

New  
Weather  
Institute



**badvertising**

Adfree  
Cities

7th June 2023

Dear Roula Khalaf, Editor, the Financial Times, Chief Commercial Officer Jon Slade and Global Advertising Director Laura Milsted,

**Public letter Re: Misleading high-carbon advertising in the *Financial Times*.**

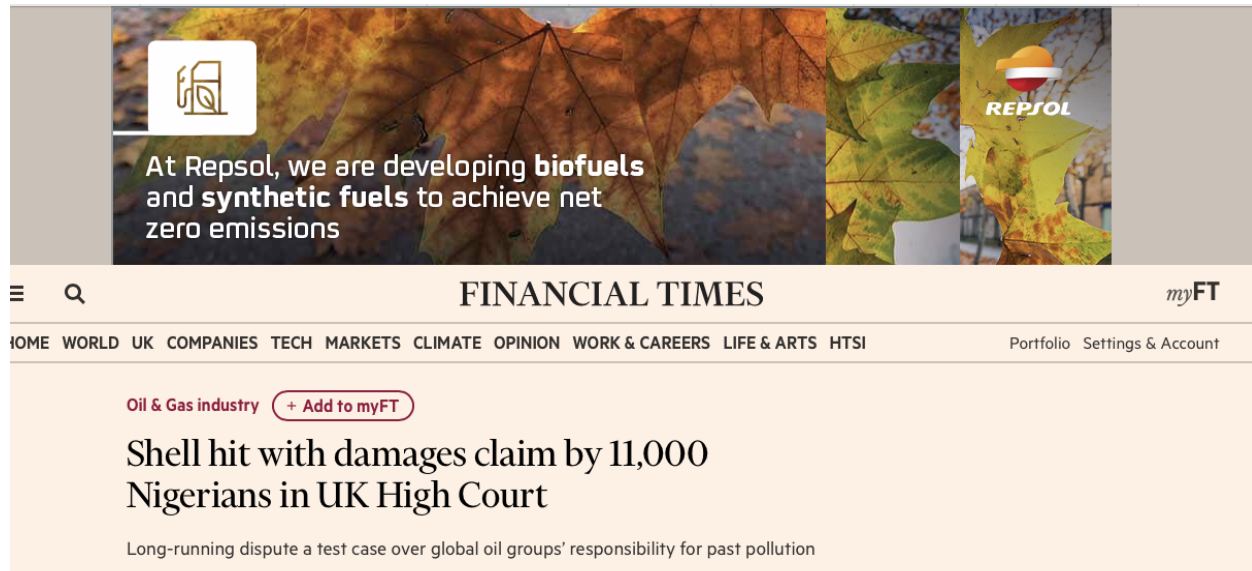
We are writing following a [ruling](#) by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), which has today banned an advert for oil company Repsol, seen in the *Financial Times*, for making misleading environmental claims.

After seeing the Repsol advert on the FT's online news site in January 2023, we wrote an [Open Letter](#) to your paper asking for the advert to be removed, given its misleading nature and insensitive placement alongside an article about citizens impacted by environmental damage inflicted by another major oil company, Shell, in the Niger Delta.

We further urged you to introduce a policy to end advertising for fossil fuel companies, and others whose activities are particularly carbon-intensive, to align the paper's corporate strategy with its sustainability commitments and editorial stance regarding climate breakdown.

The regulator's action to ban Repsol's advert has confirmed our judgement that the ad misled through promoting solely Repsol's production of alternative fuels, which, as detailed in the ASA's ruling, is "*a fraction of their [Repsol's] business activities when compared to their substantial, ongoing, and expanding fossil fuel production*". This action will protect readers from further exposure to the misleading green claims made in this ad. However, the four-month's wait in the ASA's ruling since the

complaint was first made should raise serious concerns as to the limitations of the body to act as an effective regulator. Furthermore, the harms caused by advertising for fossil fuel companies and other high-carbon goods and services extend far beyond one advert.



Caption: "Renewable fuels" Repsol advert seen in the FT in October 2022 and February 2023.

High-carbon advertising, such as that for air travel, polluting SUVs, climate-damaging foods and fossil fuel companies drives demand for products and services which must be significantly reduced in the short term, and ultimately phased out, to reach climate goals,<sup>1</sup> and to reduce the public health harms caused by localised air pollution<sup>2,3</sup> and the health and other impacts of global heating.<sup>4</sup> As demonstrated by this ruling, high-carbon advertising also risks misleading citizens about the environmental performance of companies and harmful properties of products, therefore undermining climate action, and delaying the shift in

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[https://www.badverts.org/s/Advertising-and-demand-for-SUVs\\_Kasser-et-alBadvertising-2021.pdf](https://www.badverts.org/s/Advertising-and-demand-for-SUVs_Kasser-et-alBadvertising-2021.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officers-annual-report-2022-air-pollution>

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/air-pollution-applying-all-our-health/air-pollution-applying-all-our-health>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

understanding and social attitudes required to transition to cleaner energy and lower-carbon lifestyles.

**We are reiterating our request: that the FT stops promoting high-carbon products and services by allowing its platform to be used for their advertising.** We believe this is causing irreparable harm to the climate and communities throughout the world, and that these activities undermine the paper's sustainability commitments and climate journalism. Outlets including the Guardian, Dagens Nhyeter and Vox Media have already taken this step.

We recommend that, as a starting point, the paper immediately ends adverts by fossil fuel companies, an industry that keeps growing (96% of the oil and gas industry have expansion plans) against repeated warnings from the UN Secretary General, the IPCC and the International Energy Agency that no new oil and gas licences should be permitted if we are to reach net zero by 2050.<sup>5 6</sup> The sector's social licence to operate and expansion plans are strongly facilitated by advertising, PR and lobbying strategies.<sup>7,8,9</sup> Adverts that promote particularly carbon-intense lifestyles by a small, wealthy sector of society with both the largest carbon footprint<sup>10</sup> and the greatest responsibility to cut emissions, such as adverts for private jets, should be ended with similar immediacy. Given the role of big banks, pensions funds and insurers in supporting the expansion of fossil fuel industries,<sup>11</sup> advertising by the financial sector also deserves intense scrutiny and action.

As reported by the paper, the climate emergency is accelerating<sup>12</sup> and the impacts of global heating are being felt most strongly in communities that have contributed

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<https://www.urgewald.org/en/medien/ngos-release-2022-global-oil-gas-exit-list-industry-willing-sacrifice-livable-planet>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.carbonbrief.org/new-fossil-fuels-incompatible-with-1-5c-goal-comprehensive-analysis-finds/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://influencemap.org/landing/-a794566767a94a5d71052b63a05e825f-20189>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-netherlands-stateless/2021/10/3b500e9b-word-s-vs-actions-the-truth-behind-fossil-fuel-advertising.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.clientearth.org/projects/the-greenwashing-files/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/47db95b4-ce9f-42c7-8b37-86483c85267a>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bankingonclimatechaos.org>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/a9901b6a-e8eb-414b-99c5-455618cc968b>

the least to global emissions,<sup>13</sup> while wealthy nations fail to act.<sup>14,15</sup> In the FT Editorial Board's own words, "*The climate crisis will be solved only by massive collective action*".<sup>16</sup> This is one such action that the FT can and must take to play its part in protecting future generations.

We appreciate your time to consider this issue and look forward to hearing what course of action you intend to take in light of these points.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Veronica Wignall, Adfree Cities; Emilie Tricarico, Badvertising campaign and Andrew Simms, New Weather Institute



Caption: Private jet advert in the FT's *How to Spend It*, May 2023.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/b5a90d16-c053-4e24-b831-49e8cd59b2dd>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/47db95b4-ce9f-42c7-8b37-86483c85267a>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/841d03c3-99b7-4688-b975-dc92d10e7cdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/ab9df2e5-4869-4e7e-8ce0-4bd9d9f27a62>