

ACF Community Bushfire Response Conversations Guide



Australia is experiencing its most devastating bushfire season on record. The scale of the impact – on people’s homes and health, the loss of life, nature and wildlife – is enormous, and difficult to comprehend.

Along with the groundswell of support for affected communities, more and more people are demanding our leaders step up. Millions of people took to the streets for the last global climate strike, and with the ferocity of these fires attitudes are shifting even more around the world. By working together, we can rapidly build our movement and reach a tipping point for action.

We need climate leadership.

Our elected representatives must rise above party politics and stand with our communities, wildlife and places we love – not the big polluters who have fuelled climate damage.

The Morrison Government is not showing the leadership we so desperately need. And the big polluting corporations who have fuelled this crisis are evading responsibility. **Enough is enough.**

A good government would end their ties to dirty polluting fuels, ramp up clean energy, and properly resource communities to manage the impacts of climate damage on people, nature and wildlife.

We’ve prepared [an open letter to all Members and Senators in the Australian Parliament](#) to do the right thing for our communities and planet. The more people who sign the open letter, the more power we build together – invite others to sign the open letter and share it far and wide!

Every conversation counts.

During a time of crisis people search for answers. Conversations are a powerful way to connect with your community and join the dots between this crisis and the big polluters who are damaging our climate.

Every conversation is different – some people will simply want to express their grief, others may be energised like never before to get involved in the movement for change.

PRINCIPLES FOR CONVERSATIONS THAT CONNECT

Be present and authentic. The best conversations involve making a human connection, coming from a place of genuine care for how each of you are feeling and interest in how you've come to form your views. Be present and focused on engaging with what others say – it will help you understand their views and see opportunities for making new connections.

Ask questions. The goal is to have others talking twice as much as you, to give them the opportunity to think things through for themselves and genuinely share their own experience. The more time people have to process the situation, the more likely they will be able to think clearly about it and consider action.

Listen compassionately. Focus on listening to others' experience and tune in to their emotional state: are they flat and despondent? Upset but talkative? Outraged and ready to act? Meet them where they are at. If they're not ready for this conversation, don't force it.

Join the dots. The unprecedented bushfire crisis is fueled by climate change – and the biggest cause of climate change is burning coal. We need to help people join these dots so that together we can demand the change that people and wildlife so desperately need.

Share your story. Your personal story can be powerful. Think of examples from your own experience recently which connect to this conversation. Whether you or someone you know have been affected by bushfire, had your health impacted from the smoke or had an emotional reaction to reports of the fires – your story can connect with theirs.

Build the movement. At times like these attitudes can shift quickly. Unlikely alliances and new connections can be made. Always be on the lookout for opportunities to invite new people to take action and join the movement. Ask others to sign and share the open letter!

HOW TO COLLECT SIGNATURES TO THE OPEN LETTER

A. ONLINE

To collect open letter signatures digitally (preferred!), simply go to acf.org.au/stall using your smartphone and follow the prompts.

B. PAPER

[Print copies of the open letter](#) for people to sign. To return open letter signatures that you've collected by paper to ACF, you just need to upload the list of signups to Action Centre. For instructions, please see:

- [Written instructions](#): 'How to import a list of signups' pg 9 in our Action Centre Guide.
- [Video tutorial](#): Tutorial 5 - 'How to upload a list of new supporters' (last video on the page)

KEY QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONVERSATIONS

Q: How have the bushfires impacted you?

Q: Where have you seen kindness and hope in the midst of this tragedy?

Q: The bush is drier, our rainfall patterns are changing and the bushfire season is getting longer and more dangerous. How resilient do you think our communities are to managing these changes?

Q: The biggest cause of climate damage in Australia is burning coal. What more should governments be doing to help us replace coal with clean energy?

Q: Climate strikes in September saw hundreds of thousands of people hitting the streets in Australia alone, and I feel like more people are connecting the dots between climate damage and increasing droughts, fires and floods. With the current bushfire crisis, do you feel like attitudes are shifting?

Q: I've signed an open letter to all Members and Senators in the Australian Parliament to urge them to rise above the politics and stand with our communities and ecosystems – not the big polluters. Would you like to add your name to the letter?

Invite them to sign onto the open letter.

OPEN LETTER TEXT

"To all Members and Senators of the Australian Parliament,

The bushfire crisis continues to devastate communities and wildlife on an unprecedented and alarming scale.

Intensifying drought and heat are making bushfires larger, more destructive and frequent. This is climate change and the root cause – burning polluting fuels like coal – is making it worse.

We urge you to use this moment of crisis as a turning point. Let's move forward together, as a nation, and not look backwards at a decade of division and missed opportunity. We call on you to stand with our communities, wildlife and places we love and:

- *Rapidly replace coal with clean energy, stop any new coal mines and fund a transition plan for affected workers and communities.*
- *Massively increase funding for long-term wildlife and ecosystem recovery and create strong national environment laws to protect nature and end extinction*

This is too important for party politics. Please step up and act so our communities and wildlife have a thriving future."

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are bushfires getting worse?

The experts are unequivocal – the unprecedented ferocity of this bushfire crisis is driven by climate change. Burning polluting fuels like coal, and clearing carbon-dense forests and woodlands, have damaged our climate making fire conditions ever-more dangerous.

Severe drought, very dry vegetation and soils, strong winds and record-breaking heat are driven by climate damage and all contribute to worsening conditions for bushfires. Even rainforests that are normally too wet to burn have dried out and burned for the first time on record.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use fire and other methods to manage country, but since European colonisation governments have prevented many First Nations communities from continuing their highly sophisticated land management. Whilst traditional land management has continued in some regions, most of the communities affected by this bushfire crisis have had limited management by First Nations people for well over a century. This is beginning to change, however, with successful Aboriginal fire and land management programs now in place in more places around Australia.

Changes in land management combined with climate damage means the risks from bushfires on people, property and wildlife is higher than ever before.

Did anyone predict it would be this bad?

Scientists have warned for years that climate change would increase the risk of extreme bushfires in Australia and be very apparent by 2020. This warning was accurate – and largely ignored by successive federal governments.

Scientists expect dangerous fire weather will continue to become more frequent and severe without substantial and rapid action to reduce climate pollution from burning polluting fuels like coal, and clearing forests and woodlands. That's why we need urgent action to stop burning polluting fuels, switch to clean energy, and protect and restore degraded ecosystems.

What about 'hazard reduction burns'?

Firefighters have clearly stated that fires are more destructive because there's so little moisture in the landscape ([Source](#)). This is because of drought and heat fuelled by climate damage. Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons has also said very publicly that hazard reduction burns have not prevented these recent fires from destroying homes and killing people. ([Source](#))

The window for so-called prescribed burning measures during winter months is getting smaller and smaller. This is because climate damage is making temperatures higher, and droughts longer and drier. This has been expressed numerous times by fire authorities.

There are also many downsides to a big increase in prescribed burning, including increased air pollution and the chance of fires getting out of control and damaging property and ecosystems. Prescribed burning is also very resource intensive and must be ecologically appropriate as it can do as much, and sometimes more damage to natural ecosystems as unplanned fires.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have highly sophisticated knowledge of burning techniques, from which communities and governments can learn so much. This crisis has further elevated the need to take greater leadership from First Nations communities on these issues.

How have these fires started?

The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) Inspector Ben Shepherd said earlier this week lightning was predominantly responsible for the bushfire crisis, stating “I can confidently say the majority of the larger fires that we have been dealing with have been a result of fires coming out of remote areas as a result of dry lightning storms”.¹

Because climate damage has made conditions more severe, it's becoming harder and harder to contain fires once they've started. That's why ending climate-wrecking pollution is so important – no matter how fires start, they're becoming increasingly more difficult to stop.

What's the deal with 'clean energy'?

With some of the best wind and solar resources in the world and significant land areas, Australia is well placed to become a global leader in renewable exports – particularly the emerging renewable hydrogen and ammonia export industry, which is basically liquid sunlight!

If Australia manages the transition to renewable energy in a proactive, smart way then it has massive potential to attract new industries that are hungry for cheap and clean power.

Why is there so much misinformation out there?

Some people are trying to deflect the conversation away from climate damage and the fact that burning fossil fuels like coal has fuelled this crisis. Important discussions on the causes of the fires and the required solutions have both fallen victim to deliberate misinformation.

Dealing with misinformation can be sensitive – we encourage you to check the sources of the information you share, and take a moment to read some analysis of how the misinformation is spreading and be understanding if those around you are confused or share information you know to be false.

Some useful information:

- Article: Hazard reduction burns are 'not the panacea': RFS boss
<https://www.theage.com.au/national/hazard-reduction-burns-are-not-the-panacea-rfs-boss-20200108-p53poq.html>
- Article: Disinformation and lies are spreading faster than Australia's bushfires
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/12/disinformation-and-lies-are-spreading-faster-than-australias-bushfires>
- Article: Bots and trolls spread false arson claims in Australian fires 'disinformation campaign'
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/08/twitter-bots-trolls-australian-bushfires-social-media-disinformation-campaign-false-claims>

¹ Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-11/australias-fires-reveal-arson-not-a-major-cause/11855022>

Worksheet | Personal Reflection

To prepare yourself to talk to others about the bushfires, first take some time to reflect on what this crisis means for you..

How have the bushfires impacted you personally?

Where have you seen kindness and hope in the midst of this tragedy?

The bush is drier, our rainfall patterns are changing and the bushfire season is getting longer and longer. How resilient do you think we are as a country to cope with these changes?

What more should governments be doing to help us transition away from coal to clean energy?

With the current bushfire crisis, do you feel like attitudes are shifting and people are connecting the dots with climate? Any examples?
