

European airlines hit by 'greenwashing' complaint

June 22 2023



Seventeen European airlines including Lufthansa have been hit with a complaint of making misleading climate-related claims.

European airlines have been hit by a consumer complaint filed with the EU's executive arm accusing the 17 companies of greenwashing, the practice of making misleading climate-related claims.

The European Consumer Organisation, or BEUC, said Thursday the

claims made by the airlines breach EU rules on unfair commercial practices.

The BEUC called for a Europe-wide investigation and for airlines to "stop making claims that give consumers the impression that flying is sustainable".

"We urge authorities to take the matter into their hands and crack down on this greenwashing practice seriously misleading consumers," BEUC deputy director general Ursula Pachl said in a statement.

"Airlines must stop giving consumers the false impression that they are choosing a sustainable transport mode," Pachl said.

The BEUC said 23 of its member organizations from 19 countries had joined the complaint to the European Commission.

Greenwashing is when companies use deceptive claims to convince the public that its products or operations are environmentally friendly.

The complaint targets Air Baltic, Air Dolomiti, Air France, Austrian, Brussels Airlines, Eurowings, Finnair, KLM, Lufthansa, Norwegian, Ryanair, SAS, SWISS, TAP, Volotea, Vueling and Wizz Air.

The BEUC said airlines are misleading consumers by charging them more to contribute to the development of sustainable aviation fuels (SAF), which are "not market-ready" and will only represent a minor share of a plane's fuel mix once they finally become widely available.

The group also denounced claims that paying extra credits can "offset" or "compensate" for a flight's CO₂ emissions.

The BEUC said consumer protection authorities should ask airlines to

reimburse customers who paid such extra "green" fees.

Airlines for Europe (A4E), an industry association, said in a statement that companies "fully recognize the importance of transparent communications on sustainability".

A4E said that while offsets currently play a role, "their significance will diminish as the industry bring in more fuel-efficient aircraft and invests in more SAF" to meet a target to of net-zero emissions by 2050.

"We continuously learn and improve our sustainability communication, carefully reviewing all messaging to enhance transparency," A4E said.

"We are dedicated to assessing what can be improved and made even more transparent to effectively communicate our efforts and progress in sustainability."

An Air France-KLM spokesman said the Franco-Dutch group was "paying increased attention to the precision of these messages" and that it was the world's biggest buyer of sustainable aviation fuels last year.

Germany's Lufthansa said it plans to slash its net emissions by half by 2030 compared to 2019 levels and has a "constant dialog" with customers.

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Citation: European airlines hit by 'greenwashing' complaint (2023, June 22) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-06-european-airlines-greenwashing-complaint.html>

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