

Frequently Asked Questions v1.3

Overview

The Global Media Sustainability Framework (GMSF) is a cross-industry initiative. It allows advertisers, media owners, media agencies, and all other companies in the media supply chain to voluntarily calculate GHG emissions across six major media channels. The goal is to help advertisers and their partners reduce emissions from media planning and buying, which is Action 3 on Ad Net Zero's 5-point Action Plan.

It is now up to the industry - to you - to test and implement the GMSF.

Below are some common questions and responses to help you begin that process and field queries from your organisation and stakeholders.

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Context

What is Ad Net Zero?

Ad Net Zero is a voluntary not-for-profit climate action programme for the global advertising industry. Over 280+ supporters worldwide help fund our work to deliver a range of tools, resources, frameworks and education materials. This is geared to help supporter companies embed sustainability into their strategies for increased business resilience and higher growth opportunities. Action 3 of Ad Net Zero's Five-Point Action Plan helps the industry to reduce carbon emissions from media planning and buying.

What does sustainability mean in this context?

In 1987, the UN defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The [17 UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) have provided detailed descriptions and metrics for each aspect of sustainability since 2016. Climate Action, SDG 13, is one of the most relevant to the ad sector, and the focus of this Framework. Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 12, is also very relevant to the ad sector.

What is it?

What is the GMSF?

In March 2023, Ad Net Zero established a project to create a universal framework for calculating the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from media campaigns. The GMSF is a voluntary industry standard to improve consistent, comparable calculation of greenhouse gas emissions from digital, television, print, audio, outdoor, and cinema media channels.

How is the GMSF different from other industry sustainability efforts?

The GMSF is being created through voluntary industry contribution and channel specific working groups, with guidance from a climate science expert group. This is akin to the process Union des Marques ran in France via OneFrame, the French advertising industry standard, for different channels. By inviting organisations into a voluntary process with the wider industry, we have sought to create a single universal framework that can be used across major media channels and markets, with scope to improve and evolve over



time. This will add much needed consistency across territories and channels and give full transparency to the methodology.

What is new in version 1.3 compared to previous versions?

With each iteration of the Playbook, our methodology becomes stronger, providing a more robust foundation for the industry.

In the latest version:

- We have introduced Data Guidance for OOH, TV, and Print, to accompany the previously released Data Guidance for Digital, which is the highest-spend channel globally. This means that the Frameworks related to these four channels are now fully usable, allowing stakeholders to apply standardised methodologies for calculation with confidence.
- The Digital Data Guidance released last year has also been updated.

Audio and Cinema will be completed in Summer 2026.

These updates mark a significant step forward in enabling more accurate, consistent, and actionable calculation of media emissions across all major channels.

What is the development and governance process for the GMSF?

To create our proposals, we implement a process to balance both efficiency and rigour. The different contributors are defined below, as well as the crucial role each plays in the development of the GMSF. By adopting this process, we ensure we build upon any industry leading work that has taken place already, create multiple feedback points for industry stakeholders and apply the latest climate science and carbon accounting best practice.

- **Steer Team review:** To ensure that recommendations help existing media planning, buying, and reporting processes, and that recommendations are consistent with industry practices.
- **Climate Science Expert Group review:** To ensure that recommendations leverage sustainability and carbon accounting best practices from other sectors, and that recommendations adhere to environmental science expertise.
- **External legal counsel review:** To ensure that the framework is voluntary and recommendations comply with competition law and promote transparency.
- **Channel expert trade associations:** To ensure that media owners and publishers are involved in the creation of voluntary channel level proposals and that they reflect current media delivery operations, levels of data availability, and industry best practice.



- **The GMSF and ANZ community:** To ensure that we receive widespread feedback and gain support and understanding across our supporter base for our proposals, before releasing publicly.
- **Industry release:** To ensure that all proposals are open source so that any company within the advertising industry can voluntarily adopt them as best practice.

What is the purpose of Data Guidance?

To provide a structured approach to standardising emissions calculations, ensuring consistency, transparency, and practical implementation across the industry, especially when data is missing or unavailable.

- Bridges theory and practice - Translates theoretical formulae into actionable methodologies by addressing data gaps and inconsistencies
- Standardises methodology - Aligns data collection and assumptions across stakeholders, ensuring consistency and comparability in emissions reporting
- Supports data availability constraints - Establishes a tiered approach, allowing for emissions estimation at different levels of granularity and providing industry-approved defaults when necessary
- Enhances implementation feasibility - Creates a practical framework that enables companies to report emissions consistently, even with incomplete data, while maintaining transparency on uncertainty levels

What is a Data Request Form?

The Data Request Form is a consistent RFI allowing the industry to implement the GMSF and guide them through the data collection process, identifying the relevant owners/providers of the required data. A singular output that can be shared repeatedly with stakeholders, meaning that media owners only need to gather the data once.

What are data hacks?

A data hack is a GMSF recognised approach to deal with data shortcomings (e.g. no data, insufficient data, unreliable data). While the intention of a hack is to reduce complexity and eliminate any barrier to estimating emissions, the use of hacks generally means the level of accuracy will decrease. Hacks for less impactful activities will not have a material impact to the final resultant estimate, while hacks for high impact activities need to be called out as increasing the level of uncertainty in the final estimate. The purpose of the data levels classification is to call out which hacks/approximations lead to material uncertainties in the result.



What are Emissions Factors?

An Emission Factor (EF) is any number that converts data into kgCO₂e emissions. There are several basic types of EFs used in the GMSF:

- i. Operational Emission Factors help define how much CO₂e is released, that can be based on complex activities such as ‘how many kWh of electricity is used in a particular location’, or more general asks like ‘the approximate average amount of CO₂e emitted per £ on advertising spent’ (a common, highly simplified approach).
- ii. Embodied Emission Factors define how much CO₂e is released in the manufacture of physical items used in the advertising process. For example, all the emissions from producing the paper in a newsprint or billboard ad are estimated via a Lifecycle Assessment (LCA). Less visible examples are all the ICT (information and communication technology) equipment used across all ad channels. These EFs are based on “cradle-to-gate” LCAs that capture all the materials and activities required to make the object.
- iii. End of Life Emission Factors define how much CO₂e is released in the disposal of the physical items used in the advertising process. For example, the CO₂e emissions from disposing (recycling, burning, landfilling) the paper in a newsprint or billboard ad, as well as all ICT and other goods used in advertising are estimated through these EFs.

How do trade associations help to create Data Guidance?

Channel expert trade associations and their members possess deep knowledge of the specific workings, value chain, and operational realities of their respective channels. This specialist insight is essential to ensuring that the GMSF accurately reflects real-world industry practices.

They help to ensure that:

- i. The emissions formulae are practical, actionable and aligned with industry operations.
- ii. Data gaps are identified and addressed through accurate industry backed methodologies.
- iii. The framework is fit for purpose, facilitating more consistent, transparent emissions reporting in all media channels.
- iv. Each channel's emissions data is robust enough to improve comparability across carbon calculators, reducing the variance in reported results and enhancing industry wide trust in emissions calculation.

How often will the GMSF be updated?



We are committed to onboarding feedback from the industry as and when we receive it, and our intention is to continue to update the work regularly as critical updates are needed to component parts of the framework.

Why is it needed?

How much is the advertising industry accountable for in terms of emissions footprint?

It's difficult to pinpoint an exact percentage for the advertising industry. Based on academic estimates of adjacent activity such as the IT industry and digitisation more generally, the estimated carbon footprint for all advertising is in the 3-4% range of total global greenhouse gases. As a reference, this is on par with the aviation industry.

Source: <https://theecologist.org/2025/mar/05/digital-marketings-carbon-footprint>

Who will this framework benefit?

The framework provides many opportunities for those within the advertising industry.

- **Advertisers:** Advertisers who may work with multiple media agencies, that each have their own GHG calculation tools, will now have a voluntary framework that can create consistency and transparency for GHG media calculations. In addition, by calculating the GHG emissions within their media supply chain, advertisers may voluntarily decide to identify the most GHG intensive activities and may individually decide to take action to reduce these in line with their own targets and goals.
- **Media Agencies:** Agencies can choose to adopt the GMSF or map their current methodologies to the voluntary standard and can use the data request form to more easily get access to first party media seller and supply chain emissions data.
- **Media Sellers:** Media sellers and service providers can have clarity on what data they should provide to GHG estimating tool owners, such as agencies or other tool providers. This should cut down on the number of requests, and the amount of time it takes to respond to requests for this information. It also provides clarity over how exactly they will be calculated, and how other channels will be calculated too. Media Owners can then work to improve the level of data granularity they provide, and ways to reduce the GHG emissions they produce.



- **Media Sustainability Solutions Providers:** Like agencies, solutions providers will have the opportunity to use the GMSF to adopt or map their methodologies to this voluntary standard and can use the data request form to more easily get access to first party media seller and supply chain emissions data.

Can I use this framework to help my company with our own science-based target reporting, and with any existing and upcoming regulations? How does it align with existing standards?

In providing feedback during the development of the GMSF, 63% of respondents from across the ad sector indicated that a primary goal in implementing the GMSF is compliance with contractual or regulatory requirements to report GHG emissions. The common foundation for all climate accounting standards and emerging regulatory requirements is the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHGP) and the GMSF is fully aligned with the GHGP.

A critical objective of the GMSF is to provide GHG emissions estimates for ad campaigns that can be directly incorporated into the current scope 3 subcategory “Purchased goods and services” section of enterprise level GHG inventory reporting (particularly for advertisers) in compliance with all GHGP aligned regulations, international climate accounting standards (e.g., the ISO 14064 series), and best practices. Because of significant marketing and advertising spend, many advertisers have reported that the marketing function is a material part of their overall GHG inventory; in some cases, it is the largest single line item, making the GMSF particularly relevant. The GMSF can also be valuable to other participants in the advertising value chain in both their enterprise level reporting and in providing reliable, transparent, and consistent estimates to their stakeholders at the ad campaign level.

What to do now?

How can industry stakeholders consider using the GMSF?

As a voluntary industry standard, the GMSF is available without any restrictions. Any stakeholder within the advertising industry can access the resources and consider the relevance to their operations.

Below are some examples of use cases for consideration by the industry:



- Advertisers may consider requesting, that their partners who calculate GHG emissions from their media activities, use the GMSF, ensuring that regardless of which partners they work with in each market, there will be consistency of calculation.
- Agencies may consider using the GMSF within their own tools and make GHG emissions a consideration for all media plans, alongside other established media metrics.
- Media sellers may supply the requested data to advertisers, agencies and other solutions providers in as much granularity as possible, continually improving the quality of this data over time, adding increased value and transparency to their offerings, and supporting their stakeholders' compliance needs.
- Ad Tech Solutions Providers can highlight how their tool maps to the GMSF, enabling them to showcase unique enhancements or opportunities they may offer.

What are the biggest and easiest things I can do to reduce my emissions from media planning and buying?

Read, use, and adopt the principles produced in the [Guide to Sustainable Media](#) that was launched by Ad Net Zero in 2023, as it was based on current tactics being used by advertisers and agencies. This is available for free and downloadable via this link. You can also check the [Campaign Ad Net Zero Awards Winners](#) playbook, to see the best-in-class work across the industry, including on media.

Other FAQs

How does the GMSF address AI?

The GMSF captures AI-related emissions through several mechanisms within the framework.

1. Unit operation formulae

Where AI replaces or augments a traditional activity, the associated activity data and emissions factors should reflect the actual emissions generated by that activity. Depending on the use case, AI-enabled workflows may result in either higher or lower emissions than conventional approaches.

2. 'Asset Manipulation' unit operations

Several channels within the GMSF include an 'Asset Manipulation' stage within the creation workflow. This acts as a placeholder for activities such as AI-enabled editing, transformation, or enhancement of advertising assets



after the initial master creative has been produced. Existing formulae, such as creative transcoding in TV advertising, sit within this section today, and additional AI-specific methodologies may be incorporated as more robust data becomes available.

3. 'Corporate Overhead Emissions'

Many AI-related emissions are not directly tied to a single campaign activity and are therefore captured through the corporate overhead allocation methodology. This includes:

- AI model training and development;
- experimentation and testing;
- AI-enabled product development;
- infrastructure and maintenance activities; and
- other shared operational functions.

This is currently one of the most important mechanisms for accounting for AI-related emissions within the framework, as it ensures organisation-wide emissions are allocated appropriately across advertising activities.

The GMSF also recognises that AI's role within advertising is likely to expand beyond creative workflows into distribution, optimisation, and media delivery, and with AI as a potential new media channel itself. As industry practices and data maturity evolve, the framework will continue to develop its treatment of AI-related emissions accordingly.

