



Climate Responsibility Approach

Communicating transparently



Mainstreaming climate contributions

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Transparency is a key element of the Climate Responsibility Approach. Communicating your organisation's approach, actions, achievements and challenges transparently is crucial for mutual learning. It helps internal and external stakeholders keep track of your organisation's progress, make informed decisions, and learn from shared good practices. The quality, accuracy and transparency of your communication will be key to guarantee the integrity of your contribution.

Share all data and information related to your approach

Your organisation should ensure that all information about every step of its Climate Responsibility Approach is publicly available. Stakeholders, analysts, watchdogs or peers might challenge your organisation or simply ask for evidence or feedback. You should make sure that your organisation is prepared to respond to inquiries and provide all necessary information.

Transparency does not necessarily equate to marketing communication. Organisations should first consider the risks and opportunities before trying to benefit from their climate-related actions. Poorly designed or weakly substantiated communication may damage your organisation's credibility.

Describe your actions, achievements and challenges in detail

Global net zero

Global net zero refers to the state where, at planetary level, the total amount of greenhouse gas emitted into the atmosphere every year equals the amount absorbed by carbon sinks. Not to be confused with corporate net zero.

Climate claim

A statement, communication or representation that implies or suggests how the organisation (or one of its products, services or brands) is addressing its climate impact. See also net zero claim.

We recommend that your organisation frames its Climate Responsibility Approach as part of the *global net zero effort* – not as an individual organisational success. Achieving global net zero is only physically possible at planetary scale and politically meaningful at national or regional levels.

Specific evidence-based communication presented with context is more credible and less likely to mislead consumers, investors and regulators than short, single message headline *claims*. Therefore, your organisation should communicate through in-depth formats (e.g. written reports, project videos, case studies) rather than brief ones (e.g. voluntary labels or QR codes on packaging).

Communications should be substantiated by evidence. Your communication can showcase progress in reducing emissions ([Step 1](#) and [Step 2](#)), the level of the carbon fee and the share of emissions covered ([Step 3](#)) – all as signals of your organisation's ambition. It can also highlight the outcomes resulting from the projects supported by your climate contributions ([Step 4](#)). This will create trust and confidence in your strategy.

Conversely, your organisation must also clearly communicate the reasons that led it to compromise or reduce the ambition of its approach. For instance, if your organisation chose to apply a low carbon fee, to cover only parts of its ongoing emissions by the carbon fee, or if the supported project failed to deliver outcomes.

Dos and Don'ts of contribution claims

Making contribution claims are optional and cannot replace internal decarbonisation efforts. Before making a contribution claim, your organisation should ensure that it has completed all the necessary steps to reduce its emissions in the entire value chain. In addition, a contribution claim should be supported by a strong public reporting to be credible.

Headline claims oversimplify the message by reducing it to an overly brief framing that contradicts transparency requirements. In most cases, positive impacts cannot offset the negative ones. Therefore, claims such as “carbon-” or “climate neutral”, or “net-zero” emissions, specifically, are unclear and misleading, favouring greenwashing and delaying real climate action. Similarly, “eco-friendly” or “planet friendly” claims are meaningless as they do not rely on verifiable facts.

If your organisation chooses to make a claim regardless, it must adhere to a set of safeguards. The following safeguards reflect the guidelines developed by multiple organisations to prevent greenwashing and guarantee honest, complete and transparent environmental claims ([Federal Trade Commissions, n.d.](#); [OECD, 2011](#); [The European Consumer Organisation, 2020](#); [Competition & Market Authority, 2021](#); [ISO Standard, 2011](#); [Gold Standard, 2022](#)):

- * **Clear and understandable:** The claim should be presented in clear and understandable language that consumers can easily comprehend. Technical jargon or vague language can create confusion and reduce the credibility of the claim.
- * **Specific:** The claim should be specific and quantifiable, such as the percentage of reduction in greenhouse gas emissions or the amount of renewable energy used. Specificity makes the claim more credible and allows consumers to make informed decisions to compare different options.
- * **Evidence-based:** The claim should be supported by robust and verifiable evidence – primarily with data, and optionally through independent audits or certifications. Companies should provide evidence to back up their claims and be transparent about their methods of measurement, including potential limitations.
- * **Up to date:** The claim should reflect the most current information and best practices. As scientific knowledge and environmental standards evolve, companies should update their claims accordingly and remove historic claims.
- * **Contextualised and complete:** The claim should be placed in the context of the company's full value chain climate impact and associated strategy. Claims should not rely on partial information or hide details that could alter the interpretation of the messaging.
- * **Relevant:** The claim should be relevant to the company, product or service marketed. Claims that are not relevant or are only tangentially related to the product or service may be seen as “greenwashing” and undermine the credibility of the company.

Q&A: How do contribution claims differ from net zero claims?

Claiming ownership of a mitigation outcome effectively privatises the benefits of climate action, framing it as an individual achievement rather than a collective effort.

This is precisely what net zero claims do – organisations can claim ownership of mitigation outcomes achieved by others, for example, through the purchase and retirement of carbon credits. Besides, they frame net zero as an achievement, giving the impression that this status can be reached and maintained at individual level over time.

In contrast, making a contributing claim equates to socialising the benefits of a private action to offer it as an individual contribution to a collective effort.

A contribution claim acknowledges that carbon neutrality is only physically achievable at planetary, systemic level. Therefore, it can only be reached by global, collective efforts. With a contribution claim, the organisation asserts that it took responsibility to reduce the emissions generated by its activities (individual responsibility) and to further contribute to global efforts towards carbon neutrality (collective responsibility). The results of the actions covered by the claim are not counted towards the organisation's emissions accounting, but towards the host country's NDC.

Beyond their conceptual differences, both types of claims oversimplify their message and carry the risks to mislead the public. Therefore, we do not recommend organisations to use any forms of claims, but rather to communicate extensively about their approach.

The Climate Contribution Hub is set up by NewClimate Institute with initial support from the Allianz Foundation. This website aims at providing step-by-step guidance to help businesses and civil society organisations (e.g. NGOs, foundations, trade-unions) measuring and reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and setting up a climate contribution to take responsibility for their ongoing emissions.

www.climateresponsibility.org

