

Reliable green claims and consumer information: keys to sustainable consumption

Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference
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EEB

European
Environmental
Bureau



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REPAIR**

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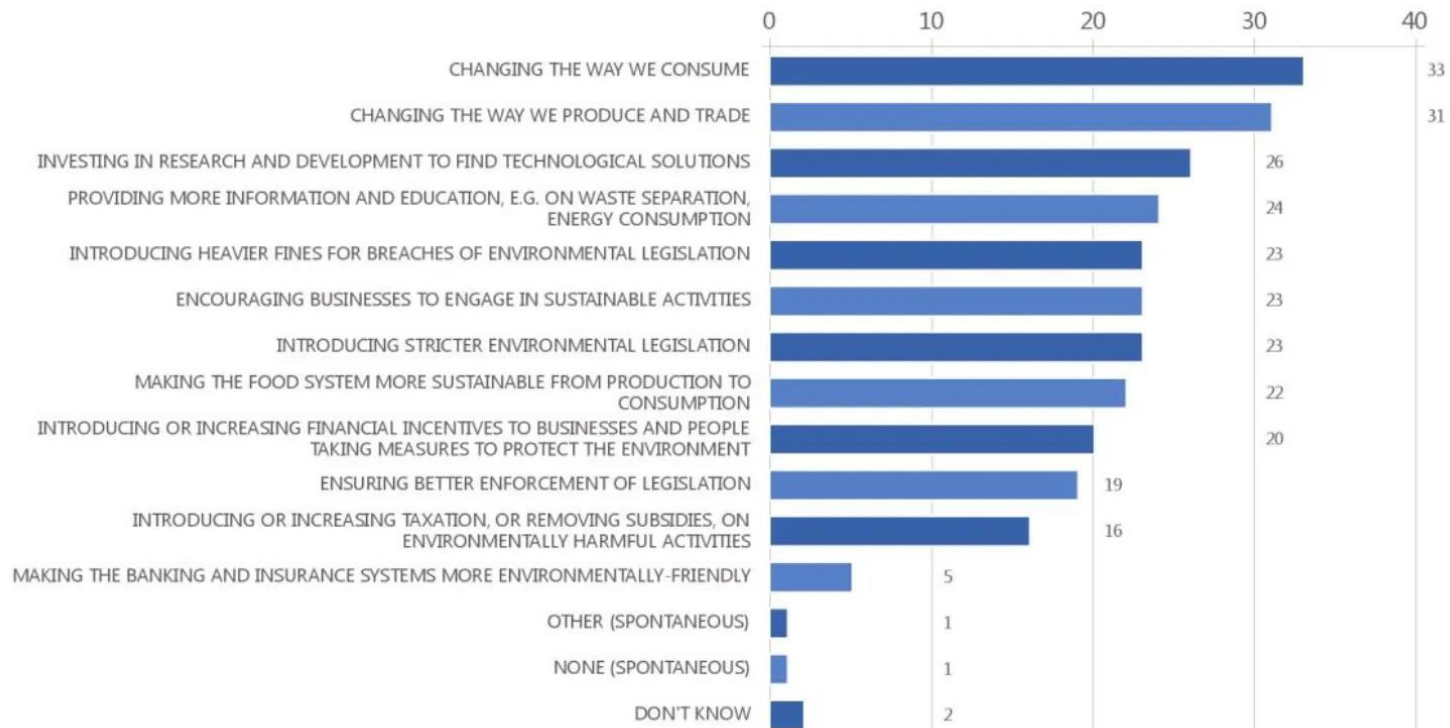
KEY POINTS

- Why green claims matter?
- What are greenwashing and misleading claims?
- What does it mean to make sustainable products the norm? Our vision for the SPPI
- How should sustainable product be defined? Beyond environmental footprint
- EEB recommendations

WHY GREEN CLAIMS MATTER?

What people say – Eurobarometer 501

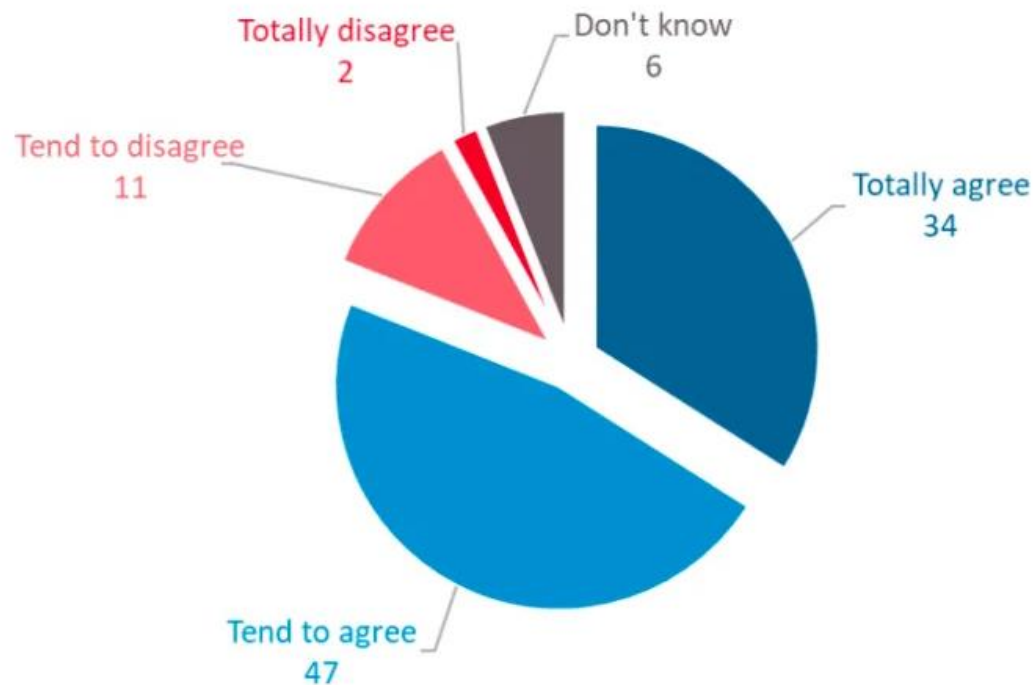
In your opinion, which of the following would be the most effective way of tackling environmental problems? (% - EU)



WHY GREEN CLAIMS MATTER

What people say – Eurobarometer 501

Many products claim to be environmentally friendly, but you do not trust this is true? (% - EU)



WHY GREEN CLAIMS MATTERS

DG Justice 2014 study

- **3 out of 4 products** display an environmental claim or label in the EU
- **57% of EU consumers are receptive to environmental claims** when making their purchase decisions.
- **A majority (61%) find it difficult to understand** which products are truly environmentally friendly.
- Mistrust in **environmental information** displayed on products and in advertisements is relatively common. **44% of consumers say they do not trust this type of information**

GREENWASHING & MISLEADING CLAIMS

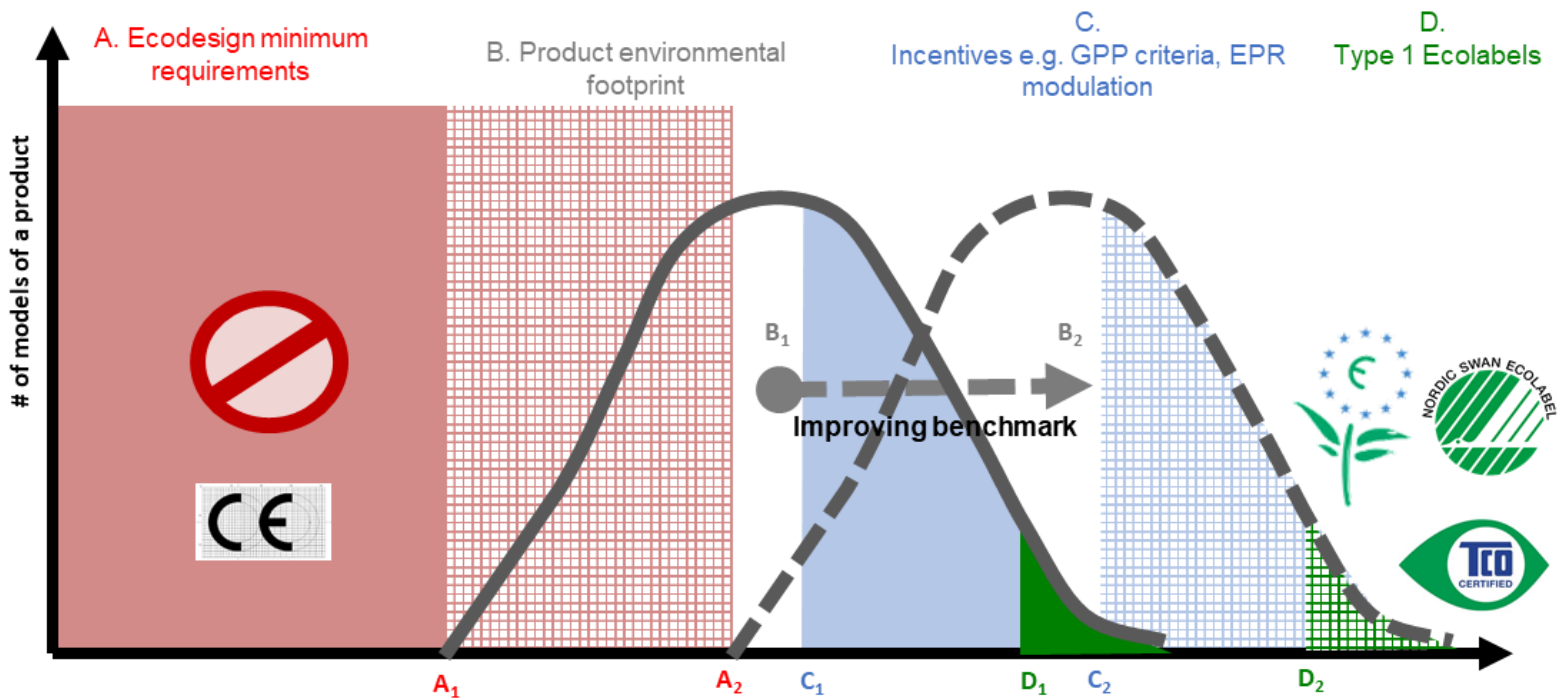
What does this mean?

- Can occur at both **product** and **brand** or **sectoral** level
- Lack of verifiable or transparent information
- Vague or unclear reference to environmental performance (e.g. “climate friendly”)
- Confusing information (e.g. biodegradable in a geography without separate collection of biowaste)
- Focusing on impacts which aren’t the most important for that product
- Making a claim about the overall sustainability of brand based on a small line of products
- Making weak sustainability commitments without setting in place accountability

PEF can help with some of these but not all of them

MAKE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS THE NORM

What does this mean? A vision for SPPI



Ecodesign addresses supply removing 'unsustainable products'

PEF identifies benchmark or average performance on the market

Incentives pull the market beyond better than average performance

Endorsement labels clearly identify top 10-20% performance

MAKE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS THE NORM

Is environmental footprint the only important factor?

- Need a common definition of a sustainable product
- Other factors beyond the 16 environmental footprint impact categories must be considered:
 - **Social-economic** (due diligence, fair trade, local job creation potential)
 - **Environmental** (toxicity exposure, biodiversity loss potential, marine litter potential)
 - **Qualitative factors** (recycled content, organic, microplastic free, reusable or repairable)
 - **System aspects** (product as a service, software update availability, sectoral level footprint, local waste collection)

PEF can help define some aspects of sustainability but not all of them...

ADDRESSING MISLEADING CLAIMS ON PRODUCTS

Recommendations

- A **white list of environmental labels** should be established Type 1 ISO (e.g. **EU ecolabel**) or specific (e.g. EU organic label, energy or repair label) to illustrate best in class
- **Blacklist confusing or misleading claims** (e.g. unsubstantiated use of “green”, “sustainable”, and “climate friendly”) or labels (e.g. self declared)
- Claims should **not be allowed for performance at the level of legal requirements** or below the benchmark
- **A pre-approval process should be explored** for specific claims and labels, as applied by EFSA for food health claims
- Green products should also **be fair and socially sustainable** – the initiative should also enable due diligence

USING PEF TO VERIFY CLAIMS ON PRODUCTS

Recommendations

PEF should be used to substantiate green claims on environmental footprint impact categories but should meet these conditions:

- Information is **relevant to the product**, there is **no burden shifting between impact categories**, and **when performance is above the benchmark** (better than average)
- PEF profile should be submitted to market surveillance using the product passport

When communicating about the overall greenness of products

- PEF may need to be complemented as not all significant impacts are covered in LCA (toxicity, biodiversity, marine litter etc.)

CLAIMS ABOUT COMPANIES OR BRANDS

Recommendations

- Claims about a brand should not be allowed if they are not **representative of the company's main activities**
- Challenge claims on climate neutrality or biodiversity impacts based on **off-setting schemes**
- Challenge claims from heavily polluting industries – **explore “tobacco style” warnings** on their communications (e.g. for sectors outside the taxonomy)
- **Avoid additional consumption or rebound effects** resulting from environmental gestures
- Limit sustainability claims based on strategies based on far-off targets without accountability

ENFORCEMENT AND TRANSPARENCY

Recommendations

- **Deterrent penalties** should be established at the EU level to prevent greenwashing
- **Evidence to support any green claims should be available** to market surveillance authorities and ideally citizens
- Market surveillance should annually assess randomly sampled green claims
- The EU **product passport initiative** can enable transparency and market surveillance on key issues: overall environmental footprint, repairability, toxicity, due diligence etc. (i.e. establishing a right to know)
- **Incentives such as EPR modulation and GPP criteria** can support transparency beyond market requirements



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