

10 COMMUNICATION TIPS TO CHANGE THE CLIMATE STORY

"Since using this guide I've been surprised by the receptive responses from colleagues & friends and how much they want to engage further with me on climate change."

**Local government
sustainability officer**

"The '3 parts call to action' has really helped me to shift the mood and lift the tone of my presentations to students."

Environmental Educator

"I really like the 10 tips because it reinforces in me to just be brave and have a go."

**State government
planner**

...and be a climate leader during your day job

WITH FOREWORD BY COSTA GEORGIADIS



**Australian Association for
Environmental Education NSW Chapter**

Contents

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"The buildup of greenhouse gases we experience today occurred in the absence of human understanding: our ancestors were innocent of the damage they were doing.

That can tempt us to believe that global warming is something that is happening to us- that we are victims of a fate that was determined by actions that precede us.

If we change the preposition, and consider that global warming is happening for us- an atmospheric transformation that inspires us to change and reimagine everything we make and do- we begin to live in a different world.

We take 100% responsibility and stop blaming others.
We see global warming not as an inevitability, but as an invitation to build, innovate, and effect change, a pathway that awakens creativity, compassion and genius.

This is not a liberal agenda, nor is it a conservative one.
This is the human agenda."

[Paul Hawken](#)- global sustainability leader and editor of the book [Drawdown](#)- the most comprehensive plan ever to reverse global warming.

"Take a deep breath and decide that collectively we can do this.

And you will play your part.

We have just entered the most consequential decade in human history.

The scientific assessment of climate change suggests this can either be our final hour, or our finest.

We can survive the climate crisis and thrive in the new world we create."

From [Global Optimism](#), an organisation founded by Christiana Figueres- former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and Tom Rivett-Carnac- former Buddhist monk and senior political strategist, who worked together to negotiate the United Nations Paris agreement on climate change.



FORWARD by Costa Georgiadis

Patron of the Australian Association for Environmental Education- NSW Chapter



We really are living in an incredible time in history. So much change. So many unpredictable twists and turns to the narrative of life.

Much of it is deemed unprecedented which by virtue of that title places it in what for many becomes the “Too hard basket.”

What can **one person** do?
What difference will my vote make?
It's just too hard and too big a problem.

People step away with a feeling of helplessness. Media and technology today allow those feelings to be preyed upon.

It's almost like everywhere people turn the very source of their overwhelm and frustration is persistently niggling away like a splinter under a fingernail.

Do something about it and it is going to involve pain and effort, don't do something about it and it is still going to involve pain and effort to hide from the pain. Check mate! Or is it?

The media and technology that bombards individuals with its partisan polarity, is the same media and technology that is informing and providing information in a manner that could never have been deemed imaginable.

The children of today have at their fingertip's information and knowledge that in the past could never have been purchased by the biggest of superpowers or mega multinational companies.

But with accessibility of this kind and sheer volume will come the inevitable overload. A generation highly tuned and focussed and capable of taking in massive amounts of data but at the same time walking on a razors edge when it comes to the point of saturation.

Data has become the new battlefield of a generation. How do you get attention? How can you be heard?

How can your story get cut through in a media and data landscape that is totally swamped with options, information and platforms delivering this data 'pret-a-porter' ready to roll 24/7 on an endless but also very highly managed and laser focussed delivery spectrum?

The window to be heard is tiny.
So what can you do to **get buy in**?

How do we get skin in the game? What message and narrative can you develop that will have meaning and cut through?

Welcome to 2020. Your time starts now, and the playing field is pretty uneven. And did I throw on top of all of this the Covid pandemic to decimate the business landscape as we know it, shatter families and communities and leave a level of unemployment, uncertainty, fear and mental health consequences that will not be dissolved at the flick of a switch or the release of a vaccine.

This is one major disturbance the likes of which most people bar our elders have lived through.

And yet disturbance is the precursor to **change**.

Status quo and security remain unchanged without disturbance. When a tree falls in the forest the disturbance is an opportunity. New light helps germinate seeds awaiting their moment in the sunshine that is now reaching the forest floor. Nature plays by these rules.

And by this very nature the outlook from this point in time **needs a story with heart**.

People need to feel connected and heard during this time of indifference and overload. It is not just about the facts. It is about how you build a story. Narrative is not about big shocking facts. People are done with that. You need your facts, but you also need to couch them in humanity. Even science has been marginalised by the political polarisers, so just saying you need facts isn't going to cut it.

We need story tellers who can build a narrative. Who can connect similarities, not expose and aggravate wounds of division.

Building such a narrative requires understanding and **compassion**.

It's not about proving points, it's about selecting points and crafting a modular and flexible line of discussion that brings people in rather than signals or singles them out. We need to understand the tribes that people connect and sympathise with.

Listening is a lot harder than most people give credit for because they don't always listen. Too many people are too quick to hear and not listen. Hear what you want and then marginalise, isolate and propagate the same old polarised debates.

Understanding involves a real shift. Understanding not just who you are talking to, but more precisely who you are. Crafting connection through love is what is needed. Love of what you do. Love of differences. Love of people's backgrounds that make them see what they see, but give you insights and clues to help you connect and be comfortable within your discomfort.

When we truly love the planet and its story, when we understand the facts and have them in order, but then shift to the next level of appreciation of the threads, the humble elements that make our world hold together. This glue is the glue we can use to connect a polarised view of the world with the embedded beauty and intricacy of a planet that knows its way.

There are many good people, individuals and professions showing positive leadership whose collective actions and momentum building is growing change all around us. Climate creep has consequences that are understood and being addressed.

This guide is a **priceless tool** for all those people taking action or wanting to contribute to a future where our actions are nurturing the social and physical landscapes of life.

The narrative of nurture requires that the story telling collective manages fear and hope, facts and fiction, but most importantly head and heart on a daily basis.

Our story tellers- you and I- carry the tools and creativity to help write and live a loving, balanced and exciting future.

Costa Georgiadis BL.Arch (UNSW)

WHY WE NEED TO CHANGE THE STORY

The loss of lives and economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic has made 2020 a tragic start to our decade.

This presents the global climate movement with challenges and opportunities to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Billions of dollars are being spent globally to stimulate our economies.

If this is used to increase fossil fuel extraction, our challenge to limit global warming to a safe limit of below 1.5 degrees will be made even more difficult.

But if our economic stimulus are invested in green jobs, we will be able to use this once in a generation opportunity to rapidly accelerate our transition away from fossil fuels and move faster towards a below zero emissions economy.

Australian groups including Beyond Zero Emissions, the Climate Council, Farmers for Climate Action and Australian Parents for Climate Action have all recently released economic recovery plans that highlight the gains to be made by investing in green jobs.

And just as exciting, the global economic recovery plans from the International Energy Agency, International Monetary Fund and International Trade Union Confederation all work to address the intersecting climate and social justice Black Lives Matter movements.

In Australia we are also seeing the climate and indigenous rights movements coming together, such as at the 2020 National Bushfire and Climate Summit hosted by Emergency Leaders for Climate Action.

For the best hope of avoiding irreversible and catastrophic climate and biodiversity tipping points, we all need to take urgent action to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030.

To do this in Australia we need more businesses, organisations and communities talking about the climate crisis.

But the problem is, many of us find it hard to talk to our colleagues or friends about climate change, and we can't fix a problem if we can't talk about it.

Australian and global climate leaders tell us that when we talk about climate change **we need to tell a new story** that moves away from the negative, doomsday narrative of the past.

The Climate Action Network Australia advises that four key areas of work are needed to make progress on climate change in our country:

1. Build a movement
2. **Change the story**
3. Shift the money
4. Change the politics

Changing the climate story can mean a lot of things.

It could mean feeling more optimistic about the climate crisis so that you can engage more with the issue personally.

It might mean changing the climate story for other people, by talking to your friends, family and colleagues about climate change.

Or it could mean changing the climate story for your workplace or community group, by encouraging them to show greater climate leadership.

For professions that involve natural systems or people, we have a fantastic opportunity, and some would say a **moral obligation** to build the climate crisis into our existing communications.

This is because as the mother of all environmental, health and social problems, the climate crisis is inherently connected to every problem that our projects are trying to solve.

Every week we communicate to colleagues, other organisations, businesses or communities about our projects.

By building the climate crisis into our communications, **we can change the climate story** whilst doing our day job.

This resource has been created to help you feel more confident and optimistic by using a positive and inspiring narrative to communicate about the climate crisis.

To engage more people, we still need to acknowledge the sober truth that we are in a climate crisis or emergency.

But our narrative needs to instead focus on the hopeful climate solutions happening *now* in our local communities, that will give our communities and the world a better future.

And the stories of the ordinary people working towards the goal of a below zero emissions world are the most powerful and motivating way to engage others.

Australian professions are increasingly coming together and showing climate leadership, through initiatives such as declaring climate and biodiversity emergencies and adopting ambitious Net-Zero Emissions Plans.

These include:

[Australian Medical Association](#)
[Doctors for the Environment Australia](#)
[Emergency Leaders for Climate Action](#)
[Australian Architects Declare](#)
[Australian Engineers Declare](#)
[Climate Justice Union](#)
[Climate Justice Programme](#)
[The Future Makers](#)
[Farmers for Climate Action](#)
[Veterinarians for Climate Action](#)
[Australian Climate Roundtable](#)
[Guardian News](#)

The Australian Association for Environmental Education- NSW Chapter (AAEE NSW) has also been working to show greater climate leadership.

In October 2019 AAEE NSW declared a climate emergency and this month adopted their plan to be Net-Zero Emissions by 2022.

For more resources on environmental education & engagement and the climate crisis please visit our website:

**Australian Association for
Environmental Education
- NSW Chapter**

[**www.aaeensw.org.au**](http://www.aaeensw.org.au)



1.

START WITH YOUR CLIMATE STORY

This is your story of why you care about the climate crisis, and why you have decided to communicate about it.

It is your personal experience of climate change and your feelings, not your opinion.

Try to frame your story around the common values you have with your audience, so that they can relate to you.

This idea of “starting with love and care” is a theme explored by Australian social researcher Rebecca Huntley in her book [How to talk about climate change in a way that makes a difference](#).

For example, when talking to parents you could share how you are concerned for your children’s or grandchildren’s future.

When talking to a manager, it might be that you are concerned about how climate change impacts are increasing costs and risks for your organisation.

When talking to a community member, it might be that you are concerned about how your community will survive the next bushfire season, heatwave, drought or flood.

In this way, you might tailor slightly different versions of your climate story to suit each different audience.

Everyone loves a personal story that they can relate to, so your climate story will help your audience be more willing to listen to what you have to say.

And if you are concerned about how your communication will be received, this approach will help you to ease into a conversation or presentation, because no one can argue with your feelings.

Developing your climate story might take you some time and it may trigger strong memories or emotions, so be kind to yourself.

But once you’ve developed a version of your story that you’re happy to share in public, you’ll have a powerful tool for giving you legitimacy in this space.

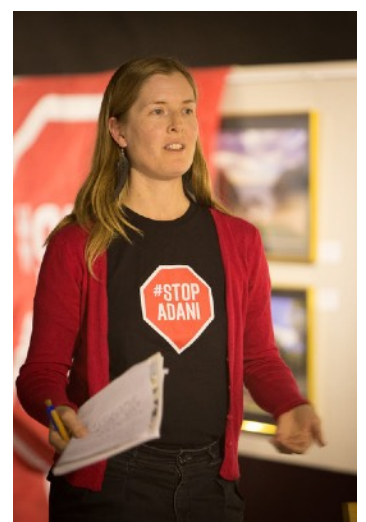
An example climate story is on page 22.

Developing your climate story is central to the [Climate Reality Training](#) that was founded by former U.S Vice President Al Gore as a result of his 2007 movie ‘An Inconvenient Truth’.

All presenters are encouraged to start their Climate Reality presentations with their climate story.

Al Gore uses the following quote to express the importance of sharing our climate story :

“I will only care about what you know, **once** I know that you care”.



2.

FRAME THE CLIMATE CRISIS AROUND HEALTH, WELLBEING & LIVELIHOOD

Breakthrough- the [National Centre for Climate Restoration](#)- is an Australian think tank of climate experts, including sustainability leader Paul Gilding and former Chair of the Australian Coal Association, Ian Dunlop.

They have created a number of useful, short guides on: the climate crisis, how to communicate about it and how to mobilise communities through emergency declarations.

In one of these guides- [How to communicate a climate emergency](#) - David Spratt and Jane Morton make the following critical points about 'framing':

"In their hearts, most people **value the same things**: good relationships with friends and family, providing for and supporting their families, and making a positive social contribution.

The health, wellbeing and livelihood frame presents climate change in ways that **connect to core values and issues familiar to people and decision makers**.

It can activate and reinforce values of empathy, responsibility, protection, community, fairness and opportunity.

These world views are commonly held by both conservative and progressives".

This means focusing on people, not the environment, when communicating about the climate crisis.

As the Climate Council suggest in their [Climate Action Toolkit](#) :

"Make your messaging about people, not polar bears".

Framing like this is also helpful during times like the global Covid-19 pandemic, because it allows you to acknowledge this global issue by linking the similarities between it and the climate crisis.

This framing is important for anyone wishing to engage others on environmental issues.

It allows you to move beyond preaching to the converted and helps the converted become preachers.

3.

SHARE A VISION OF A BETTER FUTURE

Linking climate solutions to a better, cleaner and fairer future is a motivating and empowering perspective.

World leading resource [Project Drawdown](#) provides engaging insights into how the solutions to our climate crisis are already improving lives.

This is the global road map of the best solutions that *already* exist today that can cumulatively reverse global warming within the next 30 years.

"Project Drawdown a blueprint that **already exists** in the form of humanity's collective wisdom, made manifest in applied, hands-on practice and technologies **that are commonly available, economically viable, and scientifically valid.**

Individual farmers, communities, cities, companies and governments have shown that they care about this planet, its people and its places.

Drawdown is their story."

Drawdown is the point in the future when levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere stop climbing and start to steadily decline, thereby stopping catastrophic climate change.

These top 100 climate solutions **reduce sources** by bringing emissions to zero, **support sinks** by uplifting nature's carbon cycle, and **improve society** by fostering equality for all.

These solutions deliver regenerative economic benefits that will improve our lives.

They:

- Create security
- Produce jobs
- Improve health
- Save money
- Facilitate mobility
- Eliminate hunger
- Prevent pollution
- Restore soil
- Clean rivers and more

A captivating vision of a better future in a below zero emissions world is the Tesla versus Holden drag race in episode 2 of the ABC documentary series [Fight for Planet A: Our Climate Challenge](#).

As the Vice-president of the Holden Special Vehicles Owners Club proclaims after the race:

"If this the future, we're going to have some fun!"

Sharing this vision of a better future is critical for bringing hope to our climate communication.

However, it also does something just as important.

By focusing on **what we can gain**, our communications can reach segments of our audience who switch off to negative messages.

Rebecca Huntley explores this idea in her book [How to talk about climate change in a way that makes a difference](#).

She discusses the social research that has revealed how messages of loss can make some people deny climate change, because they feel like their lives will be made worse by proposed changes to reduce emissions.

For example, a householder might fear higher electricity costs while a coal miner might fear unemployment.

If you are aware that your audience has these fears, it's important to acknowledge them and provide information on the work being done to reduce these impacts.

In the example of the coal miner, share with them how the climate movement is focused on a 'just transition' to beyond zero emissions, so that workers and communities that currently rely on the fossil fuel industry do not suffer economically during this transition.

This is critical for countering the fearful messages that transitioning to a below zero emissions economy threatens the Australian way-of-life.



Fear and hope

Fear and hope for our future are two opposing but truthful perspectives that both act to motivate us to take climate action.

However, if we *only* refer to the climate crisis when communicating about climate change, people can be left feeling despair and may switch off to protect themselves from negative emotions.

And if we *only* refer to the climate solutions, people won't understand the urgency to act and will think it's okay to leave it up to others to solve.

We need to communicate both possible futures we are facing because of the climate crisis, both the fearful future and the hopeful future—because so few people understand what either of those futures could look like.

In a podcast discussion about this on [Outrage + Optimism](#), Christiana Figueres, Tom Rivett Carnac and Paul Dickinson make the following insight:

Fear and alarmism is the **push** that draws and holds our attention to the climate crisis, and hope and optimism is the **pull** that motivates us to engage in climate actions in a sustained way.

And in the way that hope fuels action, collective action in turn generates hope and helps reduce fear.

In the AAEE NSW guide [A palette of possibilities for environmental action projects](#), change expert Les Robinson explores the systemic and behavioural strategies we can use to harness this power of collective action.

These include nourishing or creating an environmental group, building a network or alliance, and buddies and action teams.

4.

EMPOWER YOUR AUDIENCE

Good environmental communication leaves an audience feeling motivated and empowered to be part of the solution to an environmental problem.

Encouraging your audience to do something new or do something differently should be your motivational “call to action”.

For example, encourage them to adopt a new behaviour like installing solar panels on their roof, or change an existing behaviour like switching their home electricity to GreenPower.

A guide you can use for the focus of your communication is to allocate:

1 part: Acknowledging the sober truth that we are in a climate crisis* and it requires our urgent attention.

2 parts: Exploring the hopeful solutions that are already being undertaken to solve the climate crisis.

3 parts: Motivating your audience with calls to action of the most impactful things they can do to help solve the climate crisis.

* We recommend using the term climate change in place of climate crisis for children or junior high school students.

We should avoid our communications causing eco-anxiety in young people about a future that they have little influence over.

To empower your audience, describe the steps involved in each call to action.

This helps turn a vague concept into a ‘doable’ thing.

An engaging example of this is the ABC documentary series [Fight for Planet A: Our Climate Challenge](#).

Over three 1-hour episodes, writer and comedian Craig Reaucassel follows Australian households and a school as they endeavour to reduce their carbon footprints.

He follows participants as they make changes like installing a water-efficient shower head and using an app to reduce their electricity use.

In showing us the steps involved in making changes, the series reduces the fear of the unknown.

And by showing that participants ‘just like us’ are making these changes, new behaviours are modelled to create a social norm of not just caring about our carbon footprint, but of taking actions to reduce it.

A practical guide that explores how to encourage social norms and other behaviour change techniques is the AAEE NSW resource [A palette of possibilities for environmental action projects](#) by community change expert Les Robinson.

And for each call to action you are encouraging, always recommend a helpful website or other resource.

The Australian organisation [1 Million Women](#) creates clear and concise climate-related ‘call to action’ videos and other helpful online communication tools.

The majority of your audience care about climate change, so relax about deniers

Many people worry about climate deniers or sceptics, but it's important to remember that these people make up the minority of your audience.

An overwhelming 72% of Australians are **engaged with climate change**, and these are the people we can empower to take individual and collective actions.

The August 2020 Climate Compass Australian Audience Segmentation Research commissioned by [The Sunrise Project](#) shows that this 72% majority is broken up into the following segments based on their attitudes to climate change:

'Alarmed' and 'Alert' audiences make up 30% of Australians who have high levels of concern around climate change.

The 'Concerned' audience is about 24%, close to 1 in 4, Australians, who are also worried about climate change, but only at slightly lower levels than the 'Alarmed' and 'Alert' Audiences.

Together these groups make up 54% of Australians, more than half the country.

Cautious people make up 18% or nearly 1 in 5 Australians and while they have some questions and concerns about climate change, they question the impact they can make as individuals.

The minority of our audience that remains fall into the 'Disengaged', 'Doubtful' and 'Dismissive' categories.

It's important to understand that it can be challenging to try to "change the minds" of these minority segments, because their attitude towards climate change is influenced by values and world views developed over their lifetime.

It's not that they don't understand climate science, it's that some may choose not to engage with the issue of climate change because for any number of complex reasons it threatens their identity.

For more on using values in communication, refer to [A palette of possibilities for environmental action projects](#) written by change expert Les Robinson for AAEE NSW.

While our aim might not be to shift the attitudes of climate deniers, we can empower them to do things that will benefit **their lives** and our climate.

In recognising this, you can empower a denier audience to get solar panels on their roof by focussing on the economic benefits, not the emissions-reduction benefits.

For more on this topic we recommend:

[How to talk about climate change in a way that makes a difference](#) by Rebecca Huntley.

University of Queensland's free online course [Making Sense of Climate Science Denial](#).

[SkepticalScience.com](#), a non-profit science education organisation, run by a global team of volunteers.

5.

MORE STORIES, LESS FACTS

One surprising fact can be a powerful communication tool, but many facts are hard to remember. Most people find it easier to re-tell a story and one powerful fact.

In his Ted talk [How to transform apocalypse fatigue into action on global warming](#), Norwegian psychologist and economist Per Espen Stokes talks about the need for a new psychology of climate action centred on positive stories:

"Our brain loves stories. So we need **better stories** of where we all want to go, and we need more stories of the heroes and heroines of all stripes who are making real change happen".

This involves letting go of dooms day scenarios and abstract concepts like parts per million.

Instead, we need to tell new stories about how we reverse global warming and achieve drawdown.

Per Espen Stokes suggests that these stories should include the steps we take as people, as cities, as companies and as public bodies, and that these stories should be grounded by our motivation as caring humans.

As per tip 4, find stories that illustrate:

1. How the climate crisis is **impacting your local community now** - it is no longer something that will happen 'in the future'.
2. How climate solutions are **helping your local community now**, through economic and social benefits.

3. How people similar to your audience are already **reducing their carbon footprint and showing climate leadership** in their spheres of influence.

Someone's sphere of influence could be their family, community, sporting group or workplace etc. Showing climate leadership in these spheres can include anything from posting on social media that they have just divested their superannuation, to encouraging others to also divest their super and mortgage.

Need inspiration?

The following resources are full of stories of what a below zero emissions life can look like, and of the people making it happen.

They should help you to paint a picture of the better world we'll have by solving the climate crisis, and help your perspective become more optimistic too.

For a vision of life in 2050, the book [The Future We Choose - Surviving the Climate Crisis](#) by Christiana Figueres, and Tom Rivett-Carnac envisions the world we must create and tells us how to get there.

[2040](#) is the Australian movie that showed us what a regenerative, below zero emissions world could look like. It has turned into a movement contributing to, advocating for and investing in regenerative solutions.

The weekly podcast series [Outrage + Optimism](#) by the organisation Global Optimism, interviews inspirational climate leaders from business, politics, the arts and community from around the globe, who are walking the talk to create a below zero emissions world.

6.

AUSSIE MYTH BUSTING

Many Australians are unaware that we are a global laggard when it comes to our carbon footprint and climate change leadership.

These talking points can help your audience understand why we need to do more:

Australia is not on track to meet our Paris target

Government data shows our emissions have been rising consistently for five years.

If other countries adopted Australia's target, our world would be heading for more than 3 degrees of warming

195 countries including Australia signed the [United Nations Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#) in 2015 to limit global temperatures to between 1.5- 2 degrees.

However the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [2018 report](#) warns governments that only below 1.5 degrees of warming is safe and to achieve this we need to reduce emissions by at least 45% by 2030 and then rapidly to net zero by 2050 or sooner.

Australia's Paris target to reduce our emissions by 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2030, is one of the least ambitious targets amongst developed countries.

Australians create more greenhouse gas emissions than anyone in the developed world, and more than four times the global average

Per person we create more emissions than a USA citizen, more than double a Chinese citizen, three times as many as a UK citizen and 10 times as much as an Indonesian citizen.

See the Climate Council's [Mythbusting](#) Guide for more information.

Australia has the highest rate of land clearing in the developed world, mainly in NSW and Queensland

Clearing native forests, woodland, mangroves and wetlands releases carbon. These ecosystems are important sinks that drawdown carbon from the atmosphere, plus provide essential ecosystems services.

Protecting our native forests from logging and development, and preventing broad-scale agricultural land clearing are needed to reduce our emissions.

The era of fossil fuels is over

Australia has significant fossil fuel reserves including coal, oil, gas and coal seam gas.

However we also have some of the world's most reliable sources of free sun and wind energy. Combined with an exceptionally low land population density, one of the world's largest financial capital accumulations in our superannuation, and world class research and development in renewable energy, Australia has the potential to become a renewable energy [superpower](#).

The rest of the world is embracing renewable energy, and the sooner we make a just and rapid transition away from fossil fuels, the sooner we can create more 21st century clean jobs, wealth and sustainable economic growth.

Into 2020 the cost of renewable energy has dropped well below the price of fossil fuel energy in an ever increasing number of countries globally.

And the cost of firming technologies like batteries, that guarantee supply in the event of poor sun or wind generation, is similarly dropping rapidly. These decarbonisation investments in turn drive improved grid reliability and lower energy costs for all.

Combined with Covid-19 and changing shareholder and government sentiment due to climate change concerns, 2020 has seen a global crash in the value of coal, oil and gas companies. Global financial institutions are increasingly fleeing the fossil fuel sector as a wealth hazard.

Global investment is driving renewable energy market shares ever higher, far faster than any forecast as possible even just a few years ago.

This places coal mines, gas & oil fields and coal & gas fired power stations at ever increasing risk of becoming stranded assets, particularly for new greenfield projects that no longer offer an economically viable return, particularly when considering future global carbon pricing mechanisms.

Below are some stories about this:

In January 2020 the world's largest fund manager of \$US7 trillion BlackRock, [pledged to divest](#) its \$US1.8 trillion of actively managed assets from companies that generate more than 25% of their revenue from thermal coal production. This includes companies like Whitehaven Coal, Adani and China Shenhua and was described by Bill McKibben the founder of [350.org](#) as a "watershed" moment.

This announcement is having major ramifications for Australia.

For example, in July 2020, [Japan announced](#) it would close all of its coal-fired power stations by 2030.

And on September 8 2020, the first International Day for Clean Air for blue skies, [South Korea announced](#) it would close 10 existing coal power plants by the end of 2022 and another 20 by 2034. These countries are Australia's two largest export markets for our thermal coal.

In August 2020 BP (British Petroleum) [announced](#) it will leave 40% of its oil and gas reserves in the ground and invest \$5 billion a year until 2030 to build one of the world's largest renewable power businesses. A month later BP [declared](#) that the relentless growth of oil demand is over- that is, they declared that we have already reached Peak Oil.

Gas is not the answer

Burning fossil gas emits large amounts of carbon dioxide, and depending on how the gas is mined and processed, it can also leak and vent significant amounts of [methane](#), a greenhouse gas [84 times more potent](#) than carbon dioxide on a 20-30 year timeframe.

A press release from the [Climate Council](#) explains that the proposed Narrabri Gas Project in western NSW is not needed because a report from the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) shows we can rapidly transition to renewables with no new [baseload](#) gas-fired generation.

While 'peaking' gas fired power generation is important for peak-use times, AEMO estimate that by 2040 it will only be needed to supply 1% of the total Australian power.

Climate Council CEO Amanda McKenzie:

"Australia does not need any new gas. Gas is expensive, polluting and a poor public investment".

Green Hydrogen instead

Australia instead needs to [invest](#) in green hydrogen, a gas made by using renewable energy to power electrolysis (an electric current) to split water into hydrogen & oxygen.

When burnt to create power, hydrogen gas creates mainly water, but it is only 'green hydrogen' if the electrolysis process is powered from renewables, not gas.

Green hydrogen can be commercially viable by 2030 and thereafter replace fossil gas use, driving decarbonisation of Australian manufacturing.

Fossil hydrogen, created by burning natural gas- a fossil fuel, is not a transition fuel, it is a distraction.

Tim Buckley from the [Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis](#):

"Reducing emissions can't be achieved by increasing the use of fossil fuels."

7.

HIGHLIGHT THAT CONCERN ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE IS WIDESPREAD

Referencing the latest poll on climate change attitudes can be empowering for the concerned majority of your audience, and thought provoking for the dismissive minority.

Many people are unaware that the majority of the Australian and global population believe that climate change is a problem *and* that they want governments to take action to reduce emissions.

In the January 2020 [Australia Talks National Survey](#), 72% of us rated climate change as the biggest problem for us personally, above saving for retirement and health.

This [Essential Research poll](#) reveals that the majority of Australians would support the Federal government adopting climate change policy proposals, with a breakdown of levels of support and political alliance.

Each year [The Australia Institute](#) also conducts the Climate of the Nation report, that tracks Australian attitudes on climate change. In January 2020 this polling found that almost seven in ten Australians saw the clear link between the bushfires and climate change and they want the government to lead on climate action.

8.

TAILOR YOUR MESSAGE TO YOUR AUDIENCE

A basic principle of any communication is to tailor your message so that it relates to the values of your target audience.

Find out the values and world views of your audience so you can establish the common ground between their needs and the actions you are encouraging.

With this in mind:

Put yourself in the shoes of your audience and ask yourself "how might they react to my message?"

An excellent, easy-to-read guide to help you do this is [A palette of possibilities for environmental action projects](#).

Community change expert [Les Robinson](#) created this resource for AAEE NSW, and it is a must for anyone trying to create change in the environmental field.



9.

WORDS, TONE & BODY LANGUAGE

Use neutral language and a matter-of-fact tone when communicating the seriousness and urgency of the climate crisis.

Using powerfully emotive language to describe the climate crisis can make some people switch off to protect themselves from feeling unpleasant emotions like panic and anxiety. In some people, this language can even be a trigger and cause them to become distressed.

However, positive language and tone is important when we are communicating our hopeful messages about the climate solutions and motivating calls to action.

If your tone is stressed or worried or your body language is not confident, your audience may be left feeling unconvinced that we can solve the climate crisis.

It's very normal to feel despair when thinking about the climate crisis.

We hope that this guide and the resources within it help you to cultivate the perspective needed to communicate with positivity about the climate crisis.

However if you are struggling to move beyond the fears you have for our future, we recommend the self-help guide [Facing the Climate Emergency- How to Transform Yourself with Climate Truth](#).

It is written by Margaret Klein Salamon, clinical psychologist and founder of [The Climate Mobilization](#) movement, which pioneered the internationally recognised Climate Emergency Declaration campaign.

How are you feeling? (Your heart and head)

For many of us, caring for the planet is part of who we are and we feel a deep need to do this.

Award winning climate scientist and evangelical Christian Dr Katharine Hayhoe captures this in [Outrage + Optimism](#):

“Caring about and acting on climate change is a **genuine expression** of who we already are”.

Just as reconnecting physically with nature brings us a sense of peace, ignoring our spiritual connection to the earth and not doing enough can be equally as distressing.

This is why so many climate and First Nation leaders keep doing what they do, despite the overwhelming challenges. And it is what drives so many faith-based communities around the world to be inspiring climate leaders.

We know that giving up and into despair is not an option, because it would mean giving up on our love and care for others and the planet, which would be soul-destroying.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait elders have been sharing this message of our physical and spiritual connection to our earth with us for 250 years.

This understanding that our existence and very survival is dependent on how we care for our country is at the heart of good climate communication.

While being a climate leader can be so important in this way for our hearts, if the sense of urgency stops us from having balance in our lives, this work can be challenging for our heads.

Paying attention to our personal resilience is vital, because if we burn out we can't help anyone or the planet.

Below are some recommended resources to support your mental health whilst engaging with the climate crisis.

[Coping with Climate Change Distress](#) is one of our favourite resources from Melbourne-based organisation [Psychology for a Safe Climate](#).

Written with the Australian Psychological Society, The Climate Reality Project and the Australian Conservation Foundation, this booklet provides helpful tips to keep our lives functioning well while staying engaged with climate change.

The top Australian online resources for mental health, recommended by General Practitioners are:

[Smiling Mind](#) is a free Australian mindfulness and meditation app for primary school-aged children through to adults, which is used by public primary schools and high schools.

[myCompass](#) is a free personalised online self-help tool for adults, developed by the Australian Black Dog Institute.

It utilises cognitive behavioural therapy to help with depression and anxiety and has been found to be as effective as face to face counselling for reducing anxiety.

[1GiantMind](#) is a free meditation app that teaches how to meditate in 12 steps and includes 30 day challenge, a video library and a podcast.

[ReachOut](#) is Australia's leading online mental health organisation for young people, their parents and schools. It offers practical support, self-help content, forums, tips, tools, one-on-one support and ratings for hundreds of different apps.

Even people changing the world need sleep and a day off

It is a wonderful privilege to feel empowered to change the world.

However this idea can become a heavy burden if we misinterpret it to mean “If I am not doing my climate or environmental work, the world is not being changed”.

If we find ourselves thinking this, it can make it hard to give ourselves permission to have a day off or a break from it all.

If we find these thoughts creeping in, exploring the resources listed in “How are you feeling?” on the previous page can help.

And for anyone who ever finds it hard to fall asleep because they are thinking about all of the urgent climate action work they want to do, the following ‘global climate shift-work’ imagery that the author uses could be of help:

“When I find it hard to switch off at bedtime, I remind myself that on the other side of the world, millions of workers and volunteers are all clocking-on to do their bit in the climate and environmental movement.

I tell myself that it is my job now to rest, so that when my northern hemisphere peers clock-off, I will be fresh and ready to clock-on with all my southern hemisphere peers.”

10. BE NON-PARTISAN AND FACTUAL

If the topic of politics comes up whilst engaging with others about the climate crisis, be non-partisan and keep the discussion factual.

To help your audience engage with your communication regardless of their political preferences, avoid emotional language like 'good' or 'bad' to describe climate policies or political parties.

Focus on what needs to be done, not on what hasn't been done in the past.

As frustrating as Australia's 'climate wars' have been, we need to let go of the past and look towards the future where solving the climate crisis is the priority of all political parties. To get to this future we need to acknowledge that people can change, and ensure our communications reflect this.

During an interview for the podcast series [Outrage + Optimism](#), CEO of [Leaders' Quest](#) Lindsay Levin shares the following insight:

"The climate movement has to make room for people to **change their minds** and to do that with **dignity**".

Think like a buddhist and show empathy and compassion for others who have a different attitude to you on climate, and be mindful not to disparage anyone.

We need everyone to feel welcome in the global climate movement, and our communications play an important role in this.



THE LAST WORD

BE BRAVE, IMPERFECT, KIND & TEAM UP

This is the critical decade for change. The world needs to cut emissions by at least 50% by 2030 to avoid irreversible climate and biodiversity tipping points.

But we cannot achieve this if we open up new oil, gas or coal seam gas fields or new coal mines.

Our contribution to climate change, combined with our vulnerability to droughts, bushfires, heatwaves, coral bleaching and floods, means that **Australia has every reason to do so much more.**

Australia needs us to be courageous climate leaders now and use our influence to help change the climate story.

Anna Rose, Australian climate campaigner and co-founder of the climate advocacy funding organisation [Groundswell](#), reminds us in her article in [Peppermint Magazine](#):

“Whatever you do, do something.

One thing I’ve learned from the work I’ve done is that **ordinary people like us** can be much more powerful than we think”.

But we must remember: don’t try to be perfect, be kind to yourself, look after our mental health, and team up with our peers or mentors.

In the way that hope fuels action, collective action in turn generates hope and helps reduce fear when being a climate leader.

In her Ted talk [Six Keys to Leading Positive Change](#), leadership expert Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter shares her insights:

“Show up, speak up, look up, **team up**, never give up, and lift others up”.

Below are some suggestions to find ‘climate buddies’ in your spheres of influence:

Your workplace

Approach the green team to discuss ideas for climate leadership, such as [declaring a climate emergency](#) and committing to [Net-Zero Emissions](#).

No green group? Organise a lunch screening of [Fight for Planet A: Our Climate Challenge or 2040](#) to find other concerned colleagues. Or contact the [Climate Reality Project](#) about a climate reality leader giving a presentation.

Your community

[Climate Action Network Australia](#) has over 100 diverse climate action organisations listed.

[Beyond Zero Emissions](#) support ‘Zero Carbon Community groups’ across Australia.

[Australian Religious Response to Climate Change](#) is a multi-faith network committed to action on climate change.



The author's climate story

Erika Van Schellebeck is a Sustainability Engagement Consultant with over 20 years experience engaging with NSW communities, not-for-profit and government.

She worked in Local Government from 2000-2015, running education programs for residents, volunteers and staff on stormwater pollution, sustainable living, biodiversity protection and waste reduction. After leaving local government, she coordinated a sustainability leadership program for environmental educators where she was mentored by environmental education legend Grahame Collier. In 2018 Erika was awarded Community Educator of the Year by the Australian Association for Environmental Education- NSW Chapter (AAEE NSW).

She runs her business [Eco Engage](#) from Sawtell on the mid-north coast of NSW and is on the Executive of AAEE NSW.

Below is her climate story:

“With the birth of our first child in 2004, my own sustainable living journey became focused on reducing my family’s carbon footprint and attending climate marches.

In 2013 while working as a Sustainability Officer, I wrote the first Climate Change Policy for my local Council and became aware of the risks climate change posed for my coastal town. Two months later, the organisation GetUp! put the call out for Australians to organise Climate Picnics as part of a National Day of Climate Action.

I watched the website with interest for weeks, waiting for someone to register an event in my town. When no one had registered an event two weeks out from the National Day of Action, I realised I couldn't sit by and do nothing.

Knowing what I knew about climate change, I couldn't sit on my hands any longer. Despite being fearful of what my co-workers and managers might think, I organised an event.

Hoping that 50 people might come, I was stunned when a whopping 330 people arrived! The event was the catalyst for the formation of the Coffs Coast Climate Action group, which showed me that when we have the courage to step up for something we believe in, we give others the permission to do the same.

Fast forward to 2019. The mega bushfires burned for five months across my region, and the blue skies and starry nights disappeared for weeks at a time. My teenagers attended the global youth climate strikes. Three things became clear to me. 1. My family and I were living and literally breathing in the climate crisis. 2. As a mother and adult I wasn't doing enough and 3. I could no longer wait for politicians to lead on climate action.

So I teamed up with AAEE NSW President Sue Martin to help the association show greater climate leadership and in 2020 I undertook the Climate Reality Global Leadership Corps Training. I have dedicated the rest of my life to the global movement for a below zero emissions world and I'm pursuing a future in regenerative agriculture to help our farming families have a brighter future on the land.

Creating this resource has helped me to develop the stubborn optimism and gritty determination required to feel more positive about our future.

I sincerely hope that this guide helps you on your climate leadership journey to create a better future for your family, community, our planet and humanity.”

