Overview

This briefing contains an overview of the corporate lobbying detected by InfluenceMap related to fossil fuels for the month of July 2023.

- **In the United States:** InfluenceMap’s analysis reveals active involvement from the American Gas Association, advocating for measures to proactively counter any potential federal restrictions on the usage of fossil gas appliances. Meanwhile, the American Petroleum Institute has shown support for ‘anti-ESG’ regulations.

- **In Australia:** There was significant opposition from Australian fossil fuel and cross sector groups to Victoria’s announcement that it intends to phase out gas connections in new houses from January 2024.
American Gas Association and member utilities advocate for federal gas ban preemption

Between March and July 2023, the American Gas Association (AGA) and gas utilities have been strongly advocating for measures to preempt any federal-level regulatory attempt to phase out fossil gas stoves. InfluenceMap’s analysis shows that, following December 2022 statements by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) suggesting that the agency may pursue gas stove regulations, AGA has been spearheading efforts to pass legislation that would prevent agencies from banning the use of fossil gas in the building sector. Such measures include the proposed Save Our Gas Stoves Act, which would prohibit the Department of Energy from enforcing energy conservation standards based on fuel type, as well as the Gas Stove Protection and Freedom Act, which would block the CPSC from using federal funds to limit the sale or use of gas stoves. Both bills received enough bipartisan support to pass in the House in June.

- As reported by the Financial Times on July 6th, a few gas utilities emphasized their support for gas ban preemption, with CMS Energy Corp subsidiary Consumers Energy stating support for the Save Our Gas Stoves Act and CenterPoint Energy highlighting the importance of “customer fuel choice.” CenterPoint had previously advocated in March 2021 for Texas’ gas ban preemption bill, House Bill 17, which was successfully passed into law.

- AGA CEO Karen Harbert supported House passage of the Save Our Gas Stoves Act in June, advocating for its passage in the Senate and referencing the gas ban preemption laws currently in place in 24 states across the US. Earlier, in March 2023, Harbert had published several press releases on similar legislation, including support for the Gas Stove Protection and Freedom Act, support for the Natural Gas Appliances Act, and support for the gas ban preemption amendments in the Lower Energy Costs Act.

- According to Q2 federal lobbying reports, which were published in July, utilities WEC Energy Group and Xcel Energy directly engaged on both the Save Our Gas Stoves Act and the Gas Stove Protection and Freedom Act, with Southern Company disclosing lobbying on gas stove issues. All three utilities have demonstrated opposition to building electrification in the states where they operate: WEC Energy Group advocated for gas ban preemption legislation in Wisconsin in March 2022; Xcel reportedly co-launched the anti-electrification group Coloradans for Energy Access in Colorado in February 2022; and Southern Company subsidiary Georgia Power advocated in February 2021 for Georgia’s gas ban preemption bill, House Bill 150, which later became law in May 2021.
American Petroleum Institute Supports House “Anti-ESG” Legislation

In a 23rd June press release from Congressman Andy Barr, the American Petroleum Institute (API) endorsed the “Ensuring Sound Guidance (ESG) Act,” a bill that seeks to “protect retail investors’ retirement and investment accounts from asset managers who put environmental and social goals ahead of returns.” This bill was introduced as part of the House Financial Services Committee Republican’s “ESG Month,” which saw a series of hearings take place throughout July in a continuation of the “anti-ESG” movement that started in 2021 in Texas and West Virginia and has expanded across the country and into the federal policymaking sphere. Previous InfluenceMap research has shown how this movement was sparked and supported by the fossil fuel industry, a trend that appears to be continuing with API’s support of the ESG Act. Additionally, research from the Congressional Integrity Project shows that Republicans on the House Financial Services Committee received almost $200,000 in contributions from the oil and gas/fossil fuel industry in the three months leading up to “ESG Month.”

Australia

Fossil fuel and cross sector groups voice opposition to Victoria’s government’s decision to phase out gas connections in new homes

On the 28th July, the government of Victoria announced a phase out of gas connections with new homes in the state from January 2024, that will be connected to electricity networks only. The decision follows Victoria’s Gas Substitution Roadmap, released last year, that aims to help the state half its emissions by 2030. The roadmap originally removed the requirement for new homes to be connected to gas networks, but has now gone one step further and now aims to phase out gas connections entirely. News of the phase out was met with significant opposition from the fossil fuel sector:

- The Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association (APPEA) CEO Samantha McCulloch stated in a press release that the phase out ‘ignores the fundamentals of the energy system transformation’, adding that the focus should be on bringing on new gas supply, suggesting that this would reduce energy prices. The Australian Pipelines and Gas Association (APGA) stated that it was ‘disappointed’ by the decision to phase out gas connections, with CEO Steve Davis also stressing costs to consumers as a result. Energy Networks Australia stated that it ‘acknowledged’ the phase out, but stated the decision was ‘premature in the absence of a thorough and transparent process’. APA Group Steve Watson was reported by The Australian to have also appeared to not support the phase out,
stating that ‘gas will be needed for decades’ and that ‘we don’t want to keep coal in the system because we aren’t prepared to bring gas to market, especially when it is reliable and affordable’.

- Cross sector association the **Business Council of Australia** also came out against the phase out. In a 28th July LinkedIn post, the association stated that the decision puts Australia’s net-zero by 2050 commitment at risk, adding that natural gas will have a critical role to play and that any energy market policy should be ‘technology-agnostic. The **Ai Group appeared to give a mixed response**, with CEO Innes Willox stating that the decision was a ‘turning point for our energy systems’ but appeared to stress the need to maintain adequate gas supplies.

- The **Clean Energy Council** came out to support Victoria’s decision, stating in a press release that it was clear that ‘electrification was the best decarbonisation strategy for households’, adding that it’s a cheaper option for consumers compared to fossil gas.