

# Consumer understanding of green terms

A research report completed for the  
Department for Environment, Food and  
Rural Affairs by Brook Lyndhurst and  
Icaro Consulting

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## **Consumer understanding of green terms**

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# 1 Executive summary

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## 1.1 Research objectives and approach

This research set out to explore participants' (individual consumers') understanding of, and responses to, green terms – the words and phrases found in marketing claims made on product packaging, in broadcast, print and online media and other promotional materials. The research comprised:

- A rapid, two week literature review (this was designed to identify key pieces of literature in this area and did not follow a systematic approach);
- 15 discussion groups during October/November 2009 (following a qualitative approach, and therefore results are not generalisable to the wider population); and
- An online survey of adults between 29 January 2010 and 1 February 2010 (achieved sample size of 2,019 individuals using a quota sample drawn from an online panel. It should be noted that, while quota sampling is used in this type of research (particularly when time or budgets are limited or a sample frame is not available), it is subject to sampling and response biases. Thus, although the sample was designed to be reflective of national characteristics, the results cannot automatically be assumed to be representative across the population as a whole so some caution is needed in the interpretation of results).

In addition to investigating participants' responses to green terms in general, the project has provided additional insight on:

- Participants' responses to individual terms;
- The use of green language by participants in relation to pro-environmental behaviour change; and
- Participants' responses to environmental labels.

These additional findings are covered in three supplementary reports, which will be published separately.

## 1.2 Responses to green terms

### What was tested

The online survey was designed to explore respondents' responses to individual, isolated terms against a range of criteria including how familiar they were, how meaningful they were, and the extent to which they would be used to inform purchasing decisions. We chose to test how 'meaningful' terms were because we wanted to explore the hypothesis, based on findings from the discussion groups, that participants may find a term meaningful even if they do not fully understand the concepts it describes, and that finding it meaningful may be sufficient for them to absorb a claim and, potentially, act upon it.

### Different types of terms

Over the course of the research, it has been useful to distinguish between different green terms in two principal ways. These distinctions are the result of our interpretation of the evidence available and, briefly, are as follows:

- **Specificity** – terms appear to vary in how specific they are about the environmental issues they relate to:
  - With ‘inferential terms’, any association with the environment is implied or inferred through the context within which the term is used (e.g. clean, natural);
  - ‘Flag terms’ are explicitly linked to environmental issues, but only in as much as they ‘flag’ a product or claim as broadly relating to the environment (e.g. green or environmentally-friendly); and
  - Finally, ‘specific terms’ invoke a particular environmental issue, such as climate change, or a particular environmental action, such as recycling.
- **Emerging terms** – as discussed below, participants in this research were more familiar with some green terms (such as environmentally-friendly) than they were with others (such as water footprint). We have referred to this latter group as ‘emerging terms’.

## Awareness

Awareness and understanding of green language seems to be evolving rapidly. Previous research (e.g. Futerra, 2007) has suggested that terms like ‘carbon footprint’ and ‘energy efficiency’ are unfamiliar to most consumers and poorly understood. Those findings contrast with the findings of this study. For example, almost three quarters of respondents to our online survey (74%) said they were either very familiar or fairly familiar with the term ‘carbon footprint’. ‘Energy efficient’ was found to be one of the most familiar/meaningful of all the terms tested (second only to ‘recycling’).

Terms that have been in use for some time such as ‘recycling’, ‘green’ or ‘environmentally friendly’ were even more familiar to respondents participating in the online survey, but the opposite was true for emerging terms that are relatively new to participants, such as ‘zero carbon’ or ‘water footprint’. Evidence from the discussion groups suggests that familiarity with green terms seems to come from a mix of mainstream product marketing and media.

## Meaningfulness

The terms that survey respondents said they found most meaningful were those with which they were most familiar. The same trend was evident at the other end of the spectrum: only 43% of respondents to the online survey said they were familiar with the term ‘low impact’; 38% said they found the term meaningful. However, despite the fact that many participants in the group discussions claimed terms like ‘carbon emissions’ or ‘climate change’ were familiar and meaningful to them, there was evidence that for some, their actual understanding of the concepts behind these phrases was less than perfect.

Some emerging terms seemed to be intuitively more meaningful to discussion group participants than others. When discussion group participants felt that terms were not intuitively meaningful, they were observed trying to make sense of them in a number of ways. They might, for instance, pick up on a familiar element within a term and attempt to apply it in its new context (referring back to ‘carbon footprint’ in order to interpret ‘water footprint’, for example). A good example of a common element that seemed to cause discussion group participants confusion was the prefix ‘bio’, which was at various times wrongly linked to washing powder, fuel, yoghurt and natural decomposition. ‘Neutral’ (as in ‘water neutral’ or ‘carbon neutral’) and zero (as in ‘zero carbon’ or ‘zero waste’) also caused

problems, since some group participants tended to infer from them a total absence of something. In contrast, some discussion group participants seemed to feel 'footprint' was more intuitive as an indicator of impact.

Another factor that appeared to influence the way in which participants made sense of emerging terms was their existing expectations – about the sort of environmental impacts that might be associated with a given product, for example. If a term appeared to infer an impact that was counterintuitive (carbon emissions being linked to an insurance policy, say), some participants struggled to make these links.

Our analysis of the evidence collected over the course of this research also points towards some useful lessons for marketers when using green terms. These include:

- The need to be aware of terms' 'internal dependencies' – the degree to which understanding one emerging term is dependent upon understanding a related concept (a grasp of carbon offsetting is required to understand the term 'carbon negative', for example);
- The need to ensure that claims referencing multiple environmental issues are as clear as possible about how those impacts relate to one another and their relative importance. There was evidence that some discussion group participants found it difficult to judge the value and importance of claims that linked a product to several different environmental issues; and
- The need to ensure that messages are consistent, and that negative environmental impacts do not appear to be glossed over in the promotion of positive outcomes.

## The role of supporting information

Research participants in both the online survey and the discussion groups demonstrated different preferences when it came to the level of detail that supported a headline claim. This appeared to vary from person to person and from product to product, with some discussion group participants expressing frustration with what they saw as too much text and others demanding more. We can hypothesise that this supports the need for key information to be informative and concise in order to cater to both ends of this spectrum. The survey findings suggest that high quality supporting detail that quantifies environmental benefits can improve trust in green claims, and participants' sense of how well those claims have been understood.

## Responses to different types of terms

The research highlighted some important ways in which participants differentiated between green terms.

### 'Inferential' terms and 'flag' terms

Inferential terms (e.g. 'clean' or 'natural') seemed to induce positive responses from discussion group participants and to convey a general sense of environmental benefit, despite the fact that they are not explicitly 'environmental' terms. This is important as it appears to create the potential to mislead participants. 'Flag' terms (e.g. 'green' or 'environmentally friendly') performed a little better, in that when they were presented to discussion group participants without any context, participants generally considered them relatively meaningful. When flag terms were tested as part of a claim, responses varied



depending on the specific context. Few participants found 'green' or 'sustainable' meaningful when associated with particular products (such as bank accounts) for example, but this situation improved in other contexts (such as sustainably sourced fish).

Crucially, however, irrespective of context, it appears that flag terms only ever indicate *overall* environmental benefit. We might conclude from this that there is a risk that green claims which make use of such terms may not accurately transmit the scale of the specific environmental benefit associated with the product concerned. That is to say, they could suggest far greater environmental achievements and benefits than might in fact be the case. Moreover, even if a flag term is qualified with supporting information, there is no guarantee that this information will either be read or understood, and so the risk remains that the consumer may be misled into thinking that a product is 'better for the environment' than it actually is; or that its net impact on the environment is positive, when in fact improvements are limited to a particular area or issue. We would suggest that this reinforces the need for any supporting information that *is* provided to be concise and easily understood.

### **Comparative terms**

Participants in the group discussions expressed considerable scepticism about the use of comparative terms (such as 'greener' or 'more environmentally friendly') and frequently demanded 'proof' that claims using these terms were true. This seems to support the recommendations of Defra's green claims guidance that comparative terms be avoided unless the basis for comparison is made clear, and the claim quantified.

### **Carbon terminology**

Evidence from the discussion groups suggested that consumers seem to be acquiring understanding of carbon terminology gradually and in an ad hoc manner. This meant that for the individuals who participated in this research, understanding of carbon terminology was patchy in a way that is hard to predict. The picture was further complicated by the ability of participants in the group discussions to *feel* a term had meaning without truly understanding it – perceived understanding of carbon terms is not the same as actual understanding.

### **Terms that consumers themselves would use**

Some individuals who participated in the group discussions differentiated between terms that they could relate to (by which they seemed to mean that they themselves could envisage using them) and terms that would be used by people who were less like them. Broadly speaking, participants in the group discussions seemed to identify most closely with terms with which they were familiar, although this was not always the case.

## **1.3 Links between terms and products**

The importance of context in giving meaning to green terms has already been well established<sup>1</sup>. This research explored participants' responses to green terms in a particular type of context: specifically, the type of product promoted in a claim.

Respondents to the online survey tended to find the use of green terms far more intuitive in relation to some products. The most meaningful term tested in association with cars, for

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Consumer Focus (2009) Green expectations: consumers' understanding of green claims in advertising

example, was 'energy efficient', found meaningful by more than 80% of survey respondents. In contrast, the most meaningful term tested in association with holidays – 'environmentally friendly' – was considered meaningful by only 42% of respondents. Overall, responses to claims linking green terms with particular products appeared to demonstrate the impact these associations can have on how meaningful a term is. The terms that were considered most meaningful when linked to products were in general those that:

- Were more familiar to participants; and
- Described specific measures or outcomes – e.g. 'Renewable energy tariff', '100% recycled bottle', 'locally sourced fish', 'energy efficient washing machine' and 'energy efficient car'.

'Environmentally friendly' was considered more meaningful than many of the other terms tested when associated with particular products (most notably, holidays, washing machines and washing powder). It appeared from the conversations that took place during the discussion groups that this was because participants found it useful as a broad indication that a product did have some level of environmental impact (and so might be subject to an environmental claim). In contrast, other 'flag' terms such as 'green', 'eco' or 'sustainable' performed less well in the online survey, reflecting findings from the discussion groups that these terms were considered slightly less meaningful than 'environmentally friendly' when tested in isolation. The importance of context was demonstrated, however, by responses to the term 'sustainable' – the word became much more meaningful to people when it was associated with fish.

Carbon-related terms were considered meaningful by participants in the group discussions when associated with products seen to produce direct emissions *through use*. Links to carbon terms were less well received for products like holidays (where flights – strongly linked to carbon by discussion group participants – were just one element of the product) or washing machines (where the emissions are produced through electricity generation, rather than direct product use). 'Low carbon' tended to score poorly for meaningfulness even on those products that were closely associated with other carbon terms, which might lead us to conclude that there is something about the phrase when it is used in association with a particular product that is unclear.

Individuals who participated in the online survey and discussion groups did not seem to find links between financial products (or the investments that underpin them) and the environment meaningful, nor did they find the association of financial products with carbon offsetting particularly intuitive. When linked to bank accounts, only two terms were considered meaningful by more than a fifth of respondents and these related to wider social issues ('ethical' and 'socially responsible') rather than the environment. Our observation is that this appeared to be because participants did not see clear and direct links between financial products and environmental impact – any consideration of where money might be invested, for example, seemed too far removed to resonate.

## 1.4 Differences by sub-group

Variations in responses to specific terms did appear in the online survey, although caution is needed in relation to these results due to small sample sizes in some cases, as well as the limitations relating to quota sampling outlined above. It is important to note that whilst some variations were evident, these often applied only on a case by case basis rather than

reflecting any broader, strategic trends. There were relatively few variations across different groups in relation to those terms with which participants were familiar (such as 'energy efficient', 'environmentally friendly' and 'green'). In contrast, variations were much more evident in relation to emerging terms. Typically, these phrases were considered more familiar and meaningful by those who read broadsheet newspapers, lived in southern England, were aged 25-34, and were classified by the Defra segmentation model as 'positive greens'. For example, 'carbon offsetting' was considered familiar by 34% of tabloid readers, compared with 44% of those who read mid-market papers and 56% of those who read broadsheets. There was a similar picture when it came to region, with less than 40% of respondents in Wales, Scotland and the north of England saying the term was familiar, compared with 44% in Midlands/East of England and 52% in Southern England.

## 1.5 Key lessons

While this research highlighted a whole host of issues that will help to inform the use and deployment of green terms, both in green claims and in wider environmental messaging, a few points emerge as particularly important. Specifically:

- The more familiar a term was to participants, the more they felt they understood it;
- If participants found a term meaningful, they had the potential to respond positively to it even if they did not truly understand the concepts it described;
- Participants seemed to rely upon intuition to derive meaning from emerging terms. Our observation is that this means it is essential that new terms – particularly those which are effectively composites using part or all of an existing term – have a clear internal logic; and
- Qualifying or explanatory detail may make claims more trustworthy and meaningful, but it cannot be relied upon.

## 2 Introduction

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### 2.1 The policy backdrop

The Government produced [Green Claims - Practical Guidance](#) in 2003 - building on an earlier Green Claims Code that agreed a set of easy-to-follow principles about how to make a good environmental claim. Both scientific and consumer understanding of environmental issues has evolved since the guidance was produced, while the breadth and sophistication of environmental reporting in the media has also changed. Different concerns have risen up the environmental agenda and are increasingly being used by businesses in product and service marketing.

For these reasons the guidance has been updated. To support this process, Defra's Sustainable Consumption and Production Programme commissioned four projects to assess the level, type and impact of green claims currently in use on products and services. These four projects were designed to provide an overall picture of the current 'state of play'. Specifically, they covered:

- Consumer attitudes to green claims and 'greenwash';
- A review of data on the use of green claims on product packaging and associated materials in the UK;
- A review of data on the use of green claims in marketing in the UK; and
- Work with industry to explore where guidance is needed and invite feedback.

This document reports the findings from an additional, fifth strand of research exploring consumer understanding of, and responses to, specific environmental terms – the words and phrases found in marketing claims made on product packaging, in broadcast, print and online media and other promotional materials.

In addition, the research has been developed to provide Defra's Centre of Expertise on Influencing Behaviours with further evidence about people's wider understanding of the words and phrases that might be used to encourage them to live more sustainable lives and adopt pro-environmental behaviours.

### 2.2 Research aims and objectives

Specifically, this research seeks to provide Defra with:

- Further insight on what consumers think about green claims and their use (building on the work carried out by the other four projects mentioned above);
- A greater understanding of the ways in which consumers understand the different environmental terms used in green claims;
- Insight on consumer responses to emerging environmental terms;
- An understanding of how the context within which a term is used impacts upon responses to a claim;
- Insight on how these findings vary between different population groups; and
- An assessment of the implications of the research for wider communications around pro-environmental behaviours.

## 2.3 Methodology

### Overview

In order to meet these requirements, the research team (Brook Lyndhurst, Icaro Consulting and Sauce) employed a three-pronged approach.

#### A brief literature review

The review was designed to give a greater sense of what is already known about consumer understanding of green terms, and where there are gaps that need to be addressed through this current study. The literature review was limited – the review was completed rapidly (within two weeks) and did not follow a systematic design. We found that direct research into consumer understanding of green terminology is ‘wide and shallow’, in that there are many sources that touch upon the issue, but rarely in any great detail. A small piece of research carried out for Futerra in 2007 appears to be the only UK study designed specifically to explore reactions to terms themselves<sup>2</sup>. Marketing agency EcoAlign carried out testing of environmental phrases in 2009<sup>3</sup>, but only relating to energy, and with US, not UK consumers. There have been some in-depth explorations of emerging issues by market research organisations<sup>4</sup> but these tend to focus upon concepts rather than the language used to convey them. In light of the paucity of comprehensive data on green terms, we have chosen to report those insights that we could find alongside the findings from the other phases of the research rather than in a stand-alone section. Wherever possible, we have tried to be clear about the methods employed in the studies referenced, and how these compare with and link to our own work.

#### Qualitative research

The qualitative research took place in three waves during October and November 2009. An initial round of three discussion groups was used to provide a basic understanding of the ways in which individuals participating in the discussions related to the terms used in green claims, and formed the basis for the development of materials for subsequent rounds. The topic guide for these groups is included in Annex A.

The main qualitative phase consisted of two rounds of six discussion groups each. This allowed us to revise the topic guide after the first six groups in order to explore emerging findings in more detail and ensure that all research questions were covered in as much detail as possible. Groups were recruited in line with Defra’s environmental segmentation model<sup>5</sup>. In order to keep the number of groups manageable, segments with some beliefs and values in common were grouped together as follows:

- Positive greens and concerned consumers;
- Waste watchers, sideline supporters and cautious participants; and
- Stalled starters and honestly disengaged

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<sup>2</sup> Findings of qualitative research planned and commissioned by Futerra and undertaken by Onearth Research consisted of two focus groups held in London during Spring 2007. Participants were drawn from a mixture of life stages: parents, young adults and older people. One focus group was composed of people from the socio-economic group ABC1, and the other from C2DE.

<sup>3</sup> Findings from 1,000 online interviews conducted with US adults in September 2009. The sample was balanced to match the US population by age, gender, region and ethnicity.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Mintel (2009), *Slow Travel* – UK

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/behaviour/documents/behaviours-jan08-report.pdf>

Recruiters<sup>6</sup> were also asked to ensure groups included a mix of ages, gender and socio-economic grade. Participants were given £40 each to thank them for taking part. The ordering and locations of the groups are shown in Table 1. Because of the constrained timetable for this work, most groups took place in and around the south east of England. The topic guide for the first round of groups is provided in Annex B and the topic guide for the second round is provided in Annex C. In total, 113 people took part, across 13 groups.

Group	Location	Date & time (2009)	Segments
a	Manchester	Thurs 22 October, 6,15pm	Not specified
b	Coventry	Thurs 22 October, 6,15pm	Not specified
c	London	Thurs 22 October, 6,15pm	Not specified
1	Croydon	Tues 17 November, 6.15pm	Positive greens   Concerned consumers
2	Croydon	Tues 17 November, 8.00pm	Waste watchers   Sideline supporters   Cautious participants
3	Croydon	Thurs 19 November, 6.15pm	Stalled starters   Honestly disengaged
4	Watford	Tues 17 November, 6.15pm	Positive greens   Concerned consumers
5	Watford	Thurs 19 November, 6.15pm	Waste watchers   Sideline supporters   Cautious participants
6	Watford	Thurs 19 November, 8.00pm	Stalled starters   Honestly disengaged
7	Bexleyheath	Tues 24 November, 6.15pm	Positive greens   Concerned consumers
8	Bexleyheath	Tues 24 November, 8.00pm	Waste watchers   Sideline supporters   Cautious participants
9	Bexleyheath	Thurs 26 November, 6.15pm	Stalled starters   Honestly disengaged
10	Reading	Thurs 26 November, 6.15pm	Positive greens   Concerned consumers
11	Reading	Tues 24 November, 6.15pm	Waste watchers   Sideline supporters   Cautious participants
12	Reading	Thurs 26 November, 8.00pm	Stalled starters   Honestly disengaged

### Quantitative research

An online survey of 2,019 adults (achieved sample size) in Great Britain aged 18+ was used to further test and explore emerging findings. The survey was undertaken between 29 January and 1 February 2010. The questionnaire, designed by Icaro Consulting and Brook Lyndhurst, was 30 minutes in length. Fieldwork was undertaken by Ipsos MORI, with individuals recruited from Ipsos MORI's online 'access panel' (which currently holds 400,000 active members in Great Britain). From this panel, a sample was identified which reflected national characteristics, with quotas set on age, gender, work status and geographic region. Respondents were paid an incentive of £1 to complete the survey. Data have been weighted – by age, gender, work status and geographic region – to the known profile of the population of Great Britain. The questionnaire is set out in Annex D.

Defra has developed a segmentation model based on people's values and beliefs towards the environment. The survey included questions to allow us to place respondents in one of Defra's seven segments. It should be noted that the distribution across segments was in some areas markedly different to that outlined in Defra's original Framework for Pro-

<sup>6</sup> Recruitment was carried out by [Criteria Fieldwork](#).

environmental Behaviours, the fieldwork for which was conducted in 2007 and was face to face rather than online. For example, this survey found a far larger proportion of ‘honestly disengaged’ respondents (those who are not interested in environmental issues and have some scepticism about them) – up from 18% in 2007 to 30% in early 2010.

## Limitations & rationale

Any research of this scale will have its limitations and it is important to understand these from the outset in order to ensure that the findings can be interpreted appropriately.

### **Sampling and response biases in the survey**

It should be noted that, while quota sampling is used in this type of research, it is subject to sampling and response biases. Online panels are self-selecting, in that respondents have agreed to be on the panel and choose whether or not to take part in the survey. No tests of statistical significance have been performed on the data. Thus, although the sample was designed (and the data was subsequently weighted) to reflect national characteristics, the results cannot automatically be assumed to be representative across the population as a whole, nor are results generalisable to the population as a whole. Results should only be seen as indicative and caution is needed in the interpretation of results.

Designing the survey required a balance between breadth (the need to cover a wide range of questions and issues) and depth (the need for samples to be sufficiently large to allow robust analysis). In particular this was an issue when it came to those exercises for which our sample was split, either to allow us to test more phrases or to allow us to explore the impact of making small changes to particular claims. In those cases, analysis by sub group – and in particular, analysis by segment, involves base sizes smaller than we would like and this level of analysis should therefore on the whole be treated with caution and as indicative due to the greater margin for error.

### **Research purpose**

It is worth stressing that this research is intended to support Defra in developing guidance for marketers, but does not constitute the sole basis for that guidance. Consumer responses to green terms are just one consideration in any judgement about their suitability for use in claims. It might be, for example, that people respond warmly to a particular term and feel it has considerable meaning to them, but that the inferred meaning is at odds with any ‘official’ or ‘expert’ definition.

### **The influence of the research process**

It should be noted that the act of asking a research participant about a particular stimulus – whether a particular term or an advert – immediately confers on that stimulus an importance that it would not normally hold. That is to say, were an individual to encounter an advert in the course of going about their day to day life, or to encounter a particular term within the context of a particular claim, they would be unlikely to give it the same level of thought and attention as they will when asked to consider that advert or term in a research setting. This means that, while this research provides some useful insights into the ways in which people think about green terms, it cannot on its own tell the full story about likely responses to those terms when used in ‘real life’ claims.

### **Qualitative research**

The research findings from the qualitative phases cannot be assumed to apply to the public at large. The purpose of the qualitative component of this study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms people use to relate to, and understand green terms. It generated a rich body of complex and sometimes contradictory data that helps us to explain how and why words and phrases may be interpreted in the way they are, but not to predict how those explanations play out across the population. Thus, while we may observe that a particular trait is exhibited by large numbers of respondents across all of our discussion groups, we cannot automatically assume that the same characteristics are prevalent in the population at large. We *can*, however, use those findings to help explain traits identified in the survey.

### **Exploration of trends in quantitative survey data**

With any study combining qualitative and quantitative research, there is always a question about whether to run the quantitative phase first, using the qualitative research to explore emerging findings, or vice versa, using the results from the discussion groups to inform the design of the survey questionnaire. In this case, we took the view that it was important to get a real understanding of the range of thought processes and drivers of responses to green terms before drafting the quantitative survey. As a result, there was less scope for exploring the survey results, which in turn means there may be cause for further research on key issues (into the cause of differences in our ad pairing exercise for example – see section 3.5).

### **The nature of the discussion groups**

The list of research questions posed by this research was long, and consequently the discussion groups in particular had to cover a lot of ground. Specifically, it was important for Defra to get qualitative data on responses to a large number of *individual terms* (see Annex E for a full list). As a result, it was not always possible to explore every aspect of every term to the degree we might have liked (the impact of using them in different contexts, for example, or the degree to which people responded differently if terms are used in advertising claims or in pro-environmental messaging more widely).

### **Qualitative sampling**

As noted above, sampling for the qualitative phases was designed to ensure that the research explored whether attitudes towards green terms – and the way people react to them – are linked to their more general environmental outlook. Potential respondents were therefore asked a series of 14 questions, the responses to which were used to place them in one of the Defra segments. For advice on recruitment to Defra's segmentation model as outlined in Defra's framework for pro-environmental behaviours, please contact Defra's Centre of Expertise on Influencing Behaviours. As shown in Table 2 (page 12), we sought to ensure a good mix in each group according to gender, socio-economic grading and age, setting minimum quotas (e.g. a minimum of four males and four females) in order to guard against missing responses to green terms linked to these particular characteristics.

Throughout this report quotes have been used to help illustrate the discussion of the findings. Quotes are intended to reflect the tone of the discussions in the groups and not as representative of the views of the entire group or groups, nor consumers more generally.



**Table 2 – Sampling – discussion groups**

#	Gender	Age	SEG	Segment	Location	Date
1	Mix	Mix	Mix	Positive greens/Concerned consumers	Croydon	18.15, 10.11.09
2				Waste Watchers/Sideline Supporters/Cautious Participants		20.00, 10.11.09
3				Stalled starters/Honestly disengaged		18.15, 12.11.09
4				Positive greens/Concerned consumers	Watford	18.15, 10.11.09
5				Waste Watchers/Sideline Supporters/Cautious Participants		18.15, 12.11.09
6				Stalled starters/Honestly disengaged		20.00, 12.11.09
7				Positive greens/Concerned consumers	Bexley- heath	18.15, 24.11.09
8				Waste Watchers/Sideline Supporters/Cautious Participants		20.00, 24.11.09
9				Stalled starters/Honestly disengaged		18.15, 26.11.09
10				Positive greens/Concerned consumers	Reading	18.15, 26.11.09
11				Waste Watchers/Sideline Supporters/Cautious Participants		18.15, 24.11.09
12				Stalled starters/ Honestly disengaged		20.00, 26.11.09

### Different types of terms

Throughout this report we have distinguished between three types of green term. These are broadly defined by their level of specificity in relation to an environmental claim. The three groups are:

- **‘Inferential terms’**. These make no *explicit* link to environmental issues but have the potential to imply one from context in which they are used. Examples include ‘clean’, ‘pure’ or ‘natural’;
- **‘Flag terms’**. These make an explicit link to environmental benefit without picking out a specific issue and so may be used to ‘flag’ a product or claim as having an environmental aspect. Examples include ‘environmentally-friendly’, ‘green’ or ‘sustainable’. There is more detail on flag terms on page 37; and
- **‘Specific terms’**. These either highlight a specific environmental issue (e.g. ‘carbon footprint’ or ‘carbon emissions’) or specific steps taken to negate an environmental impact (e.g. ‘renewable energy’ or ‘recyclable’).

## 2.4 The structure of this report

This report draws together findings from all three phases of the research and sets them out thematically. Specifically, it addresses the following issues:

- **Section 3 - Green terms in general**  
This section looks at some of the lessons emerging from the research about participants’ understanding of, and responses to, green terms in general.
- **Section 4 - Links between terms and product types**  
The research provided an opportunity to explore the links participants drew between green terms and particular types of products and services. This section sets out the findings from this work.
- **Section 5 - Implications**  
Finally, section 5 draws together the findings from the preceding sections to identify the implications of the research for policy and communications.

## 2.5 Supplementary reports

In addition to the core focus on green terms, this research has provided additional insight that is not covered in this main report. These further findings are covered in three supplementary documents on:

- Consumer insight on individual terms – this document explores each of the terms tested in this research in detail and draws out findings that may assist marketers in framing claims and pro-environmental messages;
- Consumer insight on the use of green terms in fostering pro-environmental behaviour change – this document explores some of the implications of our findings on green terms for pro-environmental behaviour change messaging more generally; and
- Consumer responses to environmental labels – in addition to exploring the way in which research participants related to green terms, we also briefly tested familiarity with – and understanding of – a range of environmental labelling schemes. The findings from this work are covered in this third supplementary report.

## 3 Green terms in general

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This section draws out thematic findings about responses to, and understanding of, green terms. Specifically, it covers:

- Participants' use of environmental information in general;
  - General trust in green claims;
  - Awareness of green terms;
  - How meaningful participants found the green terms explored in the research;
  - The role information supporting a headline claim in generating trust in a claim and making it meaningful;
  - Responses to different types of terms; and
  - Key differences by sub-group.
- Alongside this section, the supplementary report *Consumer responses to specific environmental terms* is a further resource providing findings on all the individual terms tested with participants in the research.

### 3.1 Environmental information and purchasing – an overview

Findings from recent literature suggest that growing numbers of consumers claim to be influenced by green issues in their purchasing decisions. Landor's Green Brands survey<sup>7</sup> found that 62% of UK respondents agreed with the statement, "I make a conscious effort to purchase green products", and 57% agreed that, "I am purchasing more green products than I used to". In research by Consumer Focus<sup>8</sup>, 54% of survey respondents said they were buying more environmentally responsible products than they were two years previously. Furthermore, that research suggested that levels of demand for, and use of, green information varies by product sector. For example, 45% of respondents said they always or often sought out environmental information in relation to white goods, compared to 33% for cars, 15% for holidays/tourism and 13% for banking.

The quantitative survey undertaken for this study offers an additional perspective. 43% of respondents said they found it difficult to understand whether a product is environmentally-friendly based on the information on product packaging (Figure 1, page 15). The same percentage (43%) said that they *made an effort to look for information* on pack about whether a product is environmentally friendly. Around one in four respondents (26%) said that they were prepared to pay more for environmentally friendly products.

The results of a second exercise support the data in Figure 1. Respondents to the online survey were shown variations of five adverts that included environmental claims. They were then asked about the extent to which they would personally make use of the information contained in the adverts when making product choices. Even for the advert that the most respondents said would be used in purchasing decisions (for fabric conditioner), only 45% said they would use the claim in this way (Figure 2). This fell to 14% for the advert that the smallest percentage of respondents said they would use in purchasing decisions (for a small

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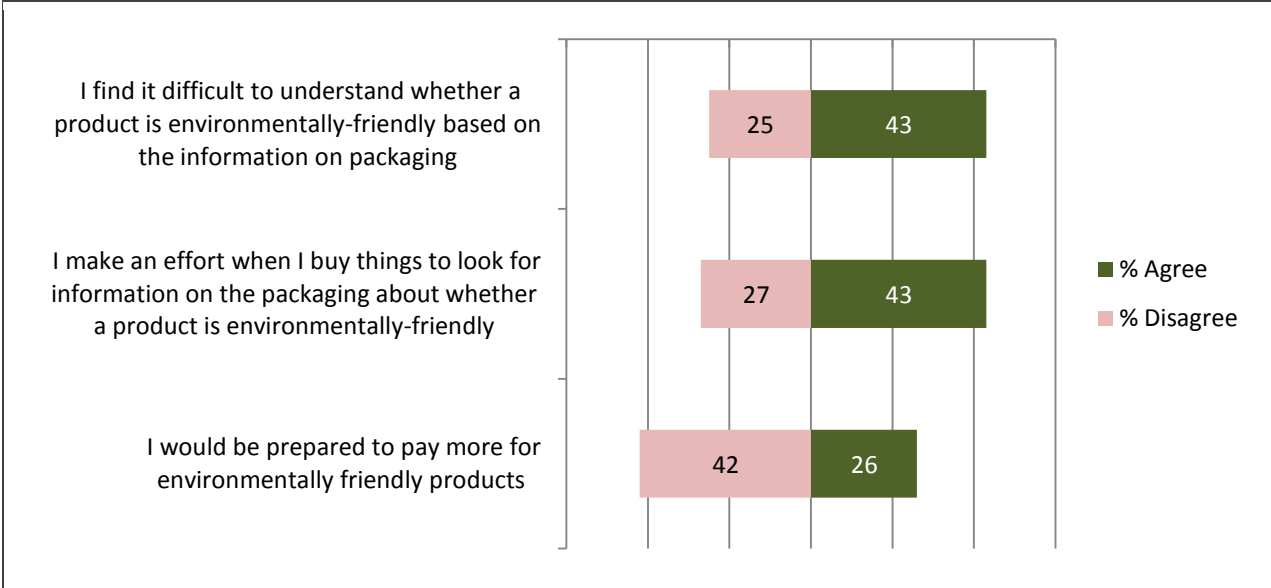
<sup>7</sup> Landor (2009) ImagePower Green Brands Survey

<sup>8</sup> Yates, L (2009) Green Expectations: Consumers' understanding of green claims in advertising, Consumer Focus

car). This is consistent with the Consumer Focus research findings outlined above, in which claimed levels of use of the information in claims varied between 10% and 40% of respondents, depending on the product category.

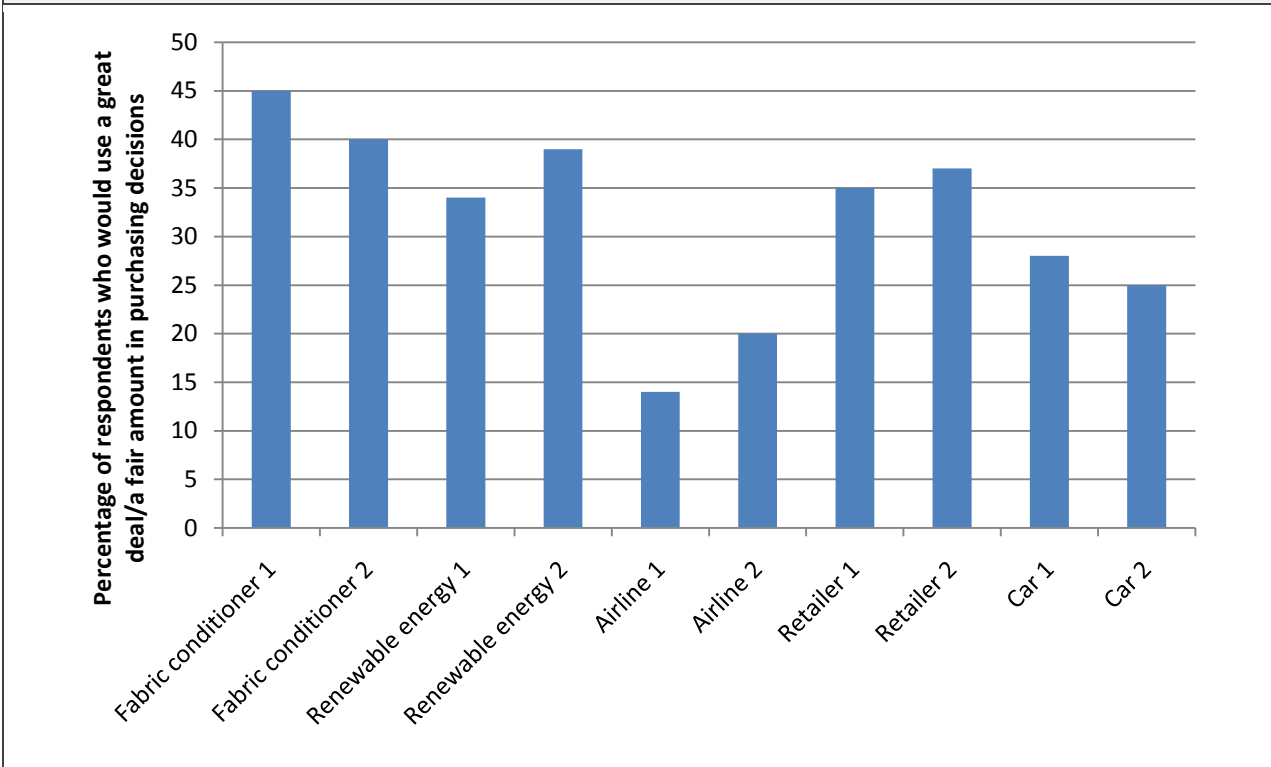
**Figure 1 – Headline attitudes to environmental information and purchasing**

**Question:** To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Base: 2,015) (note: chart does not show “neither agree nor disagree” or “don’t know” responses)



**Figure 2 – Use of environmental information in purchasing decisions**

**Question:** To what extent would you personally make use of the information in this advert in making product choices? (Base: Adverts numbered 1 - 1,013; Adverts numbered 2 – 1,006)



## 3.2 Trust in green claims

Before exploring responses to green terms, it is worth making one or two observations about trust in green claims more generally, drawing on available literature. Consumer Focus<sup>9</sup> found that 58% of respondents to their survey on reactions to green claims agreed with the statement, “A lot of companies nowadays pretend to be green just to charge higher prices” and 42% *disagreed* with the statement, “It’s not possible these days for companies to make false claims about environmental performance.” However, when we asked our online survey respondents about the degree to which they trusted a range of adverts carrying green claims (see page 35) between a half and two thirds said they found the information provided either ‘very trustworthy’ or ‘fairly trustworthy’. The picture, then, is far from clear.

It is important, when making judgements about these responses, that we view them against the backdrop of wider cynicism about advertising claims in general. A 2007 study by Nielsen<sup>10</sup> found that 49% of UK consumers trust advertising in general (though it is unclear precisely what question was asked to generate this figure). Two years later, in 2009, another Nielsen survey<sup>11</sup> found that 49% of consumers across the European Union either ‘trust completely’ or ‘trust somewhat’ TV advertising, with similar figures for newspaper adverts and much lower trust (36%) in online advertising.

These figures tell us two important things: first, a large group of consumers are generally distrusting of all types of advertising; and second, trust in advertising is fluid, and varies greatly depending upon a number of variables, including the media used.

### Who are the cynics?

The Consumer Focus research mentioned above found that, “The greener consumers in our research gave adverts shown in the online survey better marks on issues such as trust and believability than less environmentally receptive consumers.” This is interesting because it suggests that consumers who are more environmentally engaged may trust green claims more than those who are more cynical about environmental matters in general. To put this another way, we could hypothesise that cynicism about environmental issues prevents some consumers from fully engaging with green claims. This could even work at a more issue-specific level, so that consumers who felt they cared about the environment in the broadest sense but had issues with climate change, were less trusting of, and receptive towards, the language of climate and carbon.

As mentioned above, we asked online survey respondents about the degree to which they trusted paired adverts (this is discussed in more detail on page 34). Breaking down the results according to which of Defra’s segments<sup>12</sup> respondents belonged to shows a clear pattern (Table 3, page 17).

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<sup>9</sup> Yates, L (2009) Green Expectations: Consumers’ understanding of green claims in advertising, Consumer Focus

<sup>10</sup> Nielsen (2007) [Trust in advertising](#)

<sup>11</sup> Nielsen (2009) [Trust, value and engagement in advertising](#)

<sup>12</sup> For more detail on Defra’s segmentation model, visit:  
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/behaviour/>

**Table 3** – Percentage of respondents who found adverts either ‘very untrustworthy’ or ‘fairly untrustworthy’ (highest percentage for each advert in darker red; second highest in pink; lowest in darker green; second lowest in light green), by Defra environmental segment

**Question:** To what extent, if at all, do you think this is a trustworthy environmental claim for the company to make? (Bases: 1,013 Ad 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a and 5a; 1,006 ad 1b, 2b, 3b, 4b and 5b)

Segments	Adverts									
	1a	1b	2a	2b	3a	3b	4a	4b	5a	5b
All	22	26	26	28	49	47	25	23	37	32
Positive greens	16	25	18	19	46	44	17	17	42	32
Waste watchers	19	25	23	28	46	50	21	20	39	25
Concerned consumers	18	23	20	21	48	43	17	19	33	29
Sideline supporters	14	20	25	21	39	55	14	17	26	32
Cautious participants	17	31	16	34	51	51	21	25	38	29
Stalled starters	23	31	23	31	41	38	35	29	27	26
Honestly disengaged	32	28	40	39	56	49	38	34	39	40

While we need to be aware that the bases for each segment are fairly small (ranging between 105 for stalled starters and 588 for honestly disengaged), a pattern does appear to emerge: Honestly disengaged respondents were consistently more cynical when it came to green claims. Perhaps equally interesting is the degree to which, beyond this, trust in adverts appears to vary depending on the nature of the advert. That is to say, it cannot be assumed that the more pro-environmental a person’s views and beliefs are (for the purposes of this report we will refer to this as how engaged they are with the environment), the more trust they will place in green claims.

The discussion groups provided additional insight into the way in which cynicism impacted upon participants’ responses to green claims, with some – particularly those in the groups with less pro-environmental beliefs – saying they ‘turned off’ when they encountered adverts relating to the environment.

*M: I wouldn’t take any notice, to be honest. I think they are just trying to get you to trust them.*

Scoping group 3, Manchester

This may well have significance for the communication of pro-environmental messaging more generally, since it may follow that environmental cynicism acts as a barrier to all communication around the environment, and not just advertising. When targeting those consumers who are most sceptical about the environment, it may be better to tap into other motivations rather than trying to convince them of the merits of environmental arguments. Where non-environmental hooks may currently be relatively weak relative to the desire to continue with a particular behaviour (e.g. flying), there may be a segment of the population that it is extremely difficult to reach.

It does need to be stressed, however, that a large body of participants – between a half and two thirds of respondents to the online survey – did say that they trusted green claims that were tested in the online survey.

### 3.3 Awareness of green terms

There is a general consensus in the literature that consumers' increasing use of environmental information in purchasing decisions (see 3.1) is matched by a growing consciousness about environmental issues and terminology. Brand agency Landor's work on green branding over several years<sup>13</sup> shows that in the past, consumers' perceptions of whether or not a company was 'green' primarily focused on corporate activities relating to recycling. In their 2009 survey, however, between 50% and 74% of UK respondents included issues like use of toxic materials, energy efficiency and packaging reduction among actions for a company to take if they were to be thought of as 'green'. Between 25% and 49% of consumers also rated the following actions as 'very important':

- Encourages environmentally friendly employee behaviour;
- Offers environmentally friendly products and services, such as paperless billing;
- Promotes green practices through advertising and public service announcements; and
- Partners with environmental organisations.

This broadening understanding of what constitutes environmental responsibility reflects a growing sophistication in consumers' grasp of green issues (amongst some consumers). We sought to explore this further in the discussion groups by asking participants to tell us any environmental terms they were aware of at the beginning of each group. Overall findings from the group discussions echoed findings from wider research in this field, with participants in every group, including the least engaged segments, listing a broad range of terms that included fairly technical phrases. The following quote demonstrates this, with the participant showing both an awareness of some technical terms ('offsetting' and 'carbon footprints'), and perhaps more importantly, confidence in using those terms in relation to their own behaviour:

*W: The new one is the offsetting of carbon footprints – reducing your car [use]. Providing it is [used] less a week, you can reduce your carbon footprint.*

Group 3, Croydon

This said, the quote also demonstrates that amongst some participants, awareness and use of terms like 'offsetting' was not supported by a full grasp of what was meant by those terms. There is more on this in section 3.4.

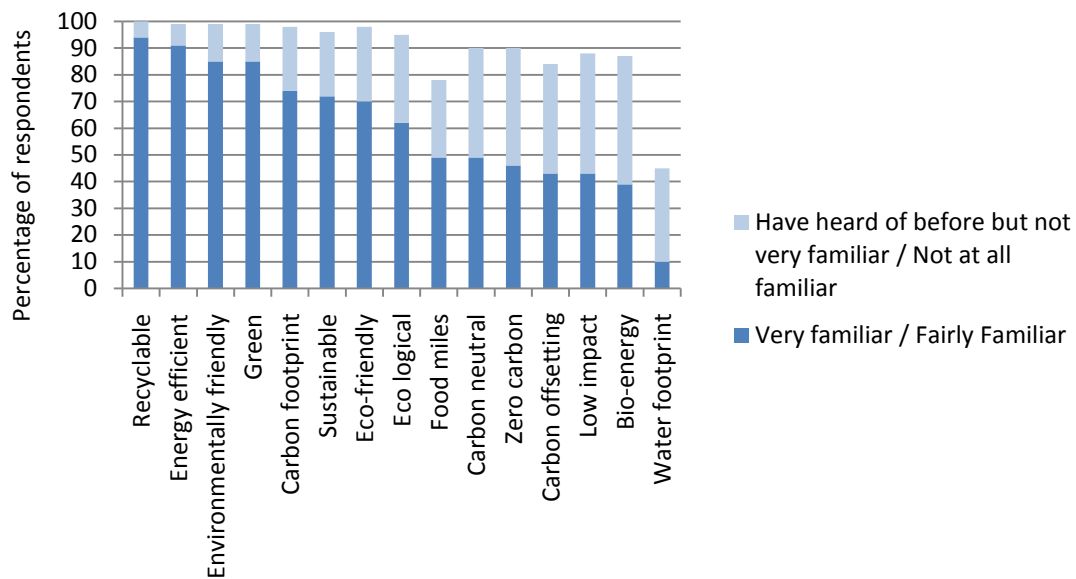
In order to look further at levels of awareness of particular terms, we asked respondents to the online survey how familiar they were with a list of key words and phrases (Figure 3, page 19).

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<sup>13</sup> Landor (2009) ImagePower Green Brands Survey

**Figure 3 – Familiarity with green terms**

**Question:** To what extent, if at all, are you familiar with the following terms? (Base: 2,015)



The results from the online survey are consistent with the findings from the literature review and discussion groups: overall, most participants seemed to be aware of a wide range of green terms. More than nine in ten (94%) survey respondents said that they were very or fairly familiar with the term ‘recyclable’, followed by ‘energy efficient’ (91%), ‘environmentally friendly’ (85%), and ‘green’ (85%).

While respondents seemed most familiar with more established terms like ‘green’ or ‘environmentally friendly’, other phrases – many of them linked to climate change – were also widely recognised. Almost three quarters of respondents were very familiar or fairly familiar with the term ‘carbon footprint’ (74%) for example, with similar figures for ‘sustainable’ (72%) and ‘eco-friendly’ (70%).

Familiarity with green terms seems to come from a mix of mainstream product marketing and media, with participants in all the group discussions regularly referring to these sources of information.

*M: I think... because these words have been in the press and on the TV a lot, I think that is maybe a reason why a lot of us are familiar and find those words meaningful.*

Group 10, Reading

A number of different government advertising campaigns were also referenced by focus group participants, including the Act On CO<sub>2</sub> campaign encouraging people to drive five miles less a week – television adverts for the campaign had been aired from November 7, less than a fortnight before the main groups took place.<sup>14</sup> Schools were also mentioned by

<sup>14</sup> Referencing the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> [‘Drive five miles less a week’ campaign](#).



participants, with some parents attributing their familiarity with green words and phrases to the influence of their children.

*W: My son is coming back from school, you know: "Oh mummy, we had to drive to school, think about the carbon footprint."*

Group 3, Croydon

As might be expected, familiarity falls for terms that relate to concepts that were relatively new to those taking part in the research. Far fewer respondents to the online survey said they were very familiar or fairly familiar with phrases like 'food miles' (49%), 'carbon neutral' (49%), 'zero carbon' (46%) and 'carbon offsetting' (43%). The disparity between the term 'carbon footprint' and the other derivatives of carbon is particularly striking. Still, for respondents who had at least heard of these terms (without being particularly familiar with them), *basic recognition* is at near universal levels. There is only one term, in fact, where even basic recognition was low – only one in ten (10%) said they were familiar with the term 'water footprint', whereas over half (56%) said they had never heard of it before.

## 3.4 Green terms: meaningfulness

### The nature of understanding

It is tempting to assume that consumers require a 'complete' or 'scientific' understanding of a term in order to use it, interpret it and, most importantly, act upon it. The literature suggests that this may not, however, be the case.

In-house consumer research conducted by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) at the end of 2007<sup>15</sup> found that despite widespread awareness of environmental concerns, many people lack a full understanding about environmental claims and what they really mean. EcoAlign<sup>16</sup> came to similar conclusions in the US, but crucially, found that some consumers have positive reactions even to terms they do not understand.

*Although people favour the ideas and intentions associated with energy conservation and smart energy, they do not understand the meaning of the terms themselves.*

EcoAlign (2009) Green Gap Redux: Green Words Gone Wrong

In order to explore this issue, we incorporated exercises into both the discussion groups and the online survey that enabled us to get a sense of how *meaningful* respondents found particular green terms. We were then able to compare these data with evidence on how well terms were understood.

### Meaningfulness

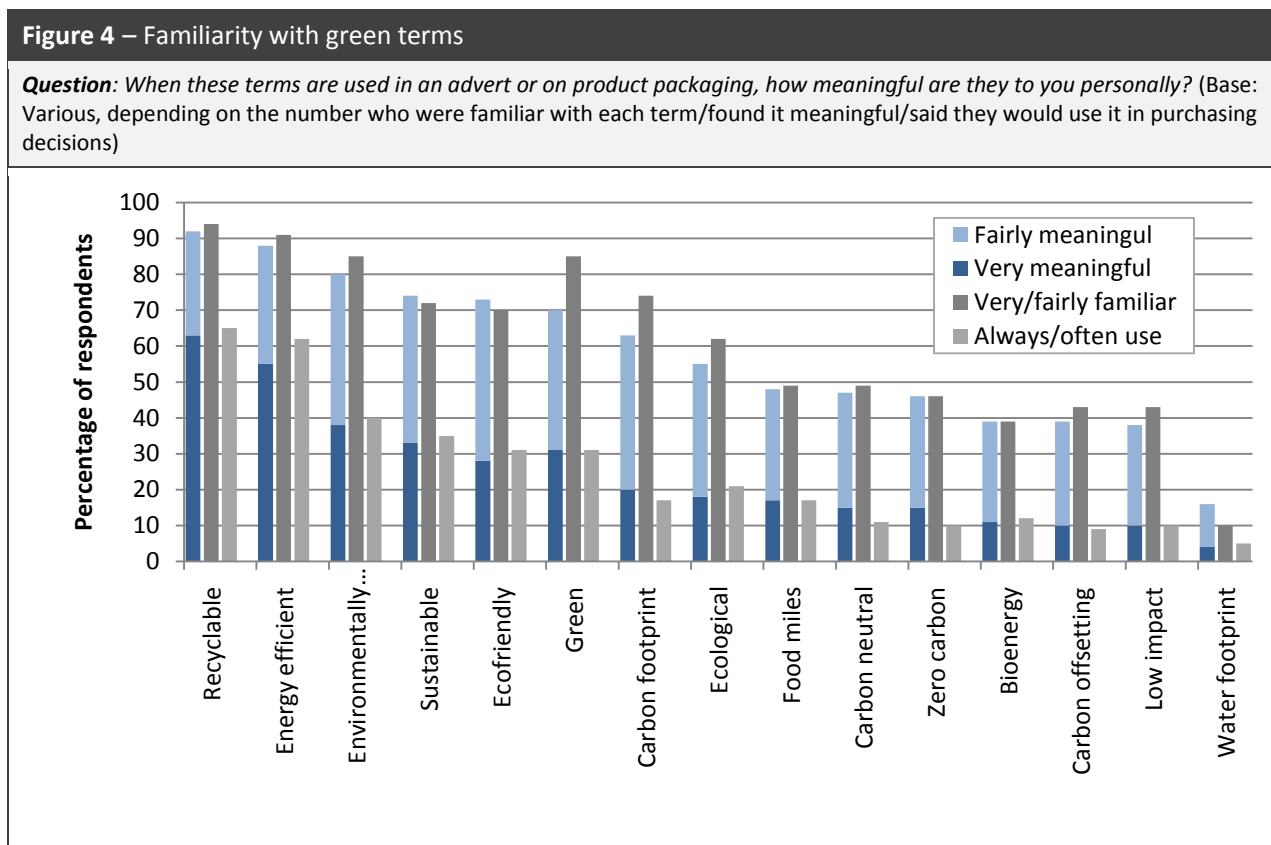
Following questions about basic recognition and familiarity, respondents to the online survey were asked how meaningful a series of terms were to them personally<sup>17</sup>. It should be

<sup>15</sup> Cited in the Advertising Standards Authority (2008), Compliance Report - Environmental claims survey 2008

<sup>16</sup> EcoAlign (2009) Green Gap Redux: Green Words Gone Wrong

<sup>17</sup> 'Meaningful' was defined in the survey question as "(i.e. whether it is easy to understand and something that makes sense)"

noted that terms were displayed without any supporting information or context, which may well have had an impact on the answers given. A strong (and perhaps not surprising) relationship with familiarity is evident – the terms that respondents found most meaningful were those with which they were most familiar (Figure 4).



This is true of terms like ‘recyclable’ (94% familiar; 91% meaningful), ‘energy efficient’ (91% familiar; 88% meaningful) and ‘environmentally-friendly’ (85% familiar; 80% meaningful). The reverse is also true, with less familiar terms typically being less meaningful to respondents – for example ‘low impact’ (43% familiar; 38% meaningful), ‘carbon offsetting’ (43% familiar; 39% meaningful) and ‘bio-energy’ (39% familiar; 40% meaningful).

The following quote from a discussion group participant is interesting because it highlights the way in which some participants reported that they felt more confident with terms the more they are exposed to them.

*M: If you... [hear] it over and over again, it becomes more memorable and you sort of pick up on it...*

Group 3, Croydon

On the basis of the evidence collected in both the discussion groups and the online survey, we can hypothesise that green terms go through a ‘familiarity transition’ which may result in subtle shifts in inferred meaning as consumers switch from literal interpretation to a more subconscious mental ‘shorthand’. Responses to the terms ‘fair trade’ and ‘ethically traded’ provided good examples of this. Participants in the discussion groups picked up on the word ‘trade’ in the less familiar ‘ethically traded’ and assumed that the term related to the

exchange of goods *within the supply chain* rather than fair reimbursement for *producers*. In contrast, familiarity with the idea that 'fair trade' implies greater rewards and better conditions for farmers meant that the supply chain aspect of the 'trade' element of the phrase was almost overlooked by participants.

This reinforces the need to avoid looking at consumer understanding of green terms as a static issue. Rather, green language should be seen as fluid, shifting constantly as new terms are introduced and existing terms become better known.

There were some examples in the responses to the online survey where familiarity and meaningfulness did not appear to be as strongly connected. For example, while the term 'green' may have had high familiarity (85%), its perceived meaningfulness was lower (70%). This is not the case with 'environmentally-friendly', suggesting a potential subtle but important difference between these two 'flag' terms. We can hypothesise that one possible cause may be the fact that 'green' is not just linked to the environment, but also describes a colour, as well as being used in figures of speech (green with envy, etc). This was evident in some of the discussion groups when those taking part were asked to link a range of terms with particular product types. Participants would occasionally link the term 'green' to a particular product that might be that colour, such as paint or a jacket, rather than because of its potential environmental credentials. In contrast, 'environmentally-friendly' is much less flexible in its application. Furthermore, and potentially reflecting its relatively recent emergence, the meaningfulness of the term 'carbon footprint' (meaningful to 63%) lags slightly behind its familiarity (74%).

A similar exercise was carried out in the discussion groups using a much wider range of words (again, without any supporting context). The results were consistent with the findings from the online survey, with similar terms considered more meaningful in both. 'Recycling', for example, was considered meaningful in both the discussion groups and the survey, possibly because it is the environmental behaviour that consumers are most conscious of being actively engaged with. 'Flag' terms were also, for the most part, considered *relatively* meaningful by discussion group participants, though again, 'environmentally-friendly' seemed to be thought of as more meaningful than terms like 'green' or 'ecological'. There is further consideration of the role of 'flag' terms in section 3.6.

Other terms considered meaningful by discussion group participants, but that weren't tested in the online survey, included 'climate change' and 'emissions', suggesting that participants felt able to make sense of some of the more common elements of the 'language of climate change'. Again, there were suggestions that the increasing prevalence of these terms led participants to feel they found them meaningful.

The discussion groups also mirrored the online survey in terms of responses to less familiar terms. Only 16% of survey respondents rated 'water footprint' as either fairly meaningful or very meaningful<sup>18</sup> and discussion group participants responded similarly:

*Q: Were there any which were particularly gobbledegook?*

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<sup>18</sup> 45% said they were familiar with the term to some degree – by far the lowest level for any of the terms tested in the quantitative work

*W: 'Water offsetting' and 'water footprint' and 'refashioned'. I mean, what the hell does that mean?*

Group 12, Bexleyheath

Some discussion group participants found phrases like 'plastics neutral' and 'biodiversity' equally impenetrable. Confusion over the latter term is particularly worth noting in light of the increasing attention being given to biodiversity in public policy<sup>19</sup>, and is likely to be a reflection both of how recently the term was coined (in the mid 1980s, as a shorthand for 'biological diversity'<sup>20</sup>) and the difficulty consumers have in relating it to environmental issues they may be sympathetic to and familiar with. When the term was explained in the groups, participants often seemed to identify with the issues covered, suggesting that it is the term itself, rather than the concepts it describes, that is at fault. This is supported by previous work on public attitudes stretching by to the mid 1990s. In the US, for example, focus group and survey research commissioned by the Consultative Group on Biological Diversity<sup>21</sup> found that: "Most people do not recognise or use the word [biodiversity], yet they understand that nature is connected and interdependent. The public also understands that species are declining and that human activity is largely responsible... Once biodiversity is explained to people, biodiversity conservation enjoys wide support."<sup>22</sup> Part of the problem with 'biodiversity' may be its use of the prefix 'bio', discussed in more detail on page 25, which was poorly understood by participants in the group discussions. We can hypothesise that a more explicit term such as 'species diversity' might perform better.

### The relationship between meaning and understanding

Despite many participants in the group discussions saying that terms like 'carbon emissions' or 'climate change' were meaningful to them, there was evidence that for some, their actual understanding of the concepts behind these phrases was less than perfect. This poor technical understanding was evident in all groups, but less prevalent in those combining positive greens and concerned consumers. In the following quote, a participant professes to know only 'the basics' of global warming, before referring to a different environmental issue – the depletion of the ozone layer – as evidence of what he *does* know.

*M: I understand global warming basically but I don't know the intricacies of exactly what is happening, apart from the ozone layer, but I am sure there is more to it than that which I don't know about.*

Group 5, Watford

In fact, some participants struggled to provide accurate definitions even for mainstream terms that they were extremely familiar with such as 'recycling'.

*Q: Okay, let's take 'recycle' first. Just very quickly, in one line, what does that mean?*

*M: Don't throw anything away.*

*W: Don't waste in your household.*

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, <http://ipbes.net/>

<sup>20</sup> Sarkar, S (2002) Defining 'biodiversity'; assessing biodiversity, *The Monist*, January 1 2002

<sup>21</sup> <http://cgbd.org/>

<sup>22</sup> The Biodiversity Project (1998) Engaging the public on biodiversity: a roadmap for education and communication strategies

*W: Making new out of old really.*

Group 1, Croydon

‘Carbon footprint’ was another phrase that scored fairly well in terms of meaningfulness in the online survey, but the term was taken by some participants in the group discussions to describe an all-encompassing environmental balance sheet (including issues like recycling, for example), rather than solely being a quantification of the carbon emissions associated with a particular person, place or product. This tended to be linked to participants’ understanding of the science of climate change – the less sure they were on the detail, the more likely they were to see a ‘carbon footprint’ as a reflection of overall environmental impact.

We would suggest that the gap between participants’ perceptions of their own understanding and actual understanding is important for two reasons:

- First, it means that marketers cannot rely upon even common phrases being understood in the way they are intended, and so making sense to people in a particular context. This in turn increases the chances of misleading consumers in cases where a term is commonly understood to mean one thing, but used in a way that has a different ‘actual’ meaning; and
- Marketers probably need to remain alert to the fact that consumers may neither know nor care about their imperfect understanding of the finer details of the terms they are exposed to. If they feel comfortable that they are deriving *some sort* of meaning from those terms, they will absorb them, and potentially even act on them.

## How consumers try to make sense of less familiar terms

The research explored a range of terms that were less familiar to participants, which we have broadly referred to as ‘emerging terms’. This section outlines some of the ways in which participants in the group discussions tried to make sense of these newer words and phrases. It is worth briefly referencing the one of the limitations noted earlier in the report here, specifically that the act of asking a research participant about a particular stimulus – whether a particular term or an advert – immediately confers on that stimulus an importance that it would not normally hold. This means that, while this research provides some useful insights into the ways in which people think about green terms, it cannot on its own tell the full story about likely responses to those terms when used in ‘real life’.

### Literal interpretation

If unsure, participants often interpreted terms in their most literal sense (e.g. ‘zero carbon’ was often translated in the group discussions as ‘emits no carbon’).

### Using understanding of one term to interpret another

There were instances in the discussion groups where participants felt terms were related. They would then use their understanding of one to give meaning to the other. In the example below, the respondent did so with confidence, although the meaning he derived from both terms was technically inaccurate in that it didn’t include lifecycle costs and in the case of ‘carbon footprint’, referred to ‘use’ of carbon rather than production of carbon emissions.

*M: I assume 'water footprint' is like 'carbon footprint' – water you're using.*

---

Group 12, Reading

There were other terms, however, where attempts to link similar phrases simply caused confusion. One participant in Group 1 (Croydon) attempted to apply “the same principles” to ‘water neutral’ as he would have to ‘carbon neutral’, but ended up struggling when attempting to explain what this would mean.

It’s worth noting that the degree to which participants were able to make sense of these terms may have had as much to do with the clarity of the shared word as they did with the particular combinations tested. That is to say, participants seemed to find the word ‘footprint’ logical in a way that they did not with ‘neutral’. Over the following paragraphs, we therefore draw out some of the reactions to these common phrases.

**Neutral** (e.g. ‘carbon neutral’; ‘plastics neutral’)

‘Neutral’ was sometimes interpreted as meaning ‘free of’ or ‘zero’, rather than ‘balanced’.

*M: I was baffled from the start because it said 'plastic neutral', but it is a plastic bottle so I can't see how a plastic bottle can be plastic neutral. Because that says to me that it is not plastic.*

---

Group 12, Reading

This trait was extremely common in the groups and noticeably applied even to participants who felt comfortable that they knew the meaning of ‘carbon neutral’. A less common tendency was to see ‘neutral’ as meaning ‘pure’ or ‘safe’.

**Bio-** (e.g. ‘biodegradable’; ‘biological’; ‘biodiversity’)

The prefix ‘bio’ was frequently linked to a number of issues including biological washing powder, alternative fuels and yoghurt. Participants in some groups seemed unsure which meaning would apply in a given context, although this didn’t appear to be linked to environmental attitudes more generally.

*W: Does it [biodiversity] apply to fuel?*

---

Group 4, Watford

*W: To me it says washing powders and things like that.*

---

Group 3, Croydon

*W: That is like a thing you get on the yoghurt or something.*

---

Group 2, Croydon

**Zero** (e.g. ‘zero waste’; ‘zero carbon’)

As noted in the previous section, terms using ‘zero’ were disliked by participants in some discussion groups, who saw them as being too absolutist.

### **Negative** (e.g. 'carbon negative')

Participants were occasionally unsure whether 'negative' was an assessment of a product's credentials (i.e. 'bad') or inferred that a product's environmental impact had been reduced (i.e. 'good').

*Q1: Sorry, do you see it as a positive thing..., less carbon, or did you think it was more carbon...?*

*M: In my mind it is like balancing itself out.*

*Q: Okay. Anyone else any ideas what carbon negative means?*

*W: Is it less carbon?...*

*W: I understand more carbon.*

---

Group 12, Reading

### **Footprint** (e.g. 'carbon footprint'; 'water footprint')

As noted previously, 'footprint' appears to be one of the more intuitively understood elements tested, with most participants in the group discussions seeing it as a quantification of impact. This understanding was then transferred relatively easily from the term 'carbon footprint' (which most respondents were comfortable using) to the term 'water footprint':

*M: You've got your water footprint, so that's something you could generate or not the more water you use... Carbon footprint, that's the amount of carbon you generate.*

---

Scoping group 2, Coventry

Interestingly, despite 'water footprint' performing badly when survey respondents were asked how meaningful they found it, the picture in the discussion groups was more complex, with participants giving a much wider range of responses to this term than they did for others. How comfortable participants were with the term often seemed to depend on how easily they felt able to apply their understanding of a 'carbon footprint' to water.

One characteristic of the way in which people refer to carbon terms was also important here. There was a tendency, when explaining terms like 'carbon footprint', for group participants to refer to the amount of carbon 'used', and this seemed to carry over into interpretations of 'water footprint', with participants in a number of groups suggesting that it referred to the amount of water 'used' by a given product. Accordingly, understanding of footprinting was generally poorer when it came to lifecycle impacts, and particularly in relation to water footprints, all participants restricted their interpretation to water consumption through product use.

There was one further aspect of the connections drawn between terms by group participants that marketers should bear in mind. In one example, a participant who had made a link between an emerging term and one they were more familiar with then tried to trade off the two phrases in terms of importance.

*M: It may be 'plastic neutral' but is it 'carbon neutral'? They have to power the factories to make the plastic.*

*M: And take it out of the recycling bin and take to the plant.*

*M: Can it be both, 'plastic neutral' and 'carbon neutral'?*

---

Group 12, Reading

This was not commonplace within the discussion groups, and may well be a product of the discussion group environment, rather than reflecting a more general pattern, but would be worth further exploration if the opportunity should arise.

### **The ‘expectation effect’**

Brook Lyndhurst’s research for WRAP<sup>23</sup> on messaging around reuse found that consumers often interpret messaging subjectively through the prism of their own experience. Thus, ‘reuse’ messages on goods such as plastic bottles may be interpreted as ‘recycle’ instructions, simply because this is the waste behaviour people most associate with that product. This makes it vital that terms – and claims – are as explicit as possible.

There was evidence of similar patterns of reasoning in the discussion groups when we asked participants to link particular green terms with particular products. Most participants were aware that white goods like washing machines could be more or less energy efficient (this was reflected in the survey when we tested the EU A-G energy rating label – nearly four fifths of survey respondents said they were very familiar with the label and, out of those who were familiar, more than 80% were able to give an accurate explanation for what it means). Participants across a number of groups suggested that they considered energy efficiency in purchasing decisions because of the financial implications of using less energy and when presented with an advert for an energy efficient washing machine, said it would be the financial savings and not the carbon savings that would motivate them to buy it. The wider evidence base on promoting pro-environmental behaviours highlights the importance of using non-environmental motivations to encourage action. This includes financial savings (although it is important to recognise that financial savings alone are often not sufficient to overcome other barriers).

There was another example of the way in which people’s expectations can influence their response to a green term in relation to car insurance. In the following quote, the participant’s cynicism about an advert for car insurance is clearly driven by her supposition that *cars* have negative environmental impacts (and implicitly, that insurance does not).

*W: [In relation to carbon offsetting] Okay, if the car does a lot of emissions, what the hell is the insurance going to do about it?*

Group 6, Watford

## **Internal dependencies**

One telling point to come out of this research that is relevant both to the development of green claims and the drafting of wider environmental messages is the need to be aware of ‘internal dependencies’ relating to particular terms. For example, discussions in many of the groups highlighted the importance of a basic understanding of carbon offsetting in making sense of the term ‘carbon negative’. In order to develop clear messages, we suggest that marketers need to be aware of these internal dependencies and to address them head on – either by directly describing measures taken (that is to say, abandoning the use of terms like ‘carbon negative’ altogether), or by providing supporting explanation.

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<sup>23</sup> Brook Lyndhurst (2009) Reuse message testing, a report for WRAP



## The potential to misread claims when using emerging terms

If consumers are unfamiliar with a term, marketers cannot assume that they will necessarily read it as intended. As a result, marketers may need to be particularly careful when phrasing claims. This is demonstrated by the following quote in which the participants have assumed that the insurance policy is for 'carbon negative cars', rather than being for 'carbon negative' insurance, which covers cars:

*M: "The UK's first carbon negative car insurance policy offsets more CO<sub>2</sub> than your car emits."*

*M: We haven't got carbon negative cars.*

*W: ...We were having trouble figuring out what the nouns were and what the adjectives were.*

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Group 4, Watford

## Numbers of issues or terms covered in a single claim

In a report from 2008, Datamonitor<sup>24</sup> claimed that shoppers can feel confused or overwhelmed by the density of information conveyed about products. This is supported by evidence from the discussion groups. Some participants disliked claims that included multiple terms, particularly if they dealt with a number of different environmental or ethical issues.

The following quote is interesting because it suggests that, when a number of different issues *were* referred to in a single advert or claim, the participant simply latched on to the one that was most meaningful to them, personally, although it is important to note that this is the only example of this occurring from the groups.

*M: "The fair trade coffee in this bag is helping to create a better future for farmers and a more stable climate because it is low carbon, responsibly grown and sustainably sourced."...*

*M: It was too much for me, I couldn't take it in.*

*M: If you just concentrate on the fair trade side of it, you know, that is fine.*

---

Group 3, Croydon

It seems important, therefore, that claims that do refer to multiple environmental issues do so in an intuitive and simple way. It may be that further research is needed on the circumstances in which the association of particular issues is understood by consumers, and those in which it jars or is considered confusing.

## Internal consistency - acknowledging negative impacts

One of the adverts tested in the discussion groups included a claim about a dual fuel car that will run on both conventional petrol and bioethanol. Some versions included small print that participants responded badly to, suggesting that it showed up the main claim as being misleading on two counts. First, because the claim failed to acknowledge that there might be

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<sup>24</sup> Datamonitor (2008) The next steps in the ethical consumerism revolution – Building brand equity by better understanding the savvy ethical consumer

additional costs implied by the accelerated consumption of bioethanol when compared to conventional fuel; and second, because they felt it implied an environmental benefit that seemed to be called into question when lesser efficiency was taken into account.

*M: That is definitely small print, isn't it?*

*M: I knew it all sounded too good to be true. More horsepower and a smaller carbon footprint, but you use 30% more of it and you still pollute the atmosphere.*

---

Group 8, Bexleyheath

This supports the need, stressed in the current green claims guidance, for adverts to ensure that messages are consistent, and that negative impacts do not appear to be glossed over. In some ways, too, the advert might be seen to have been a victim of its own transparency, and marketers need to make sure they give consumers all the information they need to make sense of claim if it *is* justified. In this case, without knowing the relative cost of bioethanol and petrol, nor how much environmental damage they cause, it was impossible for participants to know whether the central claim in the main advert was justified.

## 3.5 The role of supporting information

Many of the adverts covered by our review of green claims for Defra in 2008/9<sup>25</sup> used headline statements to attract consumers' attention, supported by additional information elsewhere<sup>26</sup>. This 'small print' generally serves one of two purposes – either:

- Explaining headline statements; or
- Providing supplementary detail that is not essential to understanding the claim itself.

In this section, we explore the ways in which information that supports a headline claim could influence participants' responses to the terms used. We first look at the role of supporting information in general, before focusing on its impact on three key characteristics of green claims: meaningfulness, trustworthiness and use in purchasing decisions.

### Overall responses to supporting detail

In a 2008 survey of consumers in the US carried out by Opinion Research Corporation (ORC), respondents were asked about their reactions to a mix of green terms and green claims that might be linked to particular products<sup>27</sup>. Between 21% and 42% of respondents, depending on the term and the product, said they needed 'more information'. We perhaps should not read too much into this – 'need more information' was provided in a pre-coded list of options, which may have led some respondents to consider whether or not they had enough information when they would not otherwise have done so. However, as we have already seen, discussion group participants in our own research also asked for additional information when they felt that claims or terms were too general – when they used unqualified flag terms, for example. While this may also have been in part a product of the focus group format causing participants to question the claims in front of them more than they would if

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<sup>25</sup> Brook Lyndhurst (2009) Assessment of green claims in marketing, a report for Defra

<sup>26</sup> In the model for print advertising developed by David Ogilvy, this is referred to as the 'copy' – Ogilvy, D (1995) Ogilvy on advertising, Prion

<sup>27</sup> Opinion Research Corporation (2008), The 2008 Green Gap Survey

they had encountered them in their own time, the consistency of this trait suggests that for some participants, the information provided in claims – and green claims in particular – can be insufficient.

*M: ...How is it grown responsibly?... [What is] the evidence to support that?*

---

Group 2, Croydon

Additional information was also more likely to be demanded by participants on products or brands that were seen as being closely linked to environmental damage, where trust in green claims may be lower.

*M: They are probably the least green companies in the world you know, energy suppliers... To make any like statement like that, you need pure facts to back it up.*

---

Group 3, Croydon

Conversely, research by Consumer Focus has seen consumers sometimes react negatively to the presence of small print, with respondents suggesting they associated this type of supporting detail as “the catch”.

*“The rule of thumb now is that small print is usually bad news.”*

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Respondent quoted in Yates, L (2009) Green Expectations: Consumers’ understanding of green claims in advertising, Consumer Focus

In their report on carbon labelling, Forum for the Future suggest a more simple reason for consumers’ dislike of small print – lack of time:

*A label needs to stand out: fast moving consumer goods are not only fast in terms of how quickly they get used up, but also fast in terms of the length of time shoppers take to make their buying decisions.*

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Forum for the Future (2008) Checkout Carbon

Our discussion group participants showed a very broad range of opinions on this issue, although the latter view was perhaps more prevalent – that too much supporting information (or supporting information that appears too dense or complex) could put them off reading further, rather than necessarily increasing distrust.

Participants in six discussion groups were shown three alternate versions of adverts with more or less supporting detail. Overt branding was removed from all adverts tested. Group participants were split into break-out groups of two to three people and asked to discuss the adverts. Their conversations – without input from group facilitators – were recorded. In the first advert, for a dual fuel car, small print setting out the product’s environmental implications was removed entirely in one version, partially in another and left in its original state in the third.

Some of the participants who discussed the car advert with least information wrongly assumed that it was for a type of fuel rather than a car. There was general consensus that

without any detail to support terms like “cleaner conscience” and “the power of nature,” it was difficult to know what the advert was promoting, and this vagueness would have an impact on willingness to engage with the claim.

The versions of the car advert with more detail also revealed differences in responses to supplementary information.

*Q: So I mean that extra bit at the bottom, is that useful...?*

*M: It is something that needs to be there legally I think...*

*W: Would you necessarily read it?...*

*W: I don't think I would.*

*M: I would because it all sounds too good to be true, so I would read right to the bottom.*

*W: Yes I would read it. I would want to know what it is all about.*

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Group 8, Bexleyheath

This quote is interesting, not so much because it reflects a desire for additional detail, but because it demonstrates different *levels* of desire for this detail. It is possible that the nature of the product covered by the claim may have a bearing on how predisposed an individual is to read information of this sort. We might hypothesise that the fact that cars are relatively expensive items, for example, may have made some participants more determined to know as much as possible. There were also signs that participants who were interested in cars seemed more likely to read more supporting detail on the adverts. Although further research would help to substantiate this point, it seems reasonable to suppose that, the higher the interest in the product, the greater the chances of a consumer reading supporting information.

What is clear, however, is that *some* respondents – and, we must suppose – consumers in general, are unlikely to read the full length of supporting detail for a given claim, simply by virtue of its being there. Some participants wanted to be able to get the gist of an advert almost instantly, but they also valued the reassurance of additional detail. This echoes the Consumer Focus finding that, “Better information, rather than more, is the key to helping consumers make more sustainable choices.”<sup>28</sup> If there is a chance that some consumers won't want to read more than a single sentence of supporting detail, then a claim must be crafted to cater for those individuals as well as those who may be more willing to read on.

### **Supporting detail and new concepts**

The second advert tested in the groups was for bottled water. Again, the participants discussing the version with least detail expressed a strong desire for additional information.

*M: I don't understand that at all... No small print on this one. It might be best if there was, you would understand what it was then.*

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Group 8, Bexleyheath

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<sup>28</sup> Yates, L (2009) Green Expectations: Consumers' understanding of green claims in advertising, Consumer Focus

In this case, however, even the additional detail did little to help, because some participants found the explanation of the concept (water neutrality) too abstract and difficult to take in. Unlike many other emerging terms explored in this research, water neutrality remained difficult for participants to relate to and understand even once it had been explained, suggesting that its journey to familiarity and meaningfulness could be a long one.

The final set of adverts explored within the discussion groups were for an airline, promoting an emissions offsetting scheme. Again, the version that relied solely on the headline claim left some participants asking for additional detail, and jumping to the wrong conclusions (that the airline's aircraft use less fuel).

It was notable that this was not true of the participants in the most environmentally engaged group (Group 7, Bexleyheath, 'Positive Greens'/'Concerned Consumers'), who quickly identified a link between the headline and carbon offsetting, largely based on their prior understanding of the concept. In contrast, some of those in the less engaged groups struggled even when the link with offsetting was made clear, because of their poor knowledge of the concept itself. This was not an issue, however, when the final line of text was present, explaining exactly how the scheme works. This suggests that any references to emerging terms or concepts need to be supported with clear explanations and wherever possible, green claims need to use terms with which the public is familiar. Where this is not possible, terms need to be accompanied by a short, clear explanation, with the emphasis on quality, rather than quantity.

Research carried out in the United States in August 2009 by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) further supports the need for information in claims to be as direct as possible. The study used an online survey with a sample of 3,777 individuals to test responses to green claims. In one exercise, the researchers presented respondents with a claim using flag terms without reference to a specific environmental attribute belonging to the product concerned. Respondents were also presented with a claim using flag terms *with* supporting detail making reference to a specific environmental attribute. More than half of the respondents (52%) viewing an unqualified general green claim linked the product to a specific environmental attribute, despite none having been referenced in the claim itself. In contrast, less than a third (31%) of respondents who viewed a qualified general green claim selected an environmental attribute *in addition* to the one specified in the claim.<sup>29</sup>

The FTC research also tested claims that did not make use of flag terms, but directly referenced a specific environmental attribute. Even then, an average of 23% of respondents said the advert implied specific benefits in addition to the attribute stated in the claim. Of course, British (and European) consumers are sometimes very different to their American counterparts and it is also possible that the phrasing of the FTC research question may have 'invited' respondents to select attributes that would not normally have occurred to them. Regardless, their willingness to infer attributes that were not specified does reinforce the need for claims to be as direct and specific as possible.

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<sup>29</sup> FTC (2010) Proposed revisions to the green guides

## Supporting detail and meaningfulness

This section on meaningfulness, and the two that follow it on trust and use in purchasing decisions, draw heavily upon an exercise carried out in the online survey. The sample was split into two halves with the same socio-demographic profiles (1,013 and 1,006 respondents, respectively) and shown variations of the same advert. The purpose was to explore the impact of subtle changes in the relationship between the headline claim and supporting information.

The three adverts used were de-branded (so far as was possible) to remove this powerful influence on consumer perceptions, and were identical in all respects *apart from* the specific variation being explored. Respondents were then asked three questions: how *meaningful* the advert was to them, how *trustworthy* they believed the environmental claim to be, and the extent to which they would personally *make use of the information* in making product choices. The sequence in which adverts were displayed was rotated to avoid any ordering bias.

Advert Pair 1 was based upon an advert for a fabric softener. The adverts included an identical broad headline claim but differed in the nature of the supporting text. Advert 1a contained supporting text that detailed specific environmental improvements in terms of plastic, water, cardboard and carbon (assigning quantified percentages to savings/benefits). In contrast, the supporting detail in Advert 1b used the flag term 'environmentally friendly' but did not provide specific information about what aspects of the product's environmental credentials had been improved.

Adverts 2a and 2b both promoted a renewable energy supplier and were identical with the exception of an additional line in Advert 2a providing additional detail on how a renewable energy tariff works. Adverts 3a and 3b (for a car) were also identical, with the exception that advert 3a quantified CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reductions, as well as providing a comparison with the previous model of the car and other cars in the same class.

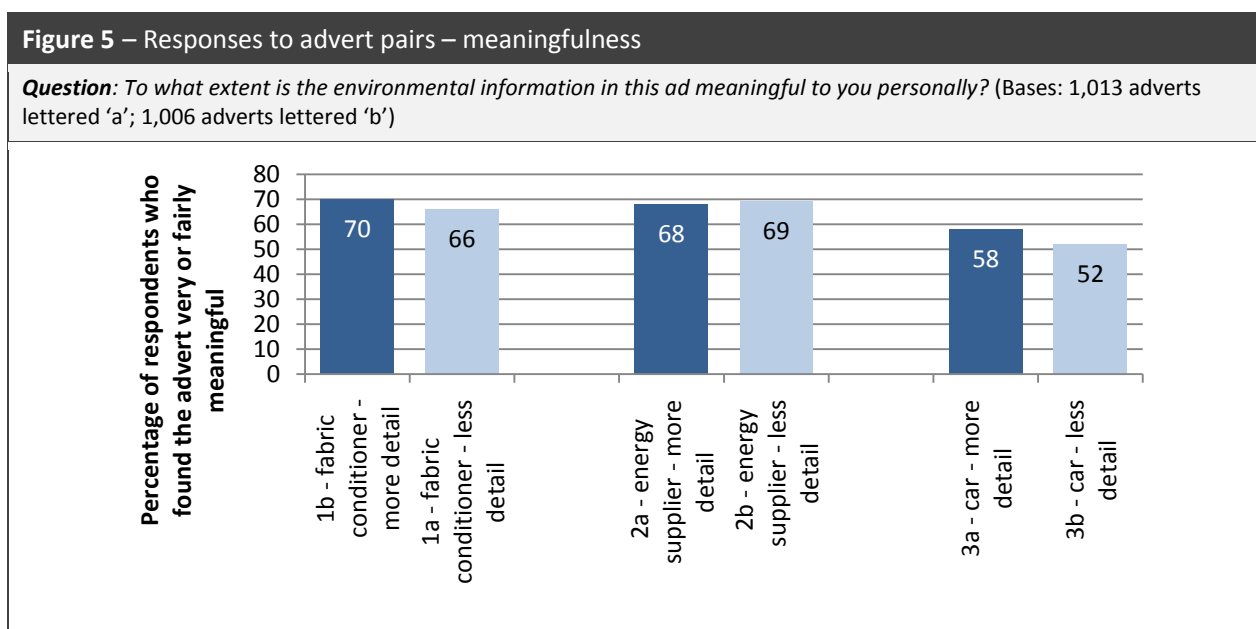
The split sample approach was experimental, and without further research there is no way of knowing for sure why adverts with more detail or less detail scored differently on any of the three criteria tested. Being asked about the adverts within the context of a survey may have made some respondents read text in a way they would not normally, giving an artificial sense of how people would react to these adverts if they encountered them in their own time. When reading this section it is also important to consider the limitations as outlined in section 2, particularly as some of the results presented in this section are based on small percentage differences. It is unlikely that the differences between the advert pairs were caused by the two samples having different profiles in terms of values, beliefs and attitudes towards the environment. Table 4 (page 34) shows how each half of the sample breaks down by Defra segment – on this count, the two halves appear almost identical.

Figure 5 (page 34) shows the results of the survey exercise in relation to supporting information and meaningfulness. Advert 1a (with more detailed/precise information) performed marginally better than Advert 1b (70% found 1a meaningful vs. 66% for 1b). The same was true for the car adverts, with advert 3a (with more detail) considered meaningful by 58% of the respondents who saw it, compared with 52% for advert 3b (with less detail). When it came to the advert for the renewable energy supplier, however, broadly the same

percentage of respondents who saw advert 2a (with more detail) said they found it meaningful (68%) as for advert 2b (with less detail – 69%).

**Table 4 – The split sample, by Defra segment**

Segment	Split sample A	Split sample B
Positive greens	18%	21%
Waste watchers	14%	12%
Concerned consumers	17%	17%
Sideline supporters	6%	6%
Cautious participants	10%	10%
Stalled starters	5%	5%
Honestly disengaged	30%	29%



Why might this be? The reason for these differences, albeit relatively small, may lie in the nature of the additional detail provided in the energy advert. The supporting information in the other two adverts *quantified* the environmental attributes of the products concerned, while the extra detail in the energy advert simply explained the nature of a renewable energy tariff (“for each unit of energy our customers use, we buy one from a renewable source and supply it to the grid”). Further research is required, but this may indicate that providing specific details about the way in which a product’s impact on the environment has been reduced can make a claim more meaningful to consumers.

### Supporting detail and trust

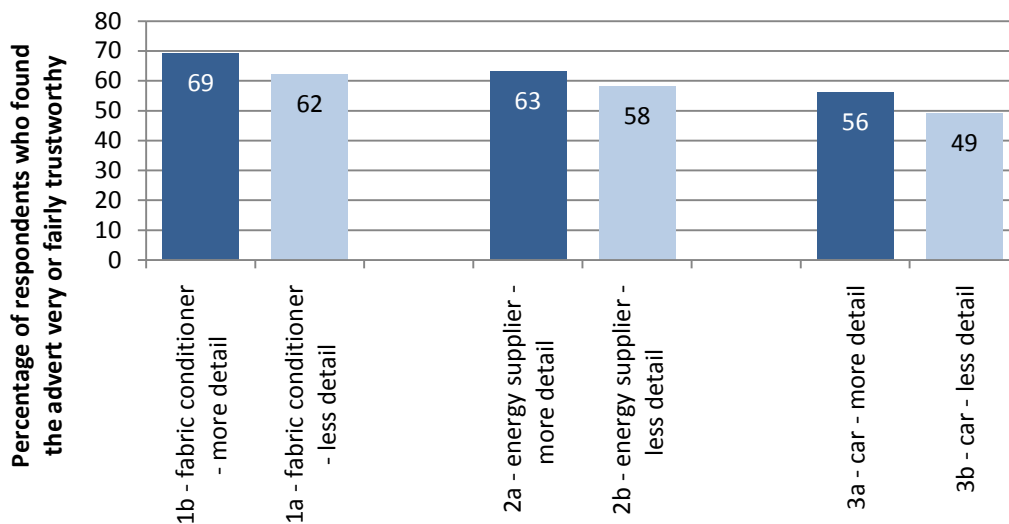
Figure 6 (page 35) shows the results of the advert pairs exercise in relation to how trustworthy respondents found the claims tested.

Of the three criteria – meaningfulness, trust and use in purchasing decisions – this offers perhaps the clearest indication of the impact additional detail can have in reassuring consumers about a claim.

For the fabric conditioner advert, 69% of those who saw the more detailed version felt it was trustworthy, compared to 62% of those who saw the less detailed version. For the car advert, 56% found the detailed advert trustworthy; 49% for the less detailed advert. Thus, in both cases, an additional 7% of those who saw the detailed adverts found them trustworthy compared to the less detailed ads. This figure was slightly lower (5%) when it came to the energy adverts (63% of those who saw the more detailed advert found it trustworthy, compared with 58% for the less detailed one) though the difference is probably too small to read much into.

**Figure 6 – Responses to advert pairs – trust**

**Question:** To what extent, if at all, do you think this is a trustworthy environmental claim for the company to make? (Bases: 1,013 adverts lettered 'a'; 1,006 adverts lettered 'b')



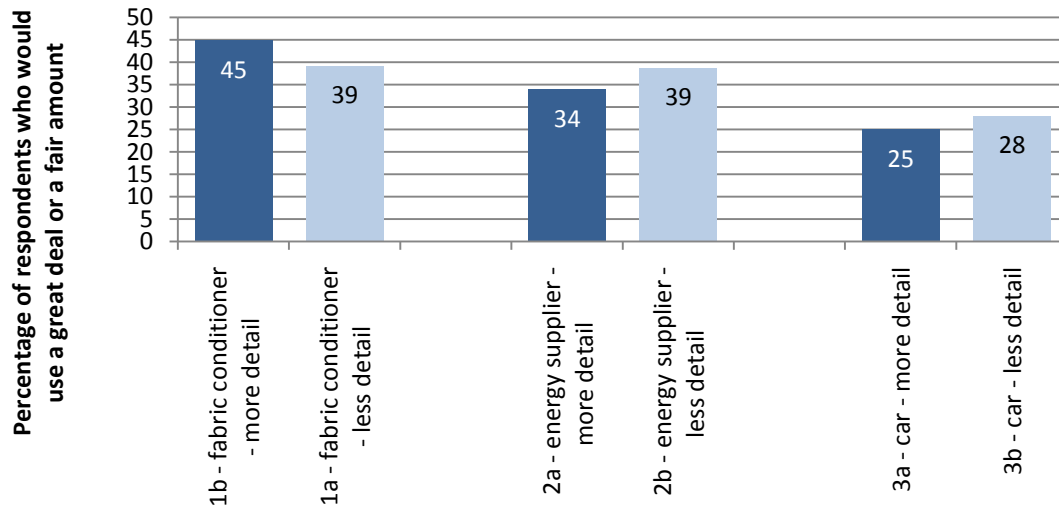
### Supporting detail and use in purchasing decisions

The results of the advert pairs test were perhaps least intuitive when it came to claimed use in purchasing decisions (Figure 7).



**Figure 7 – Responses to advert pairs – use in purchasing decisions**

**Question:** To what extent, if at all, would you personally make use of this information when you are considering what products to buy? (Bases: 1,013 adverts lettered 'a'; 1,006 adverts lettered 'b')



In the first advert pair – for fabric conditioner – a larger percentage of respondents said they would use the more detailed advert in purchasing decisions (45% compared to 39% for the less detailed version). However, for the second pair – the energy supplier – and the third pair – the car – a smaller percentage said they would use the detailed advert than for the advert without the detail (34% for the detailed energy advert compared with 39% for the less detailed one; 25% for the detailed car advert compared with 28% for the less details one). Again, the differences are not huge (and caution is needed when interpreting these results due to the limitations discussed previously), but why have they occurred at all?

One possibility is that respondents to advert pairs 2 and 3 were disappointed by the nature of the detail provided and felt that, while it was trustworthy, it was insufficiently compelling to justify the headline claim, nor to consider when making purchasing decisions.

Another explanation may be offered by Consumer Focus' work on green claims<sup>30</sup>, which found that people who profess to be influenced by environmental claims are not necessarily more persuaded by claims that convey greater environmental benefits, but rather balance environmental benefit and other concerns – namely, price. It concluded that this trend appears to be linked to a consumer preference to consider the environment, at least at the current time, in relation to smaller and less expensive purchases.

### 3.6 Different types of terms

This research has highlighted a number of ways of differentiating between green terms that may be useful for marketers. These are outlined in this section and are based on our interpretation of the evidence, rather than being directly drawn from the evidence itself.

<sup>30</sup> Yates, L (2009) Green Expectations: Consumers' understanding of green claims in advertising, Consumer Focus

## The role of 'flag' terms

When we asked participants in the discussion groups about how meaningful green words and phrases were, the terms were introduced without any supporting context. This was useful in exploring actual awareness and understanding, but there was evidence that in some cases, participants rely on context to give meaning to terms. Tested in isolation, for example, the word 'seasonal' was linked to climate change (through the changing of the seasons), holidays and food, while had it been used in the context of a claim, the link to food would almost certainly have been clearer.

Something similar may be true for the term 'green', which discussion group participants seemed to use a great deal, without prompting, to 'flag' a topic as pertaining to the environment. Flag terms are by definition general in nature, and so depend on context in order to give them meaning. When used in context, they appear to act as a heuristic or shortcut, signposting green issues. Even when linked to a particular product or service, however, they are generally not sufficiently meaningful to provide consumers with a clear understanding of what is meant; additional detail on the specifics of a claim is always required.

Much of participants' faith in terms like 'green' and 'environmentally friendly' seems to come from familiarity, which offers reassurance that can be a powerful antidote to any concern about a lack of specific meaning. This is demonstrated by the quote below.

*M: 'Environmentally friendly' is just a general term, but I think it was the first word... that I heard when people started talking about the environment.*

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Group 8, Bexleyheath

The following quote from the Coventry pilot group provides additional insight on this point.

*W: [It is] a bit easier to understand 'green' rather than 'carbon neutral', because I wasn't sure what it [carbon neutral] was. I knew what carbon was but I didn't quite know about the neutral.*

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Scoping group 2, Coventry

The point here, isn't that 'green' was actually easier for the participant to understand, but that it made her feel less as though she *hadn't* understood, without actually providing her with a clear idea of the nature of the claim. We might therefore conclude that there is a risk that the use of 'flag' terms without clear substantiation has the potential to confuse or mislead by creating the impression that the net impact of the product on the environment is positive, rather than improvements having been limited to a particular issue, such as the amount of packaging used. Moreover, the quote above also suggests that a person might derive a sense of environmental benefit from a claim that uses both a flag term and qualifying information because they feel comfortable with the flag term and don't understand – or can't be bothered to read – the detail.

Despite their potential pitfalls, some use of flag terms in green claims is likely to continue. The very generality of flag terms that may cause confusion or mislead consumers makes

them powerful tools for marketers. This is not because marketers seek to mislead, but because terms with multiple potential meanings are ideal for use in what are known as rhetorical figures (or ‘figures of speech’). One study in the United States found rhetorical devices in three quarters of 2,183 magazine adverts studied<sup>31</sup>, and several pieces of research have concluded that such devices increase the attention given to adverts and make them more memorable to consumers.<sup>32</sup> It is, however based on our interpretation of this research, essential that when flag terms *are* deployed, supporting detail is as succinct, clear and focused as possible.

### ‘Inferential’ terms

Probing in the discussion groups suggested that participants were reacting positively to some terms without deriving any meaning from them. This was perhaps most notable when the word ‘natural’ was used in the phrase ‘natural crops’, where it at first glance meant very little – most crops might be thought of as ‘natural’. It may be that the term was intended to infer that the biofuel referred to in the advert was made without use of genetically modified crops, but there was little evidence that respondents gave the word this much thought, despite expressing positive attitudes toward it.

*M: “It is made from natural crops.”*

*W: It is quite catchy the way they have done that.*

---

Group 8, Bexleyheath

We have referred to this type of phrase as ‘inferential’, because such terms seemed to induce positive responses from discussion group participants who *inferred* a link to the environment. Inferential terms are distinct from flag terms because, although both sets of phrases are general and non-specific in nature, flag terms are explicitly linked to the environment, whereas ‘inferential’ terms such as ‘clean’ or ‘natural’ simply imply a sense of ‘goodness’ and require context even to establish a basic link to environmental issues. The capacity of inferential terms to generate a sense of something positive, without ever specifying what that something might be, has considerable potential to mislead consumers.

### Comparative terms

The current green claims guidance advises against the use of comparative assertions that do not make the basis for the comparison clear, and quantify the claim. In order to explore this, we presented respondents in the first round of six focus groups with four similar comparative claims based on a real life advert for an energy company. In the claims, the company claimed to be either ‘greener’, ‘more environmentally friendly’ or ‘more sustainable’ than other energy suppliers.

The responses supported the current guidance, with participants expressing considerable scepticism about the use of the comparative terms and frequently demanding ‘proof’. It is worth noting that there were exceptions to this pattern. Another advert tested in the groups made use of two comparative terms – ‘more horsepower’ and ‘a smaller carbon footprint’. In neither case was there any explanation of what the comparison was with, nor any attempt

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<sup>31</sup> Leigh, J H (1994) The use of figures of speech in print ad headlines, *Journal of Advertising*, 23 (June)

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, McQuarrie, E F & Mick, D G (1996) Figures of rhetoric in advertising language, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22, 4 (1996)

to quantify the difference. Despite this, no respondents asked what these phrases related to. This may well be because participants inferred that the comparison was with another of the company's products, or with a previous model of the same product, rather than with a competitor. Equally, it may have had something to do with the word 'horsepower', which some participants did not really understand, rendering that particular comparison meaningless. Or, perhaps most likely, participants were focusing on wider issues around the meaning of the advert as a whole (which many participants found confusing) and this took priority over any doubts about the comparative terms.

## Carbon terms

Consumers seem to be acquiring understanding of carbon terminology in a piecemeal fashion, picking up snippets of understanding from different places. Although in general the more environmentally engaged participants were more knowledgeable about carbon emissions, even within discussion groups made up of participants with similar levels of environmental awareness and engagement, considerable variations in understanding of carbon terminology were evident. Some participants, for example, would make reference to ozone depletion when explaining 'climate change', while others would be able to offer a fairly detailed explanation of what might be implied by carbon offsetting. If this pattern is replicated among consumers in general, it means that understanding of carbon terminology is patchy in a way that is hard to predict (since it is born of individuals' particular experience of carbon terms over a long period).

## Terms that people would use themselves

As well as distinguishing between terms that might be *applied* to other people, participants in several groups differentiated between terms that they themselves could envisage using and terms that would be used by *other people*, who were less like them.

This distinction appears to be primarily down to familiarity – when participants are used to a term, they seem to feel more comfortable using it themselves. The point is worth considering when drafting a green claim, since it illustrates the danger of alienating people by using less familiar, more technical terms. It is possibly significant for wider behaviour change communications too, since it suggests that messaging should focus on established concepts and terms, which people may feel are more relevant to them and identify with better. By the same token, people may be less likely to be engaged by terms that are less familiar and that they consequently feel are not meant for them.

## Links based on the terms themselves

Terms featuring the words 'low', 'zero', 'neutral' and 'negative' were often linked by participants in the discussion groups, since they saw these words as having similar meaning (implying an absence of something). 'Low' was preferred by many as it was seen as more believable, since the other terms all implied a total absence of something (such as waste or carbon), which many participants felt was impossible.

*M: 'Low carbon' is more believable than '[carbon] neutral'.*

Group 2, Croydon

## 3.7 Differences by sub group

The results of the online survey also demonstrate how responses to, and use of, green terms are distributed across different groups, according both to key *socio-demographic variables* (such as age, gender, geographic region and media readership), as well key *values-based variables* (as captured by the Defra segmentation model).

Given the number of terms explored in the research, alongside the large number of subgroups (i.e. seven Defra segments, six age categories, etc.) the analysis in this section is limited to eight green terms. In addition, there is an important caveat about auto-correlation in that some of the variations observed below do not occur in isolation (e.g. different Defra segments will disproportionately fall into certain age groups or read certain media titles), and so an apparent divide by, say, age, may in fact be driven by another interlinked variable. This needs to be borne in mind by the reader in interpreting the findings. It is also important to consider the limitations of the research as outlined in chapter 2. The results should only be seen as indicative and further research would be needed to explore whether any of the variations observed occur at a general population level.

Before exploring the results in detail, the research demonstrates an overarching finding that variations by sub group differ markedly **according to how specific and ‘emergent’ the green terms are**. As a general rule, there were fewer variations in relation to the established and/or ‘flag’ terms (such as ‘energy efficient’, ‘environmentally friendly’ and ‘green’) whereas, in contrast, variations were much more evident in relation to specific and/or recent terms. For the terms we tested, familiarity with terms tended to be greater for those who read broadsheet newspapers, were middle-aged, and were classified by the Defra segmentation model as ‘positive greens’.

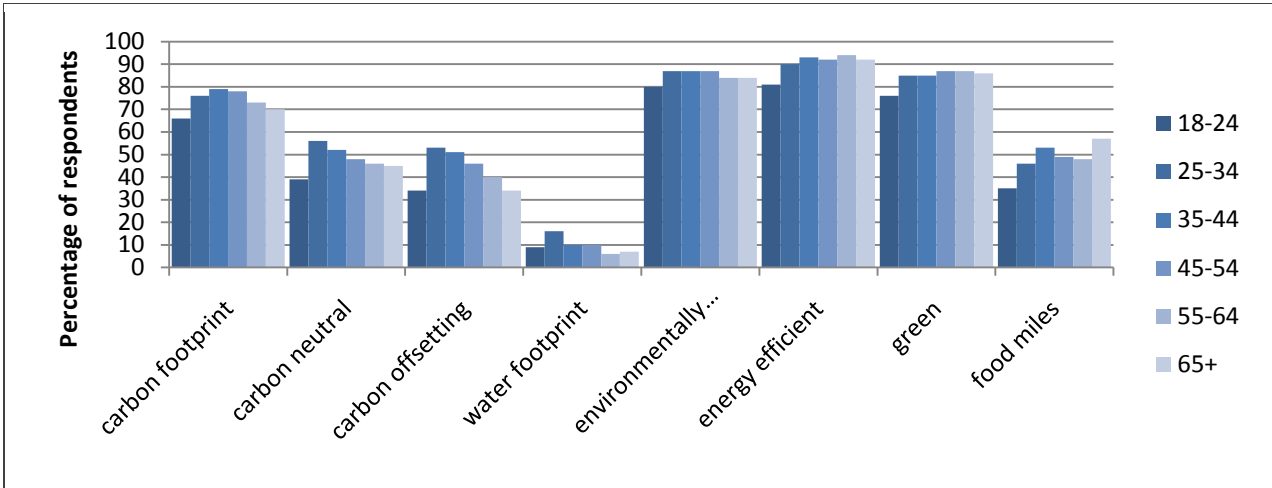
### Variations by age

There were some variations in familiarity with green terms by age according to whether the term is an established term, or a more specific and/or recent term (Figure 8, page 40)). In relation to the emerging terms, familiarity was highest among those aged 25-34 and 35-44; and lowest at both ends of the age spectrum (i.e. those aged 18-24 and 65+). In contrast, in respect of established green terms, there was much less variation - familiarity was high and stable across all age groups. The term ‘food miles’ is one notable exception, since familiarity actually increased with age and was highest among the 65+ group.

Turning to how the use of green terms in purchase choices varies by age (Figure 9, page 41), the distinction between recent and established terms was again central, although it is was subtly and critically different. First, in terms of recent terms the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups once again stood out as more likely to use these terms (e.g. ‘carbon offsetting’), though some caution is needed as overall the percentages of those reporting to use these terms was low. However, when it came to the established terms like ‘energy efficient’ and ‘green’, it was the 65+ group who were significantly more likely to use the terms.

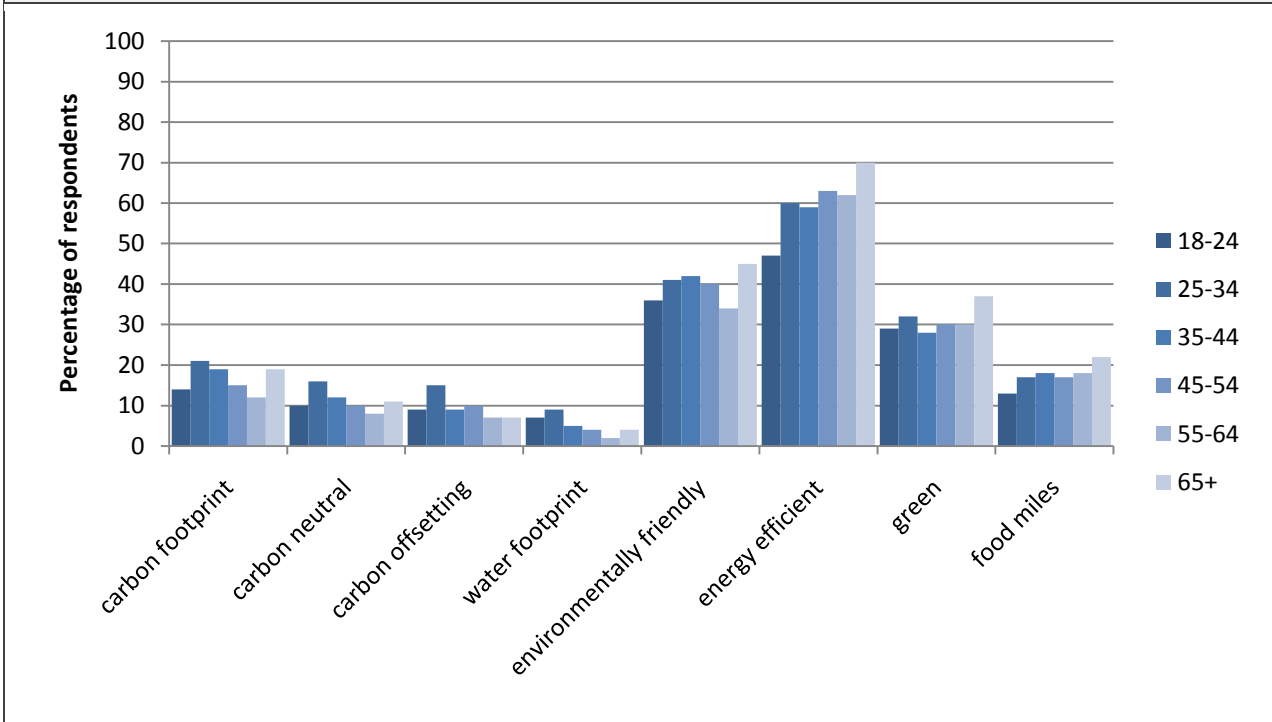
#### Figure 8 – Familiarity with green terms by age

**Question:** To what extent, if at all, are you familiar with the following terms? – very/fairly familiar (Base: 2,019)



**Figure 9 – Use of green terms in purchase decisions by age**

**Question:** When you are considering what products to buy, how often do you use these terms when they appear on product packaging? – always/often use (Base: 2,019)

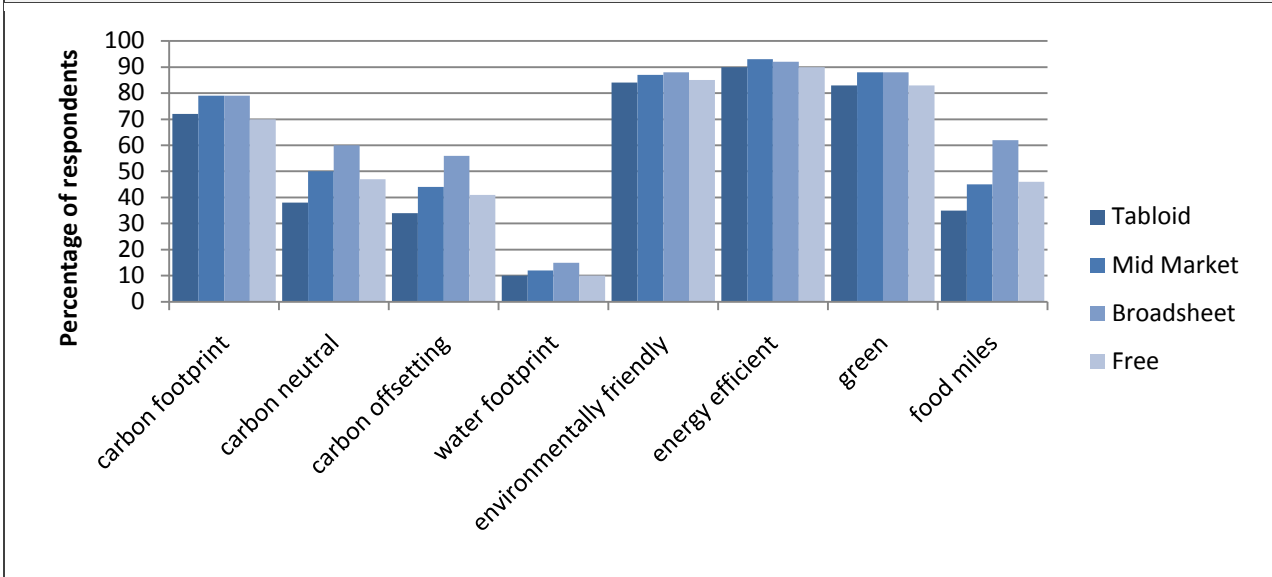


### Variations by media readership

Analysis of the findings according to media readership reveals some interesting and subtle variations (Figure 10, page 42). In respect of familiarity with established terms like ‘environmentally friendly’, ‘energy efficient’ and ‘green’, there were no variations of note. However, and in respect of terms that are more specific and/or recent (such as ‘food miles’ and ‘carbon neutral’), familiarity was much higher among broadsheet readers. The exception was ‘carbon footprint’, which behaved more like an established term than a specific/recent term.

**Figure 10 – Familiarity with green terms by newspaper readership**

**Question:** To what extent, if at all, are you familiar with the following terms? – very/fairly familiar (Base: 2,019)



A similar pattern was evident in relation to how these terms were used in purchase decisions, although overall percentage differences were relatively small. There were only minor variations when it came to terms like ‘green’ and ‘energy efficient’, whereas variations were stronger in relation to ‘carbon footprint’, ‘carbon neutral’ and ‘food miles’ (all of which are used more by broadsheet readers).

### Variations by geographic region

The analysis revealed some key variations by region (defined here to be: Scotland, Wales and three English regions – North, South and Midlands). This is in contrast to evidence on more general environmental attitudes and behaviours, where there is relatively little difference between regions. Once again, in relation to terms, there was an important distinction between established and recent terms. A ‘Southern England’ effect was evident for some of the terms (followed closely by Midlands/East England); for example, the ‘family’ of carbon terms and ‘food miles’ (Figure 11, page 43).

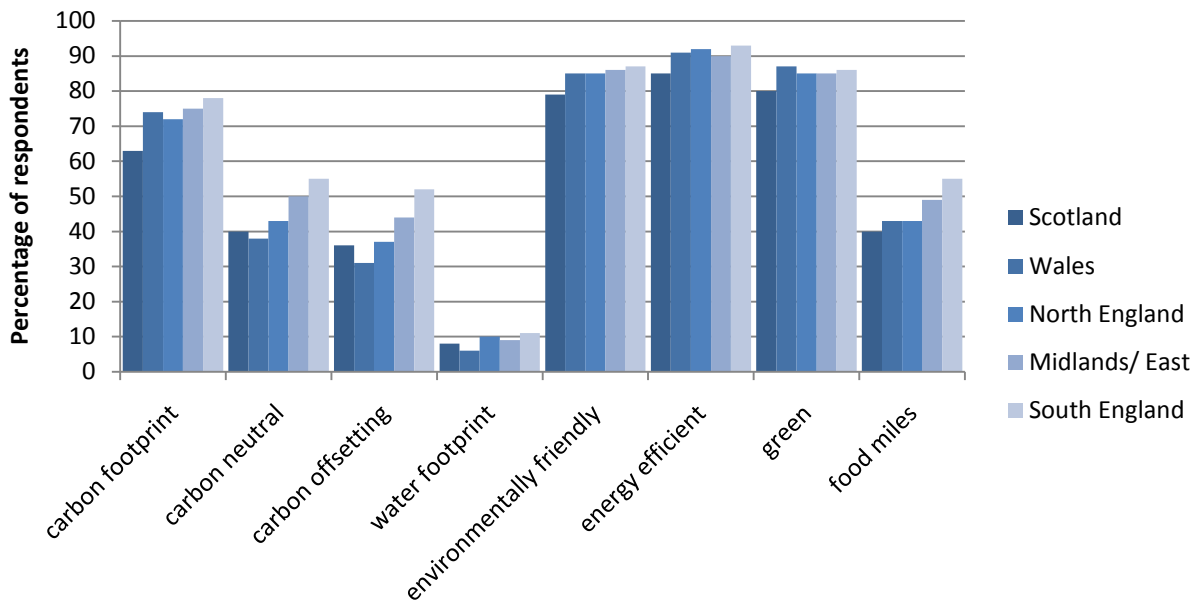
In contrast, there was less variation when it came to terms like ‘environmentally friendly’, ‘green’ and ‘energy efficient’. Familiarity with green terms tended to lag behind in Scotland and – at least for the ‘family’ of carbon terms – in Wales as well.

These trends carried across into actual use (Figure 12, page 43), with Southern England (as well as Midlands/East England) notable for higher levels of claimed use of terms like ‘food miles’, ‘carbon footprint’ and ‘carbon neutral’ (as well as, somewhat out of synch, the term ‘green’). Use of several of the green terms was significantly lower in Scotland.

There were relatively few variations to report in terms of the green lifestyle descriptions that were liked and disliked across the regions, other than the fact that ‘low impact living’ was more disliked in Scotland than elsewhere, while ‘eco-savvy’ was more disliked in England.

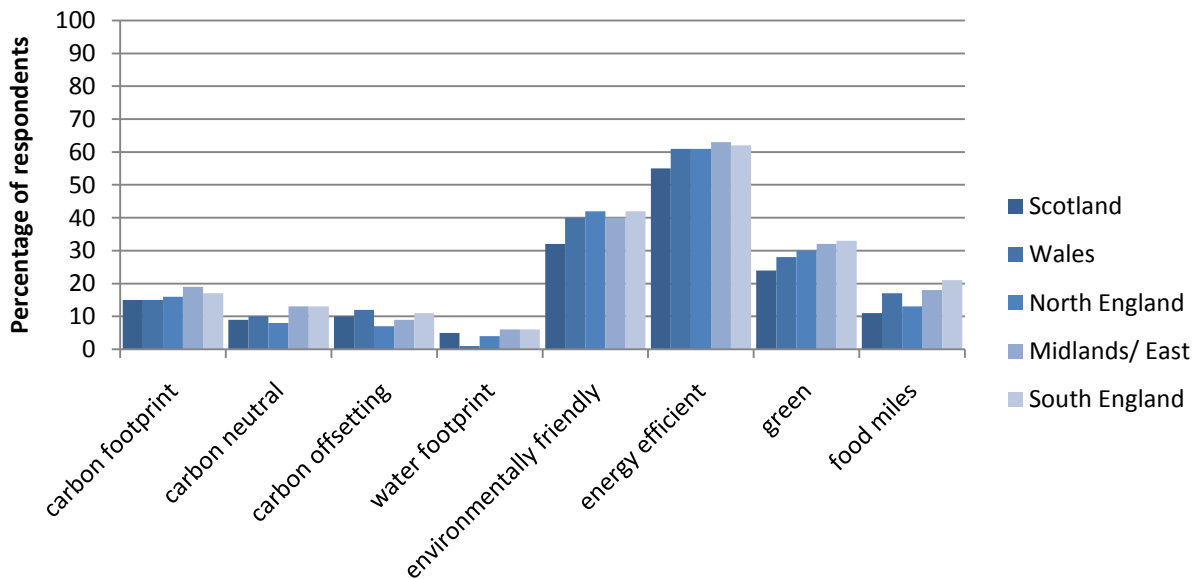
**Figure 11 – Familiarity with green terms by geographic region**

**Question:** To what extent, if at all, are you familiar with the following terms? – very/fairly familiar (Base: 2,019)



**Figure 12 – Use of green terms in purchase decisions by geographic region**

**Question:** When you are considering what products to buy, how often do you use these terms when they appear on product packaging? – always/often use (Base: 2,019)



**Variations by Defra Segment**

In terms of familiarity, there was a clear gradient from high familiarity among ‘Positive Greens’ through to lower familiarity among the ‘Honestly Disengaged’. This was particularly pronounced for the recent terms. For example, ‘Positive Greens’ were significantly more familiar than any other segment with terms from the carbon ‘family’, and with the term

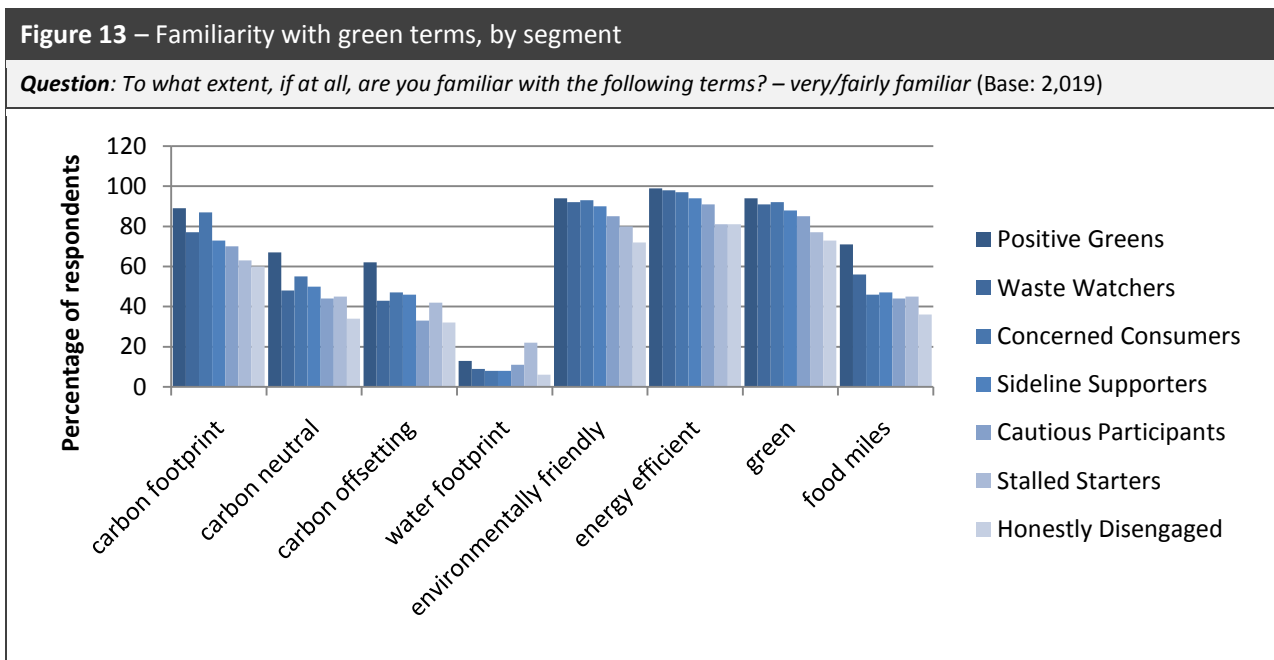


‘food miles’ (Figure 13). In terms of established terms the same gradient is evident although it is less pronounced – with only the ‘stalled starters’ and ‘honestly disengaged’ reporting significantly lower familiarity.

There were a number of occasions in the online survey when stalled starters appeared to be more engaged with green terminology than might be expected (responses to the term ‘water footprint’ being a good example). Such responses are, in fact, consistent with the wider behaviour of this segment in surveys. Defra’s *A Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours*, which originally set out the findings of the Department’s segmentation work, described stalled starters (which it referred to as ‘group 6’) as follows:

*It is hard to take the findings on group 6’s ecological worldview at face value, as... they are more likely than average to agree with each of the statements in this section of the survey (whether the statements are positive or negative). This pattern suggests that they are not properly weighing each question before responding and other findings across the survey suggest they may not have the knowledge or inclination to do so.*

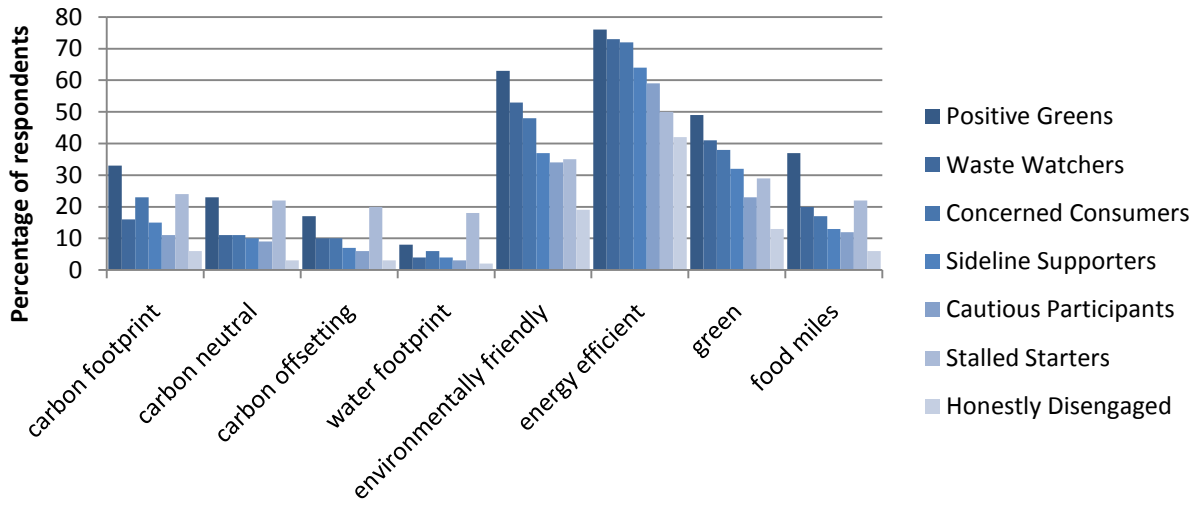
Defra (2008) A framework for pro-environmental behaviours



Turning to patterns of use (Figure 14, page 45), there was, once again, a clear gradient with ‘Positive Greens’ (much more likely claim to use the terms in considering their product choices), through to ‘Stalled Starters’ and the ‘Honestly Disengaged’ (less likely). It is worth noting again that the responses of stalled starters, particularly when it came to emerging terms, were again more positive than might have been expected.

**Figure 14 – Use of green terms in purchase decisions by Defra Segment**

**Question:** When you are considering what products to buy, how often do you use these terms when they appear on product packaging? – always/often use (Base: 2,019)



## 4 Links between terms and product types

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This research has already demonstrated the importance of context in giving certain green terms meaning (flag terms, for example). Two further exercises explored the degree to which responses to green terms vary depending on a particular type of context; namely, product type:

- First, we ran a word association exercise in the final six discussion groups. Participants were presented with a list of products and then shown a series of terms. If they believed a term might be linked to a particular product, they were asked to mark this down. In order to test more products, six were used in the first three groups and six in the second;
- Second, we presented online survey respondents with a range of terms describing eight different product categories and asked them to state how meaningful they found those descriptions. The terms used were changed depending on the product, but efforts were made to use common terms as far as possible in order to explore the way in which the same phrase performed across different product categories.

This section brings together the findings from these two exercises, first by exploring the terms that made most sense to participants in relation to particular products; then by looking at the products that were most closely linked with particular terms. Throughout the discussion of the survey findings in this chapter, the limitations outlined in section 2 should be borne in mind.

### 4.1 Overall trends

Overall, responses to claims linking green terms with particular products demonstrated the considerable impact these associations could have on how meaningful a term was to participants. The terms that were considered most meaningful when linked to products were in general those that had proven to be more familiar to participants when tested in isolation (see section 3.3). Thus, phrases like ‘zero carbon washing machine’ or ‘plastic neutral bottle’ tended to be considered far less meaningful than ‘environmentally friendly washing machine’ or ‘environmentally friendly bottle’.

Terms that were more descriptive or specific about measures or outcomes also seemed to perform better in terms of meaningfulness. This was demonstrated by the following terms, which were considered most meaningful in relation to the products concerned: ‘Renewable energy tariff’, ‘100% recycled bottle’, ‘locally sourced fish’, ‘energy efficient washing machine’ and ‘energy efficient car’.

Before considering the detailed findings, a number of other, overarching issues are worth drawing out. Specifically:

- Comparing the results for similar products such as ‘holiday’ and ‘flight’ demonstrates how product-sensitive participants’ responses to terms were – and how marketers in turn may need to be sensitive to this. Despite the clear overlap between these products, responses to them were very different;

- Links between carbon-related terms and food products were relatively weak, suggesting that for some participants, the idea of embedded carbon has yet to gain traction, despite familiarity with terms like 'food miles'. There was a similar story in relation to clothing and household products. Links between environmental responsibility and financial services appear even weaker; and
- There appears to be little awareness of embedded water as an issue. Water-related terms were only associated with products linked to prolific water use (such as washing machines) and even then, this was not consistent (they were rarely linked to shampoo, for example).

## 4.2 Product by product

For reporting purposes, products discussed in this section have been grouped into the following categories:

- Transport and travel;
- Electrical and electronic goods;
- Food and drink;
- Energy;
- Financial;
- Clothing; and
- Household

### Transport and travel

#### Cars

Discussion group participants closely associated cars with terms relating to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Efficiency-related terms were also closely linked to cars – an association that for some participants appeared to have more to do with cost concerns than environmental issues:

*W: I think of it as the consumption of petrol to the miles I can drive and how speedily it's going to drink petrol and ultimately how much it's going to cost to run.*

.....  
Group 8, Bexleyheath

Perhaps the least obvious link made was between the term 'environmentally friendly' and cars. This cropped up in two different groups. When asked to explain the association, participants suggested that it was borne of an awareness that modern car manufacturers seemed to be more sensitive to environmental issues than they had been in the past. A range of issues spanning many years, including publicity around catalytic converters, unleaded petrol and carbon emissions, may have contributed to this idea.

*Q: ...'Environmentally friendly' for a car – why do you say that?*

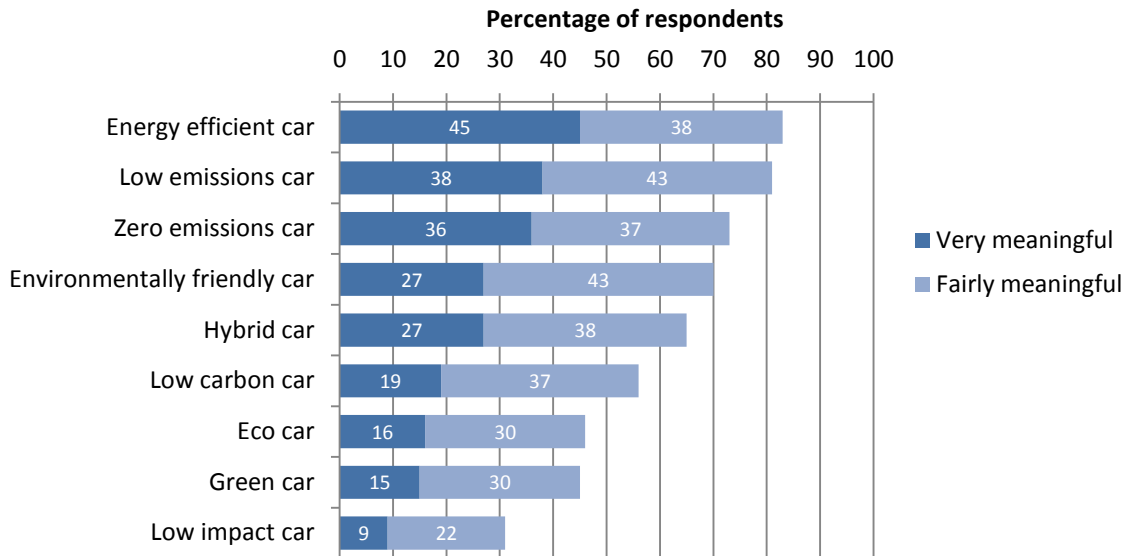
*M: ...I think it's relevant when you look at the changes in our lifetime of how cars have developed. They're getting more efficient, the emissions are getting so low that you think, "Well, where they going to go next?"*

.....  
Group 8, Bexleyheath

This isn't to say that participants – or consumers more generally – believe that cars are good for the environment; rather, that those taking part in the groups were aware that car manufacturers have made efforts to promote environmental improvements in their products.

**Figure 15 – Meaningfulness of various green terms in the context of new cars**

**Question:** When looking for a new car, to what extent would the following environmental terms be meaningful to you? (Base: 1,006)



The discussion group findings were echoed by survey responses to green terms associated with cars (Figure 15), with ‘energy efficient’ being considered most meaningful (83% either very meaningful or fairly meaningful), followed by ‘low emissions’ (81%), ‘zero emissions’ (73%) and ‘environmentally friendly’ (70%). Interestingly, ‘hybrid’ did less well, as did ‘low carbon’ (possibly because it was taken by some respondents to infer something about the materials used to manufacture the vehicle as well as its fuel consumption) and ‘green’ – possibly because of the potential dual meaning in terms of both environmental impact and colour<sup>33</sup>.

**Flights**

As with cars, discussion group participants closely associated flights with carbon-related terms such as ‘carbon footprint’, ‘emissions’ and ‘CO<sub>2</sub>’. A few participants connected flights and ‘carbon offset’, but very few drew links with any other terms. Interestingly, the similarities between the terms participants associated with cars and flights were reinforced by some participants who explicitly linked the two product types when explaining their

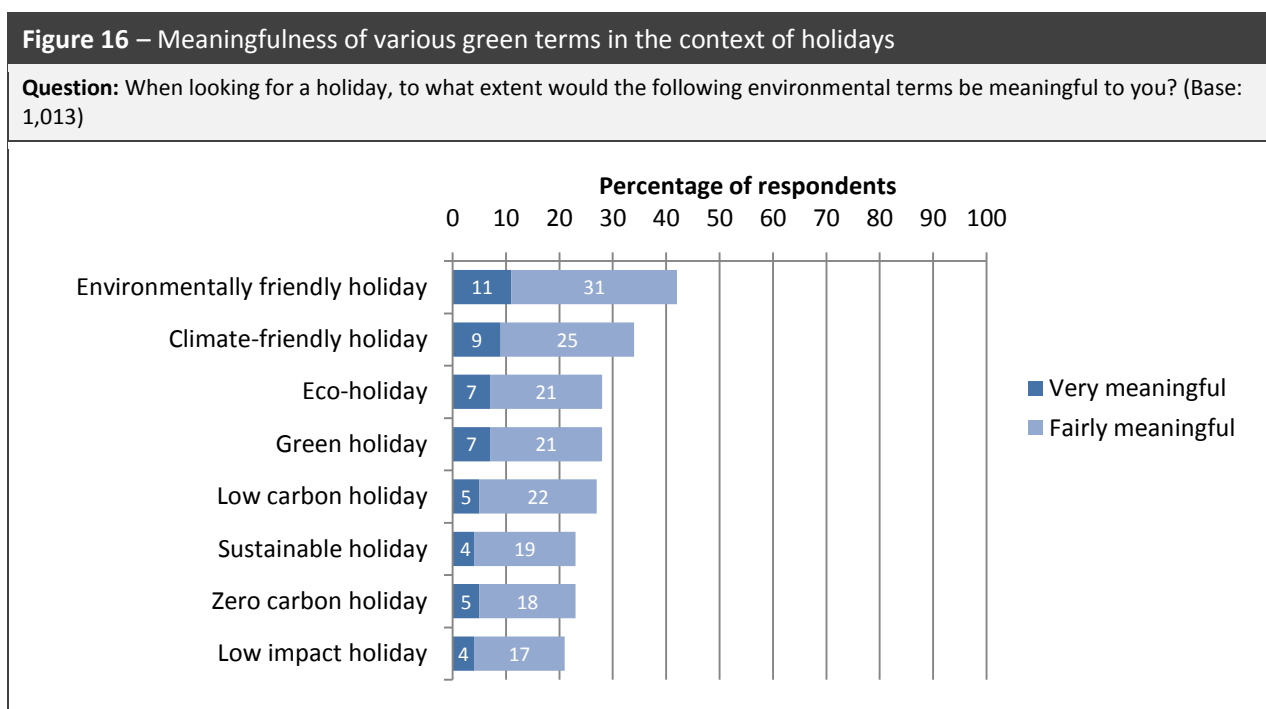
<sup>33</sup> The pattern when it came to ‘hybrid car’ was particularly interesting. Although a greater proportion of positive greens found the term meaningful (78% either very or fairly meaningful) than most other segments, there was a notable exception when it came to sideline supporters, 79% of whom found the term meaningful. 52% of sideline supporters found the term ‘fairly meaningful’, compared with 38% overall. This segment is known to have “an ecological worldview similar to group 1 [positive greens] but with slightly less conviction” (Defra (2008) A framework for pro-environmental behaviours). Possibly, these responses reflect a belief among sideline supporters that they *should* find ‘hybrid car’ meaningful, but aren’t in fact sure of the details.

reasoning. Associations between flights and green terms were not tested in the online survey.

### Holidays

When links between green terms and holidays were tested with participants in the discussion groups, perhaps not surprisingly, the term most frequently associated with holidays was 'seasonal'. Many of the other responses also appeared to be influenced by the travel aspect of holidays (e.g. flights), with terms relating to carbon mentioned frequently. The only other notable frequent occurrence was 'local', which *may* relate to changing views on taking holidays in the UK, though without further research it is impossible to know for sure.

When the meaningfulness of green terms was tested in the context of holidays during the online survey (Figure 16), however, *none* of the terms tested was meaningful to the majority of respondents. The term that respondents felt was most meaningful in the context of a holiday was 'environmentally friendly', but even then, less than half (43%) of respondents in the online survey shared this view. Given the growing media attention paid to the travel (and carbon) implications of flying, it may be that respondents felt linking environmental terms to entire holidays rather than more specifically to travel impacts was confusing.



## Electrical and electronic goods

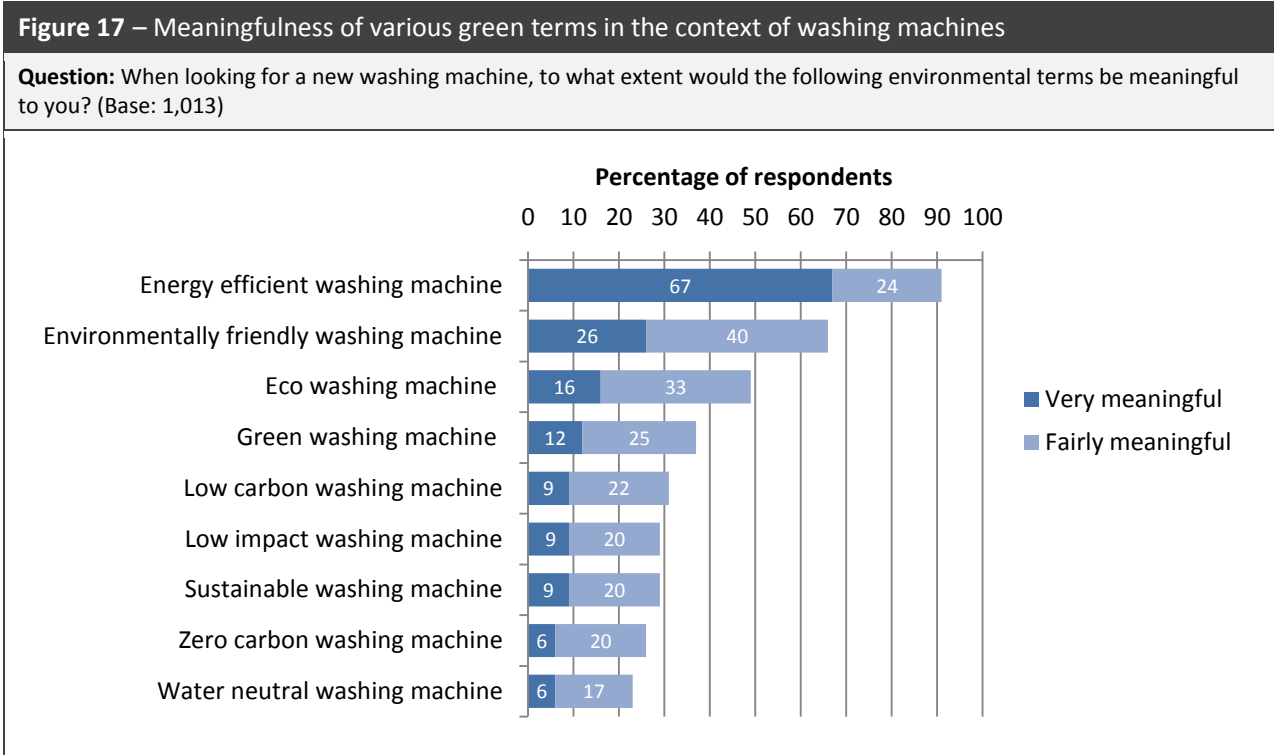
### Washing machines

Research in the past (including Brook Lyndhurst's work on carbon calculators<sup>34</sup>) has demonstrated that many consumers struggle to make the link between their household appliances and climate change, possibly because the emissions do not feel as immediate as they do with cars or aeroplanes. Results from both the discussions groups and the online survey provide further support for this, with respondents frequently linking washing

<sup>34</sup> Brook Lyndhurst (2008) Per capita carbon footprints, a report for Defra

machines to ‘energy efficient’, but less so to terms making direct reference to carbon (Figure 17).

Another interesting aspect of this exercise was the percentage of respondents claiming to find ‘environmentally friendly’ meaningful in the context of washing machines in both the online survey and the discussion groups.



When participants in at least two groups were asked about this, they referred to the ‘wash at 30’ campaign. This echoes the findings in relation to cars. Some participants in both the discussion groups and the online survey seemed to be using the term ‘environmentally friendly’ not because they felt a product *benefitted* the environment, but simply to flag a known association with environmental issues. This is probably a result of this particular exercise, rather than a wider reflection of participants’ understanding of the term ‘environmentally friendly’, since they did not seem to be implying a similar meaning when the term was tested in other ways.

**Light bulbs**

As with washing machines, participants in the group discussions seemed to connect light bulbs to energy efficiency, in the main because they were so aware of the phrase ‘energy saving light bulb’. Unlike washing machines, however, light bulbs were more readily connected to carbon related terms such as ‘carbon footprint’, albeit by a relatively small number of participants.

*Q: ...What are the main things you associate with light bulbs?*

*M: Energy, heat, carbon footprint.*

.....  
 Group 11, Reading

This appeared to be because, in the case of communications about energy saving light bulbs, energy efficiency may have been more explicitly linked to an environmental imperative, whereas in the case of white goods, publicity (many participants mentioned the A-G European energy label) has been restricted to energy efficiency in its own right. This proposition needs to be tested with further research, but may offer an important lesson for wider behaviour change messaging, since it suggests that, although in some cases non-environmental arguments (such as cost) may be most effective in ‘selling’ pro-environmental behaviours, there is still value in making clear the specific environmental benefits associated with that behaviour in order to foster broader consumer understanding. Associations between light bulbs and green terms were not tested in the online survey.

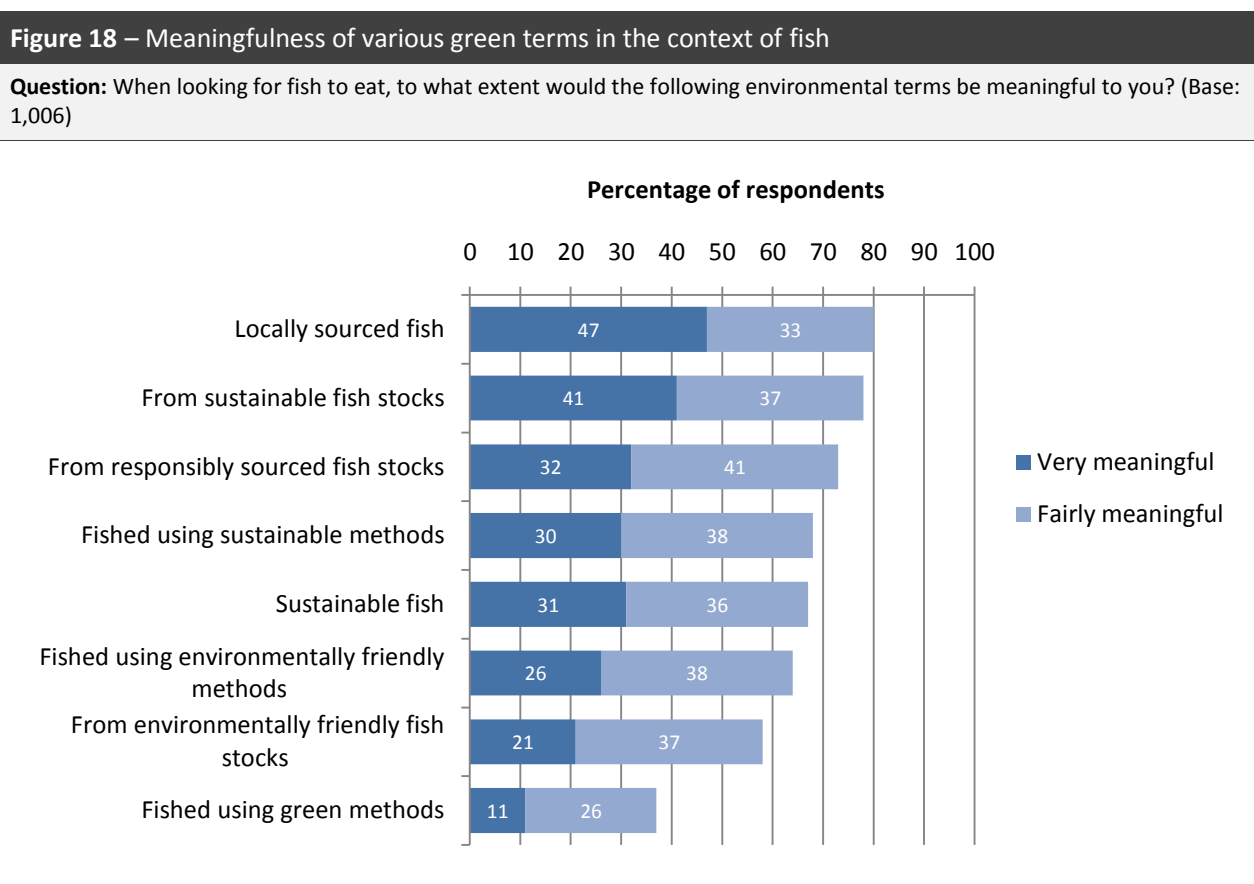
## Food and drink

### Coffee

Relatively few environmental terms were associated with coffee by individuals who participated in the discussion groups. The terms that cropped up most frequently were ‘fair trade’, ‘organic’ and ‘ethical’. Some participants also identified a link with ‘food miles’, but only one or two made any mention of explicitly carbon-related terms. Associations between coffee and green terms were not tested in the online survey.

### Fish

In both the discussion groups and the online survey (Figure 18), the term considered most meaningful in the context of fish was ‘local’ or ‘locally sourced’.





For many discussion group respondents, the term 'local' seemed to invoke both provenance (i.e. where the fish had been farmed or caught) and place of purchase – whether or not it had been bought through a local supplier.

- Q: So would you trust... a local fishmonger more than a supermarket with a label on it?...*  
*M: That is why I put 'local'...*  
*Q: And... have you seen 'local' on fish packaging or anything like that?*  
*W: I have. I know if you get Scottish salmon and it is not farmed in a salmon farm with masses of chemicals and force fed, I would want to know that.*

Group 8, Bexleyheath

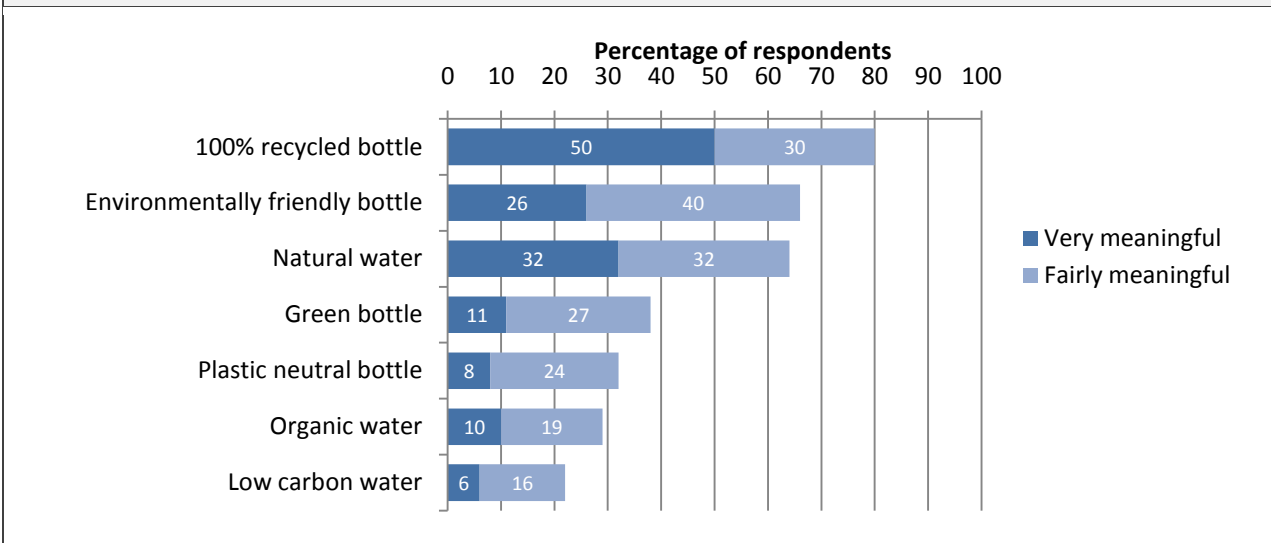
The other interesting aspect of the links drawn between green terms and fish was responses to the word 'sustainable'. Very few discussion group respondents linked this term to fish and familiarity with the Marine Stewardship Council's certification scheme was very low in the online survey. Yet, when placed in the context of fish stocks, 78% of respondents to the online survey said the term 'from sustainable fish stocks' was either very meaningful or fairly meaningful. This perhaps indicates two things:

- First, the notion of 'sustainable fish', while not widely known, has an internal logic that makes sense to people; and
- Second, the term 'sustainable' – fairly meaningless to people when tested in isolation – can have considerable meaning if used in the right context (i.e. if linked to a product that consumers consider finite or capable of renewal or replenishment).

**Bottled water**

**Figure 19 – Meaningfulness of various green terms in the context of bottled water**

**Question:** When looking for bottled water, to what extent would the following environmental terms be meaningful to you?  
 (Base: 1,006)



The terms respondents to the online survey found most meaningful in relation to bottled water tended to focus on the packaging of the product. Four fifths of respondents (80%) said

that the phrase '100% recycled bottle' was meaningful to them (Figure 19), reflecting the generally positive responses to recycling-related terms.

There was a significant gap between this and the next term – 'environmentally friendly bottle', which two thirds (66%) of respondents felt to be meaningful – but even so, this less popular term focused on the packaging rather than the overall environmental impact of the product. Given the findings in relation to the term 'environmentally friendly' and other products, it may also be that some respondents who said this was meaningful to them were simply acknowledging that they knew that either the water or the bottle had implications for the environment.

The most meaningful term to refer to the water rather than the bottle was 'natural water', felt to be meaningful by 64% of respondents, but it seems likely that many of these responses were related to the origin of the water and whether it had anything added to it, rather than its environmental impact.

## Energy

### Electricity and energy tariffs

The links drawn between energy products and green terms provided further demonstration of the importance of context in driving consumer responses to, and understanding of, green claims. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 'energy efficient' and 'efficient' were both mentioned frequently by discussion group participants when asked which terms they associated with 'electricity'. 'Green' was also mentioned a fair amount, which initially seemed to be a result of the promotion of 'green tariffs' by energy suppliers.

*M: It has been... hammered home to you now with electricity. They tend to promote... 'green energy', or they are more 'green' in their production of it, or they use a certain amount of 'green electricity'.*

---

Group 8, Bexleyheath

The term split the groups, however, with some participants suggesting it meant very little to them in connection with electricity.

*Q: 'Green electricity', is that the term that you are familiar with?*

*W: It is but I don't really understand how it is 'green'.*

*W: No I don't either.*

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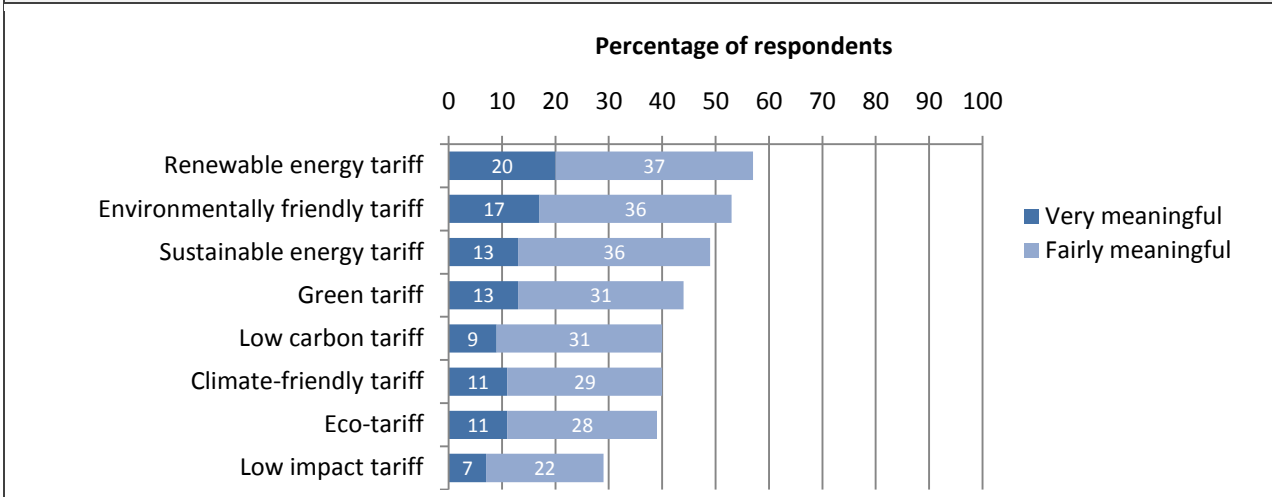
Group 8, Bexleyheath

When green terms were tested in the context of energy tariffs in the online survey, this split was again in evidence, with around two fifths (44%) of respondents claiming the term 'green tariff' was meaningful to them (Figure 20, page 54). The term 'renewable energy tariff' – which perhaps tells consumers more about how the energy is generated – meant more, with 57% of respondents claiming it was either very or fairly meaningful. What is perhaps most striking of all, however, is that at least a third of respondents still seemed to struggle with

any attempt to link how they pay for their energy (the tariff) with the way the energy is generated (through the use of a green term).

**Figure 20 – Meaningfulness of various green terms in the context of energy tariffs**

**Question:** When looking for a new electricity tariff, to what extent would the following environmental terms be meaningful to you? (Base: 1,006)



## Financial

### Credit card

Very few discussion group participants linked any environmental terms with credit cards, and those that did tended to focus on the physical properties of the credit card itself, highlighting terms like ‘recyclable’ and ‘plastics neutral’. For most though, credit cards – and financial services more generally – had little to do with the environment.

*M: Nothing on credit card.*

*M: I haven't got anything...*

*M: Nothing on credit card no.*

*W: I put like 'low impact', 'biodegradable', 'recyclable' and 'plastics neutral'.*

*Q: What was your reasoning for those ones?*

*W: ...I thought, "Oh yes, maybe you could recycle them."*

Group 12, Reading

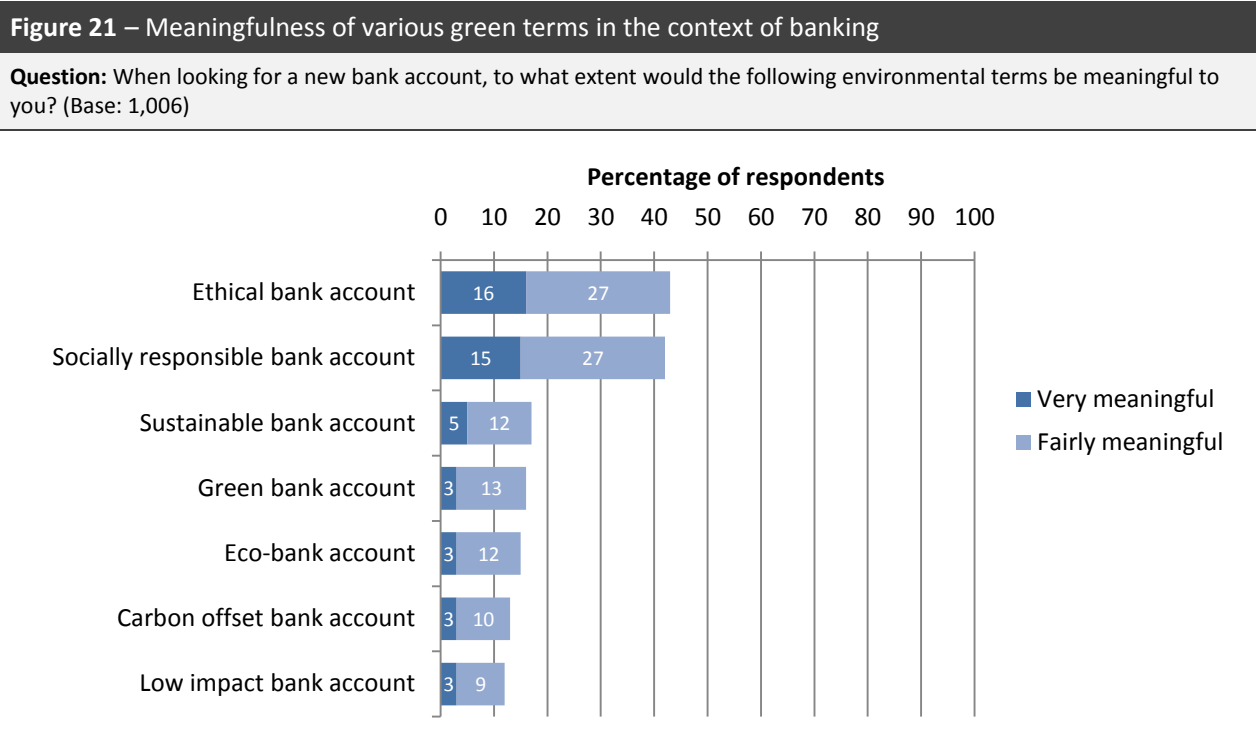
Associations between credit cards and green terms were not tested in the online survey.

### Banking

When links between environmental terms and banking were tested in the online survey (Figure 21), the results echoed the responses to credit cards in the discussion groups. The terms that were most meaningful to people tended to focus upon the wider social impacts of banks. Even then, only 43% of respondents said the term ‘ethical bank account’ was meaningful to them, with a similar percentage (42%) saying ‘socially responsible bank account’ was meaningful.

Terms linking bank activities directly to green issues fared even worse, with only 16% of respondents suggesting a ‘green bank account’ would be meaningful to them, and only 3%

saying the term was very meaningful. When the link to environmental issues was made more explicit with the phrase ‘carbon offset bank account’, even fewer respondents (just 13%) said they found the term meaningful, echoing responses to the idea of environmentally friendly car insurance in the discussion groups (see page 27). Overall it appears that participants struggled to make links between the environment and financial products in any way meaningful.



## Clothing

### Jackets

As with financial products, associations drawn between green terms and clothing (jackets in particular) were limited and restricted to a minority of discussion group participants. The terms most frequently linked to jackets – ‘seasonal’, ‘refashioned’ and ‘fair trade’ – had more to do with non-environmental characteristics of clothing. Almost no-one associated jackets with carbon impacts, and only a few made a link to recycling in the discussion groups. Associations between jackets and green terms were not tested in the online survey.

## Household

### Paint

Relatively few green terms were linked to paint by discussion group participants, with the exception of ‘environmentally friendly’ and ‘green’. When asked why, some participants suggested that they had become used to paint being associated with environmental damage (lead content, for instance) for many years, in a similar way that they now linked ‘environmentally friendly’ to cars (page 47) and to washing machines (page 50).

A few respondents also linked paint with ‘CO<sub>2</sub>’ and ‘low carbon’ – usually because they associated it more closely with manufacturing and chemical processes:

*Q: ...And finally, paint?...*  
*M: Carbon footprint to produce.*

Group 11, Reading

Associations between paint and green terms were not tested in the online survey.

### Shampoo

Many of the terms connected to shampoo by discussion group participants seemed to be linked to the product’s packaging (e.g. ‘biodegradable’; ‘recyclable’; ‘plastics neutral’). Hardly any respondents connected shampoo with carbon-related terms. When they did, it seemed to be linked to the manufacturing process, but even then, they found it very difficult to explain why there should be this connection.

*Q: Why do you think shampoo could be ‘carbon negative’?*  
*M: In its process.*  
*Q: Okay, what does ‘carbon negative’ mean?*  
*M: I don’t know, I am guessing.*

Group 12, Reading

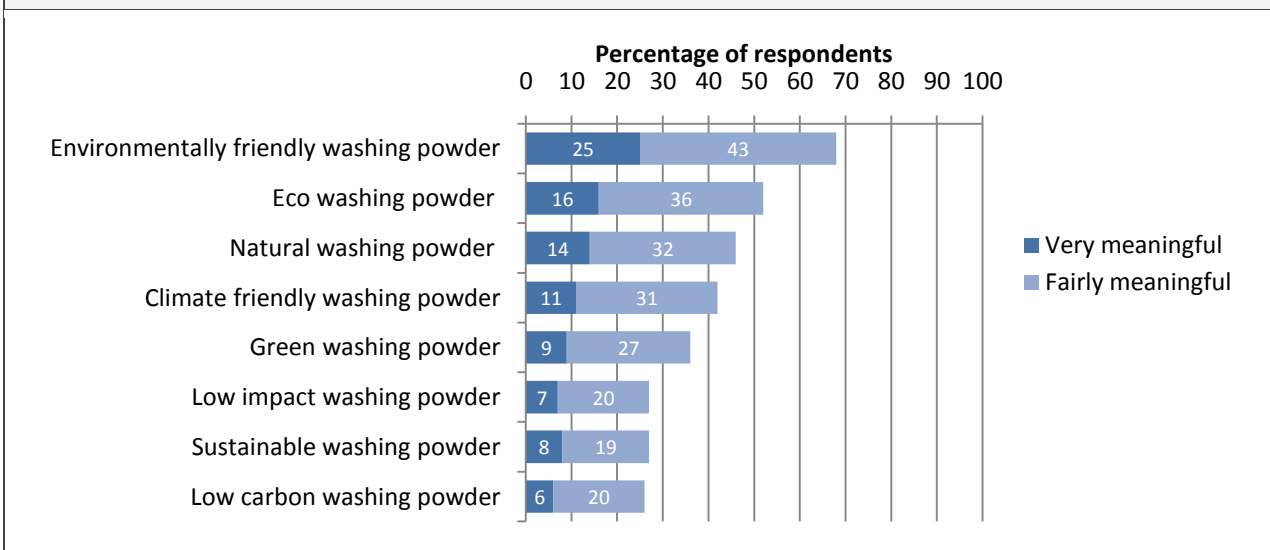
The terms most frequently associated with shampoo seemed to have more to do with the marketing of specific shampoo brands (‘organic’ and ‘natural’) than with the product’s environmental impacts. Associations between shampoo and green terms were not tested in the online survey.

### Washing powder

As with the other household products, people seemed to struggle to link washing powder with carbon-related terms. Only a quarter (26%) of respondents to the online survey claimed to find the term ‘low carbon washing powder’ meaningful (Figure 22).

**Figure 22 – Meaningfulness of various green terms in the context of washing powder**

**Question:** When looking for washing powder, to what extent would the following environmental terms be meaningful to you?  
(Base: 1,006)

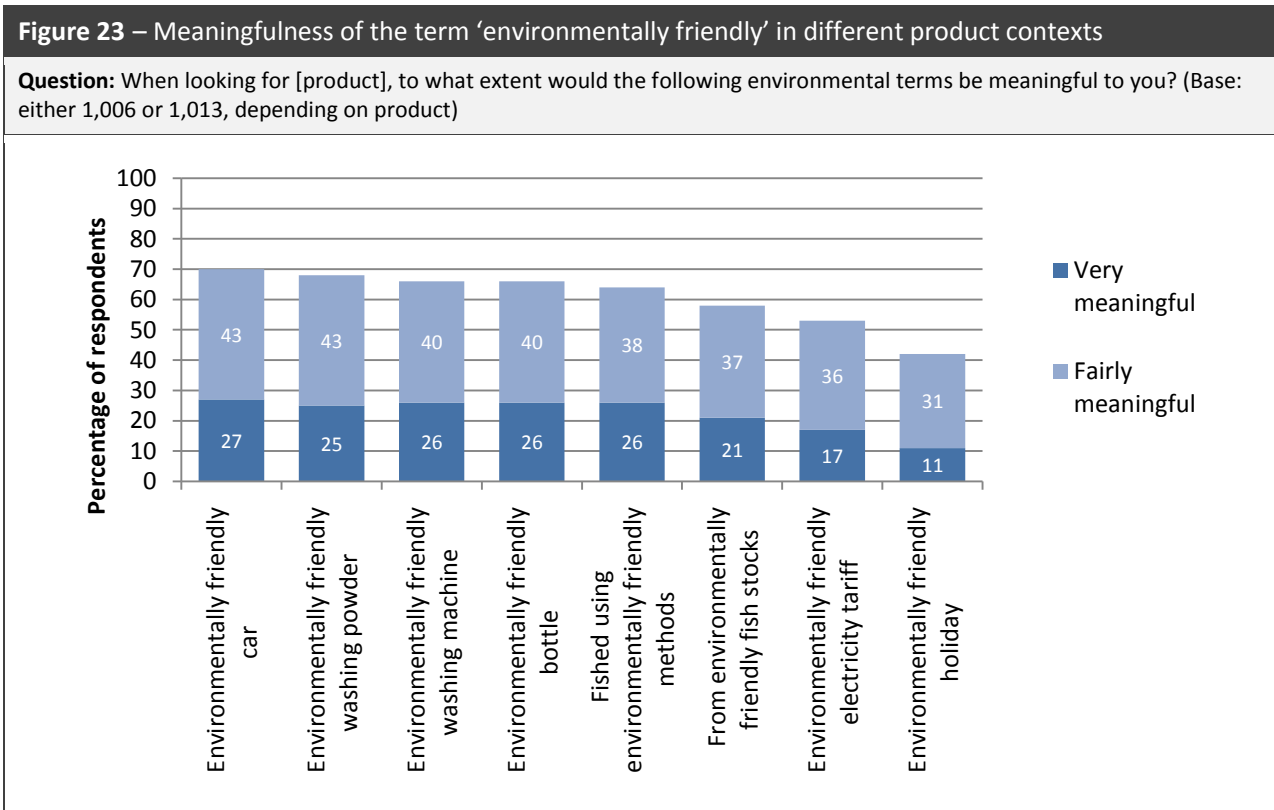


However, two fifths (44%) of respondents claimed to find the phrase ‘climate friendly washing powder’ meaningful. Without further research, it is difficult to know why this might be, but it is possible that washing powder brands’ association with the ‘wash at 30’ campaign may have strengthened the links between this particular product and climate impacts, while not necessarily invoking *carbon emissions* per se.

Two thirds of survey respondents (68%) said the phrase ‘environmentally friendly washing powder’ was meaningful to them, while more than half (52%) found ‘eco washing powder’ meaningful. This seems likely to be linked to the marketing of ‘ecological’ and ‘biological’ washing powders; as noted earlier, the latter of these terms seems to have contributed to wider confusion about the meaning of terms with the prefix ‘bio’ (see page 25).

### 4.3 Associations by term

It is also possible to present the results of the online survey on a term by term, rather than product by product, basis. Whereas the latter approach identified how terms performed relative to one another (establishing a hierarchy of meaning), looking at the results term by term allows us to explore whether the same terms have different levels of meaning, depending on the product.



The results demonstrate that different patterns are evident for each of the three flag terms that were tested across a number of different products. The term ‘environmentally friendly’ performed strongly in relation to a range of product categories (Figure 23), with a majority of respondents finding it meaningful for all bar energy tariffs and holidays (the latter being a category where no term performed well). Again, it seems likely that some respondents may have been using the association with ‘environmentally friendly’ simply to indicate their

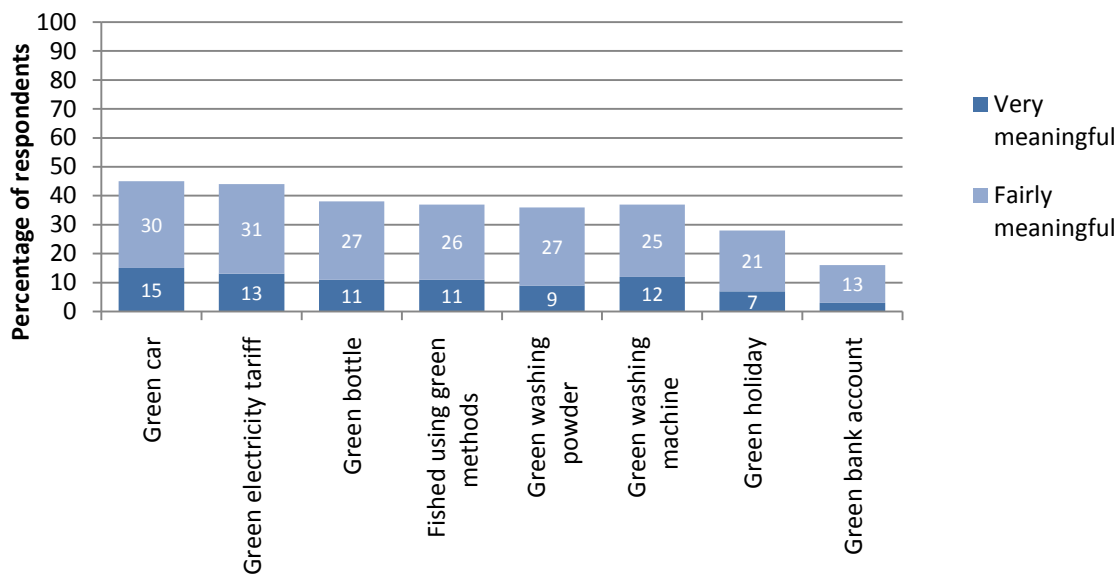
awareness that a product could have implications for the environment, and that there is, therefore, potential for that impact to be reduced (for more on this, see the discussion of washing machines on page 50).

The strength of ‘environmentally friendly’ is in stark contrast to the term ‘green’, which seems to be much less meaningful in the context of specific product categories (Figure 24). In fact, in none of the categories was it meaningful to more than half of the survey respondents.

When it comes to ‘green’, wider context (and not just product type) seems important. Without any text surrounding the phrases in Figure 24 (page 58), the word ‘green’ could mean many things – perhaps most obviously, describing a colour. The slightest additional context or framing, however, can shift this meaning – a fact that was demonstrated in some of the discussion groups. Participants were presented with an advert for a fabric conditioner with the headline ‘One Green Bottle’, together with supporting detail. Most group participants seemed comfortable that they understood this headline claim, despite the fact that, in the online survey, only 38% of respondents said they found the term ‘green bottle’ meaningful.

**Figure 24 – Meaningfulness of the term ‘green’ in different product contexts**

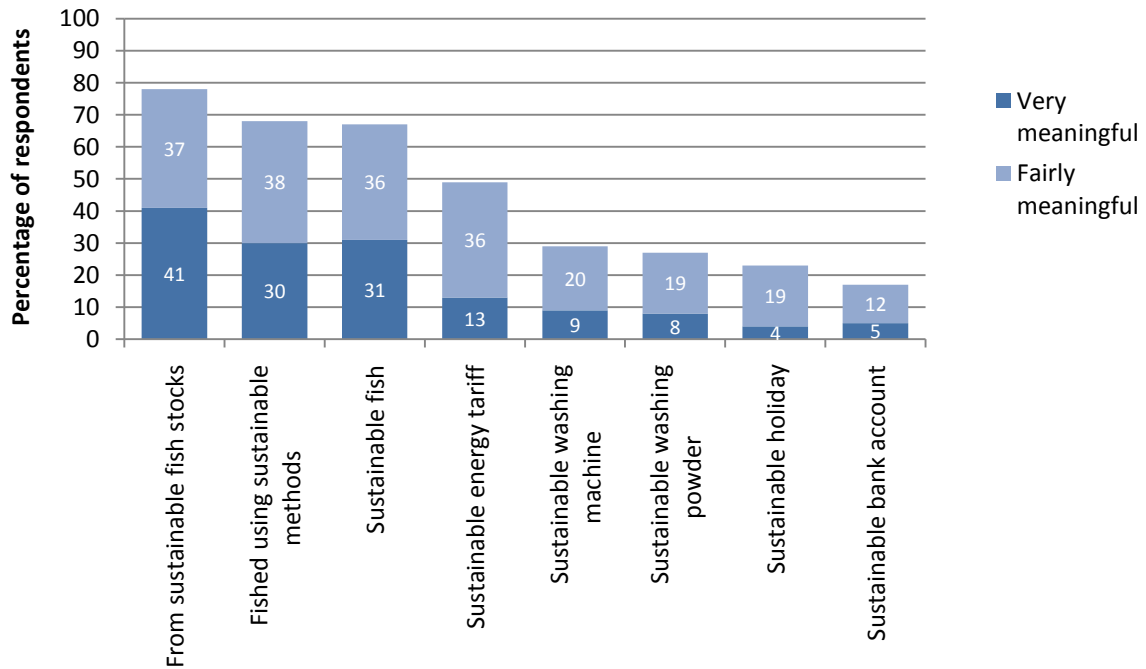
**Question:** When looking for [product], to what extent would the following environmental terms be meaningful to you? (Base: either 1,006 or 1,013, depending on product)



The term ‘sustainable’ sits somewhere in the middle of these positions (Figure 25, page 59). In some categories it is very meaningful, especially in relation to fish and – more specifically – in relation to the health of the fish stock (78% find this meaningful). However, the reverse was true of other product categories – fewer than one in five (17%), for example, thought that a ‘sustainable bank account’ was meaningful, whereas neither a ‘sustainable holiday’ (23%) nor ‘sustainable washing powder’ (27%) was particularly meaningful to online survey respondents.

**Figure 25 – Meaningfulness of the term ‘sustainable’ in different product contexts**

**Question:** When looking for [product], to what extent would the following environmental terms be meaningful to you? (Base: either 1,006 or 1,013, depending on product)





## 5 Implications

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This section draws together the key findings from the preceding pages and sets out the implications of this research for policy and communications. Again, it should be stressed that there are some limitations associated with the methodology used in this project. The results cannot therefore be assumed to be truly representative of the UK population and should be treated as indicative only.

### 5.1 Implications for communicating green claims

#### Familiarity equals meaningful

Participants in both the online survey and group discussions were aware of a very broad range of green terms. This is important, because **as familiarity with green terms increases, so does people's sense of how meaningful those terms are**. Although the boundaries of this need to be explored further, it is possible that even the most impenetrable jargon may become familiar through use. You only have to look to the development of the internet for evidence of this – who could have foreseen that we would so readily choose between an 'HTML' or 'plain text' email, or so easily relay web addresses laden with http's and www's to one another without a second thought?

An emerging green term can seem alien and challenging when first encountered by a consumer, but just as language evolves, **green terms can go through a 'familiarity transition' that transcends whether or not they are liked or disliked, and which may result in subtle shifts in inferred meaning as people switch from literal interpretation to a more subconscious mental 'shorthand'**.

The role of familiarity is important to understand, but should not be seen as encouragement to invent an endless stream of new jargon and wait for consumers to catch on. New terms still take time to bed in and become familiar, and there is no guarantee that a new phrase will be used sufficiently widely to achieve this critical mass. In addition, **if a term or phrase is hard to make sense of, or not immediately intuitive, it may be less likely to become meaningful overtime**.

#### Responses to green language are fluid

The way that people's relationship with environmental words and phrases may change as they become more familiar is important because it illustrates an aspect of green terms that is absolutely fundamental. **Green language is constantly evolving as new terms are introduced and older ones become more (or less) established**. As it does, so the landscape within which marketers operate shifts. While this research provides some important lessons about the ways in which participants understood green terms, its conclusions about current responses to individual terms represent just a snapshot from a particular point in time. Marketers need to remain conscious of this, and consider the broad direction of travel when drafting (and testing) claims.

It would be easy, for example, to advise against the term 'water neutral' today because of its poor performance in this research, but what happens if water use rises up the national agenda? As the issue gets more exposure, so too terms associated with it may start to make

intuitive sense to people without them needing to understand the detail. Just as research participants didn't seem to need to have a full grasp of climate science to process and relate to claims relating to climate change, so it is possible that a greater awareness that products have negative lifecycle water impacts could result in 'water neutral' scoring much better in future. **It may well therefore be worth reviewing particular terms on an ongoing basis to explore the degree to which the meaning that is derived from them has changed.**

## Not all terms are equal

**Not all terms stand the same chances of being accepted into general use.** Certain terms seem less likely to gain traction with the public because they refer to concepts that are either poorly understood, or use terms that people feel they *do* understand in ways they feel do not make sense. 'Carbon negative' and 'biodiversity' are good examples.

## Meaning doesn't equal understanding

This research has found evidence that **participants were regularly reading, using and feeling they had understood green terms without fully understanding many of the concepts that underlie them.** This isn't true of all participants, of course, but a great many claim to find terms like 'climate change' and 'carbon neutral' meaningful without really 'getting' the science that underpins these terms. In some cases, participants professed to be sufficiently confident in their *perceived* understanding take action on messages using these terms. This may not matter, providing that people's inferred meanings aren't at odds with the meaning intended by marketers, but what is certain is that marketers can never assume that the meaning they intend is the one that will be received.

## Degrees of specificity

It is possible to categorise the green terms used in green claims according to how specific they are about the environmental attributes associated with the product or service being promoted. At the least specific end of the spectrum are what we have called 'inferential' terms. These have no explicit link to the environment but have the potential to *infer* such a link from context in which they are used. Examples might include 'clean' and 'pure'. **This lack of specificity together with the potential for inference creates considerable potential for inferential terms to mislead consumers.**

Next are 'flag' terms, such as 'green' or 'environmentally friendly'. These were generally understood by research participants to explicitly refer to the environment and to indicate that a product's impact on the environment has been reduced. Crucially, however, **flag terms do not highlight a specific environmental issue. As a result, there is a risk that consumers may be left with the sense that every environmental impact of a product has been improved or negated, or that a product is actually *good* for the environment when this is not in fact the case.**

In contrast, other terms that either invoke a specific environmental issue (e.g. carbon footprint, carbon emissions) or a specific remedy to an environmental issue (e.g. recyclable, renewable energy) are much clearer in establishing the true parameters of a claim. **The level of specificity of a term therefore has a direct bearing on how informative it will be: The less specific the term, the greater the need for supporting detail.**

## Supporting information

In light of the importance of supporting detail in giving meaning to particular types of green term, several points about consumer absorption of such detail are worth noting. First, **too much small print can be off-putting**. In the words of one respondent, people shouldn't have to "put themselves out" to read, make sense of and absorb a claim. Second, **preferences in relation to supporting detail varied from person to person and product to product**. As a result, claims should be worded in a way that does not rely on an individual reading every word in order to derive the correct meaning. **Supporting text needs to be clear and concise, avoiding unnecessary detail or the use of jargon or emerging terms**. In particular, supporting detail should be considered to ensure that it does not appear to contradict other elements of a claim, or pose more questions than it answers. Supplementary detail that is not essential for a claim to be properly understood can be made available through websites.

Although the findings of this research are only tentative, **there are indications that the provision of detail *quantifying* improvements made to a product against specific criteria can increase trust in a claim**. Trust may be lower, however, for claims about products that are seen as being more environmentally damaging, accentuating the need for this kind of additional detail.

## Context is key

This research has confirmed the findings of previous studies: **To a greater or lesser extent, the context within which a term is deployed can change its meaning**. Simply adding one or two words adjacent to a term, for example, can shift the meaning of a perfectly ordinary phrase (compare, for example, the inference you might read into the phrases "green bottle" and "one green bottle" – the latter, in echoing a popular children's song, invites the reader to give greater consideration to what might be inferred by the use of the word 'green'). This is crucial because green terms are very rarely deployed without any kind of context, even if this is limited to a reference to a specific product.

## Mechanisms used to derive meaning from unfamiliar terms

This research has highlighted a number of ways in which participants attempted to make sense of terms with which they were less familiar. **Some participants tried to use 'overlaps' between terms to give meaning to an emerging term**. For example, some participants used their understanding of 'carbon footprint' to make sense of 'water footprint', since the use of the word 'footprint' seemed consistent and intuitive. However, the same could not be said of 'carbon neutral' and 'water neutral', since while respondents understood that CO<sub>2</sub> was 'bad' and was therefore something it might be desirable to 'neutralise', they couldn't identify a negative aspect to water that would require it to be treated in the same way.

Linked to this point, **emerging terms may rely upon consumers' understanding underlying concepts**. A good example is provided in this research was 'carbon negative' – understanding this term requires an understanding of carbon offsetting. Marketers need to be aware of these 'internal dependencies' when using green terms, particular if, as seems likely, understanding of terms develops at different rates within different sections of the population, which could result in some consumers being 'excluded' from green claims.

**Participants sometimes took new and unfamiliar terms at face value.** As a result, phrases like 'zero carbon' were interpreted to mean 'contains no carbon'.

## Addressing multiple issues

Although we did not seek to test responses to particular types of *claim* in this research, there was anecdotal evidence from the discussion groups that claims invoking multiple environmental impacts in relation to a single product had the potential to confuse participants. It may be that further research is needed on the circumstances in which the association of particular issues is understood by consumers, and those in which it jars or is considered confusing. At the very least, **it is important to ensure that claims that do refer to more than one environmental impact do so clearly and in a way that makes sense to consumers.**

## Comparative terms

The responses to comparative terms such as 'greener' in this research echoed Defra's existing guidance about comparative claims. Specifically, our findings reiterate the need for comparative claims to:

- Make clear the basis for comparison;
- Quantify the claim; and
- Ensure that comparisons are made against a comparable product serving similar functions.

## Thinking like your audience

The research highlights that there may be a number of ways in which participants related to green terms that are useful for marketers to bear in mind:

- Some participants distinguish between terms they see as relating to 'corporate' or 'government' issues (climate change, or energy efficient, for example) and terms they see as being more personal (recycling, low energy or biodegradable). It may be worth further research to probe further on what underpins these distinctions and whether they are consistent within or between different population groups;
- A number of respondents suggested that they felt more warmly towards terms that they themselves would use. This appears to be strongly linked to the terms they are most familiar with; and
- Participants sometimes draw links between different terms. This is either on the basis of the subject of those terms (e.g. recycling; food; carbon emissions) or elements within the terms themselves (e.g. terms containing words implying an absence of something, such as 'zero', 'neutral' or 'negative'). It is worth noting that an interpretation of 'neutral' as meaning 'free from' was particularly prevalent in the discussion groups, and it would be useful to get some more robust figures on the extent to which this is reflected across the wider population.

## Links between products and green terms

Overall, responses to **claims linking green terms with particular products demonstrated the considerable impact these associations can have on how meaningful a term is to consumers.**

The terms that were considered most meaningful when linked to products were in general **those that were more familiar to participants and described specific measures or outcomes** – e.g. ‘Renewable energy tariff’, ‘100% recycled bottle’, ‘locally sourced fish’, ‘energy efficient washing machine’ and ‘energy efficient car’.

## Annex A – Topic guide, scoping phase

Time	Instructions	Purpose of section
<p>10 mins (18.40)</p>	<p><b>Introduction and warm up</b></p> <p>Ask respondents to chat to the person on their left, find out their name and one advert they have seen recently that stood out for them and why.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce yourself and Brook Lyndhurst</li> <li>• Toilets, fire drills, mobile phones</li> <li>• Purpose of groups: to find out a bit about their responses to some of the language used in marketing</li> <li>• Explain the need for honesty</li> <li>• Healthy debate – no answer is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, want to understand their views</li> <li>• Will ask that people don’t speak over each other and to allow each other the time to speak - recorder can’t pick up what’s happening if everyone talks at once</li> <li>• Do want to hear about everyone</li> <li>• Confidential, but recorded - voice recording used as back-up - get permission</li> </ul>	<p>Ice-breaker</p>
<p>15 mins (18.55)</p>	<p><b>Exercise 3 – Comment on selected adverts</b></p> <p>Show a single advert. Ask respondents to give their thoughts on it, probing them on the reasoning behind their comments. Particular attention should be paid to the ways in which respondents link elements of the advert in their minds (brand and message, for example). If the conversation does not naturally home in on the green terms, probe on attitudes towards these, but do not lead. (i.e. “what about the text?” rather than, “Do you think the text is....”). Repeat for three adverts.</p>	<p>To test responses to adverts in general and in particular, to probe on the impact of contextual detail on interpretation of green terms.</p>
<p>20 mins (19.15)</p>	<p><b>Exercise 4 – Scaling exercise – adverts</b></p> <p>Ask respondents to place the adverts, <u>one at a time</u>, on the following scales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• easy to understand/difficult to understand;</li> <li>• cheap/expensive;</li> <li>• likely/unlikely to influence purchasing;</li> <li>• believable/unbelievable; and</li> <li>• trustworthy/untrustworthy.</li> </ul>	<p>To explore attitudes towards a range of adverts according to key criteria.</p>

	<p>It is crucial to probe on why respondents react the way they do and in particular, what impact, if any, the terms used have and how they are linked to other aspects of the advert. Record the position of each advert on the scaling sheet. If possible, once each criteria has been completed, take a photo of the table before clearing the terms away.</p>	
20 mins	<p><b>Exercise 1 – Grouping of terms</b></p>	
(19.35)	<p>Split group in two. Give half of the terms cards to one group, half to the other, in mixed order. Ask them to group terms they think may be linked, according to whatever criteria they please. Emphasise that there is no right or wrong answer and that every term does not have to be in a group. Give respondents five minutes for this exercise, then ask each set of participants to tell the rest of the group what they have done and why. Probe on perceptions of the terms used and preconceptions/understanding that lies behind them. Do not provide any additional information about what different terms mean.</p>	<p>To explore respondents’ attitudes towards green terms and to tease out important issues for exploration in the next phase.</p>
25 mins	<p><b>Exercise 2 – Scaling exercise – terms</b></p>	
(18.00)	<p>Hand out the terms cards to the respondents so that they have an equal number. One by one, ask respondents to place terms, <u>one at a time</u>, on the following scales (reassure respondents if necessary that they should pretend the previous exercise hasn’t taken place) by reaching agreement with the rest of the group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• familiar/unfamiliar;</li> <li>• easy to understand/difficult to understand;</li> <li>• good/bad; and</li> <li>• likely/unlikely to influence purchasing (with added explanation “when used in adverts”).</li> </ul> <p>If the group cannot reach consensus or feels a term is inappropriate, record this separately. Probe respondents on the reasoning behind their choices. If possible, once each criteria has been completed, take a photo of the table before clearing the terms away.</p>	<p>To explore attitudes towards a range of terms according to key criteria.</p>
	<p><b>Thank and close</b></p>	

## Annex B – Topic guide, round 1

Time	Instructions	Purpose of section
<p>10 mins (18.25)</p>	<p><b>Introduction and warm up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce yourself and Brook Lyndhurst</li> <li>• Toilets, fire drills, mobile phones</li> <li>• Purpose of groups: to find out a bit about their responses to some of the language used in marketing</li> <li>• Explain the need for honesty</li> <li>• Healthy debate – no answer is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, want to understand their views</li> <li>• Will ask that people don’t speak over each other and to allow each other the time to speak - recorder can’t pick up what’s happening if everyone talks at once</li> <li>• Do want to hear about everyone</li> <li>• Confidential, but recorded - voice recording used as back-up - get permission</li> </ul> <p>Divide respondents into pairs and ask them to find out one another’s name and write down all the terms they can think of which they’ve heard used in the media [stress any media] being linked to the environment. Go around the group asking them to introduce the other person in the pair. Then, ask people to tell you what words they have noted and write the words on the board.</p>	<p>Given the amount we need to cover in the hour and a half, it seems sensible to use the warm up session as a foundation for the first full exercise.</p>
<p>10 mins (18.35)</p>	<p><b>Exercise 1a – General discussion and probing</b></p> <p>Go over the words that have been written on the flip chart so far, asking the group in general:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which of the terms do/ don’t seem familiar?;</li> <li>• Which of the terms have you heard being used in the media recently (e.g. in the news, on adverts, on packaging, etc...)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If adverts and/ or packaging mentioned: what kinds of products have had environmental messages associated with them? What have those messages been?</li> <li>• What do you think of the messages you’ve heard being linked to products?</li> <li>• Do you believe/ trust them?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Which ones do/ don’t you trust? Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do they matter to you?</li> <li>• Does what’s been said generally seem clear/ unclear?</li> <li>• Is there anything that’s linked to the environment that you go out of your way to look for when you’re making a purchase or does the environment not really feature? What kinds of purchases does that apply for?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Exploring the ways in which respondents use terms themselves, which terms are most familiar to them and how they respond to and understand these terms.</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do any of the terms listed seem <u>confusing</u>?</li> <li>• If any of the words are unfamiliar or not understood, what would you guess their meaning to be?</li> <li>• Do any seem to have <u>more than one meaning</u>?</li> <li>• Do any of the <u>terms seem to mean the same thing</u> as each other (if so, write these on the board too and go through the same exercise, exploring whether respondents have a preference for one word over another).</li> <li>• Which of the terms have you yourselves used? In what contexts? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>What you mean</u> when you use those terms?;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What sort of people do you think might be interested in term XXXX?</li> <li>• Do any of the terms seem particularly relevant to you?;</li> </ul>	
20 mins	<b>Exercise 1b – Prompting on specific words</b>	
(18.55)	<p>Display the following list of words and discuss in a similar way to Exercise 1a. Make sure respondents are probed on whether they think they understand terms and what they understand terms to mean. Explore in particular whether they need to have detailed, scientific knowledge in order to feel they understand each term. Instruct respondents to ignore any that have already been covered.</p> <p><b>Round 1: eco-savvy; zero carbon; slow travel; zero waste; local; refashioned; water neutral; peat free; seasonal</b></p> <p><b>Round 2: biodiversity; well-being; durable products; food miles; sustainable fish; smart meter; binge flying; one planet living; living lightly</b></p>	
15 mins	<b>Exercise 2 – Scaling exercise</b>	
(19.10)	<p>Hand out a sheet to each respondent showing a scale from ‘meaningful’ to ‘not meaningful’. Display a list of numbered, priority terms linked to issues as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Round 1 (Thursday 19):</b> 20 terms (coloured blue on the attached spreadsheet)</li> <li>• <b>Round 2 (Tuesday 17):</b> 20 terms (coloured grey on the attached spreadsheet)</li> </ul> <p>Ask respondents to mark the numbers corresponding with each term on their scaling sheet. Then ask respondents to shout out the three terms they think are ‘easiest’ to understand and the three that are ‘most difficult’. Write these on the board and then probe respondents on why they feel the way they do about the two or three terms that crop up most frequently.</p>	Getting a feel for relative levels of perceived understanding and exploring how meaningful terms are to people, and why.
35 mins	<b>Exercise 3 – Term combinations</b>	
(19.45)	Split group into four pairs. Give each pair a Dictaphone and turn it on. Reassure them that their	To explore respondents’ attitudes

conversation won't be played back to the group – it's just to allow us to capture their discussion for transcription later. Hand out the following claims, explaining that they are 'statements that might appear on adverts, product packaging or online promotions':

**Round 1**

Yellow claims (washing machine)

Grey claims (energy)

Light green claims (coffee)

**Round 2**

Blue claims (car insurance)

Pink claims (packaging)

Dark green claims (biofuel/car)

- Give respondents one minute to discuss and jot down their initial reactions to the claim.
- Give respondents one minute to discuss and jot down how easy the claim is to understand, and why.
- Give respondents one minute to discuss and jot down how likely the claim would be to influence purchasing decisions, were they to buy that type of product;
- Give respondents one minute to discuss and jot down whether any parts of the claim make it more or less believable.

During the discussions, circulate between pairs, reminding them of the need to elaborate on their reasons for feeling the way they do.

Once each colour has been completed, display all of its claims on the projector ask the group as a whole to identify the sentence that:

- They find most appealing (and why)
- They find least appealing (and why)
- They find easiest to understand (and why) – make sure respondents are probed on how much scientific background they need to know to feel comfortable with each term.

Conclude by prompting on any words or phrases that do not seem to have been covered.

towards green terms within green claims.

**Thank and close**

## Annex C – Topic guide, round 2

Time	Instructions	Purpose of section
10 mins (18.25)	<p><b>Introduction and warm up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce yourself and Brook Lyndhurst/Icaro</li> <li>• Toilets, fire drills, mobile phones</li> <li>• Purpose of groups: to find out a bit about their responses to some of the language used in marketing</li> <li>• Explain the need for honesty</li> <li>• Healthy debate – no answer is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, want to understand their views</li> <li>• Will ask that people don’t speak over each other and to allow each other the time to speak - recorder can’t pick up what’s happening if everyone talks at once</li> <li>• Do want to hear about everyone</li> <li>• Confidential, but recorded - voice recording used as back-up – get permission</li> </ul> <p>Divide respondents into pairs and ask them to find out one another’s name and write down all the terms they can think of which they’ve heard used in the media [stress any media] being linked to the environment. Go around the group asking them to introduce the other person in the pair. Then, ask people to tell you what words they have noted.</p>	Warm up.
10 mins (19.15)	<p><b>Exercise 1 – Scaling exercise</b></p> <p>Hand out a sheet to each respondent showing a scale from ‘meaningful’ to ‘not meaningful’. Display a list of numbered, priority terms linked to issues as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Round 1:</b> 19 terms (coloured blue on the attached spreadsheet)</li> <li>• <b>Round 2:</b> 20 terms (coloured grey on the attached spreadsheet)</li> </ul> <p>Ask respondents to mark the numbers corresponding with each term on their scaling sheet. Then ask respondents to shout out the three terms they think are ‘easiest’ to understand and the three that are ‘most difficult’. Write these on the board and then probe respondents on why they feel the way they do about the two or three terms that crop up most frequently.</p>	Getting a feel for relative levels of perceived understanding and exploring how meaningful terms are to people, and why.

30 mins	<b>Exercise 2 – Sorting exercise</b>	
(19.05)	<p>Hand out a record sheet to each participant. Explain that a series of labels will be shown, one by one, each accompanied by a letter. If they think that the label would be used in claims or packaging for a particular product on their sheet, they should write the letter in the box underneath that product.</p> <p>Instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They should go with their gut instincts</li><li>• They should write quite small as they will need to fit quite a bit in</li><li>• They can place a letter in more than one product</li><li>• If they are unsure or don't think a label applies to any of the products, they don't have to write anything down</li></ul> <p><b>Round 1 products:</b> a car; a flight; a washing machine; fish; coffee; electricity <b>Round 2 products:</b> a credit card; a jacket; light bulbs; shampoo; a holiday; paint</p> <p>Once each logo is shown, before moving on to the next one, probe on familiarity, understanding (actual or inferred), whether the label would change their opinion of a product or brand carrying it, etc.</p> <p>Repeat the exercise with the terms, explaining that this time numbers will be used. Once the exercise is complete, go around and ask respondents to pick out which word or two words are most closely linked to each product. Probe on any terms that are mentioned by a number of respondents, particularly if there is another term with a similar meaning that has not been received so positively.</p>	Exploring which terms are naturally associated with which product types. Exploring understanding of labels.
30 mins	<b>Exercise 3 – Explanatory text</b>	
(19.45)	<p>Split group into three. Give each group a Dictaphone and turn it on. Reassure them that their conversation won't be played back to the group – it's just to allow us to capture their discussion for transcription later. Hand out the first of the adverts listed below. Tell participants that they have three minutes in which to discuss their advert. During that time they are to think about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Their initial reactions</li><li>• Anything they think is confusing about the adverts</li><li>• Any way in which the advert could be improved</li></ul> <p>Remind participants regularly about how much time they have left. Once three minutes is up (or all conversations have come to an end), circulate the next round of adverts. Make sure that each groups receives at least one advert with full information, one with partial information and one with minimal</p>	To explore respondents' attitudes towards green terms within green claims and the role of supporting text/information.

information.

**[Adverts]**

Once all three adverts have been discussed in the breakout groups, reconvene the whole group and collect the adverts. Ask the group with the least text in each case to report to the rest of the group on what they liked and disliked about their advert, together with anything they were uncertain about, etc. Other groups will then be invited to contribute with any additional information they have gleaned. Probe on understanding of terms, elements of information that are considered most important, and why.

**Thank and close**

## Annex D – Survey questionnaire

### M1 – Scaling exercise of terms (in isolation) – NO SPLIT SAMPLE

*We are going to show you a series of terms related to the environment that you might see on products or in adverts about products. For each of these we will ask you, in turn, how familiar you are with the term, how meaningful it is to you personally (when you are looking at a product or an advert about a product), and finally to what extent, if at all, you take the information into consideration when deciding what to buy.*

*Q1. First of all, to what extent - if at all - are you familiar with the following terms? SINGLE CODE FOR EACH, RANDOMISE ORDER*

[Answer code: Very familiar; fairly familiar; have heard of before but not very familiar; have heard of before but not at all familiar; have never heard this term before]

Carbon footprint
Low impact
Zero carbon
Carbon neutral
Carbon offsetting
Water footprint
Environmentally-friendly
Bioenergy
Eco-friendly
Sustainable
Recyclable
Energy efficient
Green
Food miles
Ecological

*Q2. Second, when these terms are used in an advert or on product packaging, how meaningful are they to you personally? [NB. By meaningful, we mean whether it is easy to understand and something that makes sense to you] SINGLE CODE FOR EACH, RANDOMISE ORDER*

[Answer code: Very meaningful; fairly meaningful; not very meaningful; not at all meaningful]

Carbon footprint
Low impact
Zero carbon
Carbon neutral
Carbon offsetting
Water footprint
Environmentally-friendly
Bioenergy
Eco-friendly
Sustainable
Recyclable
Energy efficient
Green
Food miles
Ecological

*Q3. When you are considering what products to buy, how often do you use these terms when they appear on product packaging?* SINGLE CODE FOR EACH, RANDOMISE ORDER

[Answer code: Always consider; often consider; consider occasionally; do not consider much; do not consider at all]

Carbon footprint
Low impact
Zero carbon
Carbon neutral
Carbon offsetting
Water footprint
Environmentally-friendly
Bioenergy
Eco-friendly
Sustainable
Recyclable
Energy efficient
Green
Food miles
Ecological

*Q4. And, finally, are there any terms here that you actively dislike?* MULTICODE OK, RANDOMISE ORDER

Carbon footprint
Low impact
Zero carbon
Carbon neutral
Carbon offsetting
Water footprint
Environmentally-friendly
Bioenergy
Eco-friendly
Sustainable
Recyclable
Energy efficient
Green
Food miles
Ecological
NONE OF THESE
ALL OF THESE

## **M2 – Scaling exercise of terms (in context) – SPLIT SAMPLE**

*Q5. When looking for a new [add product category, see below, and randomise order of appearance], to what extent would the following environmental terms be meaningful to you personally if they appeared on the product/in store* SINGLE CODE FOR EACH, RANDOMISE ORDER

[NB. By meaningful, we mean whether it is easy to understand and something that makes sense to you]

[Answer code: very meaningful; fairly meaningful, not very meaningful, not at all meaningful]

Split sample A	Split Sample B
----------------	----------------

<i>Washing machine</i>	<i>Washing Powder</i>
Energy efficient washing machine	Green washing powder
Low carbon washing machine	Eco washing powder
Green washing machine	Environmentally-friendly washing powder
Low impact washing machine	Low impact washing powder
Sustainable washing machine	Sustainable washing powder
Eco washing machine	Natural washing powder
Environmentally-friendly washing machine	Low carbon washing powder
Water neutral washing machine	Climate friendly washing powder
Zero carbon washing machine	
<i>Holiday</i>	<i>Cars</i>
Zero carbon holiday	Green car
Low impact holiday	Eco car
Sustainable holiday	Energy efficient car
Environmentally-friendly holiday	Hybrid car
Eco-holiday	Low carbon car
Green holiday	Low impact car
Climate-friendly holiday	Environmentally-friendly car
Low carbon holiday	Zero emissions car
	Low emissions car
<i>Electricity Tariff</i>	<i>Fish</i>
Renewable energy tariff	From sustainable fish stocks
Green tariff	From environmentally friendly fish stocks
Environmentally-friendly tariff	From responsibly sourced fish stocks
Eco-tariff	Fished using sustainable methods
Low impact tariff	Fished using environmentally-friendly methods
Sustainable energy tariff	Fished using green methods
Low carbon tariff	Sustainable fish
Climate-friendly tariff	Locally sourced fish
<i>Bottled water</i>	<i>Bank account</i>
Plastic neutral bottle	Green bank account
100% recycled bottle	Sustainable bank account
Organic water	Ethical bank account
Environmentally-friendly bottle	Low impact bank account
Green bottle	Carbon offset bank account
Low carbon water	Eco-bank account
Natural water	Socially responsible bank account

### **M3 – Scaling exercise of labels – NO SPLIT SAMPLE**

We are going to show you a series of labels related to the environment or social issues that you might see on products or in adverts about products. For each of these we will ask you, in turn, how familiar you are with the label, if it is familiar what you understand the label to mean, and finally to what extent, if at all, you take the information into consideration when deciding what to buy.

Q6. First of all, to what extent - if at all - are you familiar with the following labels? SINGLE CODE FOR EACH, RANDOMISE ORDER

[Answer code: Very familiar; fairly familiar; have seen before but not very familiar; have seen before but not at all familiar; have never seen before]



Green dot
Made up one
Carbon Trust footprint
A-G Energy Efficiency rating
EU Eco-label
FSC
Soil Association organic mark
MSC
Palm oil

Q7. ASK IF SEEN BEFORE AT Q6, OTHERS GO TO Q8 *What do you understand this label to mean?* WRITE IN BOX OR TICK 'NOT SURE', RANDOMISE ORDER

Green dot
Made up one
Carbon Trust footprint
A-G Energy Efficiency rating
EU Eco-label
FSC
Soil Association organic mark
MSC
Palm oil

Q8. *When you are considering what products to buy, how often do you use these labels when they appear on product packaging?* SINGLE CODE FOR EACH, RANDOMISE ORDER

[Answer code: Always consider; often consider; consider occasionally; do not consider much; do not consider at all]

▪ Green dot
▪ Made up one
▪ Carbon Trust footprint
▪ A-G Energy Efficiency rating
▪ EU Eco-label
▪ FSC
▪ Soil Association organic mark
▪ MSC
▪ Palm oil

#### **M4 – Descriptors of sustainable lifestyles – NO SPLIT SAMPLE**

Q9. *For each of the following terms / descriptions of an “environmentally friendly lifestyle”, please say how familiar, if at all, you are with them?* SINGLE CODE FOR EACH, RANDOMISE ORDER OF LIST APPEARANCE

[Answer code: Very familiar; fairly familiar; have heard of but not very familiar; have heard of but not at all familiar; have never heard this term / description before]

One planet living
Living lightly
Eco-savvy
Sustainable living
Eco-friendly
Low impact living
Environmentally friendly

Greener living
Low carbon living
Environmentally responsible
Eco

Q10. Which of these descriptions, if any, do you particularly like? MULTICODE OK, RANDOMISE ORDER

Q11. And which of these descriptions, if any, do you particularly dislike? MULTICODE OK, RANDOMISE ORDER

### **M5 – Ad pairs to test headline & supporting statements – SPLIT SAMPLE**

We are now going to show you a series of adverts that include information on environmental performance. For each of these, in turn, we will ask you how meaningful the ad is to you personally, whether you think it is a trustworthy claim or not, and to what extent, you would take the information into consideration when deciding what to buy.

SHOW AD THEN ASK QUESTIONS, BEFORE MOVING ON TO NEXT AD

Q12. First, to what extent is the environmental information in this ad meaningful to you personally? [NB. By meaningful, we mean whether it is easy to understand and something that makes sense to you] SINGLE CODE ONLY, RANDOMISE ORDER OF AD PAIRS

[Answer code: very meaningful; fairly meaningful, not very meaningful, not at all meaningful]

Q13. To what extent, if at all, do you think this is a trustworthy environmental claim for the company to make? SINGLE CODE ONLY, RANDOMISE ORDER OF AD PAIRS

[Answer code: Very trustworthy; fairly trustworthy; not very trustworthy, not at all trustworthy; don't know]

Q14. To what extent, if at all, would you personally make use of this information when you are considering what products to buy? SINGLE CODE ONLY, RANDOMISE ORDER OF AD PAIRS

[Answer code: A great extent; a fair amount; A little; not very much; not at all]

### **M6 – General purchase / lifestyle questions – NO SPLIT SAMPLE**

Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? SINGLE CODE ONLY, RANDOMISE ORDER

[Answer code: Strongly agree; tend to agree; neither agree nor disagree; tend to disagree; strongly disagree; don't know]

*I find it difficult to understand whether a product is environmentally-friendly based on the information on packaging*

*I would be prepared to pay more for environmentally-friendly products*

*I make an effort when I buy things to look for information on the packaging about whether a product is environmentally-friendly*

Q16. Which of these statements would you say best describes your current lifestyle? SINGLE CODE ONLY

I don't really do anything that is environmentally-friendly

I do one or two things that are environmentally-friendly

I do quite a few things that are environmentally-friendly  
I'm environmentally-friendly in most things I do  
I'm environmentally-friendly in everything I do  
Don't know

### **M7 – Defra segmentation Questions – NO SPLIT SAMPLE**

*Q17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? SINGLE CODE FOR EACH.*

[Answer code: Strongly agree, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree; strongly disagree]

The effects of climate change are too far in the future to really worry me  
I don't pay much attention to the amount of water I use at home  
It's not worth me doing things to help the environment if others don't do the same  
If things continue on their current course, we will soon experience a major environmental disaster  
It's only worth doing environmentally-friendly things if they save you money  
People who fly should bear the cost of the environmental damage that air travel causes  
It's not worth Britain trying to combat climate change, because other countries will just cancel out what we do  
The Earth has very limited room and resources  
It would embarrass me if my friends thought my lifestyle was purposefully environmentally friendly

I would only travel by bus if I had no other choice  
People have a duty to recycle  
The so-called 'environmental crisis' facing humanity has been greatly exaggerated  
Being green is an alternative lifestyle it's not for the majority  
For the sake of the environment, car users should pay higher taxes  
I find it hard to change my habits to be more environmentally-friendly  
We are close to the limit of the number of people the earth can support

*Q18. Which of these best describes how you feel about your current lifestyle and the environment?  
SINGLE CODE ONLY*

[Answer code: I'm happy with what I do at the moment, I'd like to do a bit more to help the environment; I'd like to do a lot more to help to environment; Don't know]

### **M8 – Standard socio-demographic factors**

i.e. age, gender, working status, etc. with media readership added

## Annex E – List of terms tested in the discussion groups

alternative energy  
binge flying  
biodegradable  
biodiversity  
bioenergy  
carbon  
carbon footprint  
carbon negative  
carbon neutral  
carbon offsetting  
climate change  
CO<sub>2</sub>  
durable products  
food miles  
eco-friendly  
ecological  
eco-savvy  
emissions  
energy efficient  
environmentally-friendly  
ethical  
fair trade  
food miles  
green  
landfill  
living lightly  
local  
low carbon  
low impact  
one planet living  
organic  
peat free  
plastics neutral  
recyclable  
recycled  
refashioned  
seasonal  
slow travel  
smart meter  
sustainable  
sustainable fish  
sustainably sourced  
water footprint  
water neutral

water offsetting  
well-being  
zero waste  
zero carbon  
zero waste

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