

Fossil fuel industry using sports to greenwash public image

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Credit: Filip Mroz/Unsplash

Coal, gas and oil companies spend \$14 to \$18 million a year greenwashing their public image by sponsoring sports in Australia, a new report reveals.

"Out of bounds: Coal, gas and oil sponsorship of Australian sports," prepared by Swinburne University of Technology's Sport Innovation

Research Group for the Australian Conservation Foundation, is the first research to quantify the number and value of fossil fuel sponsorships in Australian sports.

The research has identified 51 partnerships between sports and coal, gas and oil brands.

The report finds:

- Fossil fuel sponsorships of Australian sports are worth \$14 to \$18 million a year.
- Many fossil fuel sponsorship deals include high-value naming rights agreements, meaning the sponsor's name is often displayed on team uniforms or stadiums.
- Oil and gas mining companies such as Woodside and Santos tend to sponsor AFL, rugby union and rugby league, while fossil fuel retailers such as Alinta and Origin favor partnerships with cricket, soccer and netball.

"The heavily-polluting fossil fuel industry is greenwashing its public image by exploiting people's love of Australian sports," said ACF's campaigns director Paul Sinclair.

"Sports is great for our health. Fossil fuels are not.

"This weekend, an Australian national sporting team will represent our country on the international stage wearing a jersey emblazoned with a fossil fuel company's name when the 'Santos' Wallabies play Scotland in Edinburgh.

"When we see the Santos Wallabies or Woodside Fremantle Dockers on TV it has the effect of sanitizing their role and image as big climate polluters.

"Sports should use its power to help solve the climate crisis, not accept money from big climate polluting corporations.

"No matter where coal and gas is burnt, it's damaging amazing natural places like the Great Barrier Reef and Ningaloo Reef.

"Climate change is also affecting the sports we love, especially at a grassroots level. Australians can't play sports when grounds go under water during unprecedented flooding, or when the air is filled with bushfire smoke.

"In our lifetimes we've witnessed the [tobacco industry](#) shunned from sports sponsorship because of the harm it does to people's health.

"Sports already say no to tobacco sponsorship. They should say no to the dirty money on offer from the coal, oil and gas corporations."

Professor Emma Sherry specializes in sports development and is the lead author on the report.

"We all have a lot to lose from [climate change](#)—including sports. By 2040, heatwaves in Sydney and Melbourne could reach highs of 50°C and threaten the viability of iconic sporting events such as the MCG Boxing Day Test and the Australian Open.

"Extreme heat also poses a risk to community sports and air pollution from bushfires is a danger to athletes and spectators alike.

"Sports organizations have a history of moving away from corporate sponsors with growing public awareness of their harms—as they have done around tobacco, alcohol and gambling.

"While we have seen some sports teams move away from coal, oil and

gas sponsorship, most have simply focused on climate campaigns and environmental sustainability initiatives rather than more direct actions.

"Our research found that oil, gas mining companies tend to sponsor AFL, rugby union and rugby league, while fossil [fuel](#) retailers favor partnerships with cricket, soccer and netball.

"These sponsorships amount to around \$14 to \$18 million—a number that, while not small, could be replaced with less harmful options in the coming years."

More information: Out of bounds: Coal, gas, and oil sponsorship in Australian sports. www.acf.org.au/out-of-bounds

Provided by Swinburne University of Technology

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