

## Care with Sustainability Claims

### There would appear to be two primary reasons for businesses to pursue more sustainable business practices:

- A genuine desire to operate in a more sustainable manner for the sake of the environment, and
- To obtain a commercial advantage by publicising the use of more sustainable business practices.

Both of these are valid reasons to do so, and in many cases can be jointly held objectives - they are not mutually exclusive.

Should you wish to publicise your sustainable practices and products, it is important to think carefully about what you claim.

The following tips may be of assistance:

### Ensure your claims are truthful

Or put simply, *don't lie*.

If you claim your processes or products are 'certified' in some way, ensure that they are actually certified, and only by a recognised authority.

If you choose to make false claims, you may be proven wrong and in some cases even prosecuted by the ACCC.

### Make sure you can support your claims

Don't make claims in your promotional activity that you can't substantiate if asked to.

As mentioned above, third party certification bodies are excellent proof of your claims. If you have other supporting documents or evidence, consider displaying it on your website and directing any enquiries there.

### Don't be vague

It isn't acceptable to use vague (although commonly used) terms to describe your processes or products.

Commonly used phrases such as *Environmentally Friendly, Eco-anything, non-toxic* are actually quite vague and virtually meaningless. The use of such terms may undermine the real value of what you are telling your customers.

If you have a claim to make, ensure it accurately and fully describes the benefits offered. For example '*... uses 50% less energy...*' rather than '*...low energy...*'

### Make sure it's relevant

There is little point in claiming a product or process has some sustainability benefit, when all similar products have the same benefit anyway.

It is pointless to claim that a POP display is 'CFC Free' when they all are.

### Don't conceal a hidden trade-off

Whilst you may be able to legitimately claim environmental benefits from a particular process or product, be careful not to conceal that there may be other detriments as well.

It may be true that a particular product is made entirely from recycled material (which would be beneficial to publicise) but the process of manufacturing it from 100% recycled material may consume 5 times as much energy as manufacturing it from virgin material.

Be careful not to assume one benefit outweighs another environmental disadvantage.

Similarly, be careful not to claim that your version of a process or product that is intrinsically bad for the environment is a 'greener' or 'cleaner' alternative (perhaps *Organic Cigarettes*?).

It could well be preferable to dispense with the product or process entirely.

