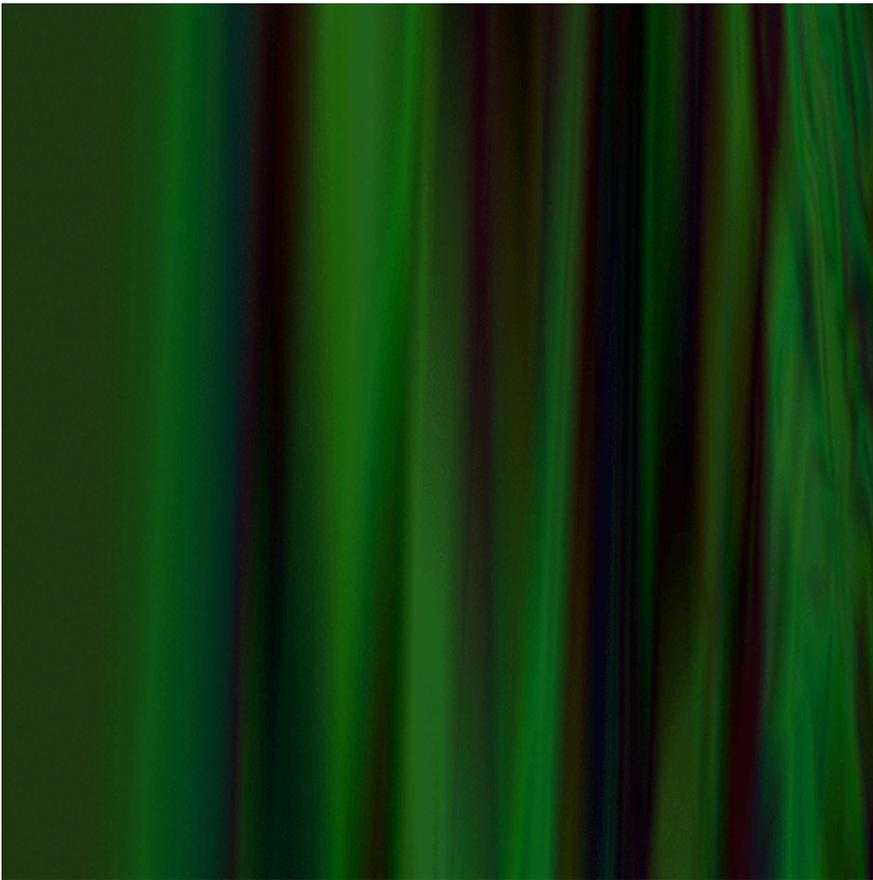


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Tougher laws needed to combat greenwashing

Law reform and tougher legal sanctions are needed urgently to stop greenwashing, according to leading intellectual property expert Dr Matthew Rimmer, from the Australian National University (ANU).



Credit: [Prairiekittin](#)

'Greenwashing is corporate spin which involves making misleading or deceptive claims that a company's products or services are environmentally sustainable or friendly,' explains Dr Rimmer.

He points out that in a market increasingly concerned about the environment and climate change, greenwashing puts consumers at a disadvantage and gives some businesses an unfair advantage.

'In regards to advertising law, the Australian Advertising Standards Bureau has developed a green code, but it has not effectively enforced this code . . . By comparison, the United Kingdom Advertising Standards Authority has been much more vigilant about greenwashing.'

Marketing practices used in greenwashing include:

astroturfing – marketing designed to give the appearance of a 'grassroots' movement in support of a particular product, service or

business (for example, through multiple supportive Facebook postings)

fraudulent claims regarding the carbon emissions status of products or services.

According to Dr Rimmer, specific offences should be developed to discourage these practices, and a tougher approach should be taken towards:

trademarks espousing the so-called green credentials of companies

the assigning of domain names ending with dot eco.

Dr Rimmer adds that the issue also raises concerns for freedom of speech, arguing that companies should not be able to use intellectual property law to stifle political speech and artistic expression.

'There needs to be greater protection for environmental campaigns and spoofs – such as Greenpeace's protest with the characters of Ken and Barbie against Mattel's packaging; the Twitter spoof account @BPGlobalPR; and The Yes Men's protest against the United States Chamber of Commerce.'

Source: Australian National University

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