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Open letter to Prof. Uzunoğlu & Poynter IFCN: Serious concerns over Science Feedback, an IFCN approved fact-checker organization

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Dear Prof. Uzunoğlu,

We are writing to you, since you were the external assessor for [Poynter International Fact-Checking Network](#) (IFCN) who [approved Science Feedback](#) [[archived link](#)] as being compliant with Poynter IFCN's principles for the last four times:

- [04-Apr-2023](#) [[archived link](#)]
- [19-Jan-2022](#) [[archived link](#)]
- [18-Sep-2020](#) [[archived link](#)]
- [25-Jul-2019](#) [[archived link](#)]

We note that Science Feedback's IFCN@Poynter signatory badge is about to expire on 04-Apr-2024 and is therefore due for a new external assessment.

[Science Feedback](#) is the parent website of two fact-checking organizations: [Climate Feedback](#) and [Health Feedback](#). Ironically, given the title of their website, they do not allow any of the victims of their alleged "fact-checks" any opportunity or mechanism to provide any reply, response, or feedback.

Science Feedback has a history of actively generating disinformation about internet content and falsely using this as a "fact check". We at the Center for Environmental Research and Earth Sciences ([www.CERES-Science.com](#)) have now been victims of Science Feedback's disinformation campaigns for the second time.

In this e-mail, we are providing you with details on exactly how their two articles specifically involving our research team have made multiple provably false and misleading claims about our scientific results and conclusions. We hope that this will be of use when Science Feedback's compliance is being reassessed in April.

We have also taken the liberty of cc'ing and bcc'ing other groups that have been targeted by Science Feedback's articles as well as others that we know are concerned about the potential abuses of "fact-checking organizations" that are providing provably false or misleading assessments of internet content.

We have used both cc and bcc according to the following principle:

- We are cc'ing relevant groups and individuals whose e-mails are publicly available.
- We are bcc'ing relevant groups and individuals whose e-mails we have obtained privately.

While we do not necessarily have explicit opinions on the veracity of these other “fact-check” articles, we know from our personal experience of the fact that Science Feedback does not allow a right-of-reply, that many others likely share our frustration with the abuse of Science Feedback’s IFCN-compliant status.

We suspect that some of them might wish to provide you with their own insights and comments on Science Feedback’s behaviour with regards to their statements that have been “fact-checked” for you to consider while assessing Science Feedback’s 04-April re-application.

[Note to everyone copied in this e-mail: We respectfully ask any of the cc'ed or bcc'ed people who wish to provide Prof. Uzunoğlu with relevant information to make sure that they provide a link to the specific Climate Feedback/Health Feedback articles in their comments.]

Please note that Prof. Uzunoğlu has **only** been the external assessor for the organizations on this page (Archived link). So, if you have comments on one of the other IFCN@Poynter fact-checking organizations, you can find the relevant external assessments on this page. (Archived link).]

The fact that Science Feedback has been an approved IFCN@Poynter signatory for many years now, is particularly disquieting because several of the most-widely used social media platforms have been relying on this approval to treat Science Feedback as one of their main “*independent third-party fact-checkers*”.

In particular, Facebook (3.05 billion monthly users, ~37.5% of the world’s population) and Instagram (2.00 billion monthly users, ~25% of the world’s population) explicitly “*rely on independent fact-checkers to review and rate the accuracy of stories through original reporting*” and they only consider fact-checkers “*who are certified through the non-partisan International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN)*”. They explain that, “*Each time a fact-checker rates a piece of content as false on our platforms, we significantly reduce that content’s distribution so that fewer people see it, label it accordingly and notify people who try to share it.*” _

Similarly, TikTok (1.22 billion monthly users, ~15% of the world’s population) use Science Feedback as one of their 15 “fact-checking partners” to “*review and assess the accuracy of content across more than 60 markets. If content violates our misinformation policies, we either remove it from our platform and notify the creator or it becomes ineligible for recommendation into anyone’s For You feed.*”

In other words, when Science Feedback (or any other Poynter IFCN-compliant signatory) issues a “fact-check” on a particular piece of content, this leads to a major worldwide reduction of public access to this content. When the “fact-check” is false or misleading (as in the case with the two articles referring to the scientific research of CERES-Science), this means that the “fact-checker” organization is effectively promoting disinformation and reducing the spread of accurate information for a substantial portion of the world’s population, i.e., the users of those three major social media platforms.

False and misleading disinformation generated by Science Feedback on members of the CERES-Science research team

The first time they created false disinformation about our scientific research occurred in Aug-2021 when they created a fake “fact-check” article falsely claiming that a journalist, Alex Newman, for the Epoch Times had been “Incorrect” in [his reporting](#) of our peer-reviewed study and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)’s 6th Assessment Report (AR6) that had been published around the same time. [Link here \(Archived link\)](#).

As we described in extensive detail in [our Sep-2021 open letter](#) to the Founder and Executive Director of Science Feedback, Dr. Emmanuel Vincent, and the then-Science Editor at Climate Feedback, Dr. Nikki Forrester, that “fact-check” article had made multiple false or misleading claims. By applying the standards explicitly described by Science Feedback in their [rating scheme](#), we showed that the reporting by the Epoch Times was “Accurate”, “Correct” and in one case “Mostly Accurate”. In contrast, Climate Feedback’s alleged “fact-check” was repeatedly either “Incorrect”, “Inaccurate”, “Misleading”, or “Lacks Context”.

We explicitly recommended to Drs. Vincent and Forrester that they, “... *correct the existing “fact-check”/“feedback” on Alex Newman’s article. Currently, your website asserts that his reporting was “Incorrect” and “Misleading”. This should be changed to “Correct” and “Accurate” immediately.*” Yet, as of [January 2024](#), they still have not corrected their false and misleading article in any way. Nor did they

provide any response or “feedback” to the open letter that we e-mailed to them directly as well as posting publicly.

Indeed, ironically, this false “fact-check” articles was one of the 10 articles that they provided you for your [19-Jan-2022 external assessment](#) as evidence for Science Feedback’s “non-partisanship”.

A few weeks ago, they did another false and misleading “fact-check” article about one of us, Dr. Willie Soon, whose interview by Tucker Carlson was posted online in January 2024 – see [here for the interview itself](#). Climate Feedback’s alleged fact-check of this interview was called, “[Evidence greenhouse gasses cause global warming denied by Willie Soon in Tucker Carlson interview, resulting in mass social media climate misinformation](#)” ([Archived link](#)).

We have now completed our “fact-check fact-check” on this Climate Feedback article too (Link to [overview here](#); link to [detailed 62-page report here](#)). Again, using the standards described by Science Feedback on their website, we have shown that their “fact-check” article contains multiple false or misleading claims.

Given that the Science Feedback team explicitly describe the importance of avoiding various logical fallacies and not carrying out due diligence in checking the veracity of claims, the fact that they have made so many false and misleading claims confirms that these false claims are not just “misinformation”, but “disinformation”. That is, they are aware of the standards that we have shown they were breaking in these two articles at least.

Summary of links on Science Feedback’s latest attack on us:

- The interview with Dr. Soon: [Link here](#).
- Climate Feedback’s so-called fact-check article: [Link here](#). [[Archived link](#)].
- Our overall response: [Link here](#).
- Our detailed (62-page pdf) response: [Link here](#).

Concluding remarks and recommendations

Science Feedback is one of the main “independent third party fact-checker organizations” used by three of the largest social media platforms today (Facebook, Instagram and TikTok) because it has been approved for many years in a row as compliant with Poynter’s International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) principles.

As we have demonstrated above, at least in terms of the two examples directly related to us, they are responsible for creating provably false and offensive disinformation about our scientific research. Despite having “science” and “feedback” in the title of their organization they appear to have **zero** interest in either of those things.

They do not provide any right of reply for the scientists (or other people) that they are making claims about. Yet, because of their status as IFCN signatories, their articles can substantially alter the spread of information on social media platforms used by billions of people. This occurs in two ways:

1. Any true or accurate information that they attack ends up being heavily suppressed.
2. Any false or misleading information that they generate is defined as “fact” by their status on these platforms – regardless of how provably false it might be.

This means that false or misleading “fact-check” articles by Science Feedback (and other IFCN signatories that behave similarly) represent one of the largest sources of disinformation on the internet today.

We have read the five “external assessments” that you have made over the 2019-2023 period on this website. We appreciate that your assessments assumed that Science Feedback were acting in good faith and that when they claimed to be abiding by the standards they purport to uphold, they are doing a good service. However, we hope that you now realise– especially in advance of their renewal application in April – that Science Feedback are active agents and vectors for creating and spreading disinformation on the internet.

This seems to us to run exactly counter to the stated goals of the IFCN.

With that in mind, we strongly recommend that:

1. When Science Feedback’s compliance with IFCN is being re-assessed in April, you should not assume they are acting in good faith. At least in our two examples, they were making demonstrably false statements and assessments.

2. If you correctly revoke Science Feedback's compliance in April, then the social media platforms that have been using them should be informed by Poynter. Poynter should also recommend to those social media platforms to reverse any restrictions on content they have introduced on the basis of a prior Science Feedback "fact-check" article.
3. Poynter should also revisit their IFCN requirements to ensure that anybody or any group that has been "fact-checked" by any of the IFCN signatories should be provided with a simple and easy right of reply to that "fact-check". If this reply indisputably shows the fact-check had been incorrect or in any way failed to meet the IFCN standards, then the fact-checker organization should issue a correction and timely apology as necessary. In cases where the fact-checker organization stands over their fact-check article, the reply from the harmed parties should still be prominently displayed beside the article. In such cases, the fact-checker organization should also make it clear that their assessment is disputed and that social media platforms should not treat that particular fact-check as undisputed.

Your sincerely,

Dr. Ronan Connolly, Dr. Willie Soon & Dr. Michael Connolly

Co-team leaders of the Center for Environmental Research and Earth Sciences (www.ceres-science.com)