



Australian Parents  
for Climate Action

# Submission to the Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season

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## About Australian Parents for Climate Action

Australian Parents for Climate Action (AP4CA) is a registered charity supported by more than 6,000 parents and carers from around Australia who are campaigning for a safe climate for our children's future.

We are focused on pushing Australian governments and business to take urgent action to cut Australia's carbon emissions to net zero as quickly as possible.

We encourage Australia to take a leadership role on the world stage, leading by example and calling for other nations to take the necessary action to protect our children's futures. AP4CA has a number of local groups in Victoria including the Inner North Melbourne Parents for Climate Action, Newlands Parents for Climate Action, AP4CA Banyule, AP4CA Melbourne West, and AP4CA Geelong Surf Coast & Bellarine Peninsula. For more information, visit [AP4CA.org](http://AP4CA.org).

## Scope of Submission

Australian Parents for Climate Action thanks the Victorian Government for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry. Our submission is focused on the Term of Reference in relation to considering all challenges and implications for bushfire preparedness arising from increasingly longer and more severe bushfire seasons as a result of climate change.

Our submission contains experiences and requirements of families and children in terms of government action to:

1. Reduce the likelihood and/or intensity of future climate-related natural disasters; and
2. Ensure that appropriate measures are in place to minimise the impacts of future climate-related natural disasters, particularly with regard to the physical and mental health of families and children affected by such disasters.

## Recommendations

Australian Parents for Climate Action recommends that the Inquiry:

1. Makes recommendations that the State Government commit to more effective climate change mitigation strategies and targets in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement (to keep warming well below two degrees and pursue efforts to keep warming to 1.5 degrees) to reduce the risk of future horror bushfire seasons. These include:
  - a. Approving no new fossil fuel developments (including coal, oil and gas)
  - b. Phasing out existing fossil fuel facilities over the next two decades to minimise climate change and reduce the risk of future catastrophic fires
  - c. Halting native forest logging to assess the impacts of the fires on habitat, and develop conservation plans
  - d. Prioritising investment in natural drawdown solutions such as tree planting, revegetation, regenerative agriculture, and seaweed and wetland carbon sequestration, particularly in fire-affected communities to assist with economic recovery
2. Takes into consideration the impact that the lack of emergency action to reduce climate change is having on the mental health of Victorian children who are experiencing grief, anger, anxiety, hopelessness and fear.
3. Makes recommendations that resilience measures implemented to reduce the impacts of natural disasters include consideration for the physical and mental health, safety and welfare needs of children. This should include measures to ensure that children in the care of institutions (including schools

and pre-schools) are kept safe and healthy.

4. Recognise that solutions to climate change may also contribute positively to improved natural disaster resilience for communities, such as distributed community renewable energy.

## Discussion

### Link between climate change and natural disasters

The 2019/20 bushfire season was the most intense and destructive on record,<sup>1</sup> and came amidst the worst drought in the history of European settlement of Australia<sup>2</sup>. In early 2020 it became apparent that the Great Barrier Reef was suffering its third mass coral bleaching event in the past five years due to high sea surface temperatures<sup>3</sup>. We are living in an era of unprecedented destructive climatic events.

In 2019 average land and ocean temperatures, globally, were 0.88 degrees C above the long term average, contributing to the third hottest year in 140 years of records<sup>4</sup>. The top 10 hottest years (since modern record-keeping began in the late 1800s) have all occurred since 2005<sup>5</sup>. Australia was 1.52 degrees C above average in 2019, recording its warmest year on record<sup>6</sup>.

The current global heating is unequivocally caused by human activities, primarily the consumption of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas)<sup>7</sup>. Climate science is clear that hotter land and ocean temperatures are contributing to more frequent and/or more intense extreme weather events<sup>8</sup>.

The link between climate change and natural disasters, including longer, more frequent bushfire seasons, has been well established and was presciently predicted to be visible by 2020 in the *2008 Climate Change Review* report by Ross Garnaut.

The fact that we are seeing such unprecedented impacts with only around one degree of global heating should in itself be of grave concern to Australia and its

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Extreme-Events/Bushfire/preparing-for-climate-change/2019-20-bushfires-explainer>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.farmonline.com.au/story/6281386/drought-now-officially-our-worst-on-record/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/the-reef/reef-health/coral-bleaching-101>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/global/201901>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.climatecentral.org/gallery/graphics/the-10-hottest-global-years-on-record>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/current/annual/aus/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/AR5\\_SYR\\_FINAL\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/SREX-Chap3\\_FINAL-1.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/SREX-Chap3_FINAL-1.pdf)

citizens. Indeed climate change was identified as a “critical threat” by 64% of Australian adults in a 2019 Lowy Institute poll (taken before the 2019/20 bushfire season), topping the list of concerns that included international terrorism and cyber attacks<sup>9</sup>.

### **Failure to take urgent action**

However, the federal government’s 2030 emissions reduction target, which is unlegislated, falls far short of the recommended science-based target to limit global heating to ideally no more than 1.5 degrees, as the government agreed to as part of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement (article 2, para 1. (a))<sup>10</sup>. The science recommends global emissions reductions currently in the order of 7.6% per annum (from current levels) between 2020 and 2030 and net zero by 2050<sup>11</sup>.

While Victoria has committed to reducing emissions to net zero by 2050, the State’s interim emissions targets, due to be announced at the end of March 2020, have yet to be announced and the government has declined to declare a climate emergency. Fossil fuels still make up a significant proportion of the State’s emissions, and there is currently no transition plan for Yallourn and Loy Yang coal power stations. Given that the biggest single cause of climate change is greenhouse gas pollution from burning fossil fuels, there should be no approvals for new fossil fuel developments (including coal, oil and gas), and existing fossil fuel facilities should be phased out over the next two decades to minimise climate change and reduce the risk of future catastrophic fires.

The impact on habitat and biodiversity of the 2019-20 fire season has also been immense, yet native forest logging continues in Victoria.

In summary, we live in a country that is already beset by well-predicted, anthropogenic climate-change-exacerbated natural disasters – including bush fires - that will only get worse as climate change intensifies<sup>12</sup>, yet federal and state climate policies have not responded to the urgency of this threat and the environmental, economic and social toll that unabated climate change will wreak.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/media-release-2019-lowy-institute-poll-australian-attitudes-climate-change>

<sup>10</sup> [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unenvironment.org/interactive/emissions-gap-report/2019/>

<sup>12</sup> The 2008 Garnaut Climate Change Review clearly “predicted that without adequate action, the nation would face a more frequent and intense fire season by 2020.”  
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-08/economic-bushfires-billions-ross-garnaut-climate-change/11848388>

## Impact on children of climate change and government inaction

This juxtaposition is already causing significant mental health issues amongst Australian children, as evidenced by a recent UNICEF investigation into the impacts of the drought. Children interviewed said that being caught up in “the natural disaster has meant they have had to prematurely ‘grow up’, facing difficulty in balancing increased farm work with their education, as well as experiencing escalating levels of stress and other adverse psychological outcomes”<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly, the 2019/20 bushfire season and the emotions felt upon hearing about human and wildlife loss are having a profound impact on how children and their parents feel about their future. Eco-anxiety has been identified as an emerging mental health issue, with 87% of Australian ‘tweens’ identifying climate change as something to be worried about in a 2018 study<sup>14</sup>.

A lack of strong and urgent action on emissions reduction (and a failure to provide strong protections to our unique fauna and flora due to weak environmental protection legislation and a current developer-friendly policy to reduce green tape<sup>15</sup>) is manifestly contributing to Victorian and Australian children’s and citizens’ suffering of eco-anxiety<sup>16</sup>.

As 11 year old Victorian boy Evan wrote for our submission:

“I am very worried about my future and the future of our planet. This summer I've been very worried about people and animals affected by bushfires and climate change. It was really scary when people had to hide indoors when the air was poisonous and I couldn't go outside and play.

“I would like the government to get rid of coal and fossil fuels and introduce more renewable energy. I want them to act before it's too late.”

In another example, Save the Children has noted that the needs of children were “systematically overlooked” during the bushfires, with affected communities lacking necessary services to avoid deleterious mental health and other welfare outcomes for children<sup>17</sup>. This echoes the issues highlighted by the UNICEF report on drought impacts on children, potentially exposing a common weakness in Victoria’s and Australia’s response to natural disasters.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Documents/Drought-Report-2019-Media-Release.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hcf.com.au/health-agenda/body-mind/mental-health/eco-anxiety-children>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/apr/23/coalition-is-aiming-to-change-australias-environment-laws-before-review-is-finished>

<sup>16</sup> <https://theconversation.com/youre-not-the-only-one-feeling-helpless-eco-anxiety-can-reach-far-beyond-bushfire-communities-129453>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/rights-group-says-children-were-systematically-overlooked-during-australian-bushfires>

## Educational responses

We also observed that Victoria's educational institutional responses to the bushfires fell far short of what might be considered desirable or responsible for a wealthy state such as Victoria. For example:

- While short term health effects of exposure to bushfire smoke is known to be harmful, particularly to those with pre-existing respiratory conditions,<sup>18</sup> there is a lack of scientific consensus on medium to long term effects of exposure to bushfire smoke due to a lack of research<sup>19</sup>. Victorian children both within and remote from the fires themselves were subjected to hazardous levels of small particulate matter (PM2.5), up to 26 times the Air Quality Index (AQI) level deemed hazardous, for weeks on end in some areas<sup>20</sup>.
- As parents we experienced a lack of clarity from our pre-schools, education departments and relevant ministers about safe air quality levels for children.
- School and kindergarten buildings are generally not designed to provide protection from poor outdoor air quality and ventilation and air conditioning systems in school buildings seldom includes air filtration at a level that would effectively exclude smoke particles.
- In the absence of effective indoor and outdoor smoke management, educational institutions should also have had a clear policy regarding the use of P2/N95 masks. It is very difficult to obtain child or infant sized P2 masks, and younger children may find it distressing to wear a mask, even if one can be found that fits. The Federal Health Department's advice for people who could not wear a mask was to "reduce exposure to the smoke"<sup>21</sup> - somewhat impractical for children in the care of schools, pre-schools or other institutions.
- As such, Victorian kinders and schools may have unwittingly either exacerbated existing respiratory issues in the short term amongst the children in their care, and potentially - subject to further research - exposed children to irreparable long term health damage, which may, like asbestos or respirable crystalline silica related diseases, only become evident in middle adulthood.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.hri.org.au/health/your-health/lifestyle/bushfire-smoke-affects-our-health>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2020/212/8/bushfire-smoke-urgent-need-national-health-protection-strategy>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2020/feb/20/the-toxic-air-we-breathe-the-health-crisis-from-australias-bushfires>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/01/statement-from-the-acting-chief-medical-officer-and-state-and-territory-chief-health-officers-advice-on-the-use-of-masks-for-those-exposed-to-bushfire-smoke.pdf>

As citizens, taxpayers and parents of a wealthy state, we have a right to expect that our government is acting responsibly on our and our children's behalf in this regard.

In terms of improving Victoria's resilience to climate-related natural disasters, *prevention*, through urgent climate action focused first on greenhouse emissions reduction, should be state and federal governments' top priority. The steps that need to be taken, including policy and expenditure, are well-researched and set out in the following, among other leading reports:

1. Ross Garnaut's book, *Superpower*<sup>22</sup>
2. PWC, *The Future of Energy Report*<sup>23</sup>
3. ClimateWorks, *Decarbonisation Futures*<sup>24</sup>

## Australian Parents for Climate Action Members' Stories

In preparing this submission, AP4CA sought stories from its members who were directly and indirectly affected by the 2019/2020 bushfire crisis in Victoria. These are included below in full. Contributors include parents from a range of professions and family types. Our request for stories was made with short notice to members (due to the impacts on parents of the COVID-19 crisis) and the quantity is not indicative of the number of individuals who were concerned with or directly affected by the recent bushfires. Some stories concentrate on direct experiences and feelings of the fires, others offer specific recommendations of relevance to the Inquiry. Highlighting is added by the editors for emphasis.

**Lucy Paplinska**  
**Preston, 3072**

I have two children, aged 4 and 11. My 11 year old son Evan O'Connor had the following words to say:

"I am very worried about my future and the future of our planet. This summer I've been very worried about people and animals affected by bushfires and climate change. It was really scary when people had to hide indoors when the air was poisonous and I couldn't go outside and play."

"I would like the government to get rid of coal and fossil fuels and introduce more renewable energy. I want them to act before it's too late."

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.blackincbooks.com.au/books/superpower>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.pwc.com.au/power-and-utilities/future-of-energy-australian-energy-outlook-report.html>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.climateworksaustralia.org/resource/decarbonisation-futures-solutions-actions-and-benchmarks-for-a-net-zero-emissions-australia/>

**Tamar Hopkins**  
**Coburg, 3058**

My 6 year old daughter and I live in Coburg in Melbourne and travel to Rosedale on the South Coast of NSW every year between Christmas and New Year to spend time with my father and step-mother. We were at Rosedale on New Year's Eve when the fires hit and my daughter and I spent New Years Eve on the beach sheltering with about 30 other people while my father and step-mother fought the fire to save the house. All the houses further north of their place burnt to the ground. Their house and the five houses to the south were saved. My daughter was completely terrified and thought she was going to die. She still talks about the fire all the time. My uncle who had a house on a ridge west of Rosedale lost his house to the fire with all his sculptures and tools. We were all on extremely high emotional alert for days after this. We returned to Canberra into thick hazardous smoke where the threat of fires was ongoing. Finally driving back to Melbourne through all the smoke felt like the whole country was under massive threat. Summer was a very scary time for us. We felt devastated, not just by our experience, but by the scale of the catastrophe across the whole country. So much forest burnt, so many animals dead as well as the impact on people. My dad and step mother have returned to Rosedale and the birds that used to come in abundance have not returned. They must have died. We all felt so sickened by the experience and the realisation that this is just the beginning of the impacts of climate change on this country.

Fires like this have been predicted by climate change experts for decades. This fire season needs to sound a sharp warning bell across the whole country. Acting to prevent global warming needs to be the single most critical focus of all levels of government. Seeing governments swing into action around COVID-19 reveals with crystal clarity that governments have the capacity to take urgent action to protect human health. Climate change will cause a far greater disaster, by many orders of magnitude, to human societies and life as we know it on the planet than COVID-19 will cause. Now that we can see that governments can act to protect us from COVID-19, we know they *can* act to protect us from climate change. It is now time for urgent action to prevent further mass devastation to our environment and human health.

We need an all of government, war like effort to protect us from climate change that is locked in and to prevent things from getting worse. We need a massive public education campaign about the danger of fossil fuel use and environmental destruction. International travel restrictions should remain where travel is done using fossil fuel methods. Petrol cars should be banned. Natural gas and coal mining and extraction needs to cease immediately. Workers can be given proper allowances while they re-train. We need regulations preventing the use of fossil fuels, and environmental destruction. The future has been imagined in movies such as 2040 and books like Drawdown. We need all parts of government working now to get us there urgently.



**Dr Meredith Levi**  
**Northcote, 3070**

In December, we headed to the far south coast of NSW for several weeks of camping and Airbnb stays in the area we had discovered and fallen in love with the year before. We were aware of the fires much further up the coast, but at that point it seemed very safe to travel. When we arrived at our campground, the effects of the drought were immediately obvious. The animals we saw were desperately hungry and the earth was parched. It was distressing.

A week later, we were forced to evacuate the house we were staying at near Tathra. We have two young children, then aged 7 and 3, and the four of us ended up camping in our friend's apartment - 8 people in 2 bedrooms for New Years Eve. We were all seeking shelter in Merimbula where the sky was orange and the air was thick with smoke. The air quality was hazardous to say the least. We travelled through 600km of smoke to get back to Melbourne, via Canberra, The experience was deeply distressing for us all and we began 2020 feeling drained and exhausted.

Many people we know have similar, or worse stories. We join with thousands of others in asking the government to urgently address the climate crisis, to prevent repeats of the summer and worse.

**Noël Skrzypczak**  
**Greensborough, 3088**

I am a mother of two boys - 4.5 years old and 3 years old. We, along with their father, spent 2 weeks in thick smoke when we visited family in Canberra over the Christmas break. Some mornings when my brother opened his front door, his smoke alarms went off because of how thick the bushfire smoke was. He has three boisterous primary school age children and after many weeks of living with constantly smokey air they continued to play outside as normal, despite the risk to their health. It was impossible to keep them indoors all the time with windows shut. For us arriving from Melbourne it was shocking to think they had had to put up with this terrible air quality for so long - I myself had trouble breathing for the first several hours when we arrived.

More recently, when I explained the changes we were going to have to make to our lives due to the COVID19 outbreak, my older son asked: "After the bushfires are over and Coronavirus is over will there be any more dangers?" From his completely innocent, trusting tone I knew that he felt that whatever dangers there were, we grown ups would do whatever we could to resolve them and to keep him, the child, safe. As I started to explain that there was an even bigger danger - climate change - my heart broke to think that we grown ups are NOT doing what we can to keep future generations safe.

The powers that be, that is the governments of the world and in particular our own successive governments, have let our children down by ignoring the facts about our environment. As a parent I feel absolute terror for my children. The level of intensity and extent of the recent bushfires were are result of an ever- warming climate, so there will be more fires like this and worse! The helplessness I feel is so deeply affecting that I can no longer find any justification for engaging in my life's work as a professional visual artist. I can't see any point in anything other than caring for my family and doing

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whatever I can to fight against further climate change.

For me the bush fires were a striking warning to all of us that if we don't dramatically change our priorities as a society nature will force us to change them anyway. It's not that we are unable to change. Australia's response to the COVID19 outbreak has shown me that we have the ability to change radically if the government shows strong leadership, provides clear guidelines and necessary support.

To discuss protective health measures such as providing respiratory equipment in schools, etc, seems irrelevant to me. We must address the root cause of our environmental imbalance. I would dearly love to be able to say to my children that we grown ups and the powers that be are doing EVERYTHING we can to reverse climate change, to fight the dangers that threaten to annihilate life on earth as we know it and to make bushfires like the ones we have just been through a thing of the past rather than the new normal.

**Anthea Griffiths**  
**Ocean Grove, 3226**

I am writing this as a deeply concerned parent and a Paediatric Occupational Therapist. Not only did these fires impact us directly I was also able to observe the detrimental impact these fires had on my own child and other children's "occupations" as well as their health and wellbeing.

Firstly, as a parent to a 3 year who recently witnessed the terrifying experience of fleeing fires in Mallacoota. My husband is from this beautiful town and we were visiting for Christmas. When we arrived, we had spent the days before the fires hit the town enjoying its beauty, we listened and watched the abundance of wildlife all from my mother in laws backyard. We were so excited to see koalas, birds, kangaroos, frogs we even rescued a sugar glider and spent the afternoon at the wildlife shelter.

Everything happened so quickly from when we heard the fires were approaching Mallacoota. Fortunately, we were able to evacuate before the fires hit the town. Our experience was still awful and what no child should ever have to go through. After we left Mallacoota, we spent days confined to a motel room in Merimbula because the air was so thick with smoke it was too dangerous to go outside. We were also on high alert hearing how the town and how friends were coping along with monitoring how close the fires were to us and if we would have to evacuate again. We spent days after the fires hearing what so many of our friends went through with their children along with so many other families and it was distressing and unimaginable. They feared for their lives and the long-lasting impact of this is truly concerning.

Once it was safe, we then spent days on the road attempting to get back to our home in Ocean Grove, Victoria. My mother in-law spent a month with us while she waited to hear when it was safe for her to return to her home. She was one of the lucky ones as her home was saved but since seeing the devastation on her street and the rest of the town it has been extremely difficult for her. One of the first things she said to me when she returned was the wildlife had gone, she could no longer hear the birds, frogs, or animals moving in the bushes, it was silent. The impact this has had on the environment and flora and fauna is heartbreaking.

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As an OT, I also witnessed firsthand the impact the fires had on my own child's occupations. My son was restricted to a small room or the car for days on end so the only thing he could do was use technology. He was barely able to play and at no times was he able to play outside. Upon returning home we were still unable to escape it as our hometown was also filled with smoke from the fires, so for days it was still too dangerous for my child to play or go outside. He started to cough frequently, and his eyes were red. What I witnessed was on such a small scale compared to so many other families but the impact that these fires have had on so many children's occupations, their mental and physical health was significant.

We cannot allow this to become Australia's "new normal" and risk a future of even more severe bushfires and drought. This would lead to more loss of human life and ecosystems, severe food shortages, much of Australia being unliveable and our children being put in these traumatic situations that they should never have to experience. What I am asking the government to do to ensure our children and future generations are healthy and safe is:

- Listen to the science and act on the current climate crisis we are in.
- Commit Australia to net zero and 100% renewable energy by 2030.
- Allow no new fossil fuel projects.
- Prioritise a smooth and fair transitions for all workers and communities impacted by the climate crisis.
- Commence a program to rapidly drawdown carbon emissions using natural climate solutions including tree planting, regenerative agriculture, kelp forest regeneration and 'blue carbon'.



**Kammy Cordner Hunt**  
**Mansfield, 3722**

Thank you for the opportunity to tell our story.

We were not affected on this occasion, but the significant thing about this summer's bushfire season is how we came to realise that life is no longer the same - and feels unlikely to return to "normal".

We live in Mansfield, North East Victoria. Summertime for decades has meant a trip to the beach to sample Australia's other iconic delights. Since 2009 (Black Saturday - and following on from the High Country fires of Summer 06-07) we have continued the tradition but on tenterhooks, feeling nervous and unable to relax on holiday and often cutting it short.

During Dec 2019 to Jan 2020 these fears were heightened to a new level. Everyone I know was operating in a state of heightened anxiety as we viewed our homes and landscapes as dangerous enemies. We worked very hard and at considerable expense to add new sprinkler systems and other fire fighting arrangements to our infrastructure at

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home. We devised alternative arrangements for family members and pets, and even packed up treasures and shipped them off the farm.

The sprinklers are a valuable addition for future summers, but it is interesting that after living here for nearly 30 years, we find that now we fully expect a fire to happen, and that it will be catastrophic. Once we felt we might stay and fight, but Victoria's experience in February 2009 showed this is no longer viable - and you can feel it.

We used to have wet patches on the farm (natural springs) but they petered out 15 years ago and have never returned. Our dams don't fill over winter any more, and the ground is as hard as cement virtually all year round.

Ancient Gum trees, many hundreds of years old - probably over 1000 - are withering and dying in hard, dry ground. Turtles used to breed in the soft dam banks but these are now high and dry - and rock hard.

A neighbouring hill top had two feature trees on it, unusual for their altitude but fed by a secret underground source. First one died 3 years ago, then the other recently. Today I noticed their skeletons have fallen over, obliterating the local landmark forever.

Bird sounds have diminished, frog sounds are decimated. The pain of feeling the natural life retreating from around us - not just here but across the region - is depressing. It makes me feel guilty on behalf of us all, for what we have done to this land's fragile balance. The land was able to nurture us before - it has little to give now.

Most of all, the sense that this iconic, enduring Australian Landscape is now certainly at risk of severe firestorms - as are those of us who live in it - was almost overwhelming during the summer fire season.

We weren't hit this year, but we will be - it cannot be avoided, it will happen at some point. It makes you wonder if it is worth staying. Why not move to somewhere where we don't have to spend 3 to 4 months of the year in fear for our safety?

We cannot continue like this. The whole world's actions are contributing to Australia's loss of health. We will all suffer for this. We need to stand up and act, and ask that the rest of the world acts. Making money is only one part of the equation delivering sustainable life. The equation doesn't add up any more.

Thank you for reading my story.

**Kristie Dunn**  
**Preston, 3072**

My daughter turned five in November. We spent the summer shut inside at Pt Lonsdale, where I spent every summer of my childhood, with a bright red sun and unhealthy air quality preventing her from going outside. We know that we were the lucky Victorians, and that this is not 'the new normal' - it's just the beginning of a future that I cannot bear to imagine for her.

This summer has shown us that we can no longer prevaricate on the climate emergency. Our country is burning. Our nation is calling for strong action on climate change. We desperately need leadership on the climate emergency to prevent more horrific fire seasons like this one.

The biggest single cause of climate change is pollution from burning fossil fuels. To deal with climate change and reduce the risk of future catastrophic fires, all new fossil fuel developments (including coal, oil and gas) must be stopped and existing fossil fuel facilities phased out over the next two decades. The recent decision to allow onshore gas exploration flies in the face of the science.

The Victorian government should also lead the country with strong emissions targets and in particular to create swift transition plans for closing the dirty brown coal power plants in the Latrobe Valley. We cannot purport to be leading the country on climate action if we don't even have a transition plan for Yallourn and Loy Yang within the next ten years.

With most of the eastern part of our state burnt in this horror season, and emissions skyrocketing as a result, we cannot afford to log any more native forests or conduct salvage logging. Given the extraordinary destruction of habitat, native forest logging across the state should be halted until we can assess what habitat remains and how biodiversity can be protected. Investment in biodiversity recovery work could be part of the COVID-19 recovery package to stimulate the economy in regional communities.

Similarly, investment in large scale and rapid drawdown mechanisms such as marine permaculture and regenerative agriculture would be hugely beneficial to many regional communities suffering as a result of the fire season.

**Anna Lycett**  
**Kingsville, 3012**

Being in the city, I thought we would be physically unaffected by the bushfires. But of course, the smoke found its way to Melbourne, making it unsafe to exercise and play outside. One of my colleagues with asthma was unwell after commuting to work, having underestimated the impact of the smoke.

The scale and intensity of the fires was terrifying. The images of the red sky and the children sheltering on the beach in Mallacoota are haunting. I can't comprehend the number of animals that have died. If this is happening at +1.1C, what does the future hold? I can't imagine how destructive the fires will be at +1.5C, which seems to be where we're heading, perhaps within a decade. I feel like I am sending my children to live on an unfamiliar planet.

The bushfires brought home the interconnected nature of our world – millions of city-dwellers breathing bushfire smoke, glaciers in NZ covered in ash, and smoke from the fires continuing to circle the Earth in April. Humans are part of nature and the environment is vital to our health and wellbeing.

Climate change policy must move beyond politics. We need to listen to the experts, as we have on COVID-19. We need to build resilience, but we can only adapt to a certain point.

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We urgently and drastically need to cut emissions. The Victorian Government can lead Australia by setting science-based Emissions Reduction Targets to keep global warming below +1.5C.

- \* Acknowledge the role that climate change played in the bushfires (as predicted in the 2008 Garnaut Climate Change Review)
- \* Acknowledge the urgent need to cut emissions to mitigate further tragedies (stop burning fossil fuels; support the transition to renewables)
- \* Improve land management in consultation with experts including scientists and Aboriginal people with knowledge in fire management
- \* Prioritise protection of old-growth forests
- \* Strengthen conservation efforts to protect our fragile wildlife

**Eloise Oxer**  
**Ivanhoe, 3079**

My five-year-old daughter and I were staying with family in Perth when the worst of the fires hit our beloved East Coast. I had seen it coming. The lead up before we left at Christmas time had been frightening. My family are avid media consumers and the news was on continuously, reporting the disastrous loss of life and wilderness, people and animals...the loss of wildlife was just staggering and had me in tears for the duration of our stay in Perth. My daughter, who ordinarily doesn't watch television and spends a great deal of time at forrest school, on the back of our cargo bike and in the wilderness could not fathom what it was they were talking about. She saw footage on the news, which was enough to give me nightmares, let alone a tiny child. She became increasingly anxious. Asking if the animals would be okay? No-one will let the animals die, will they? She kept asking. Every morning and evening, Mama, will the animals be ok? I had to ask my family to stop playing the news. Both my daughter and I became very distracted and distressed with every day's news footage and reportage. She was worried about our home, about our friends, our pets. Quite frankly, I wanted to get home as soon as possible to join in the community efforts to support the unfathomable loss of life and wilderness and to help support and rebuild communities any way we could. And so we left for home much earlier than planned. There was no way I could enjoy Perth at a distance from the catastrophe that was unfolding. Upon flying into Melbourne the colour of the sky was a crimson red. I was frightened. My little girl just couldn't understand what she was seeing. She had heard so much, had to digest so much for a little soul. When we landed in Melbourne I started to understand, really, what all the talk was about. It felt apocalyptic. We found it hard to breathe, the smoke stung our eyes, my asthma immediately flared up and there was a general feeling of grief and disbelief from not only us but all passengers disembarking.

I have always been passionate about the environment. My husband and I met while trekking in the Grampians with the Victoria National Parks Association, we were married in the Grampians and spend every other weekend camping and hiking in our magnificent wild places. We are commuter cyclists, we grow as much produce as we can in our local community garden, we have divested our funds and made sure that our energy and financial interest are all in support of a sustainable future not only for the benefit of our girl and her generation, so that she may enjoy the same delicious wilderness, clarity of air, fresh water and childhood memories that I have but so that the wilderness of which we are passionate custodians can live and thrive for its own sake,

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its own glorious benefit. So when we returned to a burning home state, to grieving friends, friends who were trapped in the fires, fiends who had lost livestock, land and livelihoods our hearts were broken.

It came time, once we'd settled into the sting, to get out and about, to do the shopping, to get to the library to knit marsupial pouches, to visit loved ones and to rejoin our community. But I'm afraid to say that we were unable to do any of this for the terrible air quality and my deep concern for my girl's health, being exposed entirely on the back of the bike. Which, as a family is our means of travel and transport. And so I began the nightmarish search for reusable or compostable infant gas masks so that my girl would not be exposed to the appalling air, which I can only imagine must have been just unbearable closer to the fires. We are in Melbourne and it was unbreathable! I felt at that point entirely betrayed. There was something in my belly that refused to buy her a mask. I felt outraged and betrayed. Betrayed as conscientious citizens trying to raise our girl with a sense of custodianship and duty of care to this remarkable country and to our future by reducing our carbon output and biking everywhere only to be confronted by a government who seemed to be absolutely negligent in regards to the numerous warnings from every direction, the science was clear, the fires had been requesting funding, support, education...and I'm afraid I felt that we all felt so terribly brokenhearted and betrayed, entirely disillusioned by the lack of leadership in the lead up to and the management of the fires that I threw myself into climate advocacy, not for want of nothing to do but for what I felt was absolute necessity. That enough was enough and we must, must stand up for the rights of those innocents who were lost, and continue to lose. The millions upon millions of precious wildlife, lost. Families, torn apart. Land decimated. Eco systems, already facing grave futures due to the ongoing drought, the misuse of our water and the continued denial of the climate emergency. Such grief and such loss. It truly was a cataclysmic wake up call, I feel. For us all to make deep systemic changes to the way we respect and heed science in our country. And now, the corona virus. And the climate conversations and the fire victims and the decimated landscapes seem lost once again.

In the shadow of the Covid-19 epidemic, I ask the government to step up their action on climate change. I ask the government to turn their attention to reducing the likelihood of such mega fires in the future by addressing the climate emergency, investing and reeducation the workforce into building a sustainable future, which not only reduces our carbon emissions but keeps us a competitive force in an evolving world, to invest in sustainable agriculture and land management, to plant more trees, to care for our forests and set about the carbon drawdown that we so desperately need in order to reduce the likelihood of such fires recurring in future. Fires, flood, drought...

I ask that our national and state governments listen to the science as they have done in relation to Covid-19. That they respectfully acknowledge the science on climate and its contributions to our ongoing and increasing extreme weather events. That they listen to the experts, as they have in relation to Covid-19. That there be investment in implementing indigenous fire management practices, that we improve our national resilience strategies in relation to such extreme weather events and act now on drastically reducing our carbon emissions and investing not in destructive, heat-inducing, fire-inviting fossil fuel industries but to implement sustainable strategies to transition our economy now. It is our children who will pay the ultimate price of extreme weather events such as these and it is unacceptable to think that we don't drastically shift our actions so that they are saved from such a frightening fate.

**Maddy Butler**  
**Coburg North, 3058**

When the bushfires first engulfed Australia I was actually in France because of a family emergency. Everyone, even in the smallest towns on the southern French coastline, wanted to talk about the fires - it was front page news everywhere. Having grown up in NSW and now living in Melbourne, it was incredibly distressing to be so far away from my homeland, my heartland, while it was on fire.

On the plane home we met a family that mirrored ours - two parents, a 5 year old and a baby. They were going home to East Gippsland and had no idea what awaited them. The mother told me that her mother had had to leave her house multiple times because the fires were closing in. No one should have to feel the stress of fleeing and abandoning their home because of bushfire danger.

When we were back in Melbourne we were fortunate to have missed the particularly bad smoky days, but there was still a haze across the city. Most days my partner and I constantly checked the EPA website and Air Visual to see whether the air quality was safe or not. We were particularly concerned for our 5 year old, who has asthma, and I remember rushing to shut all the windows and doors when the air quality dropped.

Friends of mine told me how they had been trapped in a small town near Canberra, with fires closing in on three sides. They still haven't recovered from the stress, and are terrified that the smoke inhalation has in some way affected their unborn baby. Their 5 year old son still likes to play "fire danger", where he pretends a fire is coming and they have to run or else "they will die".

The pervasiveness of the bushfire impacts has left no one untouched. I fear for our next bushfire season, where the lives and houses of my loved ones in regional areas will be at threat, and my son, my mother and my grandmother who all suffer from asthma will be at high risk with the dangerous air quality levels.

I grew up hearing stories of bushfires, I remember looking onto the red-tinged horizon from my family's place in southern Sydney. But it was never like this. Because of climate change, because of our increasingly, unbearably, hot summers, we are seeing bushfires like never before. My children may never experience the fun outdoor summers of my childhood. They may spend most of their time trapped indoors, to keep them safe. We must take the red skies as an omen - we must do something about climate change now. I urge you to stop all fossil fuel projects, transition to renewable energy, stop all logging and implement drawdown solutions which can help our planet to heal.

I will never forget the image, forever burned in my memory, of charred koalas. We must take immediate action to protect the futures of our children, our ecosystems, our societies, and ourselves.



**Suzie Brown**  
**Ocean Grove, 3226**

I live in the Bellarine Peninsula in SW Victoria and, while we were a long way from the bushfires in eastern Victoria, the local community was extremely fearful of the fires.

Adjacent to our town we have a nature reserve of around 2km square of bush - it's the only real bush reserve in the whole Bellarine region. During and after the fires many people in Ocean Grove became fearful of this reserve catching on fire and spreading into the town, even though it is a small area and surrounded by open fields on one side and houses on the other (and the MFB building about 800m away!). The risk was so low yet people were really panicking. They were seeing the fires in Gippsland and the Alps - and everywhere in Australia that was burning - and felt really afraid. This excessive fear was also whipped up by the local media (Geelong Advertiser) and the local Senator feeding misinformation to the public about the level of local risk.

The local MP had to organise a community session at the end of January where the fire authorities, CFA and DWELP all attended - taking precious time away from actually monitoring the fires in other parts of the state - to come and reassure about 200 residents that the nature reserve was well managed and would not be capable of spreading a fire to the rest of the town.

On the next night my local AP4CA group held a Climate Action workshop - we had 65 concerned locals come along who were deeply worried about climate change, particularly as a result of the summer of bushfires, and wanting to do something. People at the workshop expressed deep fears and grief about the fires and the threat that climate-induced natural disasters pose to all of us, and especially our children. These local people want the government to act to protect us all and ensure our children's future doesn't become a nightmare.

I have a 7 year old daughter and I am deeply worried for her future. Already we can see the bushfires and the drought wrecking whole swathes of Australia's natural and agricultural land. I worry that in the future there will not be enough food to go around and my daughter will not be able to survive in Australia. We frequently think about where we should move to so we can escape the threat of bushfire, drought and heatwaves - New Zealand looks safer than Australia these days... It's very sad.