



Background Information on Greenwashing of Aviation

Greenwashing is the corporate practice of making diverting sustainability claims to cover up a questionable environmental record.

- **Famous examples** of greenwashing include **Exxon** promoting its “[advanced algae](#)” project to the public using Twitter ads, while promising investors massive increases in oil production.
- In December 2019, ClientEarth lawyers lodged a complaint alleging **BP**’s global ‘Keep Advancing’ and ‘Possibilities Everywhere’ ad campaigns [misled the public](#) by focusing on BP’s low carbon energy products, when more than 96% of BP’s annual spend is on oil and gas.
- In the US, since 2017, five states and more than a dozen municipalities [have sued fossil fuel companies](#) over their contribution to — and alleged deception about — the dangers of global heating.

As well as oil companies and tobacco companies, airlines have also been found to make misleading claims to the public about the damage caused by their business:

- **Ryanair** had an advert [banned last year](#) in the UK for claiming it was the UK’s lowest-emissions airline.
- **Dutch airline KLM** has been [ordered to change advertisements](#) that misleadingly imply up to a 50% usage of “Sustainable Aviation Fuel”, when in reality biofuel only accounted for 0.18% of the airline’s fuel use in 2019.
- An advert by **Qatar Airways** at the UEFA Euros 2020 football tournament suggesting without any evidence that it could help passengers “[Fly Greener](#)”, prompted calls for the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) to crack down on greenwashing, including at major sporting events.
- More and more **airports**, especially those pushing forward with plans for expansion, present themselves as ‘carbon-neutral’ (mostly via the [Airport Carbon Accreditation](#)). However, this ‘carbon-neutrality’ only addresses ground operations (often via offsetting). This involves addressing the 5% or so of emissions produced by ground operations, e.g. electrifying on-site ground vehicles and offsetting emissions, but does not address the 95% which result from flying aircraft. For example, Heathrow is the largest single source of CO2 emissions in the UK, and stating that it is carbon neutral is therefore extremely misleading. [Bristol Airport’s](#) carbon neutral claims have been described as misleading by local councillors.

Scientific studies prove Greenwashing

- A [new 2021 scientific study](#) came to the conclusion that over **44% of airlines' green claims mislead consumers**. They investigated the communication of 37 airlines on carbon offsetting.
- The reasons for the current hype of the aviation industry's 'green' plans are not any step-changes in technology, but rather the rising pressure from civil society for climate action, especially after the Covid-induced pause of aviation and the massive public bailouts. Research suggests that this builds on a long history of greenwashing:
- A [scientific paper from 2016](#) traced back aircraft technology focused discourses over 20 years (1994–2013) and found that most of the 'solutions' that had been presented constituted **technology myths**. "Myth' defined as an idea, story or narrative believed by many people, including decision makers, even though unfounded or false."

The new [Stay Grounded fact sheets](#) analyze the currently discussed technologies and find that while their development may be helpful, they will come too late and cannot be an excuse to delay emissions reductions now.

- **Aircraft efficiency** is improving, but in a poorly regulated industry, it facilitates cuts in fuel costs and therefore market and emissions growth. A kerosene tax could actually incentivize more efficiency, which is backed by historic examples of the OPEC oil crisis.
- **Electric aircraft** likely to be certified this decade will be very small and we won't see larger aircraft before 2050. They could substitute short haul flights, which should however mostly be shifted to more efficient ground transport (train, bus).
- **Hydrogen flights** exist only on paper so far and will not be viable for medium and long-haul flights before 2050. They will not have zero emissions, because they still emit non-CO2 climate impacts.
- **Biofuels** are a false solution: Aviation does not rule out the use of first generation biofuels from crops, which are proven to cause serious environmental and social impacts. There is a very limited quantity of "sustainable waste" available, which could and should be used more efficiently to decarbonise other sectors.
- **Synthetic E-Fuels** are a demonstrated technology, but are an inefficient way to use electricity, and would require huge quantities of renewable energy, depriving other sectors needing to decarbonise. It is only viable if the number of flights reduces.

While calling on advertising regulators to crack down on the aviation industry's false and misleading claims about its climate impact and technological solutions, **the Stay Grounded anti-greenwashing campaign** is demanding that governments stop falling for these false and misleading claims, stop promoting them, and stop basing policy decisions on them.

<https://stay-grounded.org/stop-greenwashing>