

# Pathways Call for Evidence Submission

18 July – 14 August 2026

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## Disclaimer

This document is a submission to the Net Zero Commission’s 2026 Pathways Call for Evidence. As part of the consultation process, the commission has committed to publishing the submissions it receives. Submissions do not represent the views of the commission.

# SUBMISSION

NSW Net Zero Commission  
Evidence on Decarbonisation Pathways



# Introduction

Comms Declare welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Net Zero Commission's development of NSW's first decarbonisation pathways.

Comms Declare previously made a submission to the NSW Joint Standing Committee on the Net Zero Future regarding the role of fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship in delaying climate action. Since then, the evidence base has strengthened considerably. New research has demonstrated the breadth of fossil fuel industry partnerships with trusted public institutions, reinforcing the need to consider the role of commercial influence alongside technology, infrastructure and investment in achieving the State's legislated emissions reduction targets.

## Social licence is an enabling condition for decarbonisation

The Commission has been asked to identify practical pathways to achieving NSW's legislated emissions reduction targets. Those pathways will depend not only on technology, infrastructure and investment, but also on the social and political conditions that determine whether ambitious climate policies can be implemented and maintained.

The transition to net zero is often framed as a technological and economic challenge. While these elements are essential, they are not sufficient.

Governments rely on public confidence and community support to implement ambitious climate policy. Businesses rely on consumer confidence to invest in new technologies. Households make decisions about transport, energy use and electrification within an information environment that shapes their understanding of climate change and the role of fossil fuels in society.

**For this reason, social licence should be recognised as an enabling condition for decarbonisation.**

# Fossil fuel promotion maintains social licence

Comms Declare's June 2026 report, *From Cradle to Career*, documented more than 260 examples of fossil fuel companies engaging Australian children and young people aged 0-18 years through schools, museums, sporting organisations, universities and community programs. At least 75 of these programs were identified in New South Wales, representing approximately almost a third of those found across Australia.

The report found that these partnerships extended beyond financial sponsorship to include curriculum resources, teacher professional development, museum exhibitions, sporting programs, scholarships, career initiatives and community engagement activities. Importantly, the report also identified examples in which educational resources and public-facing materials contained climate misinformation or misleading representations of the role of fossil fuels in the transition to net zero. It demonstrates that these partnerships could influence not only institutional relationships, but also the information environment in which children, young people and the broader community understand climate change and, subsequently, climate action.

While many of the examples referenced in *Cradle to Career* relate to education, museums, sport and other community institutions, Comms Declare recognises that regulation of these sectors does not sit within the direct remit of the Net Zero Commission. Rather, these examples are presented as evidence of a broader issue that is directly relevant to the Commission's task: the role of fossil fuel industry social licence in enabling or constraining NSW's transition to net zero.

The research demonstrates that fossil fuel companies continue to out compete the renewable sector, maintaining trust, legitimacy and social acceptance through associations with respected community institutions. These activities contribute to an information environment in which fossil fuel companies are presented as trusted community partners, while renewables suffer from a constant stream of misinformation and decreasing community support.

# Aligning the Information Environment with Decarbonisation Goals

The Commission has identified behaviour change as an important component of NSW's decarbonisation pathways. Behaviour change, however, is unlikely to occur at the scale required if governments are simultaneously encouraging emissions reduction while the fossil fuel industry continues to strengthen its social licence through extensive advertising, sponsorship and partnerships with trusted institutions.

As *From Cradle to Career* demonstrates, these efforts begin "from cradle" - with engagement occurring from early childhood and continuing throughout people's lives. This sustained exposure helps normalise the industry's presence within communities, shaping perceptions of fossil fuels and the companies that produce them, and ultimately influencing the broader social and political environment in which decarbonisation must occur.

Evidence from public health demonstrates that commercial promotion influences social norms and public attitudes. Governments have recognised this principle through restrictions on tobacco advertising, marketing of unhealthy food to children and other forms of commercial promotion where significant public harm exists. The same principle should inform consideration of the information environment supporting the transition to net zero.

Reducing fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship will not deliver emissions reductions in isolation. However, recognising their influence will improve the realism of pathway assumptions.

Decarbonisation pathways should acknowledge that the speed and effectiveness of the transition are influenced not only by technology costs, infrastructure deployment and investment, but also by the public acceptance and political feasibility necessary to implement ambitious climate policy.

Recognising fossil fuel social licence as a factor affecting these conditions would provide a more complete understanding of the barriers and opportunities facing NSW's transition.

# Recommendations

Comms Declare recommends that the Net Zero Commission:

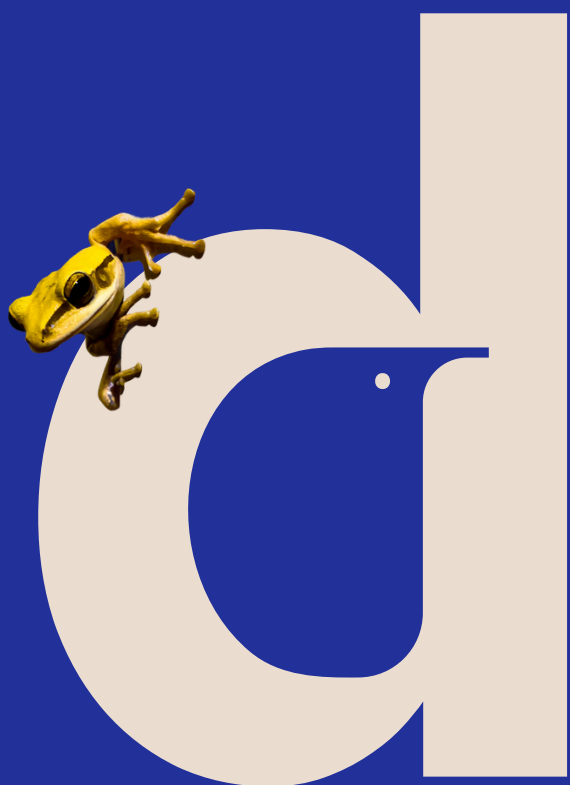
1. Recognise advertising, sponsorship and institutional partnerships as factors influencing public support for decarbonisation and the implementation of climate policy.
2. Consider the information environment, including renewables and fossil fuel social licence, as an enabling conditions within NSW's decarbonisation pathways.
3. Advise the NSW Government to prohibit fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship across government-owned assets, publicly funded institutions and government partnerships, consistent with the State's net zero objectives.
4. Support local governments seeking to reduce fossil fuel promotion through procurement, sponsorship and advertising policies as part of place-based climate action.

## Conclusion

Achieving net zero will require more than deploying new technologies or investing in infrastructure. It also requires creating the conditions in which ambitious climate policy can be implemented, supported and sustained.

The Net Zero Commission has an opportunity to recognise that fossil fuel social licence is one of those conditions. Incorporating the role of the information environment into NSW's decarbonisation pathways will result in a more comprehensive and practical framework for achieving the State's legislated emissions reduction targets.

# comms declare



## CHANGING THE INFORMATION CLIMATE

Comms Declare promotes sustainable communication, and is dedicated to shifting the narrative around climate action. We exist to reduce the social licence of climate polluters and champion those that integrate sustainability into their communications practice.

At our core is our unwavering belief in the power of communications to create cultural change and shape a safer, healthier future for each of us and our planet.

We represent dozens of communications agencies and hundreds more professionals across the influence industries in Oceania.

Comms Declare is a registered charity and member of CANA (Climate Action Network Australia).

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### AI Disclosure

This document was developed by Comms Declare and reviewed by subject matter experts. Artificial intelligence tools were used to assist with information consolidation and tone refinement to support clarity, accessibility and consistency across jurisdictions. All content has been reviewed and approved for accuracy and appropriateness.