

THE SA F-LIST 2023

# Fuelling A Perfect Storm:

**41 ADVERTISING & PR  
COMPANIES WORKING FOR  
THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A REPORT BY:

**Clean Creatives**  
SOUTH AFRICA

A CAMPAIGN OF:



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# THE GROWING MOVEMENT FOR CLEAN CREATIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Clean Creatives South Africa is the local chapter of a global movement of creatives, agencies and their clients coming together to tackle the climate crisis. The central pillar of the movement is the **Clean Creatives pledge**, which is a commitment to decline work with fossil fuel companies or agencies that retain fossil fuel clients.

The pledge has attracted more than [700 agencies](#) and a further 1,900+ individual creatives globally. With over 1,000 employees across more than 50 markets, Allison PR is

currently the [largest agency](#) to have signed the pledge. In South Africa, 35 agencies and more than 140 creatives have taken the pledge.

Clean Creatives SA has hosted industry events and educational talks at agencies, universities and advertising schools across the country.

The pledge has [received support](#) from many South African civil society and environmental justice organisations, including Just Share, the Centre For Environmental Rights, and the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation.



Emma King, founder and owner of The Friday Street Club PR agency, speaks about her decision to sign the Clean Creatives pledge at an event in Cape Town, South Africa.

# THE CLEAN CREATIVES PLEDGE BUILDS BETTER AGENCIES AND A SAFER PLANET

The Earth's climate is warming due to an accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which trap additional heat energy from the sun. The primary source of these gases is pollution created by **burning fossil fuels**. This makes extreme weather events like the drought and storms in Cape Town and the floods in Kwa-Zulu Natal more dangerous and frequent.

A warming planet also causes sea level rise and threatens our food security, health and the ecosystems on which we depend for survival. Burning coal, oil and gas accounts for [over 75%](#) of greenhouse gas emissions, not to mention [millions of deaths](#) annually.

Despite knowing their product is endangering all of humanity, fossil fuel companies have spent decades deceiving the public by sowing doubt about climate change and lobbying to delay climate regulation. **Advertising and public relations companies** are key agents in this massive and sophisticated ongoing [campaign of public deception](#).

Avoiding fossil fuel work carries a number of benefits for agencies, including being aligned to the clean energy transition, avoiding greenwashing (which carries **increasing legal and reputational risks**), and, with [research](#) showing increasing concern about climate change among workers, boosting team morale and productivity. Not to mention, a safer and more habitable planet for all.



Elzaan Debruyne carries her dog Cocoa through water in Sandvlei on the Cape Flats after a violent storm ripped through the area in September 2023. The storm killed several people, flooded homes, and caused an estimated R1.4-billion in crop and infrastructure losses.

Image: Ashraf Hendricks / GroundUp.

# THE URGENT NEED FOR SOUTH AFRICAN AGENCIES TO ACT

South Africa is among the world’s top contributors to climate change. Thanks to heavy reliance on coal, the country is among the top 15 largest emitters globally, and has the world’s most carbon-intensive economy. The country is also particularly climate vulnerable, warming at twice the rate of the global average.

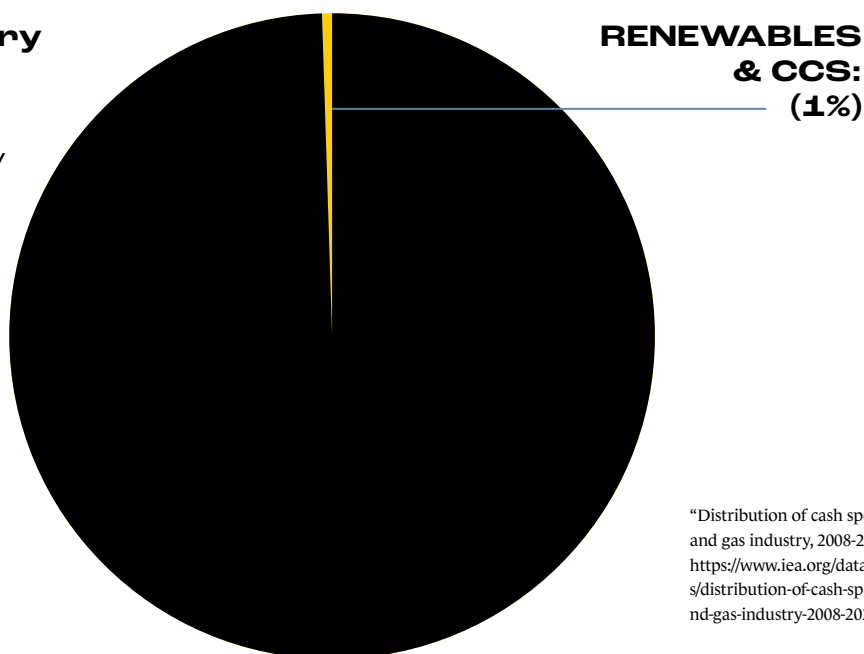
On the other hand, climate change literacy is strikingly low, with a 2021 survey showing that only 20% of the population understand that climate change is real and being driven primarily by human activity.<sup>1</sup>

This makes South Africa a fertile ground for climate change denial, disinformation and **greenwashing** – the practice where a company uses advertising and public messaging to appear more climate friendly and environmentally sustainable than it really is.

Despite [every major independent study](#) showing that renewables offer the least cost pathway to secure South Africa’s energy future (and thereby eliminate “load shedding”, the country’s frequent power cuts), fossil fuel companies use misleading advertising and PR

**Oil And Gas Industry Cash Spending, 2022**

Source: International Energy Agency



“Distribution of cash spending by the oil and gas industry, 2008-2022”  
<https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/distribution-of-cash-spending-by-the-oil-and-gas-industry-2008-2022>

<sup>1</sup> 2021, HSRC SASAS Attitudes to the Environment survey, p.2

strategies to delay a [just transition](#) away from polluting fossil fuels towards clean solutions such as wind, solar and energy storage.

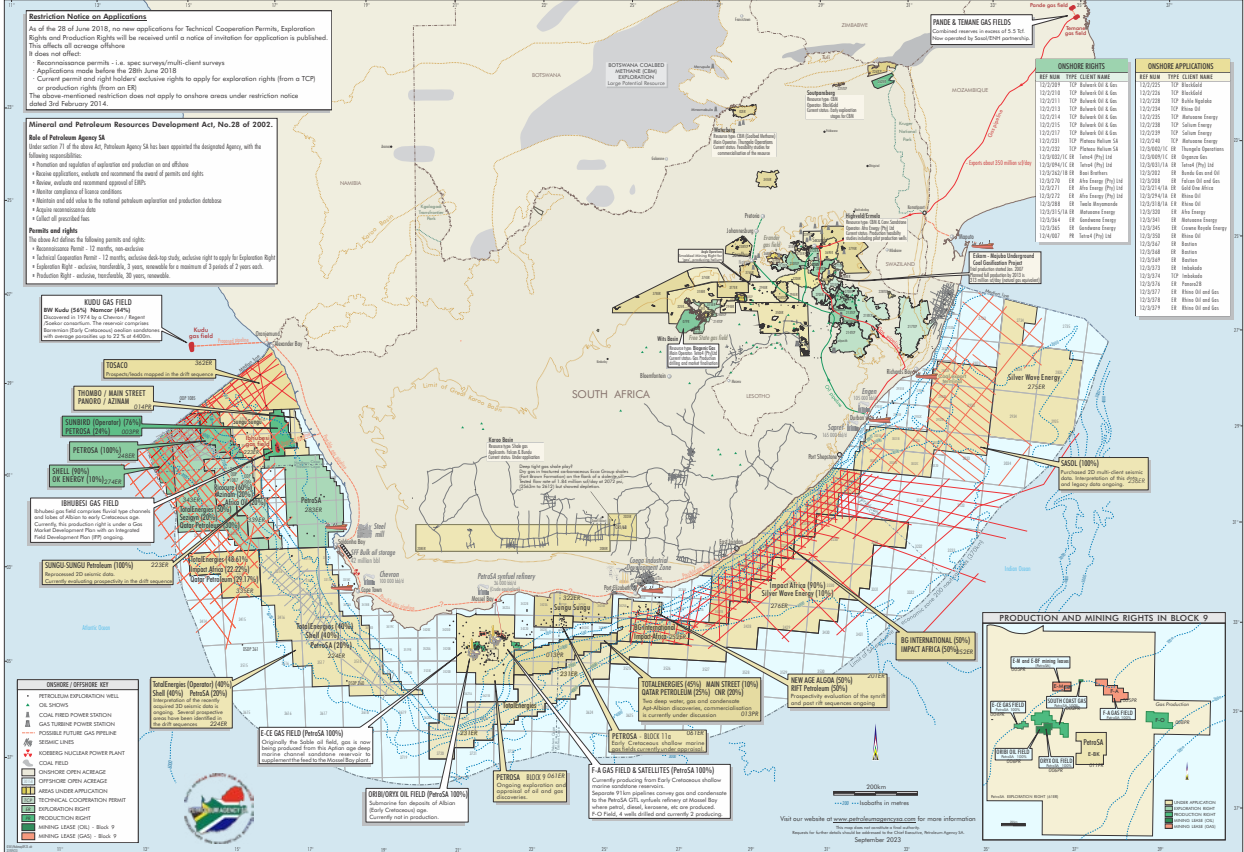
Agencies working with fossil fuel companies often (wrongly) defend the relationship by saying they are aiding their clients navigate the transition by helping them communicate their commitments to clean energy.

The reality is that in 2022, fossil fuel companies [spent about 1%](#) of their capital expenditure on renewables. The remainder went into fossil fuel exploration and extraction. Companies like BP, Shell and Exxon have recently [scaled back](#) their renewable energy plans.

“Government and business are saying one thing and doing another,” UN secretary general Antonio Guterres said recently. “Simply put, they are lying.”

The good news is that creatives and advertising agencies have a unique opportunity to educate people about climate change and influence sustainable behaviour. From the UN’s IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) [reports](#) to academic [research](#), scientists now widely recognise the crucial role advertising, the media and culture must play in helping humanity take action to avoid the worst consequences of a warming planet.

**PETROLEUM EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**



A map showing extensive planned fossil fuel exploration and production activities in South Africa. Source: petroleumagency.com

# CLEAN CREATIVES SOUTH AFRICA'S IMPACT THIS YEAR:

## A Growing Movement

Since [launching](#) officially in Cape Town in July 2022, the Clean Creatives movement in South Africa has been building momentum countrywide. Industry events have been held in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, where Clean Creatives was supported by TEDxJohannesburg to host an Earth Day conversation on the theme “The Climate Is Changing, Is Advertising?” with prominent industry voices represented.



Bogosi Motshegwa, a senior Johannesburg-based creative took part in our Earth Day industry event.

In September 2023, in collaboration with global platform [Creatives For Climate](#), Clean Creatives hosted “Unleashing Creativity For Climate Action” as part of the programme of events curated by the African Climate Alliance for Cape Town Climate Week 2023.

Attendees joined from around the world to hear a panel discussion featuring young climate change activist voices and seasoned creatives discussing how the power of advertising can be used to further climate action, with a special focus on communicating climate change in Africa.



Clean Creatives SA hosted an event bringing climate activists and creatives together during Cape Town Climate Week in September 2023.

## No Awards On A Dead Planet

The movement reached a significant milestone when leading local online resource for the production and advertising industry, IDIDTHAT.co, [announced](#) it would no longer award fossil fuel advertising campaigns its “Best In Craft” monthly award.

Website founder Julie Maunder said:

*“At IDIDTHAT we have decided to join Clean Creatives by not awarding Best in Craft in our monthly Craft Awards to any work done for the fossil fuel industry. We believe the move is in line with where our industry is moving and it’s only a matter of time before other awards and showcases stop giving airtime to these brands.”*



The most widely known annual advertising awards show in South Africa is the [Loerie Awards](#), which last year included fossil fuel entries among the finalists. Clean Creatives SA has launched a [petition](#) to pressure the awards to ban fossil fuel advertising entries.

After [major disruptions](#) by climate change activists at the 2022 Cannes Lions, including a former winner [handing back](#) his Cannes Lions Award mid-ceremony, it is likely that this trend will continue until awards shows stop recognising work which is promoting the social licence of harmful polluters.

## The Creative Cleanup 2023 Challenge

Among those most concerned about climate change are South Africa’s youth, which is why Clean Creatives SA [launched a live brief](#) challenge to students at creative and advertising schools across the country called Creative Cleanup 2023.

The brief invited the marketers of tomorrow to think about how to target their seniors in the creative industry with a campaign that would create a conscience about doing fossil fuel work, and encourage them to sign the Clean Creatives pledge.



Clean Creatives SA launched a live brief challenge to students of creativity around the country.

Work was submitted by students from advertising schools including AAA, Red & Yellow, IIE-Vega, and Open Window to the [challenge board](#) on the Creatives For Climate community hub.

The work was judged by senior industry figures including **Suhana Gordhan** (Independent Creative Leader), **Nkanyezi Masango** (Chief Creative Officer, Dentsu Creative), **Daniel Kaplan** (Executive Producer, Bioscope Films) and **Julie Maunder** (IDIDTHAT.co).

The joint winners were Joshua Kelly with an animated thought-provoking entry encouraging creatives to ponder if they are using their creativity to “[fuel the wrong fire](#),” and a team comprising Justin Beswick and Karla Koekemoer who designed a [contract version of the pledge](#) to make it more visible in agencies.



Joshua Kelly, a student of Red & Yellow Creative School of Business, was a joint-winner with this animated entry.



Justin Beswick of The IIE-Vega School and Karla Koekemoer of Open Window Institute were also joint winners with this contract version of the pledge.

The judges also gave special mentions to a team from AAA Advertising School for the effective copy: “[Why Create For Those Who Destroy?](#)” and to two other Red & Yellow students who subverted agency philosophy to encourage them to cut ties with fossil fuels:

Ogilvy, which in its own marketing claims “change is our lifeblood,” was challenged to think about “[which side of change are you on?](#)” due to its continued work for fossil fuels.

Joe Public’s agency vision is G.R.O.W.T.H. which stands for Greatness, Resilience, Ownership, Work, Thinking and Honesty. The agency was challenged to think about whether these values are compatible with working for fossil fuels with a clever reconceptualised acronym: [Get Real! Our World’s Too Hot.](#)



## The 2023 South African F-list

The below agencies have new or recent contracts with fossil fuels, according to publicly available information. For the full global list, view [cleancreatives.org/f-list](https://cleancreatives.org/f-list).

FIRM / AGENCY	FOSSIL FUEL CONTRACTS
Adclick Africa	Eskom
APO Group	African Energy Chamber
Atmosphere Communications (Accenture Song)	Thungela
BeatrootPineapple	EasiGas
Blueprint Advertising	Eskom PetroSA Shell
Boomtown Agency	EasiGas
ByDesign Communications	Anglo American
Demographica	Engen
Duma Collective	Engen TotalEnergies
Edelman (Edelman South Africa)	TotalEnergies
Flume	Astron Energy (Chevron)
Idea Engineers	Sasol
King James Group (Accenture Song)	Engen
M&C Saatchi (Connect and M&C Saatchi Abel)	Astron Energy (Chevron)
MediaMix360	Eskom
MSC Sports and Entertainment	Engen
Odd by Dsgn (The Odd Number)	TotalEnergies
Ogilvy (Ogilvy South Africa)	Africa Oil Week

FIRM / AGENCY	FOSSIL FUEL CONTRACTS
PR Powerhouse*	Thungela
Publicis Sport (Publicis)	TotalEnergies
R&A Strategic Communications	Seriti
Regency Global	BP Engen Exxaro Shell TotalEnergies
Sauce Advertising	Engen
Sgwili Media Group	Karpowership South Africa
Shift	Engen Exxaro
The Nimble*	Exxaro Glencore Sasol
The Riverbed Agency	BP
TBWA (Yellowwood & Grid Worldwide) (Omnicom)	Sasol

\*This recent contract was announced in MarkLives in September 2023 and therefore was not included in the global 2023 Clean Creatives F-list report.

\* 2nd edition update: The Nimble was incorrectly listed as having recent fossil fuel clients in version 1 of this report. The agency has not worked with the clients listed in over 3 years and has since taken the Clean Creatives pledge. We regret the error.

## Historic Contracts with Fossil Fuel Polluters in South Africa:

The below agencies have worked with fossil fuel companies in the past few years (since 2018) or currently list them as clients on their website. They did not feature in the global 2023 Clean Creatives F-list, which focused on recent contracts.

FIRM / AGENCY	FOSSIL FUEL CONTRACTS
Avatar	Eskom BP Caltex
Black Wolf Agency	Engen
Brave Group	BP
Carat South Africa (Dentsu)	Engen
Clockwork Media	Exxaro
EssenceMediaCom South Africa (formerly MediaCom South Africa) (WPP)	Shell
FCB Africa (IPG)	Sasol
Grey Africa (WPP)	BP
Harambee Communications	Puma Energy
Joe Public	Engen
Two Tone Global	Ghana Oil
Saatchi & Saatchi (Publicis)	Engen
Wunderman Thompson South Africa (WPP)	Shell

## Are there any agencies missing from this list?

Send us an anonymous tip to help us publicly confirm agencies which work for fossil fuels at: [cleancreatives.org/anon](https://cleancreatives.org/anon).

We do not accept submissions of confidential business information, however if you know about unethical activity involving fossil fuels or climate change disinformation, get in touch with the team at Climate Whistleblowers: [climatewhistleblowers.org](https://climatewhistleblowers.org).



# TOTAL ENERGIES GREENWASHING AND EDELMAN'S EACOP OUT

After Total announced its [rebrand](#) to TotalEnergies in 2021, South Africans started to see the rebrand everywhere, from animations to billboards to commercials — including [one](#) starring the South African rugby captain, Siya Kolisi, which highlights TotalEnergies' "solar powered service stations."

However, TotalEnergies' plans to increase fossil gas output [40% this decade](#) and is allocating [88% of its capital expenditure](#) to fossil fuels. It is currently engaged in fossil fuel exploration and production across the African continent, with significant plans for export.



SIYA KOLISI Dont Drop The Ball Challenge

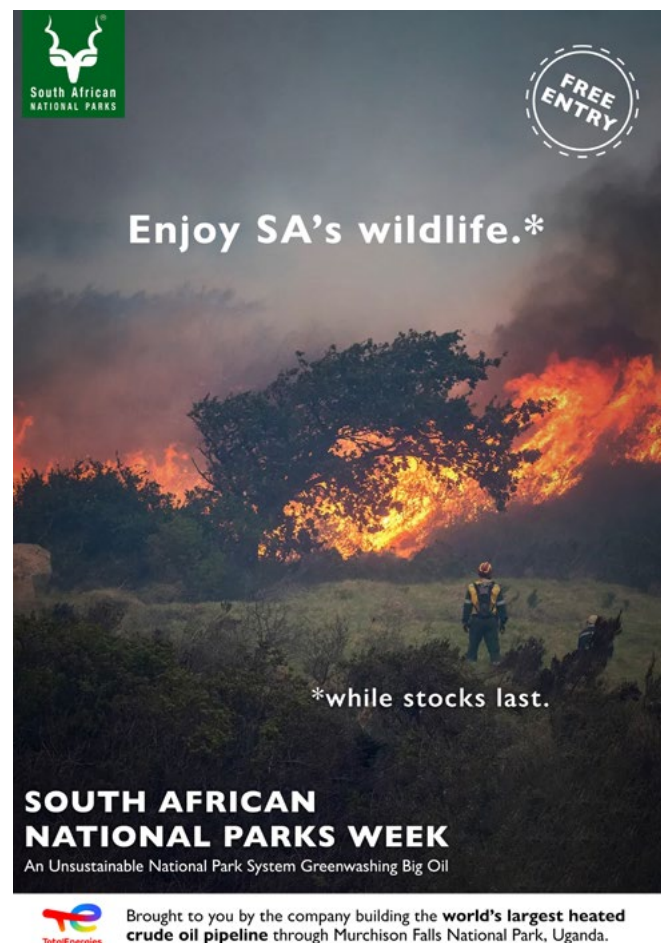
TotalEnergies is developing a project called the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), which will be the world's longest heated crude oil pipeline. At peak production, [studies indicate](#) it will generate approximately the same carbon emissions as nine coal-fired power plants. It's quite ironic — TotalEnergies is constructing the pipeline through Uganda's ecologically sensitive Murchison Falls National Park, even though they [partner](#) with the South African National Parks (SANParks).

The pipeline has been [condemned](#) for human rights violations, and was even too toxic for fossil fuel-friendly PR company, Edelman. At the 2023 Cannes Lions, CEO Richard Edelman publicly admitted to [parting ways](#) with Standard Bank due to its involvement in the pipeline. However, that discomfort did not stop Edelman Africa from working with TotalEnergies on a campaign called #DontDropTheBall. Shortly after supposedly dropping Standard Bank over the EACOP project, Edelman [applied for and won](#) a 2023 SABRE Certificate of Excellence for their work with the owner of EACOP.

Zaki Mamdoo, Coordinator at the #StopEACOP Campaign, said:

*“The advertising and PR companies commissioned by TotalEnergies are accessories to this catastrophe as they perpetuate the narrative of a ‘clean’ company, even as it continues to exploit and harm vulnerable communities across Africa. While climate activists ... can find themselves being overshadowed and drowned out by the money and influence of advertising and PR campaigns working for TotalEnergies — the hard hitting realities of climate collapse simply cannot be swept under the rug any longer.”*

As climate change effects become increasingly severe across Africa, it’s surprising that fossil fuel creative work is still being celebrated by the creative industry. Many agencies in South Africa still work for TotalEnergies and are winning awards for their work, like Odd by Dsgn and Publicis Sport who were recognized at the South African [Loeries](#) and [Creative Circle Awards](#). A growing movement of creatives, and a growing wave of climate disasters, will make this silence untenable in the long-term.

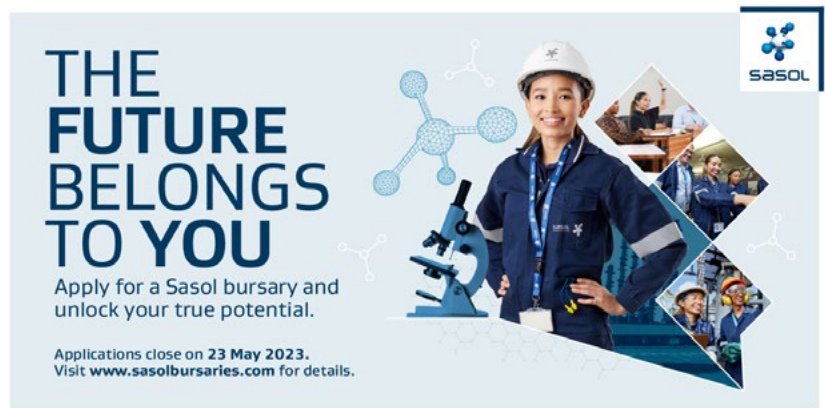


LEFT: A SANParks National Parks Week advertisement for Table Mountain National Park, featuring the TotalEnergies logo. RIGHT: A satirical poster created by Clean Creatives SA featuring an image of a wildfire in the same park in 2021, to call attention to greenwashing.

# SIX AGENCIES GREENWASHING SASOL'S HUGE CARBON FOOTPRINT

Sasol is South Africa's biggest global chemical and energy company and second biggest carbon polluter after Eskom, the national electricity utility. It hosts an annual careers expo called [Sasol TechnoX](#) for high school students.

What the company is unlikely to foreground to students attending the expo is that it is also one of the biggest greenhouse gas emitters in the world, and its Secunda complex is the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions globally. Ironically, this completely undermines the 2023 Sasol bursary marketing copy: "The Future Belongs To You."



In its most recent 2023 climate change report, Sasol reported increased carbon emissions yet again. The company has repeatedly [lobbied](#) against climate change and environmental policies, like carbon taxes and minimum emissions standards, and critics have highlighted the company's [failure](#) to provide a clear and measurable roadmap to net zero emissions. Sasol's current climate targets are all so long-term as to leave current management entirely unaccountable.

The several hundred million it spends on [corporate social responsibility](#) initiatives annually is dwarfed by the damage its emissions cause — the social cost of carbon — which is estimated to be around R60 billion annually (based on a conservative \$55/tonne figure provided by the US government).

There are three agencies listed in the SA report recently working for Sasol locally, namely, Idea Engineers, ~~The Nimble\*~~, and TBWA (Yellowwood & Grid Worldwide). There are three others working

for Sasol in other territories included in the global F-list report. Sasol's digital and social media marketing lead won the [New Generation](#) Digital Marketer of the Year Award in September 2023. (*\*Update: The Nimble has not worked for Sasol for at least 3.5-4 years and has since signed the Clean Creatives pledge*).

The [2022 Clean Creatives F-list](#) featured a case study of Sasol's "nostalgia washing" in the form of a TV commercial created by FCB Africa for Sasol's decades-old "Glug-glug" campaign. According to Kantar it was South Africa's most liked ad of 2019.

## OGILVY SOUTH AFRICA AND APO GROUP PROMOTE FOSSIL FUEL FRIENDLY EVENTS

African energy leaders, global investors, and private and public sector executives converge on Cape Town in October each year for two overlapping energy conferences: [Africa Oil Week](#) and the [Green Energy Africa Summit](#) to discuss the continent's energy future.

That these two conferences are organised by the same company, UK-based [Hyve Group](#), at the same venue and time is greenwashing on a grand scale. The fact that the Green Energy Africa Summit is only two days long while Africa Oil Week lasts a full week is an indication of the priorities of the organisers.

The African Energy Chamber's [African Energy Week](#) event also takes place annually in October. The biggest sponsors of the event are fossil fuel companies engaged in exploration activities across Africa. The chamber's Executive Chairman, NJ Ayuk, has been [convicted for fraud](#) and is a known oil and gas proponent.

The African Energy Chamber claims to be "the voice of the African Energy Sector." Yet at last year's African Energy Week conference, at a panel discussion entitled "The Just Transition: Africa's economic ambitions and its role in a global energy dialogue," the panellists were [exclusively representatives of fossil fuel companies](#) or ministries. There were also no women.

The African Energy Week’s slogan is “Making Energy History Poverty by 2030,” while the marketing campaign behind the 2022 Africa Oil Week event was “Demanding Africa’s Right to Energy Sovereignty,” — for which Ogilvy South Africa won a PR Award, the [SABRE Certificate of Excellence](#). Hyve Group also scooped a “[Best Conference](#)” award for its work on Africa Oil Week, showing again how awards shows are completely out of tune with the climate crisis.

This kind of PR captures a legitimate and urgent need to bring Africans out of energy poverty for nefarious purposes which will only bring increased extreme weather, vulnerability and poverty to African communities. These events create a greenwashing “smokescreen” and lock out civil society voices while prioritising unsustainable fossil fuel development.

## MEDIACOM SOUTH AFRICA BOOSTS SHELL SALES

MediaCom South Africa (now called EssenceMediacom South Africa), a part of WPP’s GroupM, worked with Shell South Africa in 2020 to help build its V+ loyalty programme. A [case study](#) on the work described how the agency helped Shell reach a million customers with the programme by December 2020. It proudly touts the direct effect on sales of petroleum stating: “Since the inception of V+ in December 2019, Shell has well over a million registered cards which have resulted in **more than 1 billion litres of fuel purchased.**”

In 2023, [new information](#) came to light showing how Shell’s own scientists knew very precisely about the way the company’s product was causing dangerous warming as far back as the 1970s, yet the company chose to deliberately mislead the public. Also in 2023, the UK’s Advertising Standards Authority [banned](#) a Shell advertising campaign promoting its green initiatives, ruling it was “likely to mislead.”



### Challenge

In a spiraling tough South African economy, the loyalty reward programme industry is fierce. The Health & Beauty sector makes the most impressive strides. Shell absolutely struck gold withstanding a long-term partnership with Clicks for three years. In August 2019, we hit a sudden stumbling block with a surprise ending to this partnership. We needed to come up with a robust framework that will encourage consumers to stay with Shell.



Shell has in fact recently announced plans to [scale back](#) its renewable energy ambitions.

In September 2023 news broke that Shell was [reviewing](#) their media agency, which led to a backlash towards agencies pitching for the estimated [\\$230 million](#) account. Our records show that Shell's media account has been handled by WPP's EssenceMediaCom since [1995](#).

As The Drum [explains](#), “Shell’s media review will likely be one of the largest held this year...But no media companies have admitted publicly to bidding — or even, in the case of incumbent WPP, repitching — for the account...It’s hard to see how Havas UK’s push for B Corp accreditation [a stringent social, environmental and governance standard], or Omnicom Media Group’s net zero target, would be compatible with working for the brand.”

But in September 2023, [news broke](#) that despite its B Corp accreditation push, Havas had won the Shell global media account.

There was a swift backlash from climate activists and creatives, including one agency CEO who said Havas had “[chosen revenue over ethics and integrity](#).” Havas Red, Havas Media’s sister PR agency, also lost a client.

It remains to be seen if the local Havas office will have the unenviable task of promoting a brand which received widespread condemnation in South Africa (protests, boycotts and over 450,000 petition signatures) due to its plans to explore for oil and gas off the Wild Coast.

Clean Creatives has released a guide on [How to Stop a Shell Pitch](#) to give creatives the tools and information they need to speak up. We have also [advocated](#) for B Corp standards to recognise and demand agencies and brands not to work with and represent fossil fuel clients.



Shell was the subject of countrywide protests and boycotts in 2021. Image: Extinction Rebellion South Africa.

# THE RIVERBED “CREATES POSITIVE IMPACT” FOR BP

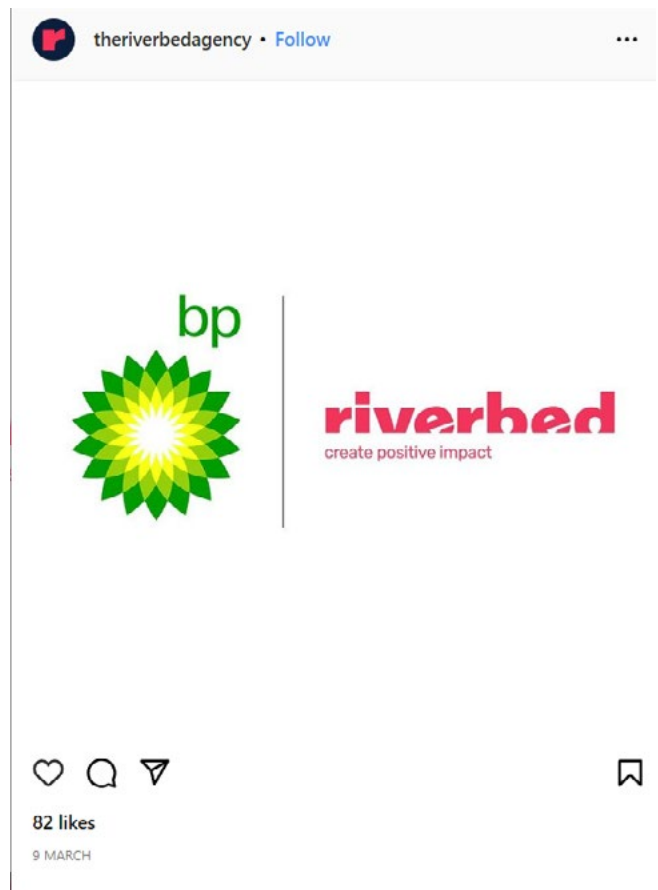
In March 2023, Johannesburg-based agency The Riverbed posted on Instagram that it had won BP as a client. The juxtaposition of the agency’s slogan, “create positive impact” next to the logo of the company behind the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill did not appear to set off any alarm bells at the agency, showing how fossil fuel companies are still revered in the South African public imagination.

Africanews [reports](#) that a gas project involving BP in Saint-Louis, Senegal, is forcing women into sex work “because their husbands, all fishermen, could no longer make a living after the gas deal came to town and the rig restricted access to fertile fishing areas.”

In the early 2000s, BP hired Ogilvy & Mather public relations agency to promote the concept of the “carbon footprint,” shifting responsibility for carbon emissions away from the company and onto individuals.

As recently as 2019, BP ran a social media campaign using this same tactic, tweeting: “The first step to reducing your emissions is to know where you stand. Find out your #carbonfootprint with our new calculator & share your pledge today!”

This has been [described](#) by Dr Benjamin Franta, a Senior Research Fellow in Climate Litigation at the Oxford Sustainable Law Programme, as “one of the most successful, deceptive PR campaigns ever.”



# THE CLEAN CREATIVES PLEDGE

South African agencies and creatives can take the Clean Creatives pledge, committing to decline future work with fossil fuels at [cleancreatives.org/southafrica](https://cleancreatives.org/southafrica).

Even as an individual creative working at an agency with fossil fuel clients, creatives can confidentially sign the pledge to receive information and support on how to encourage agency leadership to move away from these clients.



If you agree that the future of creativity is clean,

[Take The Clean Creatives Pledge Now](#)

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**Disclaimer:** Our aim is for this list to be as up to date and accurate as possible.

For any errors or omissions, please contact [stephen@fossilfreesa.org.za](mailto:stephen@fossilfreesa.org.za).



Clean Creatives  
SOUTH AFRICA