

The background image is a composite. The top right shows a clear blue sky with white clouds and several white wind turbines on a green, rolling hillside. In the foreground, a single incandescent lightbulb is planted in the soil, glowing with a warm yellow light. The bottom left of the image is a dark, triangular area with a fiery orange and red background, suggesting a forest fire.

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON?

Climate misinformation and obstruction
narratives in Government communications on
fossil fuel policies in Aotearoa New Zealand

About WWF-New Zealand

WWF-New Zealand is part of the WWF International Network, the world’s largest independent conservation organisation. WWF’s mission is to stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature.

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Executive summary

New Zealanders are being told that expanding fossil fuel supply is necessary to keep the lights on, lower energy costs and support jobs. This report asks a simple question: do Government communications about its fossil fuel policies give New Zealanders the full picture?

This report finds they do not. Across two major fossil fuel policies, Government communications consistently presented a more favourable case for fossil fuel expansion than the available evidence supports. Unsupported and overstated claims have been accompanied by the repeated omission of material information about lower-emissions alternatives, climate impacts, fossil fuel lock-in and New Zealand's international climate commitments.

Taken together, these unsupported claims and material omissions amount to climate misinformation.

This report examines the New Zealand Government's communications relating to the reversal of the offshore oil and gas exploration ban and the proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) import facility. We compared Ministers' public statements with official advice, independent research and other publicly available evidence to assess whether Government communications gave New Zealanders a fair and evidence-based account of these major policy decisions.

Across both case studies, a consistent pattern emerged. Government communications repeatedly framed expanded fossil fuel supply as necessary for energy security, affordability, economic growth and jobs. While these concerns are legitimate, the evidence did not fully support the claims made to justify the Government's chosen policy responses. No major claim examined across either case study was found to be fully established by the available public evidence.

The report also identified consistent omissions. Government communications gave limited attention to evidence that energy security can also be strengthened through reducing demand, improving energy efficiency, fuel switching, and renewable firming technologies. They similarly gave limited attention to the climate consequences of expanding fossil fuel infrastructure, the risk of fossil fuel lock-in, and the implications of these policies for New Zealand's international climate commitments.

This pattern closely aligns with internationally recognised climate obstruction narratives, which present fossil fuels as necessary while downplaying or omitting evidence about alternatives, climate consequences and the urgency of the clean energy transition.

The report assessed 25 Government communications against these internationally recognised climate obstruction narratives. Of those, 22 (88%) were assessed as containing high or very high levels of alignment with

climate obstruction narratives. Across both case studies, fossil fuels were consistently framed as essential to New Zealand's future, while evidence about alternatives, climate consequences and wider risks was minimised or omitted.

This paints a concerning picture. Government communications carry authority. New Zealanders should be able to rely on official information to understand the evidence, trade-offs and alternatives associated with major policy decisions.

Key recommendations

In response to these findings, this report identifies a clear need to strengthen New Zealand's approach to climate information integrity. It calls for:

- 1. an expanded role for He Pou a Rangi Climate Change Commission in ongoing monitoring and reporting on Government climate and energy communications**
- 2. New Zealand to endorse the United Nations Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change**
- 3. an independent investigation into information integrity more broadly across climate change policy communications**

Public trust and informed democratic debate depend on Government communications being accurate, evidence-based and complete. New Zealanders deserve the full picture so they can make informed decisions about the choices being made on their behalf.



Headline findings

Headline finding one:

No major Government claim on the repeal of the offshore oil and gas exploration ban and LNG import facility was fully supported by the available evidence.

Headline finding two:

Government communications on major fossil fuel policies consistently omitted material information about alternatives, climate impacts, and international commitments.

Headline finding three:

22 of 25 Government communications on the repeal of the offshore oil and gas exploration ban and LNG import facility (88%) contained high or very high alignment with climate obstruction narratives.

About this report

Energy decisions affect everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand. They impact household power bills, transport options, business costs, jobs, and regional economies. They also affect whether the country can meet its climate commitments. It is therefore essential that public information about the policy choices available has integrity, including by being evidence-based.

Research by the Classification Office has found widespread concern in Aotearoa that misinformation about climate change is a serious and urgent threat.¹ This reflects broader international focus on misinformation and disinformation. For example, the World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report 2026 ranks misinformation and disinformation as the second most severe risk over the next two years, while environmental risks dominate the longer-term outlook.²

Against that background, this report examines two significant fossil fuel policies of the current New Zealand Government: Case Study 1: Offshore oil and gas exploration; and Case Study 2: LNG import facility.

This report assesses whether Government communications provide the public with an accurate account of the evidence, alternatives and consequences of these policies, including their consistency with New Zealand’s climate commitments.

It does not assess whether Ministers intended to mislead the public. Rather, this report assesses the public narrative at face value, including whether any unsupported claims, omitted context, or climate obstruction narratives risk leaving New Zealanders without the information they need to evaluate major climate and energy policy choices.



Key findings at a glance

Climate misinformation

Across both case studies, Government communications rely on a consistent set of narratives: natural gas and imported LNG are necessary for keeping the lights on, reducing electricity price shocks, protecting jobs and supporting the economy. While the underlying concern is legitimate, many of the Government’s messages to support its policy direction, are not supported by the evidence, and all omit critical context. This report finds that, taken together, these unsupported claims and omissions amount to climate misinformation. A summary of the key findings is set out below.

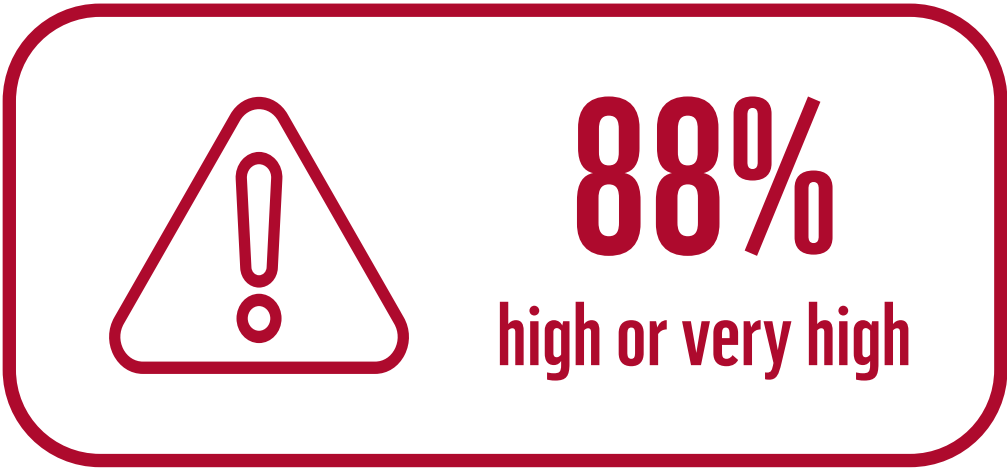
Offshore oil and gas exploration ban		
Claim	Evidence assessment	Finding
Energy security	New gas from any future discoveries is too uncertain and will be too slow to address near-term energy security risks.	NOT SUPPORTED
Energy affordability	New gas is too slow to reduce near-term power prices, and any long-term price benefit is uncertain. Electricity prices are driven by wider system factors, not domestic gas supply alone.	NOT SUPPORTED
Economic growth and jobs	The claimed economic benefits of reversing the offshore oil and gas exploration ban are overstated. Any new gas would arrive too late to relieve current pressure on gas-dependent industries.	OVERSTATED
Omission	Evidence assessment	Finding
Demand-side measures	Government communications omitted evidence that reducing demand through efficiency measures and electrification of heating systems can also improve energy security.	OMITTED
Renewable and non-gas firming alternatives	Government communications give limited attention to non-gas options for managing electricity security risks, including renewables, storage, demand response and other firming solutions.	OMITTED
Climate emissions, and fossil fuel lock-in risk	Government communications largely omit the climate implications of new gas, including lifecycle emissions, methane leakage and the risk that long-lived fossil fuel infrastructure could divert investment from lower-emissions firming options.	OMITTED
International climate commitments and legal risk	Government communications largely omitted official advice warning of risks to New Zealand’s regional diplomatic standing and legal risks relating to its international climate obligations.	OMITTED

LNG import facility		
Claim	Evidence assessment	Finding
Energy security	The need for LNG at the scale proposed is not established, and it shifts risk to global LNG markets.	OVERSTATED
Energy affordability	An import facility would have fixed costs whether used or not, imported LNG may become more expensive, and global price exposure could add volatility.	NOT SUPPORTED
Economic growth and jobs	The economic case depends on LNG being reliable, affordable, and more cost-effective than alternatives; this has not been established.	OVERSTATED
Renewables-enabling claim	LNG has not been shown to be necessary or preferable to cleaner alternatives for firming.	NOT SUPPORTED
Omission	Evidence assessment	Finding
Demand reduction, efficiency and fuel switching	Government communications give limited attention to demand-side measures that could reduce gas dependence and manage system stress.	OMITTED
Climate consequences and fossil fuel lock-in	Government messaging does not address lifecycle LNG GHG emissions, methane leakage, cleaner alternatives or fossil fuel lock-in risk.	OMITTED
International climate commitments	Government communications do not explain how LNG infrastructure fits with New Zealand's Paris Climate commitment to transition away from fossil fuels.	OMITTED

Climate obstructionism narratives

This report assessed Government communications across both case studies for alignment with climate obstruction narratives from international research: framing patterns that can delay, weaken or prevent effective climate action.

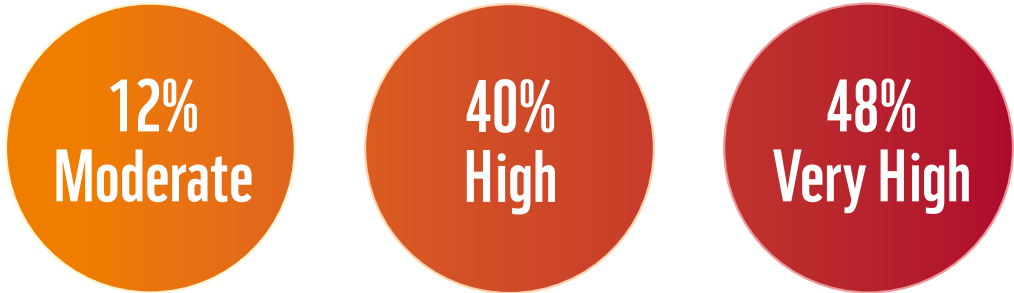
Each communication was assessed against a 12-point scale based on six narratives: three narratives that promoted fossil fuels (energy security, affordability, economic growth and jobs), and three narratives that omitted key context (alternatives to fossil fuel supply, climate impacts, and international and legal consequences). We found that 88% of the 25 separate Government communications assessed scored high or very high for climate obstruction narratives.



Most Government communications assessed scored high or very high for climate obstructionism narratives

22 of 25 communications scored high or very high on the 12-point index. The remaining communications scored moderate. None scored low or no risk.

Distribution of communications by climate obstruction-risk level



Context

This section sets out key context to assess whether Government communications gave the public an accurate and fair account of the evidence, risks, alternatives and consequences.

Natural gas in our energy system

Most natural gas in Aotearoa is used by the industrial sector, including for methanol and fertiliser production. Methanex is New Zealand's largest single gas consumer with most methanol produced in Aotearoa exported overseas. Gas is also used to generate electricity during periods of high demand and dry years, helping maintain electricity supply when hydro generation is constrained. A smaller volume of natural gas is distributed throughout the North Island and used in homes and commercial buildings for heating, hot water and cooking. Liquefied petroleum gas is used for such purposes in the South Island. New Zealand does not have LNG import or export facilities, so domestic gas demand must be met exclusively from domestic production.

Energy security and the dry-year risk

Because energy is woven through our daily life, disruptions to supply or sudden increases in prices can place pressure on households, communities and businesses. The International Energy Agency defines energy security as “the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price.”³ The Iran conflict has heightened global energy security risks by disrupting oil and LNG markets and has shown how dependence on internationally-traded fossil fuels can contribute to price volatility and supply uncertainty.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, energy security is also shaped by the way our electricity system works, including what is commonly called “dry-year risk.” In years with lower rainfall or snow-melt, hydro lakes do not refill as much, reducing the amount of electricity that can be generated from hydropower. Because hydro supplies a large share of our electricity and storage is limited, electricity prices tend to rise in these years as water becomes more valuable. Higher prices can make gas and coal-fired generation more competitive, often resulting in higher power bills.

In 2024, low hydro inflows were accompanied by higher electricity prices and increased use of coal, natural gas, and diesel generation. Assessments differ, however, on the severity of dry-year risk,⁴ with recent modelling indicating that renewable build has reduced the scale of near-term dry-year risk.⁵

Burning fossil fuels drives climate change

Fossil fuel combustion is responsible for around three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), including for industrial use, and associated methane releases from coal seams and natural gas leakages.⁶ In Aotearoa, burning fossil fuels for energy accounts for about 40% of GHG emissions with natural gas contributing around 8% of that.⁷ Keeping warming below the 1.5°C limit as agreed to by governments in the Paris Agreement requires a rapid and sustained decline in fossil fuel production and use.⁸



International commitments to transition away from fossil fuels

Much of New Zealand’s energy system relies on fossil fuels. Around 70% of total primary energy consumption comes from oil, natural gas, and coal with the remainder provided by renewable sources such as hydroelectricity, geothermal energy, wind, solar and bioenergy.⁹

Aotearoa has committed internationally to transition away from fossil fuels. In 2023, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders (including New Zealand) committed to transition away from coal, oil and gas in energy systems, in line with pathways for limiting warming to below 1.5°C.¹⁰ Later that year, as part of the outcome of the first Global Stocktake, Parties to the Paris Agreement called for accelerated action this decade to transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner, and to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that do not address energy poverty or just transitions.¹¹

Climate Change Minister Simon Watts has said that “the Government is committed to its climate change obligations, including the Paris Agreement,” and that the Paris Agreement is “our best shot at limiting the impacts of climate change.”¹² He has also said that New Zealand stands by the COP28 agreement to transition away from fossil fuels.¹³

The International Court of Justice advisory opinion on climate change has further sharpened the international legal context. The Court found that a State’s failure to take appropriate action to protect the climate system from GHG emissions, including through fossil fuel production, fossil fuel consumption, the granting of fossil fuel exploration licences, or fossil fuel subsidies may constitute an internationally wrongful act.¹⁴

New Zealand’s international trade commitments are also relevant. New Zealand has obligations within its free trade agreements to not weaken environmental protections in order to encourage trade or investment, as well as to refrain from any action or omission that materially defeats the object and purpose of the Paris Agreement.¹⁵

“The science is clear. The 1.5°C limit is only possible if we ultimately stop burning all fossil fuels. Not reduce. Not abate. Phaseout — with a clear timeframe aligned with 1.5°C.”

UN Secretary-General, December 2023 ¹⁶

Our approach

Climate misinformation

Climate misinformation is false, inaccurate or materially misleading information about climate change or climate action. It is not limited to outright false statements. Information can be accurate in isolation, but still misleading if important facts, risks or context are left out.¹⁷ In climate and energy debates, this matters because public understanding is shaped not only by what is said, but also by what is repeatedly omitted.

Climate disinformation, by contrast, is deliberately false or misleading information intended to deceive people about climate change or climate action.¹⁸ This report has not assessed climate disinformation, or whether government communications intentionally misled the public.

Rather, we are concerned with misinformation risk, including that selective or incomplete public communications may mislead people about the choices available for a clean energy transition. For each case study, the report asks three questions to assess whether government communications function as climate misinformation as set out in Table 1. The report’s technical assessment of the evidence supporting or challenging Government claims was independently reviewed by an external technical expert.

Table 1: Framework for assessing Government communications	
Question	What we assessed
What has the Government been saying?	We identified key claims from Government communications between April 2024 and June 2026
What does the evidence say?	We compared those claims against publicly available evidence
What’s the Government not saying?	We assessed whether important information or context was omitted, or selectively addressed

Climate obstructionism

Climate obstructionism refers to communication strategies, narratives or framing that delay, weaken, prevent or divert effective climate action.¹⁹ In communications about fossil fuels, this includes messages that fossil fuels remain necessary for energy security and affordability, that alternatives are not ready or realistic, or that continued fossil fuel investment is compatible with climate action.²⁰ These narratives have been assessed as misaligned with evidence in IPCC recommendations.²¹

This report assessed whether 25 Government communications across both case studies

reflected six climate obstruction narratives, adapted from international literature to the New Zealand context and set out in Table 2 (below).²² It looked at both what the Government emphasised and what it left out.

Each communication was assessed across the six narratives and assigned an overall risk level on a five-level scale, ranging from no identified obstruction risk to a strong pattern of alignment with climate obstruction narratives. This provided a transparent framework for a public-interest policy analysis. The full methodology and limitations are set out in Appendix A.

Table 2: Climate obstruction narratives

Obstruction narrative	Description
Security	Frames fossil fuels as necessary for reliable and secure energy supply
Affordability	Frames fossil fuels as necessary to keep energy prices affordable
Economic growth / jobs	Frames fossil fuels as necessary for economic growth and jobs
Alternatives to fossil fuels	Omits or minimises fossil fuel alternatives
Climate consequences	Omits or minimises climate impacts of fossil fuels
International consequences	Omits or minimises international climate commitments and the related legal and credibility risks of continued fossil fuel expansion



Role of the fossil fuel industry in climate obstruction

The fossil fuel industry has historically played a significant role in climate obstruction. Research summarised in *Climate Obstruction: A Global Assessment* shows that major oil companies, including Exxon, participated in climate research in the 1970s and 1980s documenting the likely future trajectory of climate change if fossil fuel use continued unabated.²³ Exxon later shifted from undertaking climate science to denying or distorting scientific facts, and opposing climate policies.²⁴ More recent analysis also examined how governments and politicians can contribute to climate misinformation or obstruction through official communications, policy framing and political narratives.²⁵

CASE STUDY ONE:

Reversing the offshore oil and gas exploration ban

This case study examines the Government's decision to reverse the offshore oil and gas exploration ban and establish a \$200 million public co-investment fund for gas supply.

Background

In 2018 the Labour-led Government ended the granting of new offshore oil and gas exploration permits in Aotearoa New Zealand and new onshore exploration was limited to the Taranaki region.²⁶ Existing exploration and mining permits were not affected by the ban.²⁷ The policy became commonly known as the offshore oil and gas exploration ban.

In 2025, the National-led coalition Government reversed the offshore oil and gas exploration ban. The Crown Minerals Amendment Act 2025 removed the restriction on new oil and gas exploration beyond onshore Taranaki and signalled the Government's intention to reinvigorate investment in petroleum exploration.²⁸

The Government also set aside a tagged contingency of \$200 million over four years for Crown co-investment in new gas fields through a Gas Security Fund.²⁹ The scope of the fund was later broadened to include drilling in existing fields and other investments that could incrementally increase gas supply.³⁰

What has the Government been saying?

Our analysis of Government media releases, and public comments found that the Government consistently advances three key claims to justify reversing the offshore oil and gas exploration ban and supporting new gas supply.

Energy security claim – increased domestic natural gas supply is necessary to manage energy security.

Energy affordability claim – constraints on domestic gas supply caused by the offshore oil and gas exploration ban drive higher electricity and energy prices.

Economic growth and jobs claim – continued access to domestic gas is important for supporting regional employment, energy intensive industries, and broader economic growth.

These claims are illustrated in Government statements such as:

“Kiwis are paying more for power because of the previous government’s disastrous oil and gas ban. We’re repealing that ban to unleash the energy New Zealand needs to keep the lights on and prevent power prices from skyrocketing in the years to come.”

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, July 2025³¹

“The ban sent a chilling message to the investment community, halting the very exploration that underpins our energy security and leading directly to the supply constraints and price volatility that we see today.”

Climate and Energy Minister Simon Watts, July 2025³²

“We simply cannot allow the de-industrialisation of New Zealand to continue. Our manufacturing sector, particularly in the regions, which rely on gas, are at the mercy of the market. Rising gas prices are putting increasing pressure on manufacturers and are harming the competitiveness of our businesses, risking their viability.”

Resources Minister Shane Jones, June 2025³³

The central narrative is clear: the offshore oil and gas exploration ban contributed to current energy challenges, and reversing it is part of the solution.

What does the evidence show?

Before assessing each claim, it is important to note that the Government's own policy analysis did not treat the evidence base as strong. Officials assessed the quality and certainty of evidence supporting the link between the offshore exploration ban and current supply constraints as low.³⁴ This is significant because public communications by Government Ministers have presented a much more confident causal story than the underlying evidence supports.

Energy security: not supported

Natural gas supply in Aotearoa is declining, and is likely to become increasingly constrained toward the end of this decade. Recent gas reserves data show that expected production and reserves have fallen significantly.³⁵ This decline has implications for energy security, particularly electricity supply because gas-fired generation currently provides flexibility in the electricity system, particularly during dry years and periods of peak demand.

The evidence, however, does not show that the offshore exploration ban caused the current gas supply constraints.³⁶ Government analysis and industry reporting point to a wider set of factors, including ageing gas fields,

underperforming developments, reduced global investment in fossil fuels, financing constraints, and a lack of significant new discoveries in recent decades.³⁷ Exploration activity had already been declining with limited successes well before the exploration ban was introduced.

The timing problem is also critical. Reversing the ban, even if new discoveries occur, will not enable new gas to be extracted and delivered in time to address supply constraints in the next few years. Government analysis indicates that any new field developments would take many years from discovery to production, and would be unlikely to deliver gas before the 2030s. Any new gas from exploration would therefore arrive well after the supply constraints that are forecast for later this decade.

New Zealand has also not discovered a major new gas field for decades. This makes any assumption that future exploration will materially improve energy security uncertain and speculative.

Energy affordability: not supported

Reduced natural gas supply can increase electricity prices, particularly during periods of tight supply. For example, gas and coal-fired power generation can become more important when hydro inflows are low, and their higher fuel costs can flow through into wholesale electricity prices.

The evidence does not, however, support attributing current electricity price pressures primarily to the offshore oil and gas exploration ban. Electricity prices are affected by a range of factors including hydro-lake storage conditions and run-of-river flows, variations in demand, generation availability, market structure, fuel costs, transmission constraints and investment settings.

Again, timing is important for power generation as well as industrial and domestic gas consumers. New exploration would not deliver gas for many years, if at all. Even if a

new gas resource is discovered, it would not address the immediate price pressures facing households and businesses in Aotearoa.

Economic growth: overstated

The Government argues that lifting the ban and supporting new gas supply will protect jobs, industry, and broader economic activity. It is certainly true that some industrial users rely heavily on gas, including for methanol and urea fertiliser production. Declining gas availability can affect production decisions, employment and regional economies, particularly in Taranaki.

What's also true is that any economic benefits resulting from reversing the offshore oil and gas exploration ban are uncertain. As stated, new developments would take many years to deliver gas after commercially viable discoveries are made. This means they would not address economic pressures facing gas users in the short to medium term.

What's the Government not saying?

Several important considerations are largely absent or marginalised, leading to four major omissions in statements by the Government on reversing the offshore oil and gas exploration ban.

It also shows that government communications on offshore oil and gas exploration and gas co-investment omitted key information because they paid too little attention to fuel switching, energy efficiency and managed reductions in demand.

Demand-side measures

One major omission is the potential role of increasing demand-side measures in managing energy security risk. The Gas Working Group found that reducing demand for natural gas can reduce system-wide risk.³⁸ Despite this, Government policy meant officials did not consider demand-side options in their policy analysis.³⁹ This meant that evidence about demand reduction was

structurally excluded from the policy framing that informed the Government's public narrative.

Government communications, however, tend to present declining gas supply as a problem that exclusively requires more gas supply. A fuller account would acknowledge that security of supply can also be improved by reducing gas demand, increasing efficiency, supporting fuel switching to lower emission alternatives such as biomethane or bioenergy, and managing demand during periods of system stress.

The Government's Gas Transition Loan Guarantee Scheme⁴⁰ later reinforced this omission. By supporting businesses to reduce or eliminate gas use, the Government has recognised that demand reduction is a practical response to declining supply. This undermines claims that increasing fossil fuel supply is the obvious, or only solution. It also shows that government communications on offshore exploration and gas co-investment omitted key information because they paid too little attention to fuel switching, energy efficiency and managed reductions in demand.

Renewable and non-gas firming alternatives

Government communications also give limited attention to various alternatives to increasing gas supply. Evidence indicates that expanding renewable generation, alongside non-gas electricity firming options such as using biomass, pumped hydro, geothermal, storage and demand response, can support electricity

system reliability. The OECD Economic Survey for New Zealand 2026 identifies reducing reliance on gas through non-gas firming, demand flexibility and stronger competition as an important response to energy security and affordability risks.⁴¹

Climate emissions and fossil fuel lock-in risk

The climate implications of new gas development are largely absent from Government communications. While gas produces fewer emissions than coal when combusted, it still releases significant carbon dioxide and is associated with methane leakage across the supply chain. Official advice to the Government was that reversing the offshore oil and gas exploration ban is expected to lead to a substantial increase in GHG emissions, largely from prolonged gas usage in the electricity, commercial and industrial sectors.⁴²

Further, new field developments are long-lived. Expanding fossil fuel supply risks locking in fossil fuel infrastructure, investment expectations and emissions for decades. This is particularly important because the firming role currently played by gas in electricity generation can increasingly be met by lower-emissions alternatives. The Government's public narrative does not adequately address the risk that new gas investment could delay the transition to a low-emissions energy system and thereby divert potential investment from clean alternatives.

International climate commitments and legal risk

Government communications do not acknowledge the legal and international risks of its policy choices. Official advice from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) warned that reversing the offshore oil and gas ban and promoting new petroleum exploration risks being seen as running counter to the Pacific regional and global consensus on transitioning away from fossil fuels.⁴³

MFAT also identified legal risk. Reversing the ban would likely be inconsistent with obligations in several of New Zealand's free trade agreements. Further, MFAT advised that because reversing the ban was expected to increase New Zealand's GHG emissions, it could also be perceived as New Zealand

failing to meet its Paris Climate Agreement commitments unless appropriate measures were taken to offset those additional emissions.

The Government should therefore clearly explain how its policy of expanding fossil fuel exploration fits with international climate commitments, or how it will manage the legal, diplomatic and GHG emissions risks identified in official advice.

Those risks are not abstract. Pacific representatives have criticised New Zealand's return to oil and gas exploration. For example, Tina Stege, Climate Envoy for the Marshall Islands, said in the context of New Zealand deciding to reverse the offshore oil and gas exploration ban that "[w]e would have to question if New Zealand were truly committed to the safety and security of the Marshall Islands and all our brothers and sisters in the Pacific."⁴⁴

Gas Security Fund challenged as unlawful

A report by Lawyers for Climate Action New Zealand found that the Gas Security Fund amounted to a fossil fuel subsidy, contrary to commitments in trade agreements with the UK and EU, and in the Agreement on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainability with Costa Rica, Iceland, and Switzerland.⁴⁵ Todd McClay, Minister for Trade and Investment, has denied that the New Zealand Government was breaching any of its trade agreements.⁴⁶

Climate misinformation finding

The overall finding is that none of the tested claims are fully established. Energy security and affordability claims are not substantiated, while the economic growth claim identifies real industrial pressures but overstates the benefits of reversing the offshore oil and gas exploration ban. The public narrative omits material context on demand reduction, non-gas alternatives, climate and fossil fuel lock-in risks, and New Zealand’s international climate commitments.



CASE STUDY TWO: LNG import facility

This case study assesses the Government’s claims in relation to its decision to procure an LNG import facility against publicly available evidence.

LNG is natural gas that has been cooled into liquid form so that it can be transported by specially designed ships. In February 2026 the Government announced that it would procure LNG import facility services as part of its response to dry-year risk and declining domestic gas supply.⁴⁷

The Government has described the LNG facility as a backup fuel source rather than a replacement for domestic gas. It has said LNG would be imported only when needed, such as in dry years, and that the project would proceed only if the commercial case stacks up.⁴⁸

The proposed LNG facility would create new fossil gas import infrastructure. The capital and operating costs were originally stated to be recovered through a levy on electricity consumers.⁴⁹ This decision has since been reversed and at the time of writing, how the cost of developing the LNG import facility will be met has not been publicly announced.⁵⁰

What has the Government been saying?

Government messaging on LNG advances four claims.⁵¹

Energy security claim – LNG is needed to improve energy security by providing backup fuel during dry years and domestic gas shortages.

Affordability claim – LNG will help reduce electricity price volatility and save households and businesses money.

Economic growth and jobs claim – LNG will support business confidence, regional employment and wider economic stability.

Renewables-enabling claim – LNG will support renewable investment by giving developers confidence that electricity supply can be firmed during high demand and dry years.

These claims are illustrated in Government statements such as:

“New Zealand needs the energy insurance that only LNG can provide before the next potential dry year in 2028 because, with rapidly declining natural gas, we need an alternative back up and we need it quickly.”

Simeon Brown, Minister of Energy, June 2026⁵²

“We don’t have LNG fuel sources in a dry year, and that’s why power prices have been spiking, and that’s what we’re looking to alleviate.”

Simon Watts, Minister of Climate Change, March 2026⁵³

What does the evidence show?

Energy security claim: overstated

The claim that LNG is necessary for energy security is overstated. An LNG import facility would provide an additional source of natural gas that could act as a backup fuel source during dry years or periods of domestic

gas shortage. Modelling commissioned by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment undertaken by Concept Consulting, now released in full following an Ombudsman investigation, found that the modelled need for LNG was low, with no LNG needed at all in some scenarios.⁵⁴ This suggests the Government's public framing emphasised energy-security risk more strongly than available analysis clearly supports.

LNG would also shift, rather than remove, some energy-security risks. It would make New Zealand more dependent on international gas markets, shipping, commercial contracts and geopolitical developments.

Affordability claim: not supported

The Government's claim that access to backup LNG reduces wholesale electricity prices overall by reducing the likelihood of severe shortages is not supported by the publicly available evidence. Concept Consulting's modelling found that LNG could reduce electricity wholesale prices in the most extreme dry years, but should not materially affect average electricity prices unless it increases average New Zealand gas prices, owing to lack of local gas industry competition raising gas prices towards the higher LNG prices. Their modelling did not include fixed LNG infrastructure costs or international LNG fuel-price volatility. Independent analysis has also questioned whether LNG is the best and most economic option to manage dry-year risk. The consulting company Frontier Economics warned that it would make little economic sense to build an LNG terminal only to meet dry-year risk, because large fixed costs would be spread across a small amount of output.⁵⁵ Consultant Sapere's analysis also suggested that alternative pathways may be possible at lower cost including bioenergy using forest residues, and that diesel may be more economic than LNG as a bridging fuel if renewable dry-year firming can be developed by the mid-to-late 2030s.⁵⁶ The Infrastructure Commission has also queried whether

importing LNG would lower average electricity prices,⁵⁷ and the Boston Consulting Group modelling showed imported LNG comes at a higher cost than other options to secure energy security.⁵⁸

International analysis from the OECD supports this. A recent report stated that energy affordability in New Zealand will remain difficult without breaking the link between gas and electricity prices by scaling non-gas long-duration firming, expanding demand response and strengthening competition.⁵⁹

Economic growth and jobs claim: overstated

The Government's claim that LNG will support jobs, business confidence and wider economic stability depends heavily on whether LNG can provide reliable backup fuel at a reasonable cost. This is a particular issue for gas and electricity intensive businesses exposed to declining domestic gas supply, energy-market volatility and uncertain future fuel costs. If energy constraints force firms to reduce production or close down, there can be consequences for jobs, regional economies and investment confidence.

LNG however, will only support the economy if it reduces those risks at an affordable and predictable cost. If imported LNG is expensive, volatile, or dependent on public support, it may provide backup fuel but at additional costs for consumers, businesses or taxpayers. Subsequent reporting that rising LNG prices linked to conflict in the Middle East had changed the project's economics illustrates this risk.⁶⁰

On the available evidence, the economic-growth claim is overstated: energy insecurity can harm businesses and jobs, but the Government has not established that LNG would protect them in a cost-effective way.

Renewables-enabling claim: not supported

A highly renewable electricity system does need firming and should include options to avoid power shortages, especially during dry years when hydropower is constrained. But the Government has not provided clear public evidence that importing LNG is necessary to provide that support, or that it is preferable to policies designed to accelerate non-gas firming.

The evidence points in a different direction. For example, Concept Consulting's modelling found that other options can provide a similar system-security service to LNG. These include additional gas storage and new geothermal, wind and solar generation. Sapere similarly argues that New Zealand's pathway to energy resilience does not require immediate reliance on LNG.⁶¹ It says renewables can provide dry-year support if the right investment and contracting arrangements are created, and recommends managing gas demand downwards, contracting renewables for dry-year firming, only using diesel power as a short-term bridge, accelerating industrial fuel switching, and developing firm-energy contracts. Further, public evidence identifies a credible risk that Government-backed LNG could weaken investment signals for non-gas firming, storage, demand response and electrification.⁶²

“The recent announcement of Government support for LNG importation is similarly plagued by claims that are hard to substantiate.”

*Simon Upton, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, March 2026*⁶³

What's the Government not saying?

There have been three omissions in recent statements by the Government on the LNG import facility.

Demand-side measures and fuel switching

Similar to the offshore oil and gas ban, a major omission in Government communications on LNG is the role of demand-side measures in managing gas and electricity security risks. Reducing gas demand, improving efficiency, supporting fuel switching and managing demand during periods of system stress can all reduce pressure on the energy system, but were absent from Government communications.

Climate consequences and fossil fuel lock-in

Government communications present LNG largely as an insurance policy, but give limited attention to the climate consequences of creating new fossil gas import infrastructure. LNG is a fossil fuel. Its production, transport and use generate GHG emissions, including carbon dioxide from combustion and methane from system leaks. LNG can also have lifecycle emissions associated with extraction, liquefaction, shipping and regasification.

The Government has claimed that LNG would reduce emissions compared with coal combustion for heat or power generation and could allow generators to use more hydro generation rather than holding water back for dry-year risk.⁶⁴ That may be relevant where LNG displaces coal. But the claim is incomplete if it considers only gas-versus-coal emissions, and not lifecycle emissions, methane leakage, the emissions impact of new fossil gas infrastructure, increased gas use for heat and industrial purposes or lower-emissions alternatives such as demand reduction, renewable firming, storage and fuel switching. Concept Consulting's modelling, as reported by Carbon News, estimated that

subsidised LNG would prolong gas use and increase emissions by 29.6 Mt.⁶⁵ Further, the OECD cautioned that LNG risks locking in fossil fuel dependence and should be treated only as a short-term transition tool.⁶⁶

International climate commitments

The LNG proposal raises a narrow but still important international climate issue. Unlike reopening offshore oil and gas exploration, LNG does not involve granting new exploration licences or additional production domestically. It would, however, create new fossil gas import infrastructure with a possible operating life of 15 years or more. Public communications do not explain what safeguards would prevent LNG from becoming a pathway for ongoing imported gas dependence, or how that infrastructure investment would fit with New Zealand’s commitment to transition away from fossil fuels.

Because LNG is being presented as climate-compatible backup for a highly renewable electricity system, the omission is material. UK officials sought clarity from New Zealand about the Government’s plans to invest in oil and gas infrastructure in discussions under the New Zealand–United Kingdom Free Trade

Agreement.⁶⁸ A fair public narrative would acknowledge any energy-security benefits while also explaining the climate, diplomatic and transition risks of building new fossil fuel infrastructure.

What is fossil fuel lock-in?

Fossil fuel lock-in refers to the risk that new fossil fuel infrastructure, contracts or policy settings make continued fossil fuel use harder to unwind over time. This can happen because long-lived assets create expectations for future use, attract further investment, shape markets and institutions around fossil fuels, and delay cleaner alternatives. The IPCC in its most recent Assessment Report warns that continued installation of unabated fossil fuel infrastructure will “lock-in” GHG emissions.⁶⁷



Climate misinformation finding

No tested claim was fully established. Some claims reflected real underlying pressures, but the Government’s public framing overstated what the evidence showed, particularly on timing, scale, cost and whether fossil fuel expansion was the best available response. Material context about demand reduction, non-gas alternatives, fossil fuel lock-in and New Zealand’s international commitments to transition away from fossil fuels was omitted.



Climate obstruction narrative finding

We assessed 25 Government communications across both case studies for alignment with the climate obstruction narratives outlined earlier in this report. Each communication was scored from 0 to 2 across six obstruction narrative categories, reflecting whether the relevant claim or omission was absent, limited/partial, or clearly present and important.

As set out in the methodology in Appendix A, the scores assigned across the six coding categories were added together to give each communication a total score out of 12. A score of 0 means no obstruction narrative or material omission was identified. Scores of 1–3 indicate low, 4–7 moderate, 8–10 high, and 11–12 very high, where most or all climate obstruction narratives are strongly engaged.

Table 3: Climate obstruction narrative ratings across both case studies

Climate obstruction rating	Number of coded communications	Share of coded communications
Zero	0	0%
Low	0	0%
Moderate	3	12%
High	10	40%
Very High	12	48%

Across both case studies, the Government communications assessed showed strong alignment with internationally recognised climate obstruction narratives, many of which echo documented fossil fuel industry narratives that delay climate action. Fossil fuels were repeatedly framed as necessary for energy security, affordability, economic growth and jobs, while alternatives, climate consequences, and international and related legal risks were largely omitted or minimised.



Echoes of fossil fuel industry narratives

InfluenceMap has identified recurring pro-fossil fuel narratives that frame fossil fuels as necessary for energy security and affordability, while casting renewable energy as unreliable or insufficient. Its 2025 Fossil Fuel Misinformation Tracker records claims by fossil fuel companies and industry associations that natural gas is needed to support renewable energy during periods of intermittent generation, that wind and solar increase grid instability without large-scale storage, and that natural gas underpins economic growth.⁶⁹ Similar themes appear in the New Zealand Government communications assessed in this report. Government statements have framed gas and LNG as necessary to keep the lights on, back up renewable generation when “the wind isn’t blowing, the sun isn’t shining, and the lakes are low,” and protect the economy.⁷⁰



Recommendations

Climate misinformation is increasingly recognised internationally as a governance issue that can undermine informed public debate and delay effective climate action. While this report examined only two case studies, the findings raise important questions about whether similar patterns may exist more broadly.

Responding to the growing challenge of climate misinformation will require strengthening information integrity across Aotearoa New Zealand's public institutions. WWF-New Zealand therefore recommends the following actions.

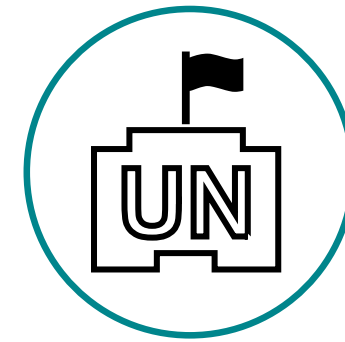


1. Strengthen the role of He Pou a Rangi Climate Change Commission in supporting information integrity on climate change.

The Government should expand the role of He Pou a Rangi Climate Change Commission (the Commission) to include ongoing monitoring and reporting on the evidence base and information integrity of Government climate and energy communications.

The Commission is already New Zealand's independent expert adviser on climate change policy. Expanding its role would provide an independent, trusted mechanism for evaluating whether public communications on these issues accurately reflect the available evidence, acknowledge uncertainty where it exists, and present New Zealanders with a fair account of the trade-offs involved in climate and energy policy decisions.

Regular public monitoring – for example through an annual climate change information integrity report – would strengthen transparency and help support informed democratic debate.



2. Commit New Zealand to the international Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change.

The New Zealand Government should sign the [United Nations' Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change](#) and publicly commit to implementing its actions.

This declaration recognises that access to accurate, evidence-based information is essential for effective climate action and democratic decision-making. It calls on governments to strengthen the integrity of climate communications and address the growing risks posed by misinformation.



3. A broader investigation into information integrity across climate change communications.

This report examined two significant fossil fuel policy decisions. While the findings reveal a consistent pattern of unsupported claims, material omissions, and alignment with climate obstruction narratives, further independent assessment is needed to determine whether this is indicative of a wider systemic issue. We recommend further research into information integrity across climate change policy communications, including a broader range of actors and policy decisions. Within existing institutions, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment may be best placed to investigate whether the patterns identified in this report are evident more broadly. Another option would be to set up a special independent inquiry similar to Australia.

An independent investigation would provide the public with more transparency and accountability of the issue, and identify ways to improve the integrity of Government communications and information.

Together, these recommendations would help strengthen public confidence in Government communications, improve information integrity, and support more informed democratic debate on one of the defining challenges facing Aotearoa New Zealand.

Conclusion

“A great divide between what humanity knows and what the present human cohort does is manifest, maintained and deepened by the ways in which information about climate change is produced and circulated through contemporary media and other channels of communication. This crisis of information integrity is intensifying and exacerbating the climate crisis.”

Information Integrity about Climate Science, A Systematic Review, 2025⁷¹

The findings of this report are concerning. Across both case studies, there is a consistent pattern of the New Zealand Government telling the public that fossil fuels are needed for energy security, affordability and economic growth and jobs, while failing to provide an equally clear account of the risks of continued reliance on fossil fuels, or of more sustainable alternatives that would not undermine New Zealand’s international climate commitments.

What makes these findings particularly significant is that when the Government speaks, through media releases and public comments, it does so from a position of authority. New Zealanders should be able to trust that Government information is evidence-based and doesn’t leave out critical context. In the two fossil fuel policies examined in this report, we found this was not the case. This risks narrowing public understanding of the choices available to address New Zealand’s energy and climate challenges, making informed democratic debate more difficult.

Climate misinformation and obstruction narratives are more commonly associated with the fossil fuel industry, which has a vested commercial interest in preserving

the status quo and protecting profits. This report finds similar patterns in Government communications, where evidence is presented selectively and material context is consistently omitted. That distinction matters because official communications carry a level of authority and public trust that fundamentally differs from industry advocacy.

The findings of this report should also be understood in a wider international context. Around the world, governments, international organisations, and researchers are increasingly recognising information integrity as a critical component of effective climate action and informed decision-making. Climate misinformation is not confined to social media or communications by vested interests. It can also arise where official communications systematically omit material evidence or context, creating a misleading overall impression.

The case studies assessed in this report may not be isolated examples in Aotearoa New Zealand. Further research is needed to assess whether this pattern is more widespread across Government communications on climate and energy policy and more broadly.

The recommendations set out in this report provide a practical pathway to improve information integrity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Expanding the role of the Climate Change Commission, committing to international principles of information integrity, and an independent investigation would help strengthen transparency, accountability and public trust – and establish whether the patterns we have identified are part of a wider systemic issue.

Governments will inevitably make contested policy choices. But New Zealanders should be able to trust that communications fairly represent the available evidence, acknowledge uncertainty where it exists, and explain the trade-offs involved. Without that foundation, meaningful public scrutiny becomes difficult and confidence in public institutions is weakened. Information integrity is fundamental to informed democratic debate, effective climate action, and public trust in the institutions that serve us all.

Climate misinformation is becoming an international governance issue

Climate misinformation is a growing focus of international attention. In 2024, UNESCO, Brazil and the United Nations launched the Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change to strengthen international collaboration on research and action.⁷² At the UNFCCC COP30 in Belém, the Initiative launched the Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change, now endorsed by a growing group of countries and the European Union, signalling growing recognition that misinformation can act as a barrier to effective climate policy.⁷³ New Zealand has not endorsed the Declaration.

Closer to home, the Australian Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy released *The Integrity Gap: Restoring Trust in the Climate and Energy Debate* in March 2026, following an inquiry that received 247 submissions and held 11 public hearings. It made 21 recommendations, including that Australia formally adopt the UN Global Principles for Information Integrity and endorse the Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change.

A separate Australian Senate Committee has also re-adopted its inquiry into greenwashing.⁷⁴ Submissions to that inquiry included the Australia Institute’s February 2026 report *Lies of Emission: The Australian Government as a Source of Climate Misinformation and Disinformation*, which argues that official communications can contribute to climate misinformation where they amplify fossil fuel industry narratives, exaggerate progress or promote false solutions.⁷⁵

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Appendix A: Methodology

This appendix explains how the report assessed whether Government communications about the removal of the offshore oil and gas exploration ban, and the LNG import facility contributed to climate misinformation or risked reinforcing climate obstruction narratives.

Step 1: What has the Government been saying?

We reviewed 25 Government communications in media releases, public statements and media comments that explained, justified or promoted Government decisions relating to offshore oil and gas exploration, and the proposed LNG import facility between April 2024 and June 2026 to identify key claims. The research drew from two categories of publicly accessible sources.

- Official Government communications:* This included ministerial speeches and media releases published on the New Zealand Beehive website. These sources were selected because they represent formal Government messaging.
- News media quotations and interviews:* Direct quotations from Ministers published in mainstream New Zealand news outlets.

Sources were identified through searches of Government releases and mainstream media reporting using terms including “oil and gas ban,” “gas supply,” “LNG,” “energy security,” “electricity prices” and relevant Ministers’ names.

Media articles were included only where they contained a substantive Government message explaining, justifying or promoting oil and gas exploration, or LNG import infrastructure. Articles were excluded where Government messaging was limited to a short quotation, passing reference, or procedural comment

that did not develop a substantive narrative and where they reported on Government statements or speeches separately coded. This avoided over-coding media coverage.

Step 2: What does the evidence say?

We compared the Government’s key claims against relevant evidence, including Government advice, independent expert analysis, climate science, energy system evidence and international climate commitments as provided in the endnotes. The report considered evidence that supported, qualified or challenged the Government’s claims.

Step 3: What’s the Government not saying?

We assessed whether key information or context was omitted from Government communications. An omission was coded as material only where the communication would likely give a materially different impression if the omitted context were included. For example, where the missing information was important for the public to understand the policy’s likely effectiveness, risks, alternatives, costs, GHG emissions, or consistency with international climate commitments, it was coded as an omission.

Step 4: Coding climate obstruction narratives

The report used six coding categories to identify claims, omissions and framing patterns associated with climate obstruction narratives across both case studies. The coding categories were informed by InfluenceMap’s work on fossil fuel obstruction narratives, wider international literature on climate obstructionism and misinformation, and the specific claims and omissions identified in the two case studies. International literature shows that climate obstruction often operates by presenting fossil fuels as necessary for

energy security, affordability and economic stability, by downplaying the feasibility of alternatives, by presenting continued fossil fuel use as compatible with climate action and by omitting material context about GHG emissions, fossil fuel lock-in risk and legal and transition consequences.

This report translated those broad obstruction patterns into six coding categories applicable to the New Zealand context and case studies: Energy Security, Energy Affordability, Economic Growth and Jobs, Alternatives to

Fossil Fuel Supply, Climate Consequences, and International and Legal Consequences as described in Table A1 (below). The first three categories capture claims that Government communications made. The final three categories capture material context that is omitted, marginalised or selectively addressed.

Table A1: Climate obstruction narratives coding		
Climate obstruction narrative	What was coded	Type
Energy Security	Natural gas or LNG presented as necessary to maintain reliable energy supply, avoid shortages, manage dry-year risk, provide backup fuel, strengthen resilience, or “keep the lights on.”	Claim
Energy Affordability	Natural gas or LNG presented as necessary to reduce prices, avoid price spikes, stabilise electricity costs, lower power bills, or protect households and businesses from higher costs.	Claim
Economic growth and jobs	Natural gas or LNG presented as necessary to protect jobs, support regional economic growth, maintain energy-intensive industries, restore investor confidence, or protect wider economic stability.	Claim
Alternatives to fossil fuel supply	No or limited attention to credible alternatives to increased fossil fuel supply, including demand reduction, fuel switching, energy efficiency, renewable generation, storage, demand response, non-gas firming, industrial transition support, or managed reductions in gas use.	Omission
Climate consequences	No or limited attention to emissions and climate consequences, including methane, lifecycle emissions, fossil fuel lock-in, or the risk of delaying climate action.	Omission
International consequences	No or limited attention to international climate commitments, trade obligations, international legal risks, climate credibility, or New Zealand’s commitment to transition away from fossil fuels.	Omission

For media articles, the unit of analysis was the Government message within the article, not the article as a whole. Each Government communication was assessed against the six coding categories using the scale in Table A2. Omission based categories were only coded a 1 or 2 where the missing context was materially relevant to the claim being made, not simply because a communication failed to mention every possible issue. For example, climate consequences were coded as “misleadingly addressed” where communications presented gas or LNG as avoiding coal use, but did not explain credible lower-emissions alternatives such as demand reduction, fuel switching, renewable generation, storage, non-gas firming or other transition measures. The coding framework was developed collaboratively by the research team and refined following an initial test application. It was then applied to the communications by a separate reviewer. The final ratings involved qualitative judgement.

Table A2: Coding scale for climate obstruction narratives		
Score	Claim categories	Omission categories
0	Claim not present	Issue not omitted, addressed, or not materially relevant
1	Claim present, but limited or secondary	Issue partly addressed, but in a limited, incomplete, selective or secondary way
2	Claim clearly present and important	Issue omitted or misleadingly addressed despite being materially relevant

The scores assigned across the six coding categories were added together to give each communication a total score out of 12. The total score was then used to determine its climate obstruction risk level, as shown in Table A3. The scoring scale and risk levels were developed for this report as a transparent means of assessing the selected communications.

Table A3: Climate obstruction risk scale		
Score	Assessment	Level
0	No obstruction narrative or material omission	No obstruction risk
1-3	Limited or secondary use of obstruction narratives	Low
4-7	Several narratives or omissions present, but not across most categories	Moderate
8-10	Multiple fossil fuel obstruction narratives and material omissions present	High
11-12	Most or all narratives are strongly engaged, indicating a pattern of fossil fuel obstruction framing	Very High

Limitations

This report has applied a structured and transparent framework to assess 25 publicly available Government communications relating to two specific fossil fuel policies. The methodology provides a consistent way to compare the communications using qualitative judgement across the two case studies. This report is a public-interest policy analysis rather than an academic study. The findings should therefore not be generalised beyond the communications and case studies assessed.

The report’s technical assessment of the evidence supporting or challenging Government claims was independently reviewed by an external technical expert. The analysis was limited to information that was publicly available at the time of writing.

The analysis assesses the content and overall framing of the communications. Assessing whether members of the public were in fact misled by Government communications was outside the scope of the analysis. Nor does the analysis assess the intent of Ministers.

