Towards Carbon Neutral Gaming:
Report on the Carbon Disclosure in
Game Development Project

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INTRODUCTION

It has long been a trope when discussing the games industry, that one of the first establishing facts offered for context is the size and scale of the games industry, which has been growing for decades now. (Kerr 2006; Hotho & McGregor 2013) While this growth is often conveyed as an unambiguously positive development, leading to more and better games, what almost always goes unexamined is the costs associated with that growth, and particularly their sustainability. These costs take a range of forms: from the sustainability of the industry as it becomes ever more franchise driven and risk averse, but just as importantly, the sustainability of the industry in an age of increasing exposure to the risks and imperatives of climate change. (IPCC 2018)

In this paper I present the initial findings of an in-progress project undertaking a survey and follow-up interview with game developers in Australia and around the world. The project seeks data and policies about the emissions intensity of game development in particular workplaces, and aims to ascertain the extent game developers are aware of and care about the emissions involved in their work as game developers. Because digital games, by their very nature, require electricity to power the devices that enable them, the same goes for the hardware and software infrastructures that game development relies on. The presentation will report on the findings around awareness and offsetting of embedded carbon emissions in the development of gaming products, setting aside the issue of accounting for the highly complex and regionally varied emissions of global power generation that game players use to power their gaming hardware. While the challenge of altering consumer behaviour and habits is beyond the scope of the project, by focussing on the intensity of emissions involved in the production of games, the level of awareness of the issue, and what types of actions are already being taken to reduce carbon emissions in game development it is hoped this project may help to catalyse further action.

If we are committed to arresting the very serious threats to our shared existence that climate change presents, then we must necessarily make carbon neutral gaming and carbon neutral game development an industry-wide goal – beginning with an understanding of where the industry is presently at, in order to create a strategic and informed response to the challenges that decarbonisation presents.

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