

ACF Community Bushfire Response MP meeting guide



Australia is experiencing its most devastating bushfire season on record. Our elected representatives must demonstrate the same courage and leadership as those on the front lines of this crisis.

Millions of hectares of bushland and forest have burned. Thousands of homes, over a billion animals and many human lives have been lost.

But behind the fires are waves of kindness, courage and resilience. People coming together, opening their homes to strangers, cooking meals for firefighters, and tending to injured wildlife.

This tragedy must strengthen our resolve to come together, demand climate action and look after each other and our planet.

That's why people across Australia are meeting with their MPs to make sure the causes of the bushfire crisis are addressed, not just the symptoms.

WHO IS MY LOCAL MP?

- You can find out which federal electorate you're in and the local Member of Parliament that represents you at electorate.aec.gov.au
- [Personalise this template](#) and email your MP to request a meeting.. You can email them using our simple tool >> www.acf.org.au/mp
- Remember that MPs are busy people, and give as much notice as you can.

Can't get a meeting? Use this tool to email your MP instead: www.acf.org.au/speak_out_bushfires

BEFORE THE MEETING

Let us know it's happening

Register your meeting at www.acf.org.au/meet_mp so we can keep track of which MPs have been contacted.

Prepare for the meeting

It's best to go into the meeting with a prepared agenda and asks. More on this below!

- If there are several of you, get together beforehand to agree who will say what, and in what order
- Get in touch with ACF at community@acf.org.au to find out how many people have signed the open letter in your electorate
- Make sure you're familiar with any statements your MP has made on the bushfires, and on climate and nature – especially recent statements
- Read your MP's maiden speech! This will help you understand who they are and what they stand for publically. You can frame some of your conversation around key points you find in their speech. Mentioning their maiden speech in your conversation will also help to form a connection with your MP.

Speak to their values, the commitments they've made to their community and how these commitments will be negatively impacted by inaction on climate.

Got other questions?

- Check out our detailed guide to influencing your MP at www.acf.org.au/fix_the_system_toolkit
- Get in touch at community@acf.org.au (or contact your Community Organiser if you're in an ACF Community group) and we'll give you a call or email you back!

DURING THE MEETING

STEP BY STEP

1. **Assign roles** (e.g. facilitator and time keeper, survey results lead, note taker, photographer, person who will ask the policy and action asks and get a signature). If there are more than four people, MP meetings can become unmanageable. If others are keen to come, they could talk to people outside the office or hold an action outside!
2. **Introduce yourself** and share a personal story of why you care about the issue.
3. **Show you've done your research** – congratulate them if they have done something well on climate, including something they may have said publicly about their values.
4. **Outline how many people have signed the open letter in your community**, along with any interesting stories from your conversations in the community.
5. **Tell them our policy asks and ask what they are prepared to commit to.**
6. **Ask for a written commitment.**
7. **Get a photo!**
8. **Thank them and let them know** you'll be having more conversations with people in the electorate and will be back!

What policy asks do we want them to commit to?

- 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.

Keen for more detail on how a party's policy could achieve these things? Check out www.acf.org.au/our_policy

What are we asking them to DO?

Often, an MP will privately agree with you on what needs to be done, or say that those asks are not possible for them to achieve on their own, or they may personally agree with us, but their party's position is different.

We can ask them to:

- Publicly speak out (in the media, in parliament, write to their leader, or on social media) in support of those demands – and let you know when they do.
- Publicly advocate for their party to change its position on these demands, or raise the issues in the party room.
- Take a photo with you and share it with their commitment to do the above.

Remember that our power is in numbers. While you are welcome to focus on the issue or impact that most motivates you during the meeting, this tactic will be most effective if the demands of all MPs are the same.

Be nice

Politicians are people too. Always be polite, professional and courteous. Arrive on time, with time to sign in at reception and gather your thoughts. If relevant, acknowledge any support they have given to your issue in the past. Try to connect with your MP by sharing the reasons you really care about this issue – they may have a story to share too. No matter how outrageous the decision a government has taken or their attitude towards the people who are campaigning against them, you are never going to influence someone by being abusive or impolite. Be respectful and focus on the issues, rather than making it personal.

Take notes

Take good notes during your meeting, including replies your MP gives to your questions, or allocate this task to someone who is coming with you who is happy to say less in the meeting. You can draw on these later to write a follow up email confirming their commitment, as well as to write letters to the editor, call talkback radio etc. Sometimes it's easier to get local media interest if your MP is engaged in the issue and is backing it.

Get a photo

Ask your MP for a photo together to share afterwards. If your MP will not take a photo with you, be sure to take one with the group outside the office with clear signage in the background.

AFTER THE MEETING

Let us know how it went!

We'll be in touch with a report back form so you can share how it went and upload any photos.

Tell the world!

Share the story of your meeting on social media using the hashtags #auspol, #AustralianBushfiresDisaster and #SpeakOutForClimate. This helps to normalise community political action.

You might also like to contact your local paper and see if they're interested in a story about the meeting and the campaign.

Send a follow up email to your MP

Thank them for their time, confirm the commitments they made and reiterate what your community is asking them to do. Let them know how many conversations you plan to have in their electorate and that you'll be back!

Like more ideas and tactics to influence your MP? [Check out our detailed guide!](#)

GOOD LUCK!

Feel free to email questions, feedback or ideas to community@acf.org.au, or contact your Community Organiser if you are in an ACF Community group.

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. This is because of drought and heat fuelled by climate damage.¹ NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons has also said very publicly that hazard reduction burns have not prevented these recent fires from destroying homes and killing people.²

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.

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 in January 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".³

¹ Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-12/nsw-fires-vic-why-cant-we-put-them-out/11860404>

² Source: <https://www.theage.com.au/national/hazard-reduction-burns-are-not-the-panacea-rfs-boss-20200108-p53pog.html>

³ Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-11/australias-fires-reveal-arson-not-a-major-cause/11855022>

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 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.

Should we call for a Royal Commission?

ACF will not be advocating for a royal commission. There is a mountain of evidence that the severity of the bushfires is a result of climate change. It would be great if the commission terms of reference could allow for climate change to be addressed but we need to get on with climate action now and not wait for the findings. We have seen in other royal commissions in recent years that the government can just ignore the recommendations anyway. ACF will continue to work to build the movement, change the story and advocate for real action NOW.

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>

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. Our climate is breaking down – and burning polluting fuels like coal is making it all worse.

We urge you to use this moment of crisis as a turning point. 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 projects, and fund a transition plan for affected workers and communities.*
- *Stop giving public money to fossil fuel corporations, and instead properly resource communities to manage the impacts of climate damage on people, nature and wildlife.*

- *Cap the amount of money that big corporations can donate to political parties – so big polluters and nature-takers can no longer buy influence in our democracy.*
- *Increase funding for long-term wildlife and nature restoration in line with the scale of the climate and extinction crisis.*
- *Create strong national environment laws to protect the people, places and wildlife we love – now and far into the future.*

This is too important for party politics. Step up and act so our communities can build a thriving future free from climate-wrecking pollution and powered by clean energy.

Signed