS OUT OF AUSTRALIAN SPORT**

The current conversation about fossil fuel sponsorship has remarkable similarities to tobacco sponsorship in the 1970s, '80s and '90s. The successful removal of harmful tobacco from sports and arts then should give cause to believe it can - and should - be done again.

When tobacco advertising was banned on radio and television in 1976, marketing budgets then shifted to advertising and sponsorship through sport and events. Cigarettes were heavily advertised on the field and in the merchandise, from stadium billboards, to jerseys and team naming rights. It's hard to imagine this now.

The Winfield Cup was the Australian rugby league trophy awarded to the winner of the New South Wales Rugby League premiership Grand Final from 1982 to 1994, and then to the winner of the Australian Rugby League Grand Final in 1995.

The Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 put an end to most forms of tobacco advertising, including sponsorship. The ban on sponsorship

was intended to reduce the visibility and appeal of smoking and deny the social licence sponsorship can buy. Existing sponsorships were allowed to continue until their contractual end, but no new sponsorships were permitted by the Act. Most organisations affiliated with tobacco brands quickly transitioned to other sources of sponsorship revenue. By 1998 all domestic sponsorships had ended.

The legislative change was supported by public health groups but was opposed by some in the sport, events and advertising industries, who argued that it would have a negative impact on their financial bottom line. Despite these criticisms, the ban has been credited with helping to reduce smoking rates in Australia and has been used as a model for similar bans in other countries. The argument that sport would collapse without the financial investment of tobacco brands proved completely unfounded and our codes have continued to flourish in the years since the ban.



Figure 22: Cricketers celebrating in front of cigarette advertising during the Australia V England Third Test, December 1982.

## BOX 5: CONTINUED

Leaders in this space are already taking advantage of the community goodwill, revenue growth and reduced risk of improving their brands environmental image:

- › 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.

We can - and must - remove fossil fuel sponsorship from sports, the arts and public events. The time is right for teams, boards and governing bodies to take the plunge.



Figure 23: Arsenal FC players promoting the club's partnership with renewable energy retailer, Octopus Energy.

**"The climate crisis presents both threats and opportunities... The threat is huge, to leagues, to society, but people don't want to hear it. We need the decision makers to get in the game."**

— **Scott Jenkins, Green Sports Alliance**



# CALL TIME! HOW TO SIGN UP TO THE FOSSIL FUEL FREE SPONSORSHIP CODE

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Figure 24: Museum of Contemporary Art lit up during the Vivid festival in Sydney.



# FOSSIL FUEL FREE SPONSORSHIP CODE

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Fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas cause dangerous climate change, which is hurting Australians and threatening our precious way of life. Our organisation is dedicated to protecting the health and wellbeing of all our supporters, patrons, friends and staff, advancing environmental sustainability, and living our values.

**For the sake of a healthy and safe future, we pledge that we will not enter into sponsorship arrangements, take funding or any in-kind contributions from coal, oil and gas companies and will not permit the use of their logo on any of our promotional materials.**

Where we currently have sponsorships with fossil fuel corporations, we will cease these at the end of the current contract term. We will not enter into new sponsorship arrangements with fossil fuel companies in future. We will disclose all of our sponsorship arrangements annually for transparency.

## **Safeguarding health and wellbeing**

The health and safety of every person involved with our organisation is paramount. We also seek to protect the health and wellbeing of the communities we operate within. By refusing to accept sponsorship from fossil fuel companies, we aim to protect our stakeholders from dangerous climate change and contribute to a healthier, safer environment for all.

## **Advancing environmental sustainability**

Our organisation is committed to advancing environmental sustainability. We recognise that climate change represents a significant threat to Australia's natural environment and the long-term, sustainable use of our shared natural resources. By refusing to accept sponsorship from fossil fuel companies, we demonstrate our commitment to stewarding Australia's environment for future generations.

## **Living our values**

We strive to align our actions with our values and to be a positive role model for our community. We recognise that living our values is important to the long-term success and sustainability of our organisation, helping us to build and maintain positive partnerships with stakeholders and across the community. By refusing to accept sponsorship from fossil fuel companies, we act with courage and integrity.

Signed

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Chair

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Chief Executive Officer

Supported by Climate Council and 350.org





# STARTING THE CONVERSATION: RESOURCES FOR ATHLETES, ARTISTS, AND MUSICIANS

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If you're an athlete, artist or musician and uncomfortable with participating in events that are associated with fossil fuel companies, kickstarting a conversation with the decision makers in your organisation is one of the most powerful things you can do.

Here's some ways you can get the conversation moving:

- › Request a meeting with your governing body to discuss your objections to fossil fuel sponsorship.
- › Ask your organisation to complete the activities presented in the Fossil Fuel Free Sponsorship Code, and to be transparent with the results.
- › Pen an open letter to your board or decision-makers, and ask your teammates or other artists to sign on in solidarity.
- › Make a public announcement outlining why you object to fossil fuel sponsorships, via social or traditional news media.
- › Think of creative and constructive ways to make a statement, for example:
  - Tape over the fossil fuel company logos on your jersey at the next game
  - Start a petition amongst your fans
  - Speak about the issue on stage, at an exhibition, or at the next post-match press conference
- › Attend a Climate Council training session on how to approach these conversations and get the most out of them.



## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

*Some athletes, artists and musicians will be bound by specific contractual requirements from the organisations they work with. It's always good to get advice on your own legal position if this might apply to you.*

## BOX 6: CHANGE-MAKERS IN SPORTS, ARTS AND EVENTS

Artists and athletes have a long history of using their platform and power to push for change.

- › In October 2022, Australian men's soccer team, the Socceroos, released a video message featuring all 16 players to protest against human rights abuses in World Cup host country, Qatar (Guardian 2022d).
- › In January 2020, 41 artists across Australia began the 'Bushfire Brandalism' campaign, replacing street and bus shelter advertising with posters calling for immediate action to address the climate crisis (Guardian 2020c).
- › Musicians are well known for the creation of 'protest songs' with some of the most famous in Australian history being Redgum's anti-Vietnam War anthem 'I Was Only 19', Yothu Yindi's 'Treaty', and the Paul Kelly classic, 'From Little Things, Big Things Grow' (Mixdown 2022).

Figure 25: Example of bushfire brandalism campaign in Australia, 2020.





# STARTING THE CONVERSATION: RESOURCES FOR DECISION-MAKERS

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Ending fossil fuel sponsorships is a decision that will generally need to be taken at the board and executive level. Currently sponsorships are managed as short-term operational decisions, driven by financial gain. There is vast potential to incorporate sponsorship decision-making into the long-term outlook of organisations, while aligning organisation's conduct and activities with the values of fans, athletes, artists and the community now and in the future.

The following guide suggests a process to start this conversation. It is designed to be undertaken as part of a dedicated board and executive workshop evaluating current and future sponsorships.

To make informed decisions, boards and directors should align their choices with the organisation's strategic goals, ensure responsible and ethical behaviour, consider the well-being of stakeholders, and apply sound governance and risk assessment practices.

Figure 26: 2015 cricket world cup final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.



## DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK: A GUIDED PROCESS

### Activity 1: Rapid Values and Impact Audit

The following questions can stimulate thought and set a decision-making compass to guide the conversation about sponsorships.

Activity session for decision-makers:

Break into three small groups and answer these questions. Come back together and determine if you have alignment. Document the key conclusions and common responses to each question.

**1. What are our core values as an organisation?**

These may be explicit - such as through a values statement, or implicit - found in 'the way we do things around here.'

**2. What are the most important things we want to achieve as an organisation?**

Consider the organisation's objectives from a range of lenses including commercial, reputational, social and other considerations.

**3. What kind of impact do we want to have on our community (or stakeholders)?**

Consider short, medium and long-term impacts, in the context of the different lenses highlighted above.

**4. How do we want to be perceived by our stakeholders?**

Consider how you want the organisation to be perceived today, in five years' time, and in the longer term.



### BOX 7: ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Environmental, Social and Governance considerations are becoming increasingly important for stakeholders, commercial partners and regulators.

**Does your organisation already have an Environmental, Social and Governance Statement, or a position on environmental sustainability which outlines your goals and commitments?**

If not, outlining your organisation's approach to Environmental, Social and Governance matters can be an important and useful first step towards assessing alignment between your priorities and your sponsors.

Find out more about why Environmental, Social and Governance practice matters on p. 40 of this document.



**Activity 2: Sponsor Fit Evaluation**

The concept of ‘sponsor fit’ captures the extent to which there is alignment between a sponsor and an organisation or audience’s values, objectives and intended impact.

When there is strong alignment, an organisation and its sponsor/s share key values and objectives, while having a common purpose to achieve positive impact in the world around them. At the other end

of the scale, organisations may find that sponsorships no longer reflect their values and objectives, or present a poor fit in the context of a changing external environment.

Consider your organisation’s current sponsors.

Working individually at first, draw a slider like the below and mark with an X where you see current sponsorships fitting for the following:

<b>Fit to our organisation</b>		
Perfect alignment	Neutral	Contrary to purpose
<b>Fit to other sponsors (current or preferred)</b>		
Perfect alignment	Neutral	Contrary to purpose
<b>Fit to audience</b>		
Perfect alignment	Neutral	Contrary to purpose

Coming back together to work collaboratively, compare, contrast and discuss the range of responses:

- › Translate individual responses to a whiteboard or shared document.
- › Identify the ‘range’ and discuss ‘outliers’ as a group.
- › Come to a consensus on where current sponsorships sit on each of these three sliders.

### Activity 3: Sponsor Risk Assessment

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Traditional risk assessments are very common for boards.<sup>1</sup> To guide a deeper consideration of the specific risks associated with sponsorship, use these reflection questions to consider stakeholders' values and perceptions of a sponsor, in the context of your organisation's own values and purpose.

Answer the following questions individually at first. Then work in pairs to compare responses. Finally, have each pair present their responses to the entire group and discuss these as an open forum.

1. What are the perceived or actual reputational risks (including ethical, social and environmental considerations) that may arise from this sponsorship?

#### BOX 8: FREMANTLE DOCKERS

**Case study:** Sports, arts and major events bodies are coming under increasing public scrutiny for their sponsorships. In late 2022, a group of high profile West Australians including former Premier Carmen Lawrence and author Tim Winton penned an open letter to the Fremantle Dockers board, calling on the AFL club to end its long-running partnership with the gas giant Woodside. The letter was also signed by well-known Dockers personalities like former player and life member Dale Kickett and former football manager, Gerard McNeill from within the club community. It sparked national media attention and has ignited ongoing public scrutiny and discussion about the Fremantle Dockers' corporate practices and values.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples and resources visit the Australian Institute of Company Directors - Risk Management Framework (<https://www.aicd.com.au/risk-management/framework.html>).



**2.** What are the legal or financial risks that are associated with partnering with this sponsor?

### **BOX 9: SHELL**

**Case study:** The International Energy Agency estimates that use of gas will be 75 percent lower by 2050 in a net-zero world, while the use of coal will be slashed by 99 percent (IEA, 2022a, 2022b). Australia, and the world's, transition to net zero is expected to see a major structural decline in the demand for, and production of, fossil fuels. This will impact the bottom line of major fossil fuel producers unless they transition to alternative energy sources. While these companies may be some of the biggest and most profitable in Australia today, there are strong and accelerating risks to their financial positions.

Internationally, there is also a rising trend of climate-related litigation against fossil fuel companies. For example, the board directors of the oil company Shell are currently being personally sued over the company's climate strategy, on the basis that it is insufficient to meet climate targets and puts the company at financial risk (The Guardian 2023a).

**3.** How would stakeholders be impacted by this sponsorship? Consider e.g. athletes, artists, fans, attendees, followers, staff, volunteers, other sponsors and partners.

### **BOX 10: MUSIC FESTIVALS IN AUSTRALIA**

**Case study:** Climate change - driven by the burning of coal, oil and gas - is putting our sports, arts and major events at risk. More than a dozen music festivals were cancelled in 2022 due to extreme weather, including The Grass is Greener in Canberra and Geelong, Strawberry Fields in the NSW Riverina, the Almost Summer Festival in Bendigo and - most famously - part of Splendour in the Grass in Byron Bay. The rising risks of extreme weather exacerbated by climate change are so severe that the events industry is calling for a 'climate safety net' in the form of a government-backed insurance guarantee (The Guardian 2022c). Anything that prolongs the life of fossil fuels - including providing social licence through sponsorships - risks increasing future harms from extreme weather and other impacts of climate change.



**4.** What are some alternative sponsorship opportunities that might align better to your decision-making compass reflected upon in the Rapid Values and Impact Audit?

**BOX 11: HANWHA**

**Case study:** Global renewable energy provider Hanwha has been expanding its sports partnerships in recent years, inking sponsorship deals with major sports clubs in the USA, Italy, England, Germany and across North Asia. Here at home, growing renewables firms like Squadron Energy are creating opportunities for new community partnerships.

The clean energy sector joins thriving Australian industries like technology and innovation; tourism, hospitality and retail; advanced manufacturing; and financial and professional services - which all offer strong opportunities for values-aligned sponsorships.

Figure 27: Brainstorming at company strategy session.





#### Activity 4: Final discussion and decision-making

Discuss the question below with input from legal, financial and other relevant internal subject matter experts as needed and document under the headings below.

**What steps would your organisation need to take to separate from existing sponsorships which have been identified as problematic through Activities 1-3?**

- › Consultation - internal and external
- › Legal and contractual
- › Commercial
- › Communication



#### **BOX 12: CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT CAN ADD VALUE TO THESE CONVERSATIONS**

Boards and executives have to lead but they also need to engage. Undertaking activities similar to these with stakeholders can provide great insight and connection to help guide the organisation's next steps.

Figure 28: Consultation and engagement underpins decision making.



# SPONSORSHIP CHOICES ARE PART OF RESPONSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE PRACTICE

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Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) is an umbrella framework used to evaluate an organisation's performance, impact on communities, and sustainability based on the organisation's approach to:

1. **Environmental:** practices related to sustainability, such as carbon footprint, resource conservation, and waste management.
2. **Social:** impact on its stakeholders, including its employees, customers, and the wider community. Organisations often consider factors such as diversity and inclusion, human rights, labour practices, and community engagement.
3. **Governance:** systems and processes for effective, transparent and ethical management and decision-making.

ESG is increasingly being used to evaluate an organisation's performance and mitigate risks associated with poor environmental, social, or governance practices. Managing ESG issues is critical for organisations to maintain their reputation and credibility, attract and retain customers and investors, and comply with regulatory requirements. Sport, arts and event organisations are no exception, with increasing pressure from

both external stakeholders (for example fans, attendees, sponsors) and internal stakeholders (for example athletes, artists, employees) to act and operate responsibly.

## ESG in the sport, arts and events sectors

More sport, arts and events organisations are considering an ESG framework in their governance practice or specifically developing plans for various aspects of sustainability. For example, the Richmond Tigers have developed an environmental sustainability action plan as part of their commitment to United Nations' Sport for Climate Action Framework. There are also industry-wide entities, like Sustainable Theatres Australia, who provide a collective voice and leadership on sustainability goals within the theatre industry.

The unique attributes of the sport, arts and events sectors situate them well for addressing ESG challenges. The emotions and deep sense of connection players, spectators, audiences and supporters experience can create a sense of community and passion that is not often experienced in other industries.



## How does sponsorship fit with ESG?

Typically an ESG framework is discussed at an organisational level, i.e. what are we as an organisation doing to improve environmental sustainability or increase governance transparency. However, given the brand image transfer that occurs between sponsors and sponsored organisations, the ESG focus (or lack of) of partnering organisations should also be considered.

The challenge here for sport, art and events organisations is to decipher the difference between greenwashing, sportswashing, and artswashing, and genuine commitments and actions towards ESG targets.

Contradictory or misaligned ESG frameworks with sponsorship partners could lead to reputational damage. Sport, arts and event organisations should also be considering the values and priorities, and ESG commitments, of their other sponsors when assessing potential partnerships.

## The bottom line

Boards and executives have a responsibility to establish positive ESG frameworks and then ensure that all of the actions an organisation takes are consistent with these. At a time of growing climate crisis, continuing to receive sponsorship from fossil fuel companies which are a major driver of harmful change is likely to be considered inconsistent with good ESG practice by a wide range of stakeholders.

Having such sponsorship exposes organisations to considerable - and growing - risks. Board directors and executives will be held increasingly accountable for their management of these risks and broader stewardship of their organisations.

### Links to further reading and resources:



[Aim High, Go Fast: Why Emissions Need to Plummet this Decade](#)  
Climate Council report



[AR6 Synthesis Report - Summary for Policymakers](#)  
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change



[Climate Risk Governance Guide](#)  
Australian Institute of Company Directors

# APPENDIX

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Page 14 - Figure 13: Lang Park (Suncorp Stadium) in Brisbane submerged after intense rainfall and floods in January 2011. Floods Qld. Miles Godfrey / Australian Associated Press.

Page 15 - Figure 14: Ancient Rock art at Murujuga, the Burrup Peninsular, Western Australia. Photo credit J.McDonald, via Sydney Morning Herald.

Page 16 - Figure 15: Melting tennis ball art installation outside the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne, 2020. Photo credit: Greenpeace.

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Page 19 - Figure 17: Woodside showing its support for the Fremantle Dockers AFL team, Perth 2015. Photo Credit: Rckr88 on Flickr.

Page 20 - Figure 18: People protesting against greenwashing in cleaning suits. Photo Credit: Devon Buchanon via Flickr.

Page 21 - Figure 19: Fremantle Dockers player Andrew Brayshaw sporting the Woodside logo during a game. Photo credit: MelbourneFan2022, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

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Page 25 - Figure 21: Entrance to the Perth Festival's Pleasure Gardens, sponsored by fossil fuel giant Woodside in 2019. Photo credit: Fringe World Festival via Facebook.

Page 27 - Figure 22: Cricketers celebrating in front of cigarette advertising during the Australia V England Third Test, December 1982, Getty images.

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