

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN

The ACCC wants to ensure that those paying for carbon offsets are not being misled and are receiving the service they are paying for.

IT'S HARD TO BUY A NEW CAR, GET ON A PLANE, OR EVEN ATTEND A MAJOR EVENT THESE DAYS WITHOUT BEING PRESENTED WITH OPTIONS TO OFFSET THE CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS LINKED TO THESE ACTIVITIES.



AS COMMUNITY concern about global warming continues to grow, so too does the size of the carbon offset industry and the number of businesses chasing the 'green dollar'. *Business Week* magazine recently estimated the size of the voluntary offset market to be \$100 million in the US alone.

But concerns have been raised about whether those who buy credits in these schemes are always getting what they pay for.

To provide some clarity for consumers and businesses, the ACCC is consulting with the community on issues relating to carbon offsetting. The ACCC aims to use information gathered from public feedback to produce guidance for businesses and the general public who may be buying or selling offsets.

A number of government agencies are developing a broad policy framework relating to carbon offset claims. While the ACCC is not involved in that work, it has recognised a need to provide consumers and businesses with information on the subject.

Like any goods or services offered in Australia, businesses selling carbon offsets need to comply with the Trade Practices Act. The ACCC wants to ensure that those paying for carbon offsets are not being misled and are receiving the service they are paying for.

The ACCC has already launched action against GM Holden over claims that every Saab vehicle it supplies in Australia is green.

GM Holden promised in advertisements to plant a number of trees to offset emissions created by their Saab cars. Among the ACCC's concerns over the case are that consumers may be led to believe that the net amount of carbon dioxide released by a Saab vehicle over its lifetime would be zero.

The ACCC is considering the types of carbon offset claims being made in various sectors; whether consumers or businesses are at risk of being misled.

Once consultation is complete the ACCC plans to release several guides to carbon offset claims with a guide to green marketing now available. ●